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Contents

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Foundations

Foundations is an international journal of evangelical theology published in the United Kingdom. Its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics, and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry. Its particular focus is the theology of evangelical churches which are committed to biblical truth and evangelical ecumenism. It has been published by Affinity (formerly The British Evangelical Council) from its inception as a print journal. It became a digital journal in April 2011.

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EDITORIAL

It is a pleasure to present to you the May 2014 issue of Foundations – an issue which particularly focuses on gospel partnerships. The past decade has seen a proliferation of gospel partnerships on both sides of the Atlantic. These partnerships have developed in different ways on either side of "the pond". In the United States, Bible-believing Evangelicals have rallied around national initiatives such as The Gospel Coalition and Together for the Gospel conferences, and out of these (The Gospel Coalition at least) more local partnerships have emerged. In the United Kingdom, the movement began in a different place. The UK has a long history of inter-denominational Evangelical partnerships such as the Evangelical Alliance (formed in 1846) and Affinity (founded in 1953 as the British Evangelical Council), but in more recent times regional gospel partnerships have emerged independent of these national groupings. The purpose of these partnerships has been to facilitate training, church apprentice schemes, mission and church planting at a local level. In the past five years the partnerships have come together to launch a resources website (http://thegospelpartnerships.org.uk) and two national outreach initiatives (Passion for Life).

These developments have generally been warmly welcomed; gospel partnership is, after all, a biblical principle (Philippians 1:5) and there is a pressing need to address the fragmentation of Bible-believing churches. Nevertheless, disquiet has been expressed in some quarters about the lack of accountability of these organisations and the marginalisation of important ecclesiological principles that sometimes results from uniting around gospel essentials. This issue of Foundations features three articles seeking to contribute to the debate.

Before we consider those articles, I'd like to return to the three words we looked at in the previous editorial: "Distinct but inseparable." As we saw, this maxim provides the crucial roadmap for navigating Trinitarian orthodoxy: the three persons of the Trinity are distinct but inseparable. Yet it was in the Christological debates of the fourth century that the maxim really came to the fore. What did it mean for God the Son to take on human flesh – to become *in carne*? And how does the Son's human nature relate to his divine nature?

The Church Fathers had to address two contrasting heresies in the fourth century. On the one hand was the teaching of Apollinarius of Laodicea who taught that God the Son assumed a human body in the incarnation but not a rational human spirit. He emphasised the inseparable union of the two natures but failed to maintain their distinction. Nestorius of Constantinople, on the other hand, fell into the opposite error by denying a true union of Christ's natures. He spoke of a "conjunction of natures" rather than union – Christ was both the Son eternally begotten of the Father and the human son born of Mary. These two natures were stuck together rather than united in a single being.

It may sound like these differences were trivial. Why do we need to be so fastidious about how we describe Jesus? Shouldn't we simply celebrate what he came into the world to do? No. The Church Fathers were right to insist on precision because the question of who Jesus is cannot be separated from the question of what he came into the world to do. Take the teaching of Apollinarius, for instance. As we've seen, Apollinarius maintained that the Son simply assumed a human body but not a human soul (inseparability without distinction). Why was this such a problem? Gregory of Nazianzus explains: our salvation rests on the fact that the Son took on the entirety of human nature because "what has not been assumed has not been healed".

The effectiveness of Jesus' work (his life, death and resurrection) is entirely dependent upon the nature of who he is. Anselm, the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury, put it really well: "Since no one save God can make satisfaction for sins, and no one save man ought to make it, it is necessary for a God-man to make it". Only a God-man – one person with two distinct yet inseparable natures (human and divine) was capable of saving sinful humanity. Therefore, God the Son (who has forever been God in perfect triune relationship) assumed a human nature at the incarnation. He now lives as one person with two distinct natures, divine and human, inseparably joined together, but not combined or mixed in any way. Only such a saviour could save and therefore we were given such a saviour.

The Church Fathers understood the importance of the distinct yet inseparable natures of Christ. They expressed it in the Definition they formulated at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451:

> We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body [against Apollinarianism]… one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union [against Nestorianism].

Christ has two natures – human and divine: distinct but inseparable. This has significance for anthropology as well as soteriology. Philosophers, theologians and ethicists have debated for millennia the question of when human life begins. Orthodox Christology actually goes some way to providing the answer because if we locate the beginning of life at any point other than conception we end up with a Christology that is either Apollinarian or Nestorian. Either we conclude that the Son united himself to some form of sub-human nature at conception – perhaps a soulless body – which is to fall into Apollinarianism (inseparability without distinction). Or we conclude that the Son only assumed his human nature once it had reached the necessary stage of development to be considered a human being. This not only contradicts the "Formula of Union" (AD 433 – accepted by the Council of

Chalcedon) which stated that "God the Word was made flesh… and from the very moment of conception united to himself the temple he had taken"; it also falls into the Nestorian heresy of claiming that Christ's human nature had an existence separate from him. Of course, this is an immensely complex debate (one which we plan to address in a future issue of Foundations) but I hope that, from what we have seen, it is clear how important the "distinct but inseparable" maxim is when applied to Christology and related doctrines.

Turning to the current issue of the journal, we begin with three articles (by Ryan Kelly & Kevin DeYoung, Carl Trueman and John Stevens) examining the growth and development of gospel partnerships. Needless to say, the views expressed are those of the authors rather than Affinity or the organisations they represent. Each article was written independently of the others and so they do not interact with each other directly. The authors were given permission to state their views freely and robustly . This is not because Foundations or the authors relish confrontation but because we believe that iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). There is much for inter-denominational organisations such as Affinity to learn from each of the articles. As John Stevens rightly notes, parachurch organisations present both great opportunities and real dangers. Those involved in leading parachurch organisations need to be aware of these, as do the many of us who interact with inter-denominational gospel partnerships on a regular basis. From a personal perspective, the church I pastor is associated with no less than three inter-denominational partnerships: Affinity (through our membership if FIEC), City to City Europe Network and the North West Gospel Partnership. We joined those networks because we were concerned for gospel unity and had a desire to work together with other like-minded churches for mission, training and church planting. Those are still our convictions but our involvement in those partnerships will only be enhanced by reading the contributions to this issue.

The fourth article is a revised version of a paper delivered by Paul Helm at last year's Affinity Theological Study Conference. The article addresses a number of difficult issues relating to war (particularly torture) from the perspective of a "Two Kingdoms" approach to Christian ethics. Helm interacts with Wayne Grudem and Al Mohler and presents a perceptive way forward in the debate based upon the prominence of virtues of the Spirit in the New Testament. The journal concludes with three reviews of books dealing with the origins debate, gathered worship and popular culture.

This issue is packed with stimulating debate and reflection. I trust it will be useful to you, your churches and your ministry. As ever we welcome corr-espondence concerning the topics addressed and contributions to future issues.

Ralph Cunnington
May 2014

EXTRA-ECCLESIAL GOSPEL PARTNERSHIPS: A MESS WORTH MAKING

Ryan Kelly and Kevin DeYoung[*]

Should Christians who share many of the most important theological commitments partner across denominational lines for mutual support and collaborative ministry? Are there historical precedents for the kind of gospel networks we see flourishing in Evangelicalism today? How do popular extra-ecclesial gospel partnerships work (or not work) in the current U.S. church scene? This article seeks to answer such questions, using Together For the Gospel and The Gospel Coalition as primary test-cases, and arguing that the dangers common to these kinds of non-denominational movements should not lead one to minimise the gospel-defining, gospel-promoting, and gospel-celebrating work they do. If we enter into these partnerships with our eyes open to their inherent limitations, they can serve a useful purpose in supporting the local church, encouraging pastors, and defending the faith.

Over the past two decades North American Evangelicalism – especially that of the broader Reformed tradition – has seen the birth of a number of interdenominational partnerships (or alliances, networks, movements, etc.). No two share the exact same aims and goals; no two draw the exact same theological lines or circles of inclusion. But many share a similar spirit.

Together for the Gospel (T4G), for instance, is simply a biennial conference for pastors, yet a flavour of interdenominational partnership is clearly found in the friendship and collaboration of the recurring plenary speakers, especially T4G's founders, Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, C J Mahaney, and Albert Mohler. Despite differing – quite candidly – on secondary theological matters and in denominational allegiances, these four friends have been outspoken about their personal appreciation and willingness to collaborate in ministry together. The Gospel Coalition (TGC), founded by Don Carson and Tim Keller, is a far more comprehensive entity with multiple conferences, a massive website housing a dozen blogs and thousands of resources, a council of national leaders, regional chapters, and several international outreach initiatives. While T4G and TGC are marked by important differences in scope and focus, they share a similar ethos and include many of the same church leaders.

The ministries of T4G and TGC are distinct and prominent on the landscape of American Evangelicalism, but they are not novel or unique.

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Other ministries share many of the same aims and inhabit the same theological universe of evangelical Calvinism. The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (ACE), founded by the late James Montgomery Boice in 1994 is something of a forerunner to today's most popular partnerships. This multi-dimensional networking and resourcing ministry is similar in many respects to TGC. Several church-planting networks also contribute to the scene, including Acts 29 (now led by Matt Chandler), Sovereign Grace Ministries (started by C J Mahaney), and Redeemer City to City (under Tim Keller). While some such church-planting networks function as something closer to denominations, with pastoral training and a vetting process, they nevertheless together represent this growth of intentional collegiality that is not merely denominational.

The question that has been put to us is whether such inter-denominational alliances are legitimate, or, even more positively, may be a sign of God moving with blessing upon the broader church. Concerns and criticisms have certainly been raised, and we have been asked to interact with those in this article. However, while we acknowledge inevitable limitations, including present and future hurdles, we will argue that many such extra-ecclesiastical partnerships represent a measure of health and divine blessing on the Evangelical church in North America and should be generally encouraged and pursued.

Precedents of Interdenominational Fellowship and Partnership

Before examining two case studies from within contemporary North American Evangelicalism it is worth considering whether church history offers any healthy examples of interdenominational, extra-ecclesiastical partnerships – and, if so, what we can learn from them. Several historical illustrations might be considered. None of them corresponds directly to the aforementioned examples within modern North America. Many, for instance, were inextricably tied to a state church and had political, not just ecclesiastical, aims. Nevertheless, some aspects of these examples suggest that the recent movement of networks and partnerships should not be judged too quickly as historically novel or circumspect.

1. Cambridge Puritanism

Throughout the mid-late sixteenth century, English Puritans grew increasingly weary of a Church of England that was still "but halfly

reformed".[1] In 1575, Cambridge Puritans caught wind of a movement of preaching renewal and training in Norwich and travelled there to observe it firsthand.[2] In such weekly meetings seasoned ministers helped younger ministers learn to "keep to the text", to "show the things of the Holy Ghost, and briefly, pithily, and plainly apply".[3] A young minister would deliver a sample sermon, followed immediately by candid feedback from older ministers regarding "the soundness of his doctrine, how he kept and followed his text, [and] where he swerved from it".[4] With the Elizabethan Church sorely neglecting the able training of future (and present) ministers, the Norwich pastors, and later the Cambridge men, sought to take matters into their own hands, using such "prophesying conferences" as a primary tool in pursuit of "a learned and godly ministry".[5]

Not all of the Cambridge Puritans had the same commitment to or forecast for the future of the Church of England – some with more separatist inclinations, others more patient and willing to conform – but their conferences were plainly not sanctioned by the Church of England. Queen Elizabeth, in fact, vehemently and consistently opposed them. It would be too anachronistic to say that their prophesying conferences were "non-denominational" (indeed, "denomination" by nature implies more than one, which was hardly imaginable in sixteenth-century England), but such extra-ecclesiastical meetings grew organically out of a need presently unmet by formal ecclesiastical structures. It bred a localised, *ad hoc* preaching partner-ship – something which later came to be known as a "spiritual brotherhood" among the Cambridge Puritans.[6]

Anyone familiar with the preaching workshops of The Proclamation Trust in England or The Simeon Trust in the U.S. might already recognise some familiarity between these modern preaching ministries and those which grew out of Norwich and Cambridge over 400 years before. While the leadership of The Proclamation Trust has always had a strong Anglican representation, today's leadership includes Baptists and its ministries are open to all Evangelicals. The Simeon Trust has been thoroughly non-

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[1] See Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

[2] This story is told well and succinctly by David Helm, "Few Are Not Enough: Training a Generation of Preachers" in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson, eds. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 235-57. See also Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 168-76.

[3] Quoted from *The Order of the Prophecy at Norwich in Anno 1575*, in Helm, "Few Are Not Enough", 238.

[4] Quoted in Helm, "Few Are Not Enough", 239.

[5] Of course the university was assumed as a necessary component to ministerial education. Indeed, most of the Cambridge Puritans were University lecturers. But their prophesying conferences aimed at providing essential missing ingredients in piety and homiletics.

[6] See Paul Schaefer Jr., *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

denominational since its inception, and its workshops are taught by pastors from a number of denominations. These are truly interdenominational – and in that sense, they differ from their forefathers in Cambridge Puritanism. On the other hand, they share much of the same DNA – that of an extra-ecclesiastical partnership seeking to resource the broader church, especially its ministers, with training and community, for the overall health and growth of the body of Christ.[7]

2. The Westminster Assembly

The famous assembly of Puritan divines that met at the Abbey from 1643 to 1652 ended up producing not only the *Confession of Faith* but a host of other catecheses and ecclesiastical documents. The thoroughness and cohesive-ness of the documents themselves may give the impression (to the uninformed) that the assembly was a wholly unified, almost monolithic, group. Of course, this was far from the case. Although much academic historiography has done little better in its portrayal of the assembly – dividing its members into only two groups, Independents and Presbyterians – the monumental work of Chad Van Dixhoorn has greatly corrected this error, showing that the assembly was made up of three or more parties, and party-lines drew up slightly differently with each doctrine debated.[8] Also, Hunter Powell has argued that the Scottish Presbyterians at Westminster were closer in ecclesiology and affinity with English Congregationalists than with English Presbyterians.[9]

Of course, the representatives called to Westminster by Parliament were just that – *called by Parliament.* It was an ecclesiastical body, but one politically formed for the political purposes of settling a new state church. So what hath the Westminster Assembly to do with modern parachurch networks? In many ways, nothing at all – the political dimension alone makes Westminster another animal altogether. However, a number of elements may have a familiar ring to them: the broadly reformed, from multiple ecclesiastical parties, with clearly held differences, gathered together to hammer out the lines of unification and deference, and draw up documents as such. To point out that the Westminster Assembly was not diverse in the same way as, say, TGC is diverse does not negate the fact that the divines had

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[7] For more on the historical precedent of "prophesying conferences" in the modern strategy of The Proclamation Trust and The Simeon Trust, and also the connection between *training* and *community* within that strategy, see Helm, "Few Are Not Enough", 245-57.

[8] Chad Van Dixhoorn, *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1653*, 5 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), Vol. 1: Introduction.

[9] Hunter Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren and the Power of the Keys, 1640-1644" (PhD thesis, Univ. of Cambridge, 2011). Those with some familiarity with the secondary literature on Westminster will likely find this conclusion surprising – indeed it is, but Powell's case is equally convincing.

serious disagreements among themselves and had to determine what issues needed striking clarity, which ones allowed for ambiguity, and which ones might not be touched at all. From that angle, the Assembly was a far more ecumenical enterprise than many would care to admit. It was as unifying as it was boundary-defining. However, theirs was not a theologically-minimising unity. As Powell concludes, "we should remember that some... Presbyterians and the [Congregationalist] Apologists could work together because their differences were in 'lesser things' not because they papered over their differences or believed them to be unimportant".[10]

3. Cromwell's churchmen

The Presbyterianism enacted by Parliament in 1648 had been poorly established and loosely enforced in the years that followed. Additionally, those coming to power in Parliament and the New Model Army in the later years of the Civil War increasingly favoured an Independent ecclesiology and more liberty in matters *adiaphora* than was allowed under the few years of Presbyterian uniformity. By the early 1650s the writing was on the wall for the establishment of a new church state – one which would more broadly unify "the godly" and allow for liberty on ecclesiastical matters of church government and worship forms.

Simultaneously, many Puritan statesmen, such as John Owen, had an additional concern about the proliferation of heresies like Socinianism. In 1652 Owen, with other Puritan pastors, presented Parliament with *The Humble Proposals.* This short document essentially proposed a whole new church settlement, one which forbade promulgation of what is contrary to the "principles of Christian religion" but otherwise allowed liberty for all others. Such "principles of Christian religion" were defined in 16 short fundamental articles representing basic Trinitarian and evangelical Protestant orthodoxy. With the dissolution of Parliament later that year nothing came of the *Proposals*, but it was only the first attempt of many for Owen and his colleagues.

Throughout the rest of the 1650s the same Cromwellian churchmen had a hand in the architecture of several legislative proposals and constitutions, including *The Instruments of Government* (1653), *The New Confession* (1654), and *The Humble Petition and Advice* (1657). *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* (1658) was most likely also a politico-ecclesiastical proposal, the final attempt at establishing a Cromwellian church state.[11] Each of these

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[10] Powell, "The Dissenting Brethren", 260-61.

[11] See Ryan Kelly, "Reformed or Reforming? John Owen and the Complexity of Theological Codification for Mid-Seventeenth-Century England" in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, Kelly Kapic and Mark Jones, eds. (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2012), 3-29. Particularly on the political purposes of the Savoy Assembly, see Hunter Powell, "The Last

proposals and corresponding confessions, while spearheaded by Congregationalist Puritans, also included Presbyterians, and allowed liberty for Baptists and Episcopalians. Each proposal drew the theological boundaries slightly differently, some more overtly Reformed than others, some more thorough than others. Each tinkered with the precarious balance of ideals: to limit heresy, to promote godliness and the gospel, and to provide a godly, uncoercive church state united around Protestant (or broadly Reformed) orthodoxy.

As with the Westminster Assembly, the political context and aims of these confessional bodies makes them very different from anything happening within today's ministerial alliances and networks. Indeed, the hurdles and complexities that faced the Puritans during the Interregnum were quite unusual, even in their own time. But, by now, some similarities with the aforementioned partnerships of our own day should be obvious. Unity was sought, neither by erasing theological convictions, nor by making ecclesiastical practices uniform. Partnerships in many cases began organically and relationally, and what became "official" did not have binding ecclesiastical authority. Circles of varying circumference were drawn, never to everyone's complete liking, and certainly not for everyone's inclusion. Nevertheless such circles of participation, fellowship and collaboration were drawn not merely according to parties (or what today might be akin to denominations). There were concentric, co-existing circles – some strictly ecclesiastical, others broader and more volitional. And, of course, such circles were codified in new confessions – not unlike the confessional documents which help define theologically TGC and T4G.[12] Sadly, the experiment of a Cromwellian church of the 1650s was not successful or lasting. But we see many of the ideals described above not only admirable, but also adaptable to a different context and age.

4. Others

If space allowed, we could expand this historical sketch to include other relevant snapshots of inter-denominational, extra-ecclesiastical partnerships. We could look at the Trans-Atlantic evangelical awakenings during the

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Confession: A Background Study of the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order" (M.Phil. thesis, Univ. of Cambridge, 2008).

[12] TGC's Foundational Documents (Preamble, Confessional Statement, and Theological Vision for Ministry) can be found at http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents. T4G's "Affirmation and Denials" are found at http://t4g.org/about/affirmations-and-denials-2. (Both accessed 14 February 2014.) We will return to the matter of confessions and confessionalism a couple more times in this article.

middle part of the eighteenth century, which brought together men like Frelinghuysen (Dutch Reformed), the Tennents (Presbyterian), Edwards (Congregational), Whitefield (Anglican), and John Erskine (Scottish Kirk) in partnerships forged by letter writing, publishing, prayer initiatives and, at times, shared ministry. We could look at many modern mission agencies which partner with local churches of different denominations. We could also consider Christian colleges and seminaries. Some seminaries in the U.S. are denominational, like Calvin Theological Seminary (Christian Reformed Church in North America) or Covenant Theological Seminary (Presbyterian Church in America), while others, including those deeply rooted in and committed to the Reformed confessional tradition, such as Reformed Theological Seminary and Westminster Theological Seminary, are not under the official auspices of any denomination.

Case Studies: T4G and TGC

T4G and TGC are far from the only partnerships worth talking about, but as they are two of the biggest and most well known, it may be helpful to briefly zoom in on what they are and what they do.

1. Together for the Gospel

T4G began in 2006 as a conference for pastors that grew out of the friendship of four men who, despite their significant differences in some theological matters and in denominational affiliation, were adamantly together for the gospel. Mark Dever, the *de facto* leader of the group and of the conference, is the Pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist (SBC) in Washington, D.C. Albert Mohler is the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBC) in Louisville, Kentucky. Ligon Duncan, until recently the Senior Minister at First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, is now the Chancellor and CEO of Reformed Theological Seminary. C J Mahaney, after serving for many years as the President of Sovereign Grace Ministries and as a pastor in Maryland, is now the pastor of a SGM church plant in Louisville.[13]

   Although the conference has tripled in size since then to over 8000 people, the every-other-year event still has the same rather narrow aim: to encourage and equip pastors. To that end, the four principals of the conference have always invited other men to share in the plenary addresses. In 2014, I (Kevin) was in the line-up of speakers, along with John Piper, Thabiti Anyabwile, David Platt, Matt Chandler, John MacArthur, Mark Dever, Albert Mohler, and Ligon Duncan. Several breakout speakers are also

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[13] More behind the scenes, T4G employs Matt Schmucker to coordinate the many logistics of T4G.

present. The conference has become a significant event in galvanising conservative Evangelicals, promoting theological resources, defending the faith from contemporary aberrations, networking like-minded leaders, and supporting pastors.

What makes T4G unique is the emphasis on the relationships among the speakers. The plenary speakers not only share meals together during the conference and sit together throughout the whole event, they also meet annually for three days of prayer and fellowship, and communicate by phone and email throughout the year. T4G is really nothing more and nothing less than a group of friends pursuing their friendship in the gospel, enjoying these friendships publicly, and preaching a series of messages every other year so that pastors might be encouraged for the work of faithful preaching ministry.

2. The Gospel Coalition

TGC, by contrast, is a bigger organisation with a bigger tent and with larger aims. Under the leadership of Don Carson of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, Illinois) and Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (New York City), TGC began in 2007 with an initial gathering of 500 interested persons.[14] Since then the reach of the organisation has grown at a remarkable pace, with a popular biennial national conference (on the opposite years from T4G), a regular women's conference, regional conferences, international initiatives, a publishing imprint, and one of the most trafficked Christian websites.

Technically, TGC is a council of not more than 60 members – mostly pastors, pulled from a variety of denominational (and a few non-denominational) backgrounds, chiefly the Southern Baptist Convention, Presbyterian Church in America, and Evangelical Free Church in America.[15] The Council members must agree to the TGC Confessional Statement and Theological Vision for Ministry. These confessional documents – which have been amended, at least once in an effort to clarify that the organisation did not see itself as an ecclesiastical body – reflect classic reformational theology, with Calvinistic soteriology, complementarianism, and neo-evangelical sensibilities toward engaging the culture.[16] The Council meets annually, every other year in conjunction with the biennial national conference and then more substantively on the off years for a three-day colloquium. TGC also has several employees, including Ben Peays as

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[14] See http://thegospelcoalition.org/conferences/2007 (accessed 15 February 2014).

[15] See http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/council (accessed 23 May 2014).

[16] For its stance on cultural engagement see specifically the Theological Vision for Ministry, at http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/vision (accessed 17 February 2014).

Executive Director, Collin Hansen as Editorial Director, and Kathleen Nielson in charge of women's initiatives.

While the conferences give TGC a live, personal face to the organisation, there is little doubt that the vast majority of people who interact with TGC do so through its website. With 20 million unique visitors in 2013, traffic to the website has increased by roughly one-third each of the last three years. TGC's online presence is simply massive. The TGC platform hosts more than a dozen regular bloggers, a steady stream of book reviews, a serious theological journal (*Themelios*), a catechism (New City Catechism), and a dizzying array of videos, interviews, podcasts, articles, commentary and regular contributors.[17] TGC is read widely in different languages, from different religious backgrounds, from all over the world.[18] It has become the best-known Christian website in North America for cultural and theological reflection from a broadly Reformed, evangelical perspective.

As significant as the web presence is and as impressive as the big conferences can seem, there is often a local dimension to TGC that gets overlooked. Both of us have seen TGC be a unifying force on the ground and in the trenches. Kevin's church hosts a monthly gathering for a dozen church leaders in the area under the aegis of TGC. While there are no official prerequisites for participation in the group, there is an explicit understanding that pastors meeting in this informal lunchtime of prayer and learning should share the same set of core doctrinal convictions. This means a support for the TGC Foundational Documents in particular and an appreciation for the gospel priorities of organisations like TGC in general.

I (Ryan) am privileged to lead one of TGC's fifteen Regional Chapters (in Albuquerque, New Mexico).[19] These Chapters exist to bring the dynamics and aims of the national Council (fellowship, partnership, sharpening, prayer) to a local context among participating pastors. About 30 local pastors make up TGC Albuquerque. We meet quarterly for three hours for relationship building, prayer, burden-bearing, sharing advice and discussion of a theological or ministerial topic (preceded by a reading assignment). These meetings (and the smaller, informal ones that grow out of them) help protect from territorialism and competition. They foster camaraderie and care for each other. They promote broad-mindedness about the kingdom and the gospel in our local area, without taking away from our different denominational allegiances. They help mitigate church-hopping and enable pastors to communicate about congregants floating between churches and/or leaving poorly. And especially for solo pastors in smaller churches,

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[17] Total online resources – text, audio, and video – now exceed 82,000.

[18] Some specifics on its international scope are worth noting: among the top ten cities for traffic on tgc.org are Sydney (#1), London (#4), and Singapore (#8).

[19] See http://tgcalbuquerque.com.

these gatherings help fight against isolation and discouragement.[20] Our Chapter also hosts one of the TGC Regional Conferences, which not only brings churches together and presents a strong witness to the community, it allows for local pastors and laypeople to experience the fellowship and learn from the teaching that might otherwise be inaccessible at a national conference in Orlando.[21]

Having participated in other, less-defined pastoral networks, we can testify that one of the unique benefits of the TGC-shaped groups is that there is a much greater degree of doctrinal depth and theological integrity. In some places, denominational groups work well for the same purpose. But in many places, there may not be others from the same denomination in close proximity. Or in mainline denominations those in the same area may not actually share the same core theological convictions. In the Albuquerque Chapter, for example, pastors must be in "hearty agreement" with TGC's Foundational Documents. That means then that we are unified on specifics such as Reformed soteriology, complementarianism, inerrancy, a historical Adam, penal substitution, and double imputation.[22] This also means there will be diversity in other areas like eschatology, church polity, sacraments, and miraculous gifts.

No doubt, some readers will view such parameters as too exclusive, others as too inclusive. We can only say that these points of agreement and diversity work well in our context for our purposes. We can also say with confidence that the differences we have tolerated in theology do not come from or lead to a latitudinarianism when it comes to our own preaching and local church practice. We are able to be more theologically precise and picky with our own church's leadership – and we must. However, since TGC is a network, not a church or denomination, we do not find that differences of ecclesiology get in the way of our unity, friendships, collegiality and mutual encouragement. In fact, such differences (e.g., spiritual gifts, the age of the earth, approaches to racial reconciliation, emphases in sanctification) are often freely discussed and warmly debated among us.[23]

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[20] Many such aspects of interdenominational partnerships and pastoral connectedness are excellently elucidated over several articles in two volumes of the *9marks Journal:* (1) *Wanted: Apostolic Pastors* (May-June 2012), at http://www.9marks.org/journal/wanted-apostolic-pastors, and (2) *Church and Churches* (May-June 2013), at http://www.9marks.org/journal/church-and-churches (both accessed 14 February 2014).

[21] For details see: http://clarusabq.com.

[22] See the Confessional Statement at http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents (accessed 14 February 2014).

[23] Intentional discussion of points of diversity can also be seen on The Gospel Coalitions's blog, such as the series "Why I Changed My Mind about…" and "Why You Should Be a…" (e.g., http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2013/08/07/why-i-changed-my-mind-about-infant-baptism/ and http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2013/12/13/why-you-should-be-a-presbyterian). Both accessed 25 February 2014.

Answering Critics

Before interacting with some of the criticisms that have been raised a couple of prefatory remarks are in order.

First, Carl Trueman has been one of the more outspoken critics of these new alliances, particularly TGC, as his article in this journal demonstrates. Both of us count Carl as a dear friend. He has often made us laugh, made us think, made us better churchmen, made us better historians, and only occasionally has he made us mad! We have both enjoyed personal time with Carl over the years. We have been out to dinner. He has been in our home (Ryan's at least). We have benefited from countless little emails, quips, and comments. So when we say that we are friends with Carl we do not mean that we are Facebook "friends" or we met in person once – we mean we genuinely like each other and know each other. As such, we have discussed these matters in person and over emails many times. In every case we have been helped and challenged. We want to say "Amen" to many of his concerns and cautions. Nevertheless, we do not always agree. And that is precisely what these articles are for – to continue friendly discussion by interacting with some of the concerns Carl has raised.

Second, we will use TGC as the primary referent point. This is not because TGC is the only possible representative of the concerns Carl raises, but because it is the largest, most influential parachurch ministry of its kind, and it seems to be what Carl – not to mention people like Darryl Hart or Scott Clark[24] – most frequently has in mind when he writes critically of parachurch alliances, celebrity culture, and the tyranny of the "Top Men".[25] Further, both of us serve on the TGC Council (Kevin also serves on its Board and Ryan serves on its Governance Committee). So we are familiar with TGC "from the inside", so to speak.

With those prefatory remarks out of the way, we will interact with five categories of concern that have been raised.

1. Aping a denomination

TGC is not a denomination or a church, but is it trying to be? Does it come too close to resembling or functioning as a church or a denomination? Some have argued yes. It surely does not help that some mistakenly refer to their own or another's church as "a TGC church", or speak of "joining TGC". By this

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[24] Hart blogs at http://oldlife.org and Clark at http://heidelblog.net.

[25] Trueman writes for Reformation 21, a ministry of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals: http://www.reformation21.org/blog. His relevant articles and blog posts for this discussion can be found with a simple search of the relevant key words.

perhaps they mean that such-and-such church is on TGC's Church Directory.[26] Perhaps they mean that their pastor is part of a Regional Chapter. But in point of fact there is no such thing as "a TGC church" and there is really no "joining TGC". The Church Directory is simply a way to find a church which believes that it shares the theology and ministry vision of TGC. The churches in the Directory are not vetted, as a disclaimer clearly states. It is simply a connecting point like other church directories.[27]

The Regional Chapters are something slightly more official in that they will, at times, need to turn away a pastor who is keen to join but holds to beliefs outside the Foundational Documents. But, as was described above, these chapters are not ecclesiastical entities; they have no authority over pastors or churches; they are volitional fraternals for pastors.[28]

The Council of TGC is more official still. It is a group of (currently) 53 men who have been recommended to, and voted on, by the Council itself. The Council may, if necessary, vote to remove one of its members. But none of this presumes any kind of ecclesiastical jurisdiction or authority whatsoever. Ecclesiastically, these men are accountable to their local churches and fellow elders (or presbyteries or bishops).[29] It is a brotherhood of sorts. Confrontation and exhortation have taken place when needed – sometimes privately, sometimes publically.[30] But it is not mistaken as some sort of extra-local church eldership. As a friend recently put it: when kids in the neighbourhood

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[26] Found at http://thegospelcoalition.org/network/church-directory (accessed 15 February 2014).

[27] Such as that on 9marks, an excellent ecclesiological resource ministry led by Mark Dever. See http://www.9marks.org/churchsearch/searchmap.php (accessed 15 February 2014).

[28] TGC's Regional Chapters seem to be very much like the Reformation Societies of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. See http://www.reformationsocieties.org/refsoc (accessed 15 February 2014).

[29] Relevant on this point is an article by Don Carson and Tim Keller, "Reflections on Confessionalism, Boundaries, and Discipline", 11 October 2011, at http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2011/10/11/reflections-on-confessionalism-boundaries-and-discipline (accessed 15 February 2014).

[30] Many readers in the UK will likely recall Don Carson's public response to comments Mark Driscoll made about the state of the church in Great Britain. See http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/01/29/reflections-on-the-church-in-great-britain (accessed 15 February 2014). As is well known, Mark Driscoll and James MacDonald both resigned from TGC's Council in wake of the Elephant Room controversy. While we appreciate the bold gospel preaching and successful outreach we have seen in the ministry of both men, we also disagreed with their role in inviting and defending the inclusion of T D Jakes in the Elephant Room event. See the important official TGC response, "Carson and Keller on Jakes and the Elephant Room" at http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/02/03/carson-and-keller-on-jakes-and-the-elephant-room (3 February 2012, accessed 16 February 2014). Further, as Driscoll seems to continue in a certain trajectory (from more Reformed, doctrinal circles and into broader, church-growth circles), we have become more concerned that critiques of Driscoll are quickly parlayed into critiques of TGC. For a recent concerned appeal to Driscoll, see Jared Wilson's post "Re: Mark Driscoll", at http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/gospeldrivenchurch/2013/12/18/re-mark-driscoll (18 December 2013, accessed 16 February 2014).

form a clubhouse and get together, it does not mean that they have deserted or replaced their families!

Beyond the Church Directory, Regional Chapters, and a Council, TGC is a ministry of resources to the broader church. People from all over the world can and do freely use the thousands of resources on the website; they may attend one or more of TGC's conferences. In these ways they may choose to "identify" with TGC, but such would be no different from one identifying with, say, Desiring God through its rich website and many conferences.[31]

Many of the church-planting networks in the States operate somewhat differently than this. In addition to conferences and website resources there are clear member-churches and/or member-pastors. There is a vetting process, even ongoing pastoral accountability in church-planting networks like Acts 29. A church and/or pastor may also simultaneously fall within a denomination, such as the Southern Baptist Convention or the Presbyterian Church in America. And where that is the case there would be distinct but overlapping circles of fellowship, identity, accountability, (perhaps) even authority. Thus, it may be fairer to argue that some church-planting networks function like a church or denomination, but it does not seem to be a fair representation of TGC as a whole or in any of its parts.

It is unfortunate if some Christians identify themselves more with TGC than with their local church or denomination. We personally have not seen or heard such a sentiment. Yet, regardless, we can say as men in the closed-door meetings of TGC's leadership, there is no intention for TGC to "be mistaken for the church", to offer itself as a "virtual denomination" or a source of "ecclesiastical identity".[32] In fact, all of the TGC Council members are committed and active churchmen in their own denominations.

2. Mere Christianity confessionalism

As already noted, TGC's doctrinal parameters have been judged too narrow and exclusive by some and too broad and inclusive by others. Space does not permit us to interact with the first concern, except to recognise that TGC circumscribes certain doctrinal positions and not others, because some are central to the preaching of the gospel (e.g., penal substitution, the uniqueness of Christ, eternality of hell); some differences evince deep hermeneutical differences, and are practically necessary for something like a preaching conference (complementarianism); and some so affect our understanding of God's glory and grace that they must be made explicit (Reformed soteriology). This makes TGC theologically tighter than the co-

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[31] See http://www.desiringgod.org.

[32] Such was Trueman's contention in a blog post "I Confess (Part III)", 20 February 2013, at http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2013/02/i-confess-part-iii.php (accessed 15 February 2014).

belligerent efforts of mid-twentieth century neo-evangelicalism.[33] We suspect it is also theologically narrower than some comparable networks in the UK today.[34]

Trueman's critique has not been with the narrowness of TGC, but with its perceived doctrinal ambiguity. TGC's Confessional Statement falls within the broader Reformed tradition, and, as noted earlier, it is particular regarding monergistic soteriology, complementarianism, inerrancy, a historical Adam, and double imputation in justification; yet it is unspecific as to eschatology, church polity, sacraments, miraculous gifts and the like. The Foundational Documents could not be fully embraced by hard-line Dispensationalists, Lutherans, Emergents, or mainline Liberals. However, among the Council there are Presbyterian, Reformed, Episcopalian/Anglican, Baptist, Free Church, and nondenominational, all of which must agree with what is contained in the Foundational Documents. At just over 2300 words, the Confessional Statement is not aiming for the kind of doctrinal specificity found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* or *The Second Helvetic Confession.* The points of doctrinal specificity in TGC's documents are intentional, as are the areas of silence.

It is also important to note that the vast majority of the Council members are part of denominations or churches which confess the faith in one or another lengthy (and, in most cases, historic) document. That is to say that, personally and ecclesiastically, the men of the Council do not eschew doctrinal specificity in order to espouse a "mere Christianity" kind of confessionalism. [35] We heartily agree with the sentiment that "being confessional is inextricably bound up with ecclesiastical commitment".[36] We, however, would disagree if it is also implied that any other (extra-ecclesiastical) confessional statement is wholly illegitimate. Confessions have, historically, served varying purposes. Primarily and most often they were ecclesial documents, but sometimes they had primary political aims and sometimes they were public testimonies of the unity shared between Christians in other communions and on other continents.[37] The church has historically crafted statements of varying length/specificity – some more

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[33] See the recent analysis, Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013). For analyses of evangelicalism from different perspectives see Andy David Naselli and Collin Hansen, eds., *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

[34] British readers will likely know which ones better than us; therefore, we will not venture into specifics which may be misinformed.

[35] Per Carl R. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 132.

[36] Ibid., 133.

[37] We would point readers to the lengthy Preface of the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* for its confessional vision. See also the treatment of the Savoy Preface in Kelly, "Reformed or Reforming?", 26-29.

elaborate, some mere "fundamental articles".[38] The latter did not generally (at least not in the Reformed tradition) grow out of a desire to minimise particulars for baptism, the Lord's Supper, or church polity, but to acknowledge the degree of unity that could be confessed and the inevitable diversity in Christ's church in matters secondary and tertiary.[39]

One wonders what the alternative is. Should pastors and churches limit any and all fellowship to their own strict confessional communion? Must it be all-or-nothing? Can there not be spheres of fellowship and degrees of partnership, while the local church robustly remains at the centre? And if fellowship, partnership, and networking are possible or even noble, shall we not sometimes write down our shared confession?[40]

3. Seeking to become "the voice" of (Reformed) Evangelicalism

Some of the criticism of TGC has centred on its perceived desire to dominate the Evangelical scene, to become "the voice" of Reformed Evangelicalism, or to "set the church's agenda".[41] Perhaps one reason for this concern is the sheer size of TGC's footprint on the web and social media. The numbers involved, already mentioned, are quite remarkable. In as much as these "clicks" represent people reading good, thoughtful material, we rejoice that Christ may use those efforts to strengthen his church. The same would go for the number of TGC conferences and their attendees. Many have come. Conferences have been added.[42] Hopefully those labours have borne true fruit, by God's grace. We believe that they have, along with many other good conferences of our day.

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[38] See the lengthy discussion on "fundamental articles" in Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 1:406-30.

[39] See R. Albert Mohler, "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity", at http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity (12 July 2005, accessed 16 February 2014) on this theological distinction. On diversity within the Reformed historically, see Richard Muller, "Diversity in the Reformed Tradition", in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates within Seventeenth-Century British Reformed Puritanism*, Michael Haykin and Mark Jones, eds. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 11-30.

[40] A similar (if not simpler) approach to expressing parachurch doctrinal unity is that of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals' *Cambridge Declaration*, an exposition of the Reformation "*Sola*'s": http://www.alliancenet.org/cc/article/0„PTID307086_CHID771654_CIID1411364,00.html (accessed 16 February 2014). Also noteworthy is that the Alliance has a unified and diverse council, quite similar to TGC's. See http://www.alliancenet.org/cc/article/0„PTID307086_CHID560462_CIID1920170,00.html (accessed 16 February 2014). In fact, both councils share several men.

[41] See for instance Carl Trueman's article, "What if Life Was Complex?", *Reformation 21* (April 2013), at http://www.reformation21.org/articles/what-if-life-was-complex.php (accessed 16 February 2014), though he has raised this concern in other articles and blog posts.

[42] See http://thegospelcoalition.org/conferences (accessed 16 February 2014).

Growth, whether in business or ministry, is a strange thing. It certainly cannot be manufactured out of thin air. It arises from reciprocating responses between public interest and leader initiative. A businessman (or a pastor, sadly) may set out from the beginning to become the biggest or most famous, and he may manoeuvre for market share in his industry. Such was not the case with TGC's organic and uncertain beginnings.[43] Tim Keller and Don Carson went for a walk one day – quite literally – and began talking of ways to encourage gospel-centred ministry in the broader church. They later invited a few dozen pastors to join them in that discussion. This group began to discuss their points of doctrinal agreement. Formal documents and future plans began to emerge. In 2007 these men went public with an unadvertised conference, and a few hundred pastors attended. [44] By 2009 another conference was planned, this time with the typical promotion of a national conference, and thousands turned up. [45] Such developments were not accidental, not totally detached from human activity, of course, but grew out of a mysterious mix of perceived need, human planning, and divine providence.

Some criticisms of TGC have, at times, seemed to presume to know and impugn motives of those leading TGC. We must always remember that it is a dangerous thing to venture a sure assessment of another man's heart (see 1 Cor 4:3-5). As we think about the men currently on our Council we do not know of any man who seems to have overtly sought out a massive ministry. Of course, they are sinners all, and no doubt wrestle with pride and the like. But more apparent to us is that they seem to be gifted men who have simply done the next thing God has put before them. A book needs to be written; one has the wherewithal to write it, and so does. A conference seems like a good idea, and so it gets planned; then another. A gifted blogger is willing to come under the umbrella to blog from TGC's website. An international initiative seems wise, and God provides for it and continues to bless it.[46] On and on it goes – or so it has thus far. God only knows whether it will exist, let alone be fruitful and faithful, in the decades to follow. It is a human institution, and only Christ's church is sure to grow and prevail (Matt 16:18). Thus far we can only confess that a Paul may plant, and an Apollos may water, but "God gives the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything" (1 Cor 3:6-7).

4. Celebrity culture

Surely the discussion of celebrity culture in American Evangelicalism is far broader than TGC, but occasionally those two have been united in the same

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[43] See http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/history (accessed 16 February 2014).

[44] See http://thegospelcoalition.org/conferences/2007 (accessed 16 February 2014).

[45] See http://thegospelcoalition.org/conferences/2009 (accessed 16 February 2014).

[46] See http://thegospelcoalition.org/io (accessed 16 February 2014).

conversation, and so it is unavoidably part of this discussion here. Why say *unavoidably*? Well, because something strange does seem afoot. It is true: at large conferences well-known speakers are often sought out for a picture or a signature. The thankfulness shown to a public preacher can at times appear to slip into adulation. Some seem to identify more with a famous preacher or author than their own church or pastor. It is an issue that has been bemoaned by a number of well-known pastors themselves.[47]

However, a number of points have also been made on various blogs, not in complete denial of such concerns, but in seeking to clarify the language used, dynamics involved, and the overall complexity of the matter.[48] We will not retrace the same arguments here (to do so would occupy a full journal article or more), but highlighting some of the bullet points might be useful:

- We ought to give thanks to God for gifted servants in his church. We should also "honour" such men (1 Tim 5:17), as we should those parts of the body which "lack honour" (1 Cor 12:24).
- We should be careful to not assume to know the hearts of those who have been given a large platform, as if fame or influence were the sure mark of greed or self-promotion.
- Critics of celebrity culture are not immune from pride, factionalism, even greed.
- "Celebrity" is probably not a helpful word since it is inherently pejorative.
- "Famous" pastors are not necessarily something new to the church. Luther, Calvin, Whitefield, Spurgeon, and many others were very well known in their day. Even in Paul's day there was apparently a "brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel" (2 Cor 8:18).
- We should pray for those who have become well known, as they face temptations (and no doubt frustrations) that others do not.
- Local pastors and their weekly preaching ministry should be of primary importance for every Christian.
- There are big differences between hero-worship, on the one hand, and thankfulness, emulation, and admiration, on the other – though the line is not always clear or agreed upon by all.

Perhaps it would be helpful for me (Ryan) to speak personally and anecdotally. I suspect I have a somewhat unique insight here since I am a

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[47] For one example of this, see John Piper, "Hero Worship and Holy Emulation", 10 June 2009, at http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/hero-worship-and-holy-emulation (accessed 16 February 2014).

[48] Many relevant blog posts can be found by simply searching "celebrity" at the Ref21 and TGC websites. Also noteworthy is a panel discussion with C.J. Mahaney, Carl Trueman, David Platt, Ligon Duncan, Matt Chandler, and Thabiti Anyabwile, "Celebrity Pastor: Indecent Exposure?" at the 2012 T4G conference, at http://t4g.org/media/2012/05/celebrity-pastor-indecent-exposure-2 (accessed 16 February 2014).

decidedly un-famous figure who happens to be friends with many of these so-called "famous" pastors. I have been privileged to serve on TGC's Council for a few years now – not because I have written a best-selling book or speak at large conferences. It is certainly not because I have deep pockets; nor does my mid-size church. Don Carson simply asked me if I would be open to joining the Council after spending time at our church for a conference weekend.[49] It was inexplicable and humbling; yet enormously encouraging, as it signalled something that I would not have known from the outside – that it is not just a Council of movers-and-shakers.[50]

From the outside I suppose the Council (with its well-known names like Piper, Carson, Keller, Dever, etc.) seems an impressive group. In many ways it is, I have learned, but perhaps not the way some may think. Every man in the room is a gifted and able pastor or theologian, but many are largely unknown outside their own churches. Yet, I have never seen any kind of class system or snootiness or gamesmanship. I have never seen someone brushed aside. Of course, some men are more vocal than others; some are more influential than others. That is inevitable just as it is in a local church eldership. But, similar to a godly eldership, I have found our yearly Council meetings to be marked by humility, not hubris; by genuine care and affection, not rivalry or boasting. When theological discussions have been rigorous, I have witnessed self-control and mutual respect, alongside passionate conviction and allegiance to truth.

I cannot speak much to the issue of "famous" pastors outside of TGC's Council. I simply have no up-close experience. But as pertains to TGC's present Council I have not seen much, if any, of the concerns that seem to be raised on blogs. Take that for what it is; it is simply one man's observation – but note that it is not from one of the "pretty people" or "Top Men", as my friend Carl likes to say.

Of course, the above is far from the only thing to be said about "famous" pastors and "celebrity" culture. Not only is it one man's perspective, it is solely an observation about the perceived attitudes and ambitions of our Council members. It is not meant to convey that all is well and that issues of

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[49] To be clear, this conversation was merely the first step in being considered for the Council. As with anyone else's consideration, a recommendation is taken to the Governance Committe, which may then make recommendation to the Board, which may then make motion to the Council, culminating in their vote.

[50] In fact, it is a stated (though perhaps unpublicised) intention that, as much as possible, the Council's makeup will be diverse in regards to ethnicity, geography, and church-size. That pursuit of diversity extends to the editorial philosophy of TGC. While many of TGC's bloggers are internationally known – and have been long before coming under the wing of TGC (e.g., Justin Taylor) – there are literally hundreds writing for TGC's main blog who have no such following (see http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc). The editorial philosophy strives to put emphasis on the content of articles and not authors. In these ways there is some intentional push against the tide of "celebrity culture".

celebrity and fandom are mere bogeymen. So we must circle back to a more cautionary note for what must happen or continue to happen if God is in these networking, conferencing efforts:

- Our young men must push against all aspirations for ministerial fame and large ministries, and instead enter ministry with the sober expectation of suffering and difficulty, as the Scriptures everywhere teach.
- Our young pastors must not allow substance to give way to style.
- Our gifted pastors will have to continue to wrestle with the opportunities that arise outside their local flock, giving priority to their pastoral call, not books and outside speaking engagements.[51]
- Our pastors of smaller churches will have to continue to fight against envying those with larger or more prominent ministries, just as pastors of larger churches must fight the temptation to think their ministries must be more blessed and more pleasing to God.
- We must all remember the frailty of man, and "put not [our] trust in princes" or pastors (Ps 146:3). Men may fail us, but God is our "strength and portion forever" (Ps 73:26).
- Our pastors of national or international notoriety must continue to look for opportunities to redirect the spotlight. Like John the Baptist, they will have to say and demonstrate: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

5. Self-appointed leaders with no accountability

As mentioned earlier, potential Council members of TGC are voted in by the Council itself. In that sense, the Council is inevitably a self-appointed entity.[52] This has been an oft-stated concern for some. But once again we wonder what the alternative is. Is the critique meant to suggest that TGC should become a denomination? Well, that would revive the first of the concerns addressed in this article. Is it suggesting that TGC should come under a single denomination? That would necessarily limit the Council's constituents to that single denomination, creating a silo affect, which we are overtly trying to avoid. Is it suggested that we form a super-denomination invested with ecclesiastical powers made up of elected officials from member churches? Of course it is not (most thankfully). What then is the alternative to a council

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[51] See the thoughtful interview, "Tim Keller on Writing and Ministry", posted 12 December 2013 at http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2013/12/12/tim-keller-on-writing-and-ministry/ (accessed 17 February 2014).

[52] As described previously, behind the scenes there are some checks and balances in place. Each year the Governance Committee nominates a handful of men. Agreed-upon-names are passed to the Board. With their approval those names then move to the Council for a vote. Council members are elected to serve on the Board or Governance Committee for three years. Similarly, their selection is determined by nominations and eventually a vote from the Council. It is surely not a perfect system, but there are checks and balances in place.

and/or board that votes upon its new members? Is such a system with a non-ecclesiastical board and larger council much different than the leadership structure one finds in a non-denominational seminary or missions agency?

A related concern is a possible lack of accountability. As was already noted, however, there are constitutional allowances for the Council of TGC to ask for a Council member's resignation. The same is, in fact, true for the President and Vice President. There is institutional accountability as far as that goes. There is also fraternal or brotherly accountability; confrontation and exhortation can, and does, take place. Obviously this sort of accountability would precede any formal, institutional kind. But neither pretends to be ecclesiastical in nature.

Conclusion: Moving Ahead with Eyes Wide Open

There are a number of legitimate dangers that need to be heeded when it comes to interdenominational, somewhat amorphous, largely self-selecting gospel partnerships. Any of the organisations, networks, or movements mentioned in this article could end up as just another fad, just another chasing after the wind. Indeed, we should be well aware that Christ only promises that he will build the church. Every interdenominational organisation will pass away in time, just like our denominational organisations may pass away. But the fact that David passed away does not make it pointless that he served the Lord faithfully in his generation (Acts 13:36). Let us not make T4G, TGC, ACE, A29, SGM, or any other abbreviation more important than it is, but let us not make them less than God may want them to be. Sure, there are dangers; these movements could crumble under the weight of supposed self-importance; there is the danger of idolising our heroes and envying our colleagues; there is the danger of minimising important doctrines in an effort to promote gospel-centred unity; there is the danger of not being careful enough with our associations – and the opposite danger of taking glee in deciding who is in and who is out.

These new partnerships have all the problems that any extra-ecclesial partnership has. There is no official spokesperson, no adjudicating assembly, no easy way to determine where and when to draw lines. In some organisations, people fight too much. In others, they are too reticent to criticise. Some leaders may labour in their informal networks to the detriment of principled participation in their own ecclesiastical structures. We need to be on guard against triumphalism and pragmatism. We need to be wary of pride. We need to be careful not to be too derivative in our thinking. We need to be anchored in books over blogs, in old truths over passing tweets. We need to be sure our deepest and most sustained energies are poured into that one institution against which Christ promised the gates of hell could not stand.

In other words, almost every critique has some merit; almost every warning should be considered. And yet, our *first* response to these new movements is not a roll of the eyes or a "yeah but"; it is gratitude:

- gratitude that 8000 pastors can hear the gospel celebrated and defended at a T4G conference;
- gratitude that TGC's website has become the go-to spot among a wide array of Christians for news, reviews, and commentary;
- gratitude for groups like A29 and City to City planting churches that are rooted in the inerrancy of Scripture and preach penal substitutionary atonement;
- gratitude for scores of young people searching for substance instead of mere style and finding what they are looking for in pastors three times their age;
- gratitude for an embarrassment of riches in theological literature getting into the hands of pastors, into churches, and into hungry church leaders around the world;
- gratitude for well-known pastors and not-so-well-known pastors taking the time to get to know each other, learn from each other, pray for each other, and cheer each other on;
- gratitude that those engaged in these partnerships believe that careful, robust theology does not get in the way of all the good we want to do, but is the engine for it.

We have no desire to spend our days as apologists for man-made ministry acronyms. If every organisation in this article disappeared tomorrow, the gospel would keep going out and Christ would keep building his church. The question is not whether any of these partnerships are essential. The question, at least for us, is whether they help to support what is essential. Do they serve the local church? Do they help pastors? Do they defend the truth? Do they preach the gospel? Do they get people into their Bibles? Do they provoke people to pursue holiness? Will someone who gets deeply involved with the conferences, the resources, the websites, the documents, and the teaching of these networks end up more committed to the church, more engaged with Scripture, more sure of what they believe, more precise with doctrine, more equipped for reaching the lost, more passionate about the nations, and more delighted with the glory of God in the face of Christ? If the answer is a yes – or even a qualified yes – then for our part we are eager to see these movements flourish and eager to partner with those similarly concerned for and similarly committed to the same gospel.

PARACHURCH GROUPS AND THE ISSUES OF
INFLUENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Carl R. Trueman[*]

Parachurch groups can fulfill a variety of legitimate functions in the Christian world but one of the key issues is that of discerning when and where the parachurch starts to usurp the functions of the church. This raises important questions of accountability and transparency as they connect to influence and power. Recent events in the United States provide a good example of some of the problems that can occur when the lines between church and parachurch become blurred. Nevertheless, as long as parachurch groups have clear and very limited purposes, they can be very helpful as a means of encouraging discussion and action on various issues.

Given the fragmented nature of the Christian church in this present age, and the fact that in many parts of the West the church is in numerical decline, there is a desire among many Christians to engage in co-belligerent propagation of the gospel that transcends congregational, and even denominational, boundaries. When one adds to the mix that many Christians belong to denominations which tolerate all manner of false teaching and thus consider themselves to have more in common with those in other churches, it is not surprising that we live in an era of significant parachurch activity. Parachurch groups so often seem the answer, or at least part of the answer, to the weakened and fissiparous nature of contemporary church life.

At a general level, the issue of the parachurch is really an issue of the church. How one understands the latter, in terms of her authority structure, the nature and extent of her power, and the role which she fulfills, will determine precisely how one understands the role, if any, of parachurch organisations. This is in many ways a modern problem. Even at the time of the Reformation and the immediately subsequent generations, the issue of parachurch as we now know it did not arise. True, churchmen did things that went beyond church services and meetings directly connected with church governance. In Geneva, the Company of Pastors met for mutual encouragement and edification. In Zurich and then in England, the proph-esyings were gatherings focused on helping ministers improve their preaching skills. But these were all churchly in that the men involved were also connected to the same ecclesiastical bodies and subject to the same

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accountability structures. They were not parachurch groups, standing apart from structures provided by established polity.

There is also a further distinction which needs to be made within the notion of the parachurch: There are parachurch organisations which are truly para-church, in that they exist to serve, and be subservient to, actual churches, and which fulfill such a narrow function that they cannot be confused with churches. To this group belong institutions such as seminaries and Bible colleges. They have a specific educational remit and are not involved in regular preaching, sacramental duties and discipline with regard to a specific congregation. We might also include in this group those organisations which exist to promote a specific issue or narrowly defined set of issues. Thus, Christian publishers fall into this category. The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood would be parachurch in this sense, as might also be groups such as the Proclamation Trust in the United Kingdom. Few, if any, question whether such groups can, in principle, do good for the church, though there might be some interesting differences of opinion on how exactly they are to be connected to the church. For example, should seminary Board and Faculty members be appointed by the church? Such a question is beyond the scope of this article.

There are also parachurch organisations which one might characterise as really being quasi-church organisations. These have much wider ambitions and can easily be mistaken for denominations. The rest of this article will address parachurch organisations which potentially fall into this category. It is not a clear line between the para- and the quasi-church, and thus it is the question of how one assesses whether a group has crossed that line which will occupy us here.

Take, for example, The Gospel Coalition, probably the most significant and influential parachurch group in the English-speaking world today. TGC seeks to represent a clearly defined, but relatively broad, constituency of evangelical belief. TGC may not explicitly fulfil all churchly functions (they do not baptise or administer the Lord's Supper) and may even claim explicitly that it is not a church or denomination. But TGC holds conferences which run over Sundays, thus supplanting the local church commitment of attendees and also holds "worship services" which may be led by people who are not ordained to gospel ministry, in the sense of being called to ministry of the Word by a specific local congregation (as in congregational and Baptist polity) or by a Presbytery (as in Presbyterian polity). It has also produced a more or less elaborate catechism. Significantly (and this is harder to quantify) for some of its affiliated churches, it has cultivated an ethos where it has come to function as an identity marker in the way denominational identity might do for others. Thus, some churches and some individuals identify themselves as "a TGC church" or "a member of TGC".

The difference between TGC and, say, a seminary or a single-issue group is clear, but that between it and a church or denomination is somewhat less obvious. Various factors play into this situation: organisational ambition, marketing, the kind of products (for want of a better word) with which it is associated and, above all, how the organisation is perceived by the market. Yet understanding why there is a need to distinguish the church from the parachurch is vital because such groups can exert tremendous influence in the church world, and, when they do so, they can also be functionally unaccountable. That is highly problematic.

One final point we should note: there is a great temptation when discussing parachurch groups to look at the good they have done and to see that as justification for their existence. It may well be so; but we must not allow pragmatic considerations to be the ultimate criteria by which we judge whether a parachurch group is a good thing or not. Those criteria must come from scripture.

The Church

Given the above, it is useful first of all to clarify what the New Testament teaching on the institutional church is. Obviously, ecclesiology is a massive subject and a brief article cannot deal with every issue and nuance. Thus, I will not here address the differences that exist between different understandings of the New Testament teaching, such as exist between Baptists and Presbyterians, but restrict myself to the most basic elements.[1]

These basics are stated clearly by Paul in the Pastoral Epistles. The church has a certain institutional structure provided by the appointment of overseers and deacons, the former to deal with doctrine and discipline, the latter with the material wellbeing of the congregation.[2] The church is also to hold fast to a form of sound words. For a Presbyterian, this function is fulfilled by a confession of faith. What is clear is that the New Testament knows of no doctrinal authority which is not also an ecclesiastical authority, connected to congregations of the church. Paul does not envisage ecclesiastical functions – preaching the gospel, refuting error, administering the sacraments, and discipleship – being fulfilled by some organisation which stands apart from the church. Overseers are appointed by the church to fulfil these functions within the church.

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[1] A good primer on Presbyterian polity is Guy Prentiss Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church* (Phillipsburg, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2011). Mark Dever has edited an excellent collection of essays on Baptist polity, *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life (A Collection of Historic Baptist Documents)* (Center for Church Reform, 2001).

[2] I am aware that Christians disagree on the nature of the diaconal office. I here offer the standard Presbyterian definition. Differences on this matter do not affect my central argument: that the New Testament envisages a church with a polity.

This basic pattern is reflected in the earliest writings extant outside the New Testament canon. Whether it is the *Didache*, (possibly written as early as 70 AD) with its hints at a congregational polity, or the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch (early second century) with their very high view of the office of overseer, it is clear that authority was conceived of as ecclesiastical, as connected in some way to local congregations and to church bodies.

This is not simply biblical; it also makes perfect sense. Paul's notion of officers and forms of sound words provides a clear way in which authority within the church can be exercised and, indeed, regulated. As that has been worked out in Congregational and Presbyterian polity, the minister is made accountable to the congregation (and in the latter case the Presbytery) with the confession of faith as the document by which his power can be limited. If I stand up on a Sunday and declare the Trinity to be a heresy, the congregation have a clear and transparent process by which they can hold me to account and, if necessary, have me removed from office.[3]

In short, Paul envisages the church as an organisation as involving the connection of structure and doctrine, of influence and accountability. The reason is because the church is in a serious business: the preservation and propagation of the gospel, which is too serious a task to be left to groups where there is no accountability to the body of Christ as it manifests itself at the most basic congregational level.

The Problem of Influence, Transparency and Accountability in Parachurch Groups

We might now return to TGC, given its status as the flagship conservative and Calvinistic parachurch group. TGC is governed by a council. The council is appointed by itself. As with all such groups, there are inevitably a few high-profile and powerful individuals who are more invested in the group and exert more influence than others. The council also decides who is allowed to speak and write for the organisation. Such is life, one might say. Yet this is the gospel we are talking about and so the question of accountability to the church as manifested in specific congregations and/or denominations is of vital importance when it comes to groups which seek to influence the church. So to whom is the council accountable?

Formally, the council is only accountable to itself. Informally, of course, it is a little more complicated than that. There is the donor base which is free-floating and not formally connected to a specific congregation or denomination as it would be in a church. Then there is accountability to the market which buys the TGC conference tickets and related products. None of

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[3] I deal in more detail with the relationship between church, confession and polity in *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012).

this is necessarily wrong: the same kind of accountability applies to publishers of Christian books, for example. But if the council of TGC starts to take on ecclesiastical functions, to function like a denomination in terms of identity, then the question of accountability becomes that much more critical. Massive influence disconnected from ecclesiastical accountability, whether we are talking individuals or organisations, is unknown in the New Testament.

Take, for example, the incident which took place in 2011-12 where two members of TGC's council, James MacDonald and Mark Driscoll decided to share a platform with Oneness Pentecostal pastor and prosperity preacher, T D Jakes at the Elephant Room 2.[4] Mark Dever, another member of TGC's council was also invited but withdrew when Jakes' invitation was made public. The problem was not that Christian leaders were engaging a modalist prosperity teacher in debate; it was that the whole point of the event was that it was a dialogue between *Christian* leaders and that the invitation to Jakes was itself an acknowledgment of his legitimacy as a leader. Several months after the announcement, MacDonald and Driscoll resigned from the TGC council and were wished well in their future ministry by TGC. Their products – books and conferences – continued to be advertised via TGC's webpage, even after ER II, when they affirmed the Unitarian Jakes as a Christian brother after he answered a series of simplistic and naively-articulated questions.[5]

The incident raised in acute forms questions of accountability and responsibility. Membership of the TGC council had given both men the imprimatur of TGC, and its leadership had brought them, via that imprimatur and the major platform they had enjoyed at previous TGC conferences, to a much wider evangelical audience, large though their previous constituencies had been. That TGC's leadership affirmed Macdonald in God's call to his future endeavours as the reason for his departure was quite stunning.[6] There was clearly a grave moral responsibility placed on the council of TGC to deal with him in a decisive and indeed a public way, making it clear that doctrinal

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[4] The Elephant Room is an event organised by Chicago megachurch pastor, James Macdonald, as a roundtable discussion among Christian leaders.

[5] See http://www.christianpost.com/news/t-d-jakes-connection-to-james-macdonalds-resignation-from-the-gospel-coalition-67881/.

[6] The Gospel Coalition's statement read as follows: "Earlier today on his blog, James MacDonald publicly announced his resignation as a Council member of The Gospel Coalition. James was one of our founding members, and we would like to thank him and Harvest Bible Chapel warmly and publicly for their years of service and support. As the reason for his departure, James notes that he "has very different views on how to relate to the broader church". He added, "I believe their [TGC's] work will be assisted by my absence, given my methodological convictions". We acknowledge that James feels called of God into these spheres, and we wish him well in his far-reaching endeavors, and many years of ministry both faithful and fruitful.' http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/category/current-events/page/15/.

lines have been crossed, Christians potentially confused and souls potentially jeopardised. These are serious matters.

Yet such clear leadership was lacking in the bland and equivocal official well-wishing that followed MacDonald's and Driscoll's departure and it is hard not to see the muted criticism of a usually forthright leadership as rooted in issues other than theology. MacDonald and Driscoll have huge churches and huge followings. To put it crudely, their names on a conference flyer sell tickets, put backsides on seats, and guarantee revenue. Unfortunately, TGC had booked large conference centres for its conferences several years in advance. It has a significant budget to meet. It has employees for which it must care. And it has a reputation for being irenic and standing above the fray of other, "nastier" groups. In short, it has both a reputation to maintain in order to hold its large and broad constituency and it also needs the constituency which the MacDonalds and Driscolls bring with them to raise the money necessary to meet its commitments and to maintain its operation.

The problem is clear: TGC has given these two men credibility in many congregations which do not belong to their own church connection. In their dalliance with the denier of the Incarnation, he has been shown to be at best theologically incompetent and thus as lacking the qualifications for serving a New Testament church as an overseer. And yet, despite the massive influence they had come to exert as mediated through TGC, there was no real public accountability. One cannot promote men as sound public teachers, use them to gain one's organisation publicity and market share, and then, when they prove not to be so, deal with the matter behind closed doors.

Money, personal relationships, other agendas – these all play their part in decisions respecting such matters at parachurch organisations in a way they should not do. Properly-constituted congregational overseers and congregations play no role in the process. Doctrine is just one issue which groups such as the TGC council have to balance against others, such as money and public relations. The self-appointed and self-perpetuating councils discuss these problematic scenarios behind closed doors and make decisions for which they, too, are unaccountable to anyone but themselves.

This raises in an acute form one of the problems which large and influential parachurch organisations create today: influence needs always to be connected to accountability. When there is no formal connection between such, and where the processes for handling problem situations are not transparent, there is a recipe for disaster.

One response to this might be that churches have problems too. That is true, though the difference is this: when a church goes bad it is because of the weak and sometimes wicked people who staff its structures and there are ways of addressing this. Good polity does not mean there will never be problems; it does not guarantee that its principles will always be followed; in fact, it merely provides transparent processes for dealing with such when

they inevitably arise. It is the men who hold office who must apply such procedures and who can sometimes fail to do so, with disastrous results.

When parachurch groups with no such processes go bad, however, it is arguably a structural problem. There is no transparency and there are constituency issues at play that are not set in any clear and precise relationship to each other, and often have little to do with doctrinal orthodoxy and Christian discipleship. A Presbyterian denomination, for example, has open and clear processes for the nomination and election of officers, for the examination of candidates for ordination, for the mutual relationship of accountability between congregation, session, Presbytery, and General Assembly. Power is not simply top-down, nor is business contracted behind closed doors in meetings to which church members can never have access. There are no self-appointed bodies in the governance of the church and there are checks and balances on power all the way through. The same is also the case in well-constituted congregational and Baptist churches. Yes, the system does fail; but it fails because of the flawed people involved, not because the system itself is ultimately incapable of handling the task which it has been set. And, of course, there is the obvious major difference between churches and parachurches: the former are divinely sanctioned and are ruled by God's Word; they are created by God and regulated, in confession and form, by the Word of God. The latter are merely human organisations, whatever practical good they may do.

Parachurch Organisations are not the Solution to the Problem that is Represented by Denominations

A common justification for expansive parachurch organisations is that they promote unity among Christians and give visible form to the unity which believers have in Christ. This is a powerful argument. The divisions that exist in the church are a tragic testimony to human sinfulness. Yet this argument is nonetheless generally overplayed.

A Presbyterian response to a Baptist or Congregationalist, of course, is going to be: that is why you need to have a connectional polity. It is good and appropriate that you wish to express the unity of the body in some form which goes beyond that of the local congregation but the way you should do that is through the offices and mechanism which God has established for doing such. If, however, you believe every local church should be truly autonomous and independent, then why do you want to create formal organisations which potentially subvert that autonomy, even if such subversion is only informal, as was arguably the case in the MacDonald/Driscoll/Jakes affair? Should you not simply be satisfied with informal, low-key inter-congregational fellowship?

In the United Kingdom, the "unity" case for parachurch organisations is often made by Anglican Evangelicals who labour in a denomination where they have little or nothing in common with many of their ecclesiastical colleagues. To them the response should be, "If you want to express unity, the first thing you should do is join a denomination where you are united in Christ, as far as you can tell, with everybody else who belongs to it. Christian unity in the Bible, at least visible Christian unity, is a churchly unity and it is that for which we should strive first and foremost."

The flip-side of such arguments is that those who do join parachurch groups as a way of seeking unity often regard those who refuse to be involved in a negative light. Such naysayers are often vulnerable to the accusation from members of that group that it is they who are subverting Christian unity and dividing the body. That is both unfair and wrongheaded.

It is unfair because of the arbitrary nature of the claim. Somebody somewhere decides to form the next big organisation for carrying the gospel forward. They manage to obtain funding for setting up an infrastructure, and then spread their influence via the web, plush conferences and a regular cast of high profile figures to be the public face of the organisation. This is the perfect context for making demands that everyone else hop on board or get out of the way. Such an approach fails to take into account that those involved in confessional denominations, where orthodoxy is upheld and churches carry out the Great Commission under the authority of elected church officers, are already trying to express Christian unity in the gospel through their churches and their denomination, albeit imperfectly. To such, it is inappropriate to have the personal vision of a handful of self-selected individuals trump or outflank historic – and biblical – ecclesiastical commitments.

It is wrongheaded because, there is a basic category error at work here. One cannot solve the problem of church disunity via a non-church organisation. The only thing which can bring about Christian unity in a formal, visible sense, is formal, visible *church* unity. To be united in a parachurch group is not expressing Christian unity in any deep sense. At best, it expresses unity for co-belligerence on a selection of specific issues. If it is doing more, then its leaders are ultimately making claims to be a church or denomination in some sense and, if they do that, then they need to develop a biblical polity to express that. One cannot simultaneously enjoy the lack of ecclesiastical accountability that self-appointed parachurch leadership brings with it and also claim to be doing something which only the church can do.

I should emphasise here that such unity in co-belligerence can be extremely helpful. As I will note below, there are numerous things which parachurch groups do well. But such unity can never be Christian churchly unity as assumed in the New Testament. That can only come about in and

through churches connecting together as churches under the authority structures set forth in the New Testament.

The Parachurch is Limited by the Fact it
Can Never Practically be the Church

The practical limits of parachurch organisations are also evident when one comes to think about what they can actually do. Parachurch unity almost always requires the sidelining of doctrines which are important in the Bible and are, indeed, important for the day-to-day running of the church. Take baptism, for example. There are Christians who are credobaptists and there are Christians who are paedobaptists. One thing that both parties should agree on is this: baptism is very important in the New Testament and absolutely basic to the local church. To put it bluntly, the local church has to have a position on the subjects and (perhaps to a slightly lesser extent) the mode of baptism. One could argue that it is a matter indifferent, but that would be very hard to maintain on the basis of the New Testament which seems to make baptism something very important indeed.

Yet so many parachurch organisations – for example, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, The Gospel Coalition, and Together for the Gospel – take no definitive stand on the issue of baptism. By doing so they signal that they cannot, for example, plant churches or function as denominations. Yet that message – "We are not a church but a group that campaigns simply for the promotion of *x*" – needs to be pressed home again and again, lest the constituency or, even worse, the leadership lose track of that idea. The Alliance exists to promote the use of confessions among churches; that message is narrow and focused. All groups need to be similarly clear and focused in their purpose. That is yet another indicator of the limited role which must be ascribed to such groups. That is fine, as long as the ambitions of these organisations are not, in practice, churchly ambitions. Once such groups come to be seen as the solution to problems epitomised by churchly organisations, then we see the difficulty.

Parachurch Organisations Can Be
Vulnerable to Cults of Personality

Cults of personality – the investing of undue power and influence in a particular individual or group of individuals because of their status within the social networks of Evangelicalism rather than because of the office which they hold in the church – are a complicated, multifaceted issue. Numerous factors come into play here: The typical parachurch conference is, by definition, far more interesting, and one might even say glamorous, as a

venue than weekly church ministry. Thus, the people up on the stage will tend to have an aura which the local man may lack. Further, the reach of parachurch groups via conferences, well-constructed websites and other media goes far beyond that of the local church and even some denominations. When this is combined with the economic need to sell tickets and fill stadia, there is a natural tendency to focus once again on the megachurch pastor types.

Several problems can arise as a result of this. First, certain parachurch leaders can begin to believe their own publicity and assume they have a right to control who says what in the broader evangelical world, to stifle criticism, to decide who is allowed to speak and who is placed on the margins. This brings us back again to the problematic relationship of influence and accountability in the parachurch world. Elder boards, sessions and presbyteries may not be perfect but one thing they do well in a healthy church culture is ensure that no one voice dominates the discussion and that no one person ends up being the centre of attention.

Second, in a world of big conferences and dynamic speakers, the aspirational model of normative ministry comes to be determined by the extraordinary. At a conference, the delegate sees the stage filled with men who pastor churches of hundreds or thousands, with excellent budgets and all of the excitement and possibilities that such things imply. Yet the typical delegate knows his ministry will never be like that. The temptation to despondency can be strong.

Parachurch Groups Can Give Power and Influence to Those Who Do Not Biblically Qualify for Such

One of the striking developments of the last two decades has been the role of information technology in parachurch organisations. Web pages, the blog format, the ability to manipulate Google searches etc. have all become critical. This technological aspect inevitably tends to favour the young, the entrepreneurial, those who have the flexibility to learn new skills and to keep up with relevant developments. Yet the young are not those which the Bible typically envisages as holding office in the church. Were that the case, Paul would hardly have had to tell Timothy that he should let no one despise him for his youth: Timothy was obviously the exception.

When one looks at the list of qualifications for ruling in the church, the reason is obvious: the qualities needed by an elder, from good household management to a good reputation in the neighbourhood, are generally only possessed by men who are older and more mature. Yet the parachurch influence, mediated through the web, separates influence from qualifications. Of course, technology has always done that to an extent: the invention of the

printing press allowed for easy extension of influence without accountability. But the role of the web has massively increased the speed and reach of influence, and dramatically favoured the media savvy (i.e. the younger) over against the kind of leadership profile and context envisaged by Paul. Again, the question of how influence can be connected to accountability in parachurch groups becomes acute.

Parachurch Groups Tend to Minimal Doctrinal Commitments and Occasional Eccentric Emphases

It is of the nature of coalition movements that the doctrinal basis has to be carefully constructed to maintain the consensus necessary. Thus, in many parachurch groups, credobaptists and paedobaptists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, cessationists and non-cessationists all co-exist. On one level, that is not a problem if the brief of the organisation is narrowly focused on an issue which does not touch on these areas. Thus, one could imagine such a group competently promoting expository preaching or raising awareness about contemporary cultural issues. It becomes problematic, however, when the group's ambition is larger – for example, if the group wants to encourage church planting or to present itself as teaching the whole counsel of God or, indeed, to demonstrate how the differences do not really matter.

   The problem here is that these issues do matter on the ground. One cannot be a church without a clear and specific view on the subjects of baptism. One has to have a view on whether the gifts continue or not. When one looks at a group like The Gospel Coalition, with bloggers like Kevin DeYoung and Tullian Tchividjian taking very different views on sanctification, the problem becomes acute at the most practical level. If one follows DeYoung, one will preach and counsel one way; if Tchividjian, then another. There is no middle ground, however much one might try to spin the situation to the contrary. How I counsel the young man addicted to pornography will be determined at the most basic level by whether I think DeYoung or Tchividjian is correct. The demands of holding together a donor base or a broad evangelical constituency cannot be allowed to obscure clear teaching on an issue of such practical, immediate and vital importance. Yet such is the nature of big-tent parachurch evangelical groups that the net result is that these issues on which there is agreement to differ become relativised and marginalised.[7]

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[7] For Tchividjian on sanctification, see his *Jesus + Nothing is Everything* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011); also *One Way Love: Inexhaustible Grace for an Exhausted World* (David C. Cook, 2013); for Kevin DeYoung's view, see his *The Hole in Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012). For a good statement of

Of course, in all churches some issues are considered more important than others. Yet the church has the advantage, at least in theory, of standing in line with historic confessional trajectories whose priorities have not been set by the tolerance or preferences of the immediate evangelical marketplace. Again, as with the case of TGC and Elephant Room II, the problem for the parachurch is really one of the collision of the financial needs, the theological limits of the sponsoring coalition, and the need to speak with a clear voice on important issues to the church. In the case of TGC, for example, it is fascinating that complementarianism (a much broader concept than simply restricting ministry of Word and sacrament to ordained men) is apparently a non-negotiable, while freedom is allowed on continuationism, baptism, sanctification, polity, and even evolution. The priorities are eclectic and not connected to any historic ecclesiastical confession of faith.

Conclusion: The Legitimate Role of Parachurch Groups

I am aware that, having been Stateside for thirteen years, much of the above material deals with examples which are primarily American. Nevertheless, modern media mean that what happens in the States today can happen in the UK tomorrow. And often all the British see is the glamorous and successful public faces of US parachurch agencies. They do not see the problems, the egos, the politics and, at points, the corruption which lies behind the scenes and which is so often an integral part of what is going on.

Having said that, and having established the problems with parachurch groups and also the necessary limits of their power, what role can they play?

Essentially, they can do what the name suggests: they can work alongside the church to support the church. Seminaries can train pastors, as long as there are clear lines of ecclesiastical accountability (as with my own seminary's requirement of ordination and presbytery call for professors). They can provide excellent conferences for pastors and people which allow for fellowship and encouragement. They can enable pastors working in small churches where they see little week-by-week encouragement to gather together to meet with others in similar situations. They can promote clearly-defined single issues, such as complementarianism or principled confessionalism, and provide material for churches who address such matters in their regular ministry. They can even produce occasional statements on key issues of contemporary interest, such as ethics or

what is at stake, theologically and pastorally, in this debate, see Mark Jones, *Antinomianism* (Phillipsburg, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2013).

inerrancy. We might say that they can fulfill handmaiden functions that help the church but they should never seek to lead or control the church.

Yet in all of this, the leadership of these groups needs to demonstrate a clear understanding that they are to serve the church. They must be careful to limit their own power to those boundaries which their accountability to churches requires. On the whole, that means they should have very limited and modest ambitions. They must make it clear in deed, and not simply in the occasional act of verbal throat-clearing, that they are not the church, do not seek to be the church, and must not be regarded by anyone as the church. Whether one is a Baptist or a Presbyterian, the fact is that the brilliant professor who has no call from a congregation or a Presbytery is just a brilliant professor, not a church leader with any formal authority in any church. The talented speaker with his own free-floating ministry is just a talented speaker, not an overseer or an elder. We need to make sure that neither the glamour and energy of parachurch groups, nor a legitimate desire to see Christians working together for the kingdom, obscures the fact that the parachurch cannot supplant the thoroughly sufficient model of church and accountability which Paul set forth in scripture.

GOSPEL PARTNERSHIPS AND GOSPEL UNITY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

John Stevens[*]

One of the most significant developments in the UK in the last decade has been the establishment of a number of regional "Gospel Partnerships". These offer a new model for unity and co-operation in the core doctrines of the gospel. The parallel development of The Gospel Coalition in the USA has been met by criticism, especially on the grounds that it exacerbates an unhelpful celebrity culture amongst pastors, exercises an undue power in defining the gospel and undermines ecclesiology and church practice. This article will examine the rise and role of Gospel Partnerships in the context of parachurch organisations more generally, highlight the blessing they have been and offer a preliminary critique of dangers they may face .

Over the course of the last decade a number of organisations which seek to unite Evangelicals in mission and church planting have emerged in the UK, whilst others have undergone significant renewal or transformation. In particular a new network of "Gospel Partnerships" have been established, which have brought conservative Evangelicals, both Anglican and Nonconformist, together to co-operate in mission, training, church planting and mutual support. Although their development has some parallels with the establishment of The Gospel Coalition in the United States, they have developed organically and indigenously. As with all such pan-evangelical bodies they have sought to identify core non-negotiable doctrines of the gospel as the basis for unity and co-operation, and have regarded convictions on matters of ecclesiology as secondary. As such they have been criticised by those who insist on the need for a full confessional basis for unity and ministry co-operation. This article will seek to explain and assess the emergence of such inter-denominational groups in the wider context of the role of parachurch organisations within UK Evangelicalism, and to indicate both the advantages and potential dangers that they might pose.[1]

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[1] For a more comprehensive consideration of the relationship between local churches and parachurch organisations see *Church and Parachurch: Friends or Foes?* http://www.9marks.org /journal/church-and-parachurch-friends-or-foes.

(1) Why have Parachurch Organisations Emerged?

Ever since the disintegration of a single church institutional structure at the time of the Reformation, and the subsequent failure of the magisterial reformers to create a uniform Protestant alternative at a national or territorial level,[2] it has been inevitable that Christians and churches will seek to find ways to co-operate together in the wider work of the gospel. Such co-operation may take the form of denominational groupings of churches, which share a detailed confessional position and have a legally-constituted hierarchy of authority, whether Presbyterian or Episcopal, to enforce discipline. Those who take an independent view of church government, with the conviction that the local church is competent under Christ to govern itself,[3] would see such structures as themselves akin to parachurch organisations. Indeed many Evangelicals within denominations, especially those that no longer enforce their Reformed or Evangelical confessional position, view them as little more than a support structure for their local church ministry.

However, denominational structures are able to develop co-operative ministry initiatives, such as the establishment of theological colleges and seminaries, which reflect the confessional or doctrinal position of the denomination, and are subject to its authority and discipline. Whilst these share some of the characteristics of parachurch organisations, and may also come to reflect the weaknesses of such entities, they are not strictly speaking parachurch organisations.

More significantly, the past three hundred years have seen the emergence of parachurch organisations that are not tied to one particular denomination, or to one single confessional or doctrinal constituency. Christians and churches from a variety of denominational and confessional positions have sought to form organisations, associations and societies to work together, regardless of their differences in theology, church government, ministry philosophy and sacramental practice, especially in regard to baptism. This has been especially true of Evangelicals, because they have come to realise that they share a set of core doctrinal convictions, and a conversionist ethos, that ultimately transcends their lesser doctrinal differences. They instinctively share more in common with each other than they do with those

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[2] See John Coffey, "Church and State, 1550-1750: The Emergence of Dissent", Ch 3 in *T&T Clark Companion to Nonconformity,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)*.*

[3] See, for example, the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order* 1659 which states that: "To each of these churches thus gathered, according to his mind declared in his Word, he hath given all that power and authority, which is any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline, which he hath instituted for them to observe, with commands and rules for the due and right exerting and executing of that power."

who might subscribe to an identical confessional position, but who lack the same passions and priorities.

A further driving force for the creation of parachurch organisations has been the simple recognition of the need to work together, because no single group can hope to accomplish the task of mission on its own. There is no realistic prospect that, say, Presbyterians will accomplish the evangelisation of the UK alone, irrespective of how tenaciously they believe that their ecclesiology and confession are truly biblical, although they may be able to contribute very substantially to the task. In a context where less than 5% of the population are born-again believers in the Lord Jesus there is no point fighting for denominational or confessional hegemony. Denominations inherently have to stress and emphasise the points at which they disagree with others, for example in regard to church government or baptism, and to highlight what they believe are the deficiencies of those who hold different convictions. However an emphasis on the points of division, which may be relatively minor, seems less important when the church as a whole is declining and struggling against aggressive secularism and rampant theological liberalism that denies core doctrines.

At its best, the rise of parachurch organisations has always been driven by a missional imperative, out of a desire to enable the church to serve the cause of the gospel more effectively. It was perhaps the rise of the missionary movement, and emergence of the missionary societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that led the way. Initially denominational mission agencies were formed, reflecting a common ecclesiology and confession, but inevitably cross-denominational agencies and non-denominational agencies also emerged. Such agencies were formed to foster co-operation in reaching a particular country, continent or people group. The sheer scale of the challenge of the unevangelised world meant that no single denomination could accomplish the task alone, thus necessitating a willingness to co-operate that was not as necessary at home.

Cross-denominational parachurch organisations have emerged to serve a wide variety of different objectives. Some exist to co-ordinate and promote ministry in a specific context, such as work amongst university students,[4] or amongst a specific profession, for example supporting Christian healthcare professionals.[5] Others have been created to undertake co-operative social action projects, such as the establishment of an orphanage or foodbank, or to engage in research or campaigning on behalf of churches, facilitating co-belligerence over social or political issues on behalf of Christians.[6] Individual local congregations and small denominations are unable to advance such

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[4] For example, UCCF (the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship).
[5] For example, the Christian Medical Fellowship.
[6] For example, The Christian Institute and Christian Concern.

projects alone, and therefore co-operation is essential. Interdenominational theological colleges and seminaries have emerged alongside denomination-ally-affiliated colleges.

The emergence of parachurch and cross-denominational institutions and organisations has also been necessitated by the growth, in the last two centuries, of independent churches, which are now the largest and most vibrant worldwide form of evangelical Protestantism. The historic confessional denominations, such as Presbyterianism and Anglicanism, simply cannot provide a home for those who are not convinced that their historic confessions are an accurate reflection of the Bible's teaching on ecclesiology, church government or the sacraments. The creation of alternative vehicles for co-operation is therefore inevitable.

The rise of Evangelicalism itself contributed to the development of parachurch organisations. The eighteenth and nineteenth century revivals transcended existing denominational boundaries. In the UK the evangelical awakening touched both Anglicans and historic Nonconformists. The pan-confessional nature of Evangelicalism was embodied by the relationship between Whitefield and Wesley; despite their differences of theology, temperament and methodology, they enjoyed fundamental unity in the gospel, and the revival breathed new spiritual life into both Calvinist and Arminian groups. New churches and denominations were created, such as Methodism in both its English Wesleyan and Welsh Calvinistic forms,[7] which could not be accommodated within existing structures. In the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries other new evangelical church movements emerged, claiming to have recaptured a truly biblical ecclesiology and ministry, including the Brethren, Pentecostalism and apostolic networks arising from Restorationism.

Whilst Evangelicalism was a deeply doctrinal movement, it was also experiential, requiring conversion and new birth to true spiritual life rather than mere formal assent to a confessional position. It was inevitable that Evangelicals would have more in common with each other because of their insistence of a particular salvation-receiving experience. A born again Presbyterian Calvinist will instinctively have far more in common with a born again Arminian Baptist than with someone who formally subscribes to the Westminster Standards but who displays no signs of true conversion and spiritual life, and has no passion for ministry and mission to the lost. It is natural that they will want to work together to see lost people saved, and that this is accorded higher priority than ecclesiological exactitude. As E J Poole-Connor observed in his 1941 book *Evangelical Unity*, the fact that God

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[7] See, for example, D Densil Morgan, "Nonconformity in Wales", Ch 2 in *T&T Clark Companion to Nonconformity,* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), which charts the history of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism and its break with Anglicanism in 1811.

made no differentiation on grounds of ecclesiology when he worked in revival, but was pleased to bless those with a wide diversity of ecclesiastical structures, was itself a driver to closer unity and co-operation.[8] The development of a pan-denominational Evangelical identity, encompassing those within historic confessional denominations and those in new or independent churches, was further consolidated by the emergence of Evangelical conventions and conferences, such as the Keswick Convention.

Over a long period of time the interaction between Evangelicals from a breadth of ecclesiological and confessional positions led to the emergence of a commonly-agreed set of core Evangelical doctrinal convictions. These convictions were also honed, shaped and tested by the battles of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries against Liberalism, and more recently by the new challenges of postmodernism. The crucial tenets of Evangelical belief (alongside the historic creeds of the early church, which have always provided a boundary for Trinitarian orthodoxy, and the Reformation recovery of justification by faith alone) became the authority and sufficiency of the Bible as the inerrant and infallible word of God, the penal substitutionary death of Christ on the cross for sin,[9] and the necessity of new birth by the Holy Spirit to eternal life in Christ. Parachurch and inter-denominational entities defined themselves by such core beliefs, and adopted more minimalist confessions, statements of faith or doctrinal bases, to delimit the grounds of unity and specific co-operation.

The test of time also began to reveal whether novel theological positions would inherently lead to heresies or to dangerous distortions of gospel belief and practice, and lead to the development of a distinct Evangelical "tradition". It became apparent that divergent views on eschatology, such as dispensational premillennialism, did not inherently undermine core doctrinal convictions, even though they might affect ministry priorities and perspectives. The same is true of the emergence of the charismatic movement in the twentieth century, which was met with initial scepticism or caution, but where time has shown that many charismatics hold to core gospel convictions just as tenaciously as historic conservative Evangelicals. Thus there is a considerable core commonality between Evangelicals from divergent ecclesiological and confessional positions, which means that they have more in common with each other than with some who hold to the same confession. A committed Reformed Presbyterian may find that she has more in common with a conservative Arminian Baptist than with an extreme hyper-Calvinist, and the Arminian Baptist has more in common with a reformed Evangelical Anglican than a prosperity-gospel revivalist.

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[8] Published by The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. See especially 36-144.

[9] As in the well-documented controversy between the Cambridge University Inter-Collegiate Christian Union and the Student Christian Movement over the centrality of the blood of Christ.

(2) Is there a Biblical Basis for Parachurch Organisations?

Whilst the emergence of parachurch organisations is an undisputed fact, it is more difficult to provide an adequate biblical basis for their existence. However, this is, in fact, a subset of the bigger difficulty of providing an adequate biblical justification for any ecclesiological structure beyond the level of the local church. The New Testament simply does not provide an uncontestably clear blueprint for how the church as a whole should be organised.[10] The focus of the New Testament teaching is on the structure and leadership of the local congregation (1 Tim 2:3-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:1-4), and there are little more than glimpses of a structure beyond this. There is little to suggest a biblical mandate for an Episcopalian structure of church, especially given the fact that the terminology of "bishop" is used interchangeably with that of elder and pastor to describe the same single office (1 Tim 3:1, 5:17), nor is there any evidence of an apostolic succession. The early churches were certainly in close relationship with one another, and there was a high degree of interchange and movement between them, but there is little indication of a formalised Presbyterian structure of church government at regional and national level.[11] Even at the local church level there is little specific indication about the way in which church officers are to be appointed to their role, so that it can be debated whether this is by congregational election or some other means,[12] whereas there is a great deal of material concerning the gifting and character qualities required of office holders (e.g. 1 Tim 3:1-7).

The result is that it has proved impossible for Bible-believing Christians to come to a commonly-agreed ecclesiology, or for a uniform ecclesiology to be imposed other than by the use of coercive force. Even this has proved impossible in anything other than the short run because individuals have demanded the right to exercise their conscience and organise churches in accordance with their understanding of the Bible. Following the collapse of the magisterial Reformation even historic confessional churches are voluntary associations of those who choose to submit themselves to a particular confession. Nearly five hundred years of church history, theological reflection, biblical interpretation and practical experimentation has led to

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[10] For a recent survey of the various types of church government and differing understandings of the sacraments see Gregg R Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012), Chs 8-11.

[11] Carl Trueman writes in *The Creedal Imperative* that being Presbyterian means "that I am committed to a Presbyterian form of church government, whereby the church is ruled at a congregational level by a session, or committee of elders; at a regional level by a presbytery of ministers and elders drawn from the churches in the area; and at a national level by a General Assembly of ministers and elders drawn from all parts of the country" (p.13).

[12] See Acts 14:23 where "appointed" can mean "had elders elected", as indicated in the NIV footnote.

the emergence of a limited number of well-worn and established ecclesiological positions. However strongly adherents may feel about their own confessional position, it is unlikely that a common belief about baptismal practice, the presence of Jesus at the Lord's Supper, the appropriate structure of church government or the validity for today of charismatic gifts will emerge. Individuals may change their minds, and shift from one position to another, and indeed from one confession to another, but the basic "mega-block" positions will likely remain until the Lord returns. This reality necessitates either confrontation or competition between those with differing ecclesiologies, or co-operation across boundaries.

Whilst it is difficult to provide compelling direct biblical warrant for parachurch organisations as they currently exist, a number of key principles emerge from the New Testament that ought to have a bearing on their nature and purpose. In the first place, the New Testament holds a high view of the inherent unity of the church in Christ (John 17:20-26; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-22). The universal church is a spiritual reality, comprised of all those who are united with Christ by faith and who have been baptised into membership of his body by the Holy Spirit at their conversion (1 Cor 12:12-14). Jesus is the Head of the Church (Eph 5:23), and he is the Chief Shepherd of all his sheep (John 10:11; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 5:4). Whilst the predominant emphasis of the New Testament is on the life and order of the local congregations, great effort is made to express unity between the many congregations (Rom 14:1-15:13), to foster fellowship and partnership in the work of the gospel (Phil 1:4), and to maintain a sense of belonging to a bigger worldwide movement. Denominational structures and parachurch organisations are, at their best, an attempt to give some expression, albeit imperfect, to this bigger understanding of the church. It is evident that the early churches experienced great diversity of culture and practice, and that the individual congregations would not have been able to sign up to a single, detailed confessional position. There were clearly divergent views about the relevance of the Jewish law to the Christian life, including observance of the dietary laws and the Sabbath (Rom 14-15; Col 2:16-17). Some groups of churches identified themselves with specific apostles or gifted leaders, and followed their model of life and ministry (e.g. 1 Cor 1:12; Gal 2:9). Yet Paul, in particular, worked very hard to try to maintain a unity in Christ that transcended these differences, and this necessitated the development of a hierarchy of doctrinal beliefs and practices that would differentiate between an essential core and other convictions which, while not unimportant, could not be the prerequisite for fellowship and unity.

It might perhaps be thought that Paul's organisation of a collection from his Gentile churches for the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem was a kind of proto-parachurch initiative, joining diverse churches together in a common project that would serve the goal of wider gospel unity across cultural and

theological divides.[13] It is quite clear that Paul had to persuade the churches and their leaders to join his initiative, and that he could not simply command them to do so. He invited the churches that were willing to participate to appoint representatives to join him and oversee his completion of the task, thus reassuring the churches of his integrity and faithfulness, and holding him to account on their behalf.[14]

As has been noted, the New Testament itself suggests the development of a number of core beliefs that are essential to true Christian faith and unity. The language of "secondary issues" is unhelpful because it suggests that some aspects of church life and ministry do not matter at all and are matters of pure indifference. However, Paul makes clear that there are some doctrines which are of more importance than others. There are things of "first importance" (1 Cor 15:3-8), and therefore others which are of lesser significance, that are not essential to true saving faith, fellowship or to gospel co-operation. In 1 Cor 15 Pauls states a relatively minimalist confessional position, as indeed does the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. In contrast, believers ought to be willing to relativise their conviction in less essential matters, so that they do not insist on imposing practices that would undermine unity in Christ with those who would take a different view to themselves.[15]

Whilst never laying down a specific leadership structure for the universal church, other than the Headship of Christ himself, the New Testament does lay down clear doctrinal and character qualifications for those who exercise spiritual authority in the church, whether as elders or as deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13). They must be theologically orthodox, gifted for the ministry responsibility they bear, but most especially humble, peaceable, trustworthy, honest and have a proven leadership track-record. These qualities must have been demonstrated in their family lives and civic involvement. There is no reason to suppose that any lower standard should be required of those serving in leadership capacities in parachurch organisations.

The New Testament also stresses the central importance of local churches to the work of the gospel. Christians live out their new life in Christ primarily in the community of the local church. It is in the local church that they are subject to the authority of duly-appointed leaders (Heb 13:17), and where they hear the word of God taught and applied. It is in the local church that they participate in the sacraments, especially the Lord's Supper, which appears to have been celebrated at the weekly gathering of the congregation, at least in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 11:17-34, also Acts 2:42). It is from

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[13] See especially 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15 and Romans 15:23-29.

[14] Paul's collection might be compared with contemporary parachurch organisations such as Tearfund and the Barnabas Fund, which encourage Evangelicals to work together to meet the needs of poor and persecuted people around the world.

[15] See especially 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 and Romans 14:19-23.

the local church that the gospel is preached and proclaimed to the community, and through the local church that they are enabled to play their part in the wider mission of the church, giving to support the needs of brothers and sisters in Christ elsewhere, giving to support gospel work and gospel workers and sending out evangelists to do the work of mission and church planting (see Acts 11:19-30). It is in the local church that church discipline is to be exercised, both of professing believers and of church officers (1 Cor 5:1-5; 1 Tim 5:19-20). Neither denominational structures nor parachurch organisations are to supplant the role of local churches.

(3) What are the Dangers Posed by Parachurch Organisations?

At their best, parachurch organisations complement and extend the work and ministry of local churches, enabling local churches to work together with others to do what they could not do themselves, or supporting their own work and ministry. They ought to be an expression of the local church, staffed and served by members or leaders of local churches, and ultimately accountable to local churches through their governance structures. Such organisations ought to adopt the same standards for those who serve or exercise authority as are required for local church leaders, be they deacons or elders. They ought to ensure compliance with their own doctrinal confessions, albeit that they are likely to be more minimalist than those of local churches, and enforce appropriate discipline against those who belong to them, in conjunction with the local churches to which the individuals concerned belong. By their very nature parachurch organisations are voluntary associations, but they can exclude and disassociate from individuals that fall short of what is required, and police their own boundaries.

Whilst they can be great servants of the church and the cause of the gospel, parachurch organisations can fall into common dangers. These are not inherent to parachurch organisations as such, but the result of sinful human tendencies that can affect any organisation, including a local church or a denomination. Parachurch organisations may become detached and unaccountable to local churches, and take it upon themselves to undertake the work of the local church. This may be especially the case where a parachurch organisation has come into existence precisely because it has been felt that local churches are failing in their ministry, thus apparently necessitating an organisation to do what the local church should be doing.

Parachurch organisations can take on a life of their own, and come to believe that their ministry, which is usually in a narrowly-defined area, is more important than that of the local church, so that the local church should exist to further the aims and objectives of the parachurch organisation. It may draw the time, energy, focus, money and commitment of local church members away from their church. It may employ people who would never be

accepted to serve in ministry in the local church, perhaps because they lack the gifts or the character, and fail to exercise discipline against those who transgress doctrinal, ethical or character boundaries.

Parachurch organisations have a tendency to persist and self-perpetuate long after they have ceased to be useful to the church, because history, tradition and "institutional drag" make it hard to close an established ministry. This is especially the case, for example, with mission agencies, which have a tendency to seek to ensure their own survival rather than to merge or close if this would better serve their supposed objective. There are also particular problems with parachurch organisations that have been established to facilitate the ministry of a specific individual, as these have a tendency to create a celebrity culture, or to elevate a person to a prominence beyond their true gifts, or to enable them to minister when they are unable to settle and accept the oversight of a local church. Parachurch organisations can become a means of escaping the controls and restraints of local church assessment and accountability.

A key issue for parachurch organisations is their accountability. To whom are they accountable, and who exercises authority over them? In practice the governance structures of parachurch organisations are just as varied as those of churches, ranging from membership models through to self-appointed trustee bodies. Genuine local church accountability is only likely to be maintained where the governance body of the organisation is comprised of suitably qualified representative leaders of local churches who are committed to the ministry and centrality of local churches.

Whilst many potential problems can be identified with parachurch structures, in reality the same difficulties have arisen with churches and denominations themselves. Neither Episcopalianism nor Presbyterianism has proved especially capable of preventing doctrinal drift and maintaining unity. The mere fact of subscribing to a confessional position does not guarantee the maintenance of orthodoxy if there is no willingness to discipline in practice, and even within a clear confessional position differences of culture and ministry philosophy may cause splits and divisions, leading to the creation of new denominations. The proliferation of Presbyterian denominations that formally adhere to the Westminster Standards, which have been the result of multiple splits and divisions, speaks for itself that this alone is not the answer. A more limited confessional basis with strong, informal, relational accountability may prove more effective in practice at maintaining gospel orthodoxy than a formal structure of submission to a confession. Unsuitable individuals exercising undue power by force of personality, and an unwillingness to discipline obvious breaches of standards, are just as common within confessional denominations and churches as parachurch organisations. In both cases a careful guard must be maintained.

(4) The Emergence of Parachurch Organisations that Exist to Pursue Gospel Unity

The emergence of parachurch organisations to facilitate cross-denominational or pan-evangelical ministry has ultimately led to the development of organisations which seek to express, maintain and encourage gospel unity as an objective in itself. Evangelical co-operation in parachurch organisations has always tended to foster gospel friendships and unity across confessional divides. Cross-denominational mission agencies inevitably relativise denominational distinctives, as do interdenominational preaching conferences and conventions such as Keswick, Spring Harvest or Word Alive.

In the UK whole generations of students have been united together, despite their diverse Evangelical backgrounds, in the strategic work of IVF/UCCF on university campuses,[16] with the result that several generations of leaders have spent their formative years working side by side in the gospel. Arminians and Calvinists, Baptists and Paedobaptists, Anglicans and Nonconformists, Charismatic and Cessationists, have prayed and laboured together to reach lost students with the good news of the Lord Jesus. Previous generations of Evangelicals have been united by their common participation in mission initiatives, such as the Billy Graham Crusades. Reformed Evangelicals across the baptismal divide were united by the work of the Banner of Truth and the Westminster Fellowship. More recently, conservative Evangelicals have been united by the work of the Proclamation Trust as it has sought to promote and encourage expository preaching.[17] The Evangelical Ministry Assembly has, for more than thirty years, provided a forum for the development of cross-denominational unity amongst those who are convinced that faithful ministry must be Word-centred.[18]

In many cases a more general unity around core gospel convictions has been a positive result of co-operation in a specific ministry task or objective. However, it is a natural desire to seek to institutionalise such unity in organisations that exist to encourage faithfulness to essential Evangelical beliefs and practices. This has been especially important to Evangelicals when they find that they are embattled in denominations that have abandoned biblical truth, a society that is rapidly secularising, and internal challenges that seek to redefine the established boundaries of Evangelicalism. Where this is the case, both Evangelicals who belong to confessional denominations and those who are belong to independent churches have a desire to stand together and work together. Most recent

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[16] http://www.uccf.org.uk/
[17] http://www.proctrust.org.uk/
[18] http://www.proctrust.org.uk/conferences

generations of Evangelicals have felt the need to do this in some way, so organisations such as the Evangelical Alliance[19] have been created to serve as a rallying point, enabling them to manifest a coherent identity and to speak both to the nation and to the church with a common voice. Other groupings such as the Evangelical Movement of Wales[20] and Affinity[21] (formerly the British Evangelical Council) have also emerged to serve a similar purpose. The desire to stand together and work together has led to some, ultimately abortive, initiatives to manifest unity, as was the case with Essentially Evangelical in the late 1990s.

The development of such entities has perhaps been more commonplace in the UK than the USA, both because British Evangelicalism is much smaller in scale, meaning that there is a greater need to work together rather than just in denominations, and has a longer history of gospel co-operation by Evangelicals in student ministry. However the pressures of secularism, decline and doctrinal confusion have led to the emergence of broader unity movements in the USA, most significantly The Gospel Coalition, which has sought to establish unity on a common understanding of the gospel across a broad range of denominations.[22]

The emergence of such entities has been criticised by some on the grounds that they lack legitimacy and accountability, that they assume to themselves the right to define the content of the gospel, and that they engender a dangerous focus on celebrity leaders. Whilst all these criticisms have some truth in them, and they are perennial dangers that face such organisations, they can be overstated.

The reality is that these entities adopt a clear confessional position, requiring adherence to specific doctrinal positions. The Gospel Coalition, for example, has an extensive confessional basis which binds all of its council members.[23] In the UK, entities such as the Evangelical Alliance,[24] Affinity,[25] and EMW,[26] also have doctrinal statements that define and delimit their membership. It is certainly true that the doctrinal requirements of such bodies do not extend to every area of church practice, avoiding those that divide Evangelicals such as the administration of the sacraments, but this is not surprising. The very purpose of these bodies is to engender and express unity in core Evangelical beliefs. They are voluntary associations of churches, or of other Evangelical agencies, not totalising institutions. They do not seek to be

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[19] http://www.eauk.org/
[20] http://www.emw.org.uk/
[21] http://www.affinity.org.uk/
[22] http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-tgc
[23] http://thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/confessional/
[24] http://www.eauk.org/connect/about-us/basis-of-faith.cfm
[25] http://www.affinity.org.uk/Affinity%20Doctrinal%20Basis%201203.pdf
[26] http://www.emw.org.uk/about-the-emw/beliefs/

churches or denominations, and the churches that belong to them generally have their own more detailed confessions that determine local church practice.

The very fact that such entities establish doctrinal boundaries inevitably means that they exercise a role in defining the essence of the gospel. However the definition that they adopt will reflect the constituency that has come together to form the association, and will necessarily address the specific challenges of the time at which they were formed.[27] The same will be the case with any group that gathers to formulate a confessional position, including, for example, the Westminster Assembly. The criticism directed at The Gospel Coalition, for example, for requiring a Reformed understanding of soteriology and a complementarian view of women's ministry, but not a specific position on baptism or charismatic gifts, is misguided and fails to recognise the limited purpose of the organisation.

The criticism that such organisations promote an unhelpful celebrity culture has also been overstated.[28] It has always been the case that gospel unity amongst Evangelicals has coalesced around certain gifted and prominent leaders, be they a Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Stott, C H Spurgeon, Terry Virgo or Billy Graham. This is simply a reflection of the fact that God raises up particularly gifted men in every generation, who exercise an influence beyond their own local church. Whilst it is certainly the case that gifted men can begin to behave without humility, and promote themselves rather than Christ, or that an organisation can reflect the corrosive celebrity values of the wider culture, this need not be the case. Money, sex and power are temptations that Evangelical leaders need to resist irrespective of whether they are serving churches or parachurch organisations. It is arguable that gospel unity movements built around informal personality cults, or unacknowledged old-boy networks, are in fact more dangerous than the attempt to establish formalised structures bounded by a clear statement of faith, because they lack any effective accountability. The model of The Gospel Coalition, with a council of up to sixty senior leaders who subscribe to a common confessional position, is more likely to preserve gospel faithfulness and to dilute the tendency to celebrity influence, than to encourage it. Over time those who might be tempted to promote themselves as gurus will either develop greater maturity and humility, leave because they do not wish to be so constrained, or find themselves side-lined and excluded because they transgress the boundaries.

The argument that such entities are unaccountable to the church can also be challenged. In many cases the entities established to express Evangelical unity are themselves associations of churches, church representatives or of

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[27] See for example Carson & Keller, *The Gospel As Centre*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012).

[28] See Jeremy Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered,* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013), 58-103.

church leaders. They are not disconnected from the accountability provided by denominational structure or local churches. Leaders that are disciplined by their local church, or by their denomination, are likely to lose their position in the wider body. As in the case of denominational structures, this does not mean that discipline will always be enacted appropriately or as swiftly as might be wished, but it is wrong to assume that there is no accountability. The recent exclusion of Steve's Chalke's Oasis Trust from the Evangelical Alliance, because of its support for same-sex relationships, is a case in point where such discipline was exercised and the organisation's confessional basis enforced.[29]

In the final analysis such entities exercise no formal control over local churches, so that churches are free to withdraw their involvement and their financial support at any time. Without the willing active participation of churches, such parachurch organisations will eventually die or become irrelevant. This may take a substantial period of time if they are bankrolled by wealthy individuals or enjoy a generous endowment.

Some unity organisations are essentially associations of churches, or associations of denominations. The FIEC is a case in point. This association of independent churches was established in 1922 to provide mutual support and foster gospel co-operation. It comprises 520 local churches who subscribe to a common Doctrinal Basis[30] and to a number of other mutually-agreed policy positions, including a complementarian view of women's ministry in church. The Fellowship is overseen by a body of trustees elected by the churches, and accountable to them. Discipline can be exercised by excluding churches from membership if they cease to hold to the required confessional standards. Affinity operates on a slightly broader basis, admitting not just individual churches but denominational bodies and parachurch organisations into membership.

(5) The Emergence of "Gospel Partnerships" in the UK

A major development over the past decade in the UK has been the establishment of a number of regional "Gospel Partnerships" around the country, which have sought to provide a framework for co-operation in gospel ministry between like-minded Evangelicals.[31] The growth of these partnerships has been largely organic. The first "Partnership" was established in the North West of England,[32] in the aftermath of a tour of the UK in 2003 by Archbishop Peter Jensen to encourage Anglicans who were

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[29] http://www.eauk.org/current-affairs/media/press-releases/oasis-trust-membership.cfm

[30] http://www.fiec.org.uk/about-us/beliefs

[31] http://thegospelpartnerships.org.uk/

[32] http://www.northwestpartnership.com/

beleaguered in their denominational struggles.[33] The success of this model of fostering gospel co-operation and extending gospel ministry has led to similar Partnerships being established around the country. Initially they were mainly an English phenomenon, but Partnerships are now beginning to emerge in Scotland. There are currently at least 13 such regional Partnerships, and two more are currently being considered in Scotland.[34] Whilst representatives of the different Partnerships meet together on a regular basis there is, as yet, no national controlling body, with decision-making devolved to a local level.

The Partnerships have been especially effective in creating regional training courses for Bible-centred ministry at a sub-seminary level,[35] and fostering ministry apprentice schemes in local churches. They have also been able to develop a strategic approach to church planting in their regions, identifying areas of gospel need and encouraging and supporting new plants or church revitalisation projects. They hold regional conferences for ministers that seek to equip and encourage them for gospel ministry in the contemporary context. They have also initiated two national church-based mission initiatives, called *A Passion for Life*, the first in 2010 and the second in 2014.[36] Some Partnerships have grown to the point where they have needed to employ a member to staff to lead their ministry.

The Partnerships were not centrally-imposed, but grew out of existing gospel friendships between church leaders that had already been fostered through the Proclamation Trust. The formalisation of such informal gospel relationships has opened the way for the Partnerships to embrace a wider range of churches with differing cultures but the same gospel convictions. As a result, gospel co-operation has become less orientated around personalities and cultural groups, and is more clearly rooted in common gospel convictions.

Each of the Gospel Partnerships has adopted a Doctrinal Basis which provides the terms for membership.[37] The basis of unity is once again the core doctrines of the gospel. These doctrinal statements deliberately seek to highlight the historical conservative Evangelical convictions about the Bible and the cross, as these are under attack from those who use the self-designation "Evangelical" but who do not accept the Bible as the fully truthful and sufficient word of God for today, the cross as a propitiatory sacrifice for sins, salvation as primarily rescue from God's wrath and eschatological judgment, and that the means of salvation is through the

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[33] http://sydneyanglicans.net/news/638b

[34] http://thegospelpartnerships.org.uk/network

[35] As, for example, TEAM (The East Anglia Ministry Training Course) and the MMTC (Midlands Ministry Training Course) http://www.midlandsgospel.org.uk/?page_id=384

[36] http://apassionforlife.org.uk/en

[37] http://thegospelpartnerships.org.uk/about-us/doctrinal-basis

ministry of the word of the gospel. The term "gospel" rather than "Evangelical" has been used precisely because the latter has become doctrinally-debased. Every generation of Bible-centred Christians has had to find new ways to qualify the term "Evangelical" so as to guard against the insipient doctrinal downgrade as, for example, by qualifying the term with the adjective "conservative" or "classic".[38] Within these boundaries there are a wide range of ecclesiological positions represented in the Partnerships.

The Partnerships are essentially associations of local churches, and they do not seek to replace the centrality of the local church to the work of the gospel. One of the great blessings of the Partnerships is that they have made a major contribution to overcoming the divisions between conservative Evangelical Anglicans and conservative Evangelical Nonconformists that were tragically precipitated in the aftermath of the disagreements of the 1960s, often unfairly misrepresented as a simplistic conflict between Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John Stott.[39] Somewhat ironically, in the intervening decades Anglican conservative Evangelicals, through the influence of the Diocese of Sydney, have come to share an emphasis on the priority of the local church over denominational hierarchy, which has made cross-denomination inter-church co-operation at local level a natural objective. It is perhaps the Presbyterians, who have a stronger sense of the church as an organised hierarchy, who find it more difficult to identify with the Gospel Partnerships, as their efforts are inevitably concentrated on their regional and national presbyteries and assemblies.

The Partnerships are led and overseen by "Steering Committees" comprised of local church leaders, who act as trustees under a formal constitutional arrangement. These committees are generally self-appointing, but this does not mean that they are unaccountable. The Partnerships would rapidly decline if their member churches chose to leave, and stopped supporting their events and activities. This necessitates that the Steering Committee members are mindful to serve the constituency that they serve. The Partnerships have absolutely no authority over the life and ministry of the local churches that belong, and they are free to leave at any time. The Partnerships may inculcate and encourage a specific culture of ministry, which some who would share their core doctrinal convictions would eschew, but these others are under no compulsion to join or to change their practices. However, the Partnerships will inevitably reflect the culture of the churches that choose to associate with them, so the culture is fluid and a diversity of churches joining will inevitably result in a greater breadth of culture within

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[38] A term suggested by Oliver Barclay in his personal retrospective *Evangelicalism in Britain 1935-1995.*

[39] See Andrew Atherstone, "Lloyd-Jones and the Anglican secession crisis", Ch 10 of Atherstone & Jones (eds.), *Engaging with Martyn-Lloyd Jones: The Life and Legacy of the Doctor,* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2011)*.*

the Partnerships. Across the country the Partnerships have their own distinct character, which reflects the local culture and varying denominational strength. In some places Anglicans are more dominant, whereas in much of the country conservative Evangelical Anglicanism is relatively weak so the Partnerships have a stronger Nonconformist feel. The creation of new Scottish Partnerships will inevitably change the overall culture of the Partnerships, so that they will be less English and less Anglican. One massive challenge facing the UK is the need for greater integration and connection between the historic indigenous churches and the rapidly-expanding growth of ethnic and immigrant churches. UK Evangelicalism is becoming increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, but this is not being reflected in the Partnerships, or in any other Evangelical unity organisation.

Most conservative Evangelical churches in the UK are relatively small, and there are few prominent leaders who exercise authoritative personal influence. The cult of celebrity pastors is not as great a danger in the UK as it may be in the US at the moment. Kevin DeYoung, who recently spoke at a number of Gospel Partnership conferences around the UK, has commented on the prevailing differences between contemporary church culture in the UK and US.[40]

One area where Gospel Partnerships have been slower to make progress is in church planting. This is because it is more difficult to persuade Evangelicals with differing ecclesiologies to establish local congregations co-operatively. Inevitably, each local church will seek to adopt a particular ecclesiology of its own, according to the convictions of its leaders and congregation. At a congregational level denominational loyalty has largely broken down amongst conservative Evangelical believers in the UK. Most will choose to attend what they view as the "best" Bible-teaching church in the area, irrespective of its denominational affiliation. Conservative Evangelical credobaptists will join an Anglican Evangelical church in preference to a liberal or emergent Baptist church, and Anglicans will join a credobaptist church in preference to an Anglo-Catholic parish church.

However, this does not mean that local churches are being planted without ecclesiological convictions at a leadership level. There is little evidence in the UK of churches within the Gospel Partnerships adopting a "no creed but the Bible" approach that is so ably critiqued by Carl Trueman in his recent book *The Creedal Imperative.* However, it is a false antithesis to suggest that the alternatives are either "no creed but the Bible" or the adoption of one of the historic Reformation confessions. In cities and large towns it may be possible to sustain a number of churches which have

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[40] http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2014/02/18/reflections-of-my-trip-to-england/

different ecclesiologies, all of which are also members of the Partnership. However, in smaller towns and estates, and places where there is no gospel witness, it is both impossible and unnecessarily wasteful of scarce resources to seek to plant multiple churches with differing ecclesiologies. Instead, new church plants are likely to seek to reach out and welcome people with a wide range of views on baptism and church government, whilst the church will adopt a specific ecclesiology that will be constitutionally-enshrined and binding on its leaders. Credobaptist churches are increasingly adapting to admit convinced paedobaptist believers into membership, and sometimes even leadership, whilst remaining constitutionally-baptistic and refraining from conducting infant baptisms.

Those who hold very strongly and exclusively to either paedobaptism or credobaptism, and who believe that this is essential to the life and health of the local church, will inevitably find this trend more difficult, and they are less likely to identify with Gospel Partnerships or to support church plants that fail to reflect their ecclesiological convictions.[41] However, this does not mean that the Partnerships, or other groups that promote cross-denomination Evangelical unity, are inherently undermining and diluting ecclesiological concerns. Rather, a healthy gospel pragmatism and recognition of the desperate need for the lost to be reached with the good news of the Lord Jesus, means that these important matters are regarded as subservient to the missional imperative to have at least one thriving gospel church in every community – whatever its ecclesiology.

(6) Critiquing Gospel Partnerships

Gospel Partnerships are still in their infancy, so it is too early to offer any extensive critique. Time will reveal whether they will manifest the weaknesses of some other parachurch entities.

They are not yet universal in geographical coverage, and there has been little indication that the Partnership model will be adopted in Wales. Areas such as Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire do not have functioning Partnerships. They tend to be strongest where conservative Evangelicalism is already relatively strong, such as the North West and South East, whereas the Partnership in the North East is much smaller. It will be a challenge to ensure that the Partnerships do not just consolidate gospel work in places where it is already strong, but ensure that they are able to support, strengthen and plant churches in those areas of the country where there is greater need.

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[41] See for example Carl Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012); Jeremy Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered,* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2103).

Given their origins, it is inevitable that the Partnerships have tended to attract conservative Evangelicals from a specific sub-culture, generally parallel with the constituency that would identify with the Proclamation Trust. Whilst they formally base their unity on a common confession of core evangelical truths, it may be a challenge for them to embrace and welcome those who would share their doctrinal convictions, but who might advocate a more traditional, rather than contemporary, style of ministry. At the other end of the spectrum it also remains to be seen whether they are able to welcome and embrace those who would equally share their doctrinal beliefs but who would be charismatic in regard to the use of the gifts of the Spirit.

One of the blessings of the Partnerships has been the renewed fellowship and gospel co-operation between Anglican and Nonconformist Evangelicals. However, this unity will always be fragile to some degree, and subject to challenges arising from issues within the denominations. Independents do not have to face a choice between denominational loyalty and involvement in other organisations, but they are prone to isolation, separatism and to adopting a superior attitude towards those who have remained in mixed denominations. Those in denominations may face a choice between loyalty to the denomination or the gospel, or between denominational involvement and investing their energies outside the denomination. As the Anglican Church enters into convulsions over the issue of same-sex marriage, and as Evangelicals feel pressure to collaborate with Anglo-Catholics within the denomination, there is a danger that history might repeat itself. It is to be hoped that the friendships and mutual understanding fostered through Gospel Partnerships might provide some protection against potential misunderstandings, and ensure that unity in the gospel is preserved even where there may be differences in conscience as to the best strategy to adopt in the face of false teaching and the absence of biblical discipline within denominations.

It remains to be seen whether the Partnerships are able to become a genuine movement of churches, actively engaging the support of congregations as well as their leaders. They tend to reflect a more Anglican style of leadership, whereby the congregation is expected to follow the decision of the leaders, rather than a more congregational model where the church leaders are expected to reflect the decision of the congregation as a whole. Nonconformist churches that have joined the Partnerships are more likely to have done so with the consent and support of their congregation members, who will generally have given their approval. The lack of congregational commitment may be overcome with time, as churches begin to experience the benefits of membership, for example as they make use of training courses and take part in mission initiatives.

It also remains to be seen whether the Gospel Partnerships will be able to maintain their national coherence, or whether different regional groups will

come to vary considerably. It also remains to be seen whether they seek to become more significant, providing a totalising identity for churches that eclipses their other denominational affiliations, either *de facto* or because they leave their denominations to join the Partnership instead, or whether they remain a secondary identity for churches alongside their existing denominational membership or affiliation. In all likelihood different local churches will decide upon a different degree of involvement and identification with the Partnerships. Will the Partnerships develop co-operative relationships with other existing entities that seek to manifest gospel unity and co-operation, or will they find themselves competing with them?

The reality is that, at present, the Partnerships are run on a relatively shoestring budget, and have limited resources. They are not comparable to The Gospel Coalition and do not seem to be seeking to develop in a similar way. The mutual suspicion of both conservative Evangelical Anglicans and historic Independents to controlling hierarchical structures means that there is no desire to become a quasi-denominational body. There is a fundamental commitment to the autonomy of the local church, whether it belongs to a denomination or not, and no desire for the Partnership to compromise this. However, there is no doubt that the Partnerships, like any such entity, can and will exercise a degree of cultural power and influence over churches and their ministries, and advocate models of gospel ministry that will leave others feeling excluded or criticised by implication. However, there is no sign as yet that the Partnerships will be able to be dominated by any single leader, as there are few leaders of undisputed national standing within the UK, and the Partnerships themselves are locally-owned and led. This is one of the advantages of the fact that they have developed organically, locally and from the bottom up, rather than being conceived and imposed centrally.

One particular challenge will be whether the leadership of the Partnerships are able to remain truly accountable to local churches, especially since they are not appointed directly by the churches, or removable by the church. It also remains to be seen whether they will be able to exercise appropriate discipline if partner churches, their leaders, or Steering Committee members drift from their doctrinal convictions. Mercifully, this has not yet been necessary. However, one of the perennial dangers of parachurch organisations, and especially those formed to express gospel unity, is that they find it difficult to exercise discipline against those who have been friends and colleagues. There is a natural desire to think the best about others who have stood shoulder-to-shoulder for the gospel in the past, and to grant them leeway if they start to question their former convictions. This will be a test that Gospel Partnerships will almost certainly face in the future, and failure to stand firm for their confessional

requirements has been the downfall of many churches, denominations and parachurch organisations.

The relative newness of the Gospel Partnerships has meant that these issues are only just beginning to be considered. It is to be hoped that they will be able to mitigate or avoid some of the dangers that afflicted parachurch organisations. But there can be no guarantee that this will be the case, so careful vigilance is required. No doubt they will run their course, so that in a generation's time a different model of gospel co-operation will be required. However this does not prevent them from serving a useful and necessary purpose in the current generation, or for however long the Lord may be pleased to use them.

(7) Conclusions

Gospel Partnerships are in their relative infancy and are still developing. Where they have been established they have contributed to local gospel unity and to the growth of gospel ministry. Churches that were initially hostile to them, and may not have felt that they shared the culture of their founders, have begun to join as they have seen and appreciated the benefits – and as a result the culture of the Partnerships is itself changing. They should be welcomed as an expression of the recovered unity between Anglican and Nonconformist Reformed Evangelicals, and commended for their commitment to historic Evangelical doctrinal convictions.

It remains to be seen whether the Gospel Partnerships will be a growing and enduring manifestation of cross-denominational Evangelical unity and co-operation in ministry. History would suggest that every generation creates entities to serve this purpose, and that such organisations can serve a useful and beneficial purpose for a time, after which they may lose their way, overreach themselves or become a self-serving end in themselves which does not advance the gospel. There will almost inevitably be some tension between those who are loyal to the institutions and organisations that served this purpose in a previous generation, but which are in danger of being eclipsed by new initiatives that are more in tune with the contemporary Evangelical *zeitgeist* and win the loyalty of a younger generation of leaders.

In contrast, local churches, which inevitably belong to one of the long established ecclesiological mega-blocks, will endure from generation to generation. This is to be expected because Jesus is at work by his Spirit to build his church. Parachurch organisations are only useful in as far as they serve this purpose rather than supplanting it, but they provide a necessary means of giving some expression to the reality of the universal church, which inherently transcends the denominational and ecclesiological differences that have been created by human tradition over the centuries.

WAR AND NEW TESTAMENT ETHICS

Paul Helm[*]

This article aims to open discussion of difficult ethical issues to do with war, particularly torture. It does so by considering the "Two Kingdoms" approach to Christian ethics, from the Reformation (when the magistrate had the obligation to uphold the true religion only), to today, when there is pluralism and widespread advocacy of toleration. The place of war in the Old Testament and the New – the Holy Wars of the OT, and the comparatively few and indirect references to war in the New Testament – is contrasted. The prominence of virtues (or graces) of the Spirit in the NT is noted. Finally the question of torture in the context of the "war on terror" (the views of Grudem and Mohler) is discussed.

Introduction

This article discusses how Scripture is to be interpreted in respect of war, and especially aspects of warfare that although they are not new, have come to prominence in our current situation, particularly torture and the various terms, perhaps in some cases euphemistic terms, that are used for it. This takes in not only direct references to war, but also attempts a biblical understanding of the Christian and society and the state. So I shall offer as a framework for interpretation a variant of the Reformers' doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. And then, secondly, I will look at how the Apostolic writings view moral reasoning and some peculiarities of our present political situation. It is not my intention, nor is it my brief, to offer a set of first-order rules to guide conduct under the matters to be discussed, but rather to look at the methods and approaches that Christians who take the authority of the Bible seriously ought to adopt.

The doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the New Testament

In the Gospels Christ contrasts his kingdom with other kingdoms – kingdoms of this world. So he says to Pilate:

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews... You say that I am a king. For this

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purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:36f.).

Paul also refers to fighting when he says:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have the divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Cor 10:4).[1]

The explicit language regarding fighting in the New Testament has to do with fighting the good fight of faith.

There are many other such references which refer to the "otherness" of Christ's kingship and his kingdom, and of course a whole series of Parables of the Kingdom, referring to its hiddenness, and also to its growth and its extensiveness.

Alongside data of this kingdom, Christ and the Apostles acknowledge that we live in and participate in earthly, state institutions, and have obligations to honour those who administer them. Christ refers to rendering to God and to Caesar (Mark 12:7), and he gives advice to soldiers who, it appears, came for baptism (Luke 3:14) And Paul and Peter write at length:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:1-4).

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor (1 Pet 2:13-25).

It is very obvious that such an outlook will present the church and individual believers with a whole range of areas of life in which tensions can arise, including what we might call the "military".

The Two Cities

These two lines of data have led some, such as Augustine, to refer to the believers' occupancy of two cities, the city of this world and the City of God, the heavenly city. This is not to be taken as endorsing or advocating a policy

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[1] Here and elsewhere (e.g. Eph 6:10f.) Paul uses the imagery of warfare to characterise aspects of the Christian life, while avoiding saying that that life may in any way be furthered by literal warfare.

of physical segregation, of apartheid, but as asserting that there are two "organisations" animated by different and incompatible outlooks, the "two loves", in which the Christians overlap, intermingle and co-operate with the inhabitants of the city of this world. The states and nations of the world provide the arena where this intermingling takes place. So Augustine says, "Thus the things necessary for this mortal life are used by both kinds of men and families alike, but each has its own peculiar and widely different aim in using them." The heavenly city "makes no scruple to obey the laws of the earthly city, whereby the things necessary for the maintenance of this mortal life are administered; and thus, as this life is common to both cities, so there is harmony between them in regard to what belongs to it". This commonality, as Augustine calls it, is real, but also limited in scope. Christians may respect the various practices of the society they live in "so long only as no hindrance to the worship of the one supreme and true God is thus introduced".[2] So there is a noticeable element in common in the running of these two cities, and well as a fundamental difference in their ends and what motivates them.

The Two Kingdoms and the Reformation

But perhaps more in keeping with the conceptuality of Scripture, the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, formulated the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. Calvin discusses the Two Kingdoms (or governments) in two places in the *Institutes*.

The first of these places has to do with the Roman Church's commanding of matters which are not required by Scripture, as here in *Institutes* III.19, dealing with Christian liberty:

[I]n man government is two-fold: the one spiritual, by which the conscience is trained in piety and divine worship; the other civil, by which the individual is instructed in those duties which, as men and citizens, we are both to perform. To these two forms are commonly given the not inappropriate names of spiritual and temporal jurisdiction, intimating that the former species has reference to the life of the soul, while the latter relates to matters of the present life, not only to food and clothing, but to the enacting of laws which require a man to live among his fellows purely, honourably, and modestly. The former has its seat within the soul, the latter only regulates the external conduct. We may call the one the spiritual, the other the civil kingdom.[3]

This is Calvin's version of the Reformation doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, which has to do with the binding and freedom of the conscience. It is an essential aspect of his critique of Rome, dealt with at length in IV.10 and (more importantly for us here) of what is to be the Christian's attitude to the

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[2] Augustine, *City of God*, 19.17, 19.19. The translation is taken from the Everyman's Library Edition, ed. R.V.G. Tasker, (J.M. Dent, 1945).

[3] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* II.19.15. (trans. Henry Beveridge).

state, (also dealt with in IV.20, though strangely, with little or no explicit reference to the Two Kingdoms).

Here he upholds an important principle concerning the Reformation view of ecclesiastical laws, namely that God alone is Lord of the conscience, and so he distinguishes the commands of the Word of God, by which our consciences are to be bound, from merely human laws, from which we are (with a qualification shortly to be discussed) free.

The second sections are to be found in IV.10 3-6. These contain a verbatim repetition of material of the passages from Book III just referred to. But they go beyond his treatment of Christian liberty from human interpositions in the Church, for they have to do with the relations between the church and the civil government, the magistrate not only as "God's servant to you for good" (Rom 14) in respect of life and limb but as having a duty to uphold the true (that is, the Reformed) religion, though the church for her part is not to be governed in her ministry and worship by the magistrate. (See also IV.11 where Calvin maintains the important principle that the church does not fall under the jurisdiction of the civil government.)

Calvin distinguishes between the operation of conscience internally, and outwardly:

By attending to this distinction, [that is, of two kingdoms] we will not erroneously transfer the doctrine of the Gospel concerning spiritual liberty to civil order, as if in regard to external government Christians were less subject to human laws, because their consciences are bound before God, as if they were exempted from all carnal service, because in regard to the Spirit they are free… The question, as I have said, though not very obscure, or perplexing in itself, occasions difficulty to many, because they do not distinguish with sufficient accuracy between what is called the external forum, and the forum of conscience. What increases the difficulty is that Paul commands us to obey the magistrate, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake" (Rom 13: 1, 5). Whence it follows that civil laws also bind the conscience.[4]

So in what sense do civil laws bind the conscience? Not in the sense that the laws of the spiritual kingdom, the gospel, do, but in the sense that they are to be "internalised" as expressions of obedience to God:

Hence a law is said to bind the conscience because it simply binds the individual, without looking at men, or taking any account of them. For example, God not only commands us to keep our mind chaste and pure from all lust but prohibits all external lasciviousness or obscenity of language. My conscience is subjected to the observance of this law, *though there were not another man in the world*, and he who violates it sins not only by setting a bad example to his brethren but stands convicted in his conscience before God.[5]

This is because the magistrate is the "minister of God", at one remove from God himself. God does not command me to keep to the speed limits, but the

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4 Ibid., III.19.15.
5 Ibid., III.19.16, emphasis added.

state sees fit to enact certain laws about speeding. In France these laws may be different. I am bound to keep these laws, whatever exactly they are, even at 2.00am when there may be no one else about. In this the conscience behaves differently from the case of behaviour called for in the case of weaker brethren. If there are no such brethren, or if we are not in the presence of them, or in a position where our behaviour will affect them adversely, then I am free to do or not to do the indifferent action; my conscience is free.

The Two Kingdoms doctrine is even more prominent in Martin Luther. Luther's views undergo some development, or at least change, during and after the Peasants' Revolt in 1524-28. The following extracts are taken from his tract on secular authority (1523):

We must divide all the children of Adam into two classes; the first belong to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world. Those belonging to the kingdom of God are all true believers in Christ and are subject to Christ. For Christ is the King and Lord in the kingdom of God, as the second Psalm and all the Scriptures say. [Ps 2:6] For this reason He came into the world, that he might begin God's kingdom and establish it in the world. Therefore he says before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world, but whoever is of the truth hears My voice" [John 18.36 f.]; and continually in the gospel He refers to the kingdom of God and says, "Amend your ways, the kingdom of God is at hand" [Matt 3:2]. Likewise, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" [Matt 6:33]. He also calls the Gospel, a Gospel of the kingdom, for the reason that it teaches, governs, and contains God's Kingdom.[6]

Note that Luther does not in these extracts refer directly to the church.

In distinguishing two kingdoms, the Reformers are not making a political case for full separation. They maintain their position in full awareness of the fact that to their left were those who sought to establish pure Christian enclaves. They make the distinction and attempt to operate by it, when also holding that the state, the Christian magistrate, has a duty to uphold the true religion as "the minister of good". This is one big difference between their view of society and that in which many Christians live today – modern liberal democracies where the government (even where the Head of State is also head of the church) regards itself as the guardian of the public square in which there is freedom of religious expression. We shall take up this difference between ourselves and the views of the magisterial Reformers a little later.

The Two Kingdoms and waging of war

How does the Two Kingdoms doctrine relate to the issue of warfare? Both Luther and Calvin are anxious to stress a positive relation to the state, no

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[6] Martin Luther, *Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed* (1523), in *Martin Luther, Selections from his Writings, edited and with an Introduction by John Dillenberge*r, (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 368. See also 370-1.

doubt partly to distinguish loyal Lutherans and conscientious Calvinists from the subversive violence associated with the Anabaptists. So Luther. He deals with the conditions under which war can be waged, and then says:

In this matter [that is, the waging of war] subjects are duty bound to follow and risk life and property for the cause. For in such a case one must risk his property and himself for the sake of the other. And in such a war it is a Christian act and an act of love confidently to kill, rob and pillage the enemy, and to do everything that can injure him until one has conquered him according to the methods of war. Only one must beware of sin, not violate wives and virgins, and when victory comes, offer mercy and peace to those who surrender and humble themselves.[7]

Subjects have no obligation to wage a war for their prince when he is in the wrong. But suppose it is not clear: "As long as they cannot know nor find out by any possible means, they may obey without peril to their souls."[8] So war is to be waged loyally and with gusto so long as the king is in the right but with such restraints and qualifications as are inculcated by the tradition of the "Just War" doctrine first enunciated by Augustine.

In Calvin's case,

But if it is objected, that in the New Testament there is no passage or example teaching that war is lawful for Christians, I answer, first, that the reason for carrying on war, which anciently existed, still exists in the present day, and that, on the other hand there is no ground for debarring magistrates from the defence of those under them; and secondly, that in the apostolic writings we are not to look for a distinct exposition of those matters... their object being not to form a civil polity, but to establish the spiritual kingdom of Christ; lastly, that, there also it is indicated, in passing, that our Saviour by his advent, made no change in this respect. For... when soldiers asked counsel as to the way of salvation, they would have been told to cast away their arms, and to withdraw altogether from military service...[9]

Their doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is surely, in outline, a New Testament outlook, though no doubt capable of being stated in different ways, and having different strengths. Secondly, it is clear that the Reformers thought about the issues of war and peace, obedience and disobedience, the morality of waging war, and what kind of a war is legitimate and what not, within the framework of the Two Kingdoms.

So there is much in these extracts, written five centuries ago, which has a familiar, contemporary ring to it. We see that the Two Kingdoms, while distinct, are not disconnected. Even in a view of the church and state different from that of the Reformers, in which magistrates were thought as having the duty to support true religion, thinking of our duties and responsibilities, including those we have to the state, the Two Kingdoms doctrine may provide the Christian citizen in a modern liberal democracy with space to think about the limits of compliance and obedience. But it

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[7] Ibid., 398.

[8] Ibid., *Selections*, 399.

[9] Calvin, *Inst.* IV.20.12.

should also apply to Christians and churches in totalitarian polities which do not have as much space. They may have less personal liberty than we have, or they may only have it by paying an immediate price for themselves and to their families. Nevertheless they have dual responsibilities. For if Scripture teaches that there are two kingdoms, then the questions as to where their separate jurisdictions apply, where their boundaries are to be drawn, inevitably arise.

The Two Kingdoms and the Lordship of Christ

What about the cosmic Lordship of Christ? The doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in no way diminishes that. But as regards themes that are currently claimed to be a consequence of affirming that Lordship, such as the redeeming of society, the stewardship of the environment, particular social and political programmes as being implied in our loyalty to the cosmic Lordship of Christ, that is another thing entirely. This is the sort of appreciation of society canvassed by the neo-Calvinistic followers of the legacy of Abraham Kuyper and those influenced to some degree by him. More recently, N T Wright writes of the redeeming of creation, and of the scope of Christian discipleship, "the work of the Lord", embracing, for example, support for the policy of renouncing Third World debt, "the number one moral issue of our day".[10] It is one thing to express the view that poverty should be relieved and Christians joining with like-minded others to relieve it; it is another thing to say that the renunciation of Third World debt is *the* means to that end, that it is the will of the cosmic Christ, and therefore a Christian duty.

Bear in mind that the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms does not mean that obedience to the magistrate is the limit of the individual Christian's activity in the kingdom of this world. The Christian in that kingdom may enjoy its privileges, as Paul did on a notable occasion. That kingdom is also an arena in which the common grace (as we now call it) of God is at work. There the Spirit's non-regenerating gifts are showered on men and women who may be outside the kingdom of God, but who nevertheless have gifts to produce beautiful and useful things, and whose learning is beneficial to all.

Differences between our situation and that of the Reformers

I have argued that, on biblical grounds, we ought to adopt the Two Kingdoms outlook of the Reformers, and ultimately, of course, that of the NT. But it goes without saying that our political and social situation is very different from that of the time of the Reformers. As we have noted, modern liberal

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[10] N T Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 217.

democracies are characterised by the espousal of pluralism, with certain areas (such as the expression of extreme political views, of racism, and those engaged in planning and perpetrating acts of terrorism) off limits. And in the theory of liberal democracy (and, you may think, still to a remarkable degree in practice) the state is regarded as – and regards itself as – a neutral gate-keeper, though in the UK there is a built-in tendency towards a liberal progressivism through the agency of the state and the media.

We stress the differences between now and the time when the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms was first articulated; that is one horizon to have in mind. There are other differences: One is that there is nowadays a good deal of personal freedom, discretion and opportunity through various agencies for people to make up their own minds as to what they do with their lives and with leisure time. All obvious enough. Closer to our theme of ethics and the military is the fact that, at present, modern armies are volunteer, professional bodies. Whoever is a soldier, sailor or airman is one because he has chosen that career. This presents a different moral framework from when there is conscription, or when armies were "raised" by combining together local militias which were summoned together by the local landowner from among his labourers and others.

Finally with the rise of modern terrorism the question of when and whether a particular state is at war has become blurred. Is "the war against terror" like the war against Hitler's Germany? For example, the sending of drones, in furtherance of the "war against terror", into territories of a nation with which the sender is at peace, may result in deaths of non-terrorist, citizens of this friendly country. Is this an act of war, or not? Clearly not, in that one country has not broken off relations with another, and declared war. But nevertheless a state's efforts to protect its citizens against the outrages of the terrorist go beyond routine policing.

So, in such a situation (no doubt more detail could given), how should Christians reason about war? What message should go out from the pulpit and the press, and what advice should the church offer to young people seriously considering enlisting in the military?

New and Old Testament data about military service and war

Whatever their similarities, and what they have in common, the two Testaments are very different in the way in which divine guidance with respect to the conduct of the people of God in the waging of war is regulated. In the pre-Mosaic phase Abraham, for example, appears free to form alliances on the basis of personal advantage. The Mosaic phase of the Old Testament is characterised by the giving to the nation of Israel of a series of direct commands and prohibitions, many of them of a particular and discrete character.

So if we restrict Old and New Testament attitudes to a comparison between Old Testament Israel on the one hand, and the Christian in the newly-established churches of the New Testament, what do we find? We find, as I shall argue, that the shape of Christian morality is rather different from that of the Old Testament Israel.

Parts of Deuteronomy 7 read as follows:

> When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them... But the Lord your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed. And he will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under heaven. No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them (Deut 7:1-2, 23-24).

Such wars are "Holy Wars". Victory is not construed in terms of weakening the enemy until they sue for peace, taking prisoners and treating them in accordance with the terms of an equivalent of the Geneva Convention, but of utterly vanquishing them, obliterating them, with the Lord co-operating and aiding the battles in a very visible way. The enemy is identified by the Lord as certain named tribes or peoples, and (it is implied) that these are under divine judgment, they are idolatrous, and "in the way" of the fulfilment of the Lord's covenant promise respecting the land. Israel is a theocracy, and there is a fusion of the law and morality for the people of God. This is the royal law for them, and so it is morally immaculate, and is to be carried out without question. There is no room for asking (as we may nowadays ask): This may be the law, but are the principles that it exemplifies and upholds morally good?

There is no blueprint here for Christians to engage in or to support such warfare, or similar ways of extermination, were this to be the character of the warfare waged by their own state today. Sometimes one finds Christian thinkers cherry-picking from the Mosaic legislation in an effort to make it apply directly to us – so the practice of the Jubilee, the fact that men and women are never imprisoned as a form of punishment, and so on, are highlighted. Forgetful of special pleading, the citing of such data is meant to be evidence that all the word of God contains material that is meant to guide us today in similar ways. Currently one of the most diligent cherry-pickers is Christopher J H Wright, but it is interesting to note that in a book of over 500 pages, *Old Testament Ethics For the People of God* [11] devoted to such fashionable themes as ecology and the earth (over 40 pages) and economics

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[11] Downers Grove, Ill. IVP, (2004).

and the poor (just under 40 pages), the topic of warfare (which cannot be said to be a vanishingly-small OT topic) is given a mere two pages.

I concur with Wright in doubting that anything written in the verses quoted above from Deuteronomy 7 (or similar passages) is to be considered a cherry ripe for picking. Why not? Because our situation is very different from that of the Old Testament. To begin with, we find that the theme of war is scarcely ever mentioned, and (I think) never mentioned in those sections of the NT expounding the ethical norms of the people of God. This in itself may seem to be rather surprising and perplexing.

While believers are urged to pray for those in authority, and for those who are in need, and to give honour to the king, neither Jesus himself, nor Paul, nor any other New Testament writer offers guidance to pray for this or that military campaign of the Emperors, or for "our troops in Germania", any more than Paul suggests as a topic for prayer the petition that there might soon be peace between the Roman Empire and her current enemies. Paul tells the churches that they are to pray for the Emperor so that *they* (that is, in the first instance, Paul and his correspondents, representative of the wider church) may live quietly and peaceably, in godliness and honesty (thus the better contributing to the building of that kingdom that is to be without end). They pray for the needy but the reason for their neediness is passed over.

We struggle to find material from which to reason about the morality of war: Jesus' attitude to the soldiers, perhaps. Paul's use of his authority as a Roman citizen, or the presence of Christians in Caesar's household, seem at best to provide us with hints. There is also a lack of explicit teaching in favour of pacifism.[12] On one occasion there was the provision of an armed escort for Paul, which he was no doubt relieved to have, though the text does not tell us as much. Then there is the conversion of a Roman prison officer and his family, with no hint that he should not remain in his job, and perhaps included in this is Paul's general advice to Christians to live as they are called (1 Cor 7:20-24). For it would seem that if everyone is to remain in the same calling in which he was (effectually) called by grace, unless an opportunity to change one's situation presents itself, then presumably this also applies to serving Roman soldiers who are converted.

The poverty of the material gives us reason to adopt a policy of "live and let live" among Christians and churches, it seems to me. And this may be thought of as providential, given the varieties of circumstance in which the New Testament international church of Christ may find itself. Across the world and down the centuries there have been very different ways in which

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[12] Of course there are Christians who are pacifists, historical claims that the early church taught and practised pacifism, and able defences of pacifism from the New Testament. For example, Richard B Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. But this paper, as originally prepared, was based on a judgment of the likely views on this question of those present at the Conference.

the injunctions of the NT are taken to apply to one thing and another. So why insist that one application of the allusions of the New Testament to military service is the correct one and so, by implication, *the* Christian norm? How could this be done?

So we must never forget that the New Testament church is an international jurisdiction, by comparison with the Old Testament theocracy. What this means is that if Christ and the apostles permit military service this may mean that, sooner or later, Christian will be fighting Christian. Given the extent to which the New Testament privileges loyalty to the people of God over loyalty to kin and country, this means that a Christian soldier may be called upon to do things which are against his or her highest and deepest instincts. And it also has implications for prayer in a time of war. Such petitions may include that Christian soldiers of the enemy and their families will enjoy the protection and deliverance of Almighty God, if such a thing is in these instances in accordance with his will.

So that is the first thing: the inexplicitness of commands about military service and the waging of war in the New Testament.

Reasoning about morality according to the New Testament

The second thing is how we are to reason about war, according to the New Testament, if there are no explicit commands about it? To try to answer that question we must first reflect on the form in which Christian morality is presented.

The second table of the Decalogue is in the background and foreground of New Testament teaching about what Christians are to do and to shun, and so shape the character of their lives. The idea that the law is no longer to be a moral guide, a point often insisted on by those dismissed as "antinomian" (rather unjustly it seems to me) is clearly mistaken. The relevance of the moral law is a view endorsed by Christ and spelled out by the apostles. So, for example, in one of the most extended discussions of the nature of sanctification in the New Testament, Romans 12 and 13, the command to love one's neighbour (12:9), not to remain indebted (13:7), the laws forbidding adultery, stealing and covetousness are summed up, as Christ himself taught, as particular instances of "you shall love your neighbour as yourself" (13:8-10). There is more to the New Testament pattern of holiness than this, but there is not less.

Yet as if to underline the difference in the situation of the New Testament church as over against the church in the Mosaic era, the New Testament has a variety of different ways of expressing the values of the Decalogue, and of inculcating its moral standards. Indeed the way in which Paul writes of the application of the Decalogue suggests that it consists, or starts, not with obedience to commands but with the formation of dispositions of character.

This outlook is strengthened by what Paul has to say about walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16) and the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22), and Peter about the formation of virtue, and other qualities (2 Pet 1:5-7). These expressions strongly imply that Christian moral character is formed from the inside out, by means of the renewal of the mind; morality is considered not as a code of separate acts of obedience which then develop in the agent the corresponding habits of mind, but as an inner renewal which brings about the practice of the appropriate actions in a properly motivated manner.

So as regards the morality of military matters, there is an absence of sets of definite commands covering that area of life, and indeed of most other matters. Where is the wisdom in all this? I suggested earlier that the diverse circumstances in which churches in the international church of Jesus Christ may find themselves, and the spirit of mature adulthood which is to characterise life in these churches, encourages diversity of expression, and about them, a spirit of live and let live. This is supported by the non-legalistic and non-moralistic approach to conduct which has to do more with the bearing of the fruit of the Spirit.

A case study: torture

To try to make our approach toward war and military service more focused I shall consider the hard case of the moral justification of torture. One needs to bear in mind the general context of the discussion of torture that follows: We shall be discussing the balancing of principle with expedience. We need to remember that there is a difference between doing evil that good may come as a proactive policy, and as a policy that is reactive to a situation not of the agent's making. Scripture condemns those who proactively have the intention "Let us do evil that good may come" (Rom 3:8), as well as those whose ethics is solely a matter of the computation of the consequences. There may also be a difference in our behaviour when it concerns ourselves only, and when we have a prior responsibility for others (for members of our families or for those who are weak). There is the question of urgency – when we know that the time bomb is ticking. Finally there is the question of the "slippery slope".[13]

First we shall consider the views of certain ethicists, beginning with examples from contemporary evangelicalism (Wayne Grudem in his *Politics*

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[13] It would be incorrect to suppose that torture is a new occurrence, prompted by the "war on terror". The detention of some members of the British Union of Fascists during World War II, as well as the treatment of internees during the policy of internment in Ulster involved torture. The treatment included sleep deprivation, compulsory positions of stress, isolation, starvation and hooding. See Iain Cobain, *Cruel Britannia, A Secret History of Torture*, (London: Portobello Books, 2013).

According to the Bible[14] and Albert Mohler in a blog-essay) and then more widely.

The section of Grudem's book where he discusses torture is concerned with "ticking time-bomb" situations, that is, with emergencies of an impending bomb blast or similar. Someone is captured who knows, or is believed to know, the location of the bomb. The question is, should he be tortured to secure the information of the bomb's whereabouts?

Grudem frames his discussion in terms an action's inherent evil or otherwise. He illustrates this by listing actions which in his view have this character and which therefore should not be countenanced under any circumstances, including the ticking time-bomb situation. Such actions are:

1. To commit actions that are in themselves always immoral, such as raping a prisoner;
2. To deny medical treatment;
3. To carry out sadistic humiliation of prisoners;
4. To attempt to force a prisoner to violate the religious convictions that he has that pose no threat to the United States or its defense;
5. To carry out any actions that would "shock the conscience" of a US court, such as doing anything that would cause lasting physical damage to the prisoner.[15]

The common thread to these actions is that they bring about or allow lasting physical damage to the sufferer. Grudem notes that real pain can be inflicted without causing lasting physical damage, and offers examples. Something similar is true in the case of the "truth serum" injection (sodium pentathol). What about waterboarding? As Grudem describes it this "involves holding a prisoner down so that his head is lower that the rest of his body while he faces up. Then a cloth is put over his nose and mouth, and water is poured over the cloth, giving the prisoner the sensation of drowning". Grudem claims that this procedure is not inherently morally wrong when used within appropriate guidelines, for it causes no permanent physical damage. He goes on to claim that these interrogation techniques "*worked remarkably well*".[16]

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[14] Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

[15] Ibid., 429.

[16] [Italics in original] But note, **"**Officials say CIA interrogators in secret overseas prisons developed the first strands of information that ultimately led to the killing of Osama bin Laden. Current and former U.S. officials say that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, provided the *nom de guerre* of one of bin Laden's most trusted aides. The CIA got similar information from Mohammed's successor, Abu Faraj al-Libi. Both were subjected to harsh interrogation tactics inside CIA prisons in Poland and Romania."

Unfortunately for waterboarding advocates, a longer version of this story adds some crucial detail: "Mohammed did not reveal the names while being subjected to the simulated drowning technique known as waterboarding, former officials said. He identified them many months later under standard interrogation, they said, leaving it once again up for debate as to whether the harsh technique was a valuable tool or an unnecessarily violent tactic. It took years of work for intelligence agencies to identify the courier's real name, which officials are not disclosing." Despite being waterboarded 183 times (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khalid_Sheikh_

"*Not to have used them* [against Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the September 11 attacks] *would have been morally wrong*, because it would have meant *having the ability to stop the murder of thousands and thousands of people and not doing it*. What could be a greater moral wrong for any government than this?" So the criteria for the use of torture are that it is not excluded by the five actions listed above, that it does no lasting physical damage to those on the receiving end of it, and there is a great saving of life in using it.[17]

One might quibble at some of this, for example that prisoners should never be denied medical treatment. But Grudem goes on to say that there are more effective ways of getting information from prisoners than by, for example, leaving their teeth to ache for a while. I suppose that this is his way of saying that the prisoner has a *right* to medical treatment, even though he may well have reasons for not using the language of rights. Nonetheless Grudem's position shows signs of not being thought through, as when on the one hand he cites certain supposedly exceptionless moral positions, but adds that the items are on the list because "None of these actions (viz. those on the list) serve any valid purpose in obtaining the needed information when it could be more readily obtained by inflicting bodily pain (within the moral limits described below) in a way that does no long-term damage".[18] But perhaps he means that these are all exceptionless moral principles which are also, as a matter of fact, inefficient means of wresting information from prisoners about the whereabouts of some ticking time-bomb.

So Grudem's position involves the observance of a series of moral absolutes – exceptionless moral principles or rules – where those rules allow the torturing of others when such torturing leaves behind no visible physical effects or disabilities. He is thinking not principally of the leaving of scars and the like, but the infliction of permanent disabilities.

Some comments on this: First, Grudem's positive assessment of the morality of means of torture appears to depend on it not leaving any physical trace in the victim. Indeed, he seems exclusively to consider physical effects.

Mohammed#Capture_and_interrogation) in March 2003, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed did not divulge actionable intelligence until at least 2006, (http://emptywheel.firedoglake.com/2011/05/02/the-osama-bin-laden-trail-shows-waterboarding-didnt-work/) withholding the information under torture (http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/05/02/972387/-Republicans-say-torture-led-U-S-to-bin-Laden-Facts-say-otherwise). KSM revealed it only under the sophisticated *non-coercive* persuasion favoured by professional interrogators (http://waterboarding.org/ accessed 20 July 2012).

[17] Italics in original. This discussion is on pages 430-2 of Grudem. For a more generalised Evangelical discussion of terrorism, see D. A. Carson *Love in Hard Places*, (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2002), 108f.

[18] Grudem, *Politics*, 429.

But what about psychological effects, and what about such effects upon not only the tortured but the torturers? One might wonder about this in calculating its morality, wonder about the morality of running an army that will seek, in the tumult of war, to weaken and wound the enemy and even take their lives in the furtherance of the aims of war. But we might wonder even more at an army who will train some of its soldiers in the slow and intentional infliction of frightening pain on the enemy, to wrest information from them. What psychological scars will using this procedure as a routine leave on them, as well as on their victims? Wayne Grudem does not have a place for calculating such effects. In a similar way he does not make any estimate of the tendency of practising such torturing to blunt the resistance of the torturers to employing some of those practices which he regards as unacceptable as a matter of principle.

Albert Mohler has expressed a more structured and nuanced view in his blog-article "Torture and the War on Terror: We Must Not Add Dirty Rules to Dirty Hands".[19] He is commenting on a widely-discussed article by Charles Krauthammer, "The Truth About Torture", published in the December 5, 2005 issue of *The Weekly Standard*.[20] Krauthammer recognises the "monstrous evil" of torture and its corrupting influence on the torturers. Krauthammer argues nevertheless that there has to be a rule permitting torture under carefully laid down circumstances. The to-be-tortured are gangsters who have forfeited all their rights. (This is a "war on terror" but apparently not one under the protection of the Geneva Convention.) So torture is permissible for the attempt to retrieve vital information in ticking bomb situations.

Mohler objects to the use of "hypothetical scenarios" to justify such acts: "I would argue that we cannot condone torture by codifying a list of exceptional situations in which techniques of torture might be legitimately used. At the same time, I would also argue that we cannot deny that there could exist circumstances in which such uses of torture might be made necessary." So, in other words, rules should not be formulated to deal with hypothetical circumstances, but real life might push us into sanctioning torture. "The key point is this – at all times and in all cases the use of torture is understood to be morally suspect in the extreme, and generally unjustified." There is conflict in a situation in which sin cannot be avoided: the death of bystanders, or the torture of the perpetrators of evil or their accomplices. Laws governing behaviour may well be broken in, as we say, "exceptional circumstances". Mohler suggests that this procedure is followed:

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[19]   http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/12/20/torture-and-the-war-on-terror-we-must-not-add-dirty-rules-to-dirty-hands/ (accessed 22 May 2014).

[20] http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/006/400rhqav.asp. (accessed 22 May 2014).

First, the use of torture should be prohibited as a matter of state policy – period. No set of qualifications and exceptions can do anything but diminish the moral credibility of this policy. At the same time, rare exceptions under extreme circumstances can be considered by legitimate state agents, knowing that a full accounting of these decisions must be made to the public, through appropriate means and mechanisms.

Second, a thorough and legitimate review must be conducted subsequent to the use of any such techniques, with the agents who authorised or conducted such use of torture fully accountable, even to the point of maximum legal prosecution if their use of extreme coercion is found to have been unjustified (not simply because the interrogation did not produce the desired information, but because the grounds of justification were invalid).

The trouble with this rule-less approach is that it can lead from bad to worse without the restraint afforded by the existence of rules. As for the restraint imposed by the policy of review, what is that worth if the supposed excessive torture has been successful in providing the infor-mation necessary to disarm the ticking time-bomb? Whether or not this is a morally persuasive policy, despite what Mohler says he is proposing the state permission of torture, with the proviso that the results must be open to public scrutiny.

A position very similar to Mohler's, though with different emphases, is that taken by David Fisher.[21] Like Mohler, he is against legalising torture. Decisions in the exceptional, ticking time-bomb emergency must be the responsibility of political leaders, but he thinks that this is better than legalising torture.

Fisher emphasises the morally corrosive consequences of training people to be effective torturers:

Torture adversely affects the character of those involved in the process; both the torturers and the tortured. We are, therefore, rightly concerned over the sort of people that the public officials, whom we appoint to conduct special interrogations on our behalf, may become through their practice of torture. Virtues are crucial to our moral lives. We want our public servants to be men and women of virtue. Yet we need our special interrogators to be – professionally – men or women of vice. If they are to excel in their profession, they will need to learn to become in the exercise of their official duties, at best, indifferent to the pain of those whom they are interrogating and, at worst, adept in the vice of cruelty.[22]

Here, whether intentionally or not, there is an explicit link to virtue, a great New Testament concept.

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[21] David Fisher, *The Morality of War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[22] Ibid., 183.

Conclusion

I have attempted to argue that in important respects New Testament ethics for Christians are different from Old Testament ethics for Israelites. Its governing question is not "What commands or rules should we obey or follow?" but "What sort of people ought we to be?" The centre of gravity of New Testament ethics lies in virtue, gift, grace, just as regeneration issues in a new "man", a new person, a new nature. The ethics are from the inside out. I also suggest that such an ethic is congruent with the internationalising of the people of God in the New Testament era. Congregations of Christians may well find themselves in a wide variety of circumstances which call for different applications or emphases of the virtues of the Spirit. Christians in a time of just war may be called to act differently from when their country is engaged in what is widely regarded as an unjust war, or during a time of peace. In a similar way a Christian congregation which is socially deprived and low in attainment may need to have certain emphases made in the formation of their Christian graces. Another, which is affluent and not socially deprived, may need other emphases. Or, to bring this conclusion nearer to what we have just been discussing, congregations in garrison towns may be under different pressures from run-of-the-mill "civilian" local churches. Finally, recognising the legitimacy of such differences among churches is one way in which Christian liberty and diversity may legitimately be expressed.

REVIEW ARTICLE:
MAPPING THE ORIGINS DEBATE

MAPPING THE ORIGINS DEBATE
Gerald Rau, IVP, 2012, 237pp, £12.99

Introduction

The debate over creation and evolution is a noisy one. The heat generated could solve our nation's energy issues, and yet the light is often equivalent to Edison's prototype bulb. There is a mountain of literature seeking to answer each of the mountains of questions the "origins" subject raises. For anyone other than a specialist to even begin an ascent has the equivalent feel of a rambler approaching Everest in flip-flops.

It is with that in mind that Gerald Rau has written *Mapping the Origins Debate*. His goal is to provide "a simple map to help high school or college students find their way through hotly disputed territory" (13). He is not attempting to add a further voice to the already crowded debating chamber, but to provide "a scaffold to support learning" (13), a commentary for the debate already in full flow, and a "You Are Here!" sign for the tourist asking, with perspiring brow, "where on earth am I?"

There is much to commend. The book had already received positive reviews elsewhere, from far more qualified people than I, (for example http://www.e-n.org.uk/2013/10/reviews/creation-cartography/?search=1, subscription required), and the map itself is much needed. Rau's approach is to outline the evidence supporting each of the six main origins models (Naturalistic Evolution, Nonteleological Evolution, Planned Evolution, Directed Evolution, Old-Earth Creation, Young-Earth Creation) as they answer the four main origins questions (The Origin of the Universe, The Origin of Life, The Origin of Species, The Origin of Humans). In doing this he then goes on to show "where they are similar or different and how each is logically consistent and tenable, based on certain underlying assumptions" (30).

To chart the models at the level of their underlying assumptions is important. A map of the debate must get to the level of worldview if the differences between the positions are to be correctly identified and the internal logic of each model respected. This surely is the first step towards generating light and not heat, and Rau's irenic tone throughout is laudable. The structure and format of the book serves this end well, and back in the 90s, as a first year undergraduate geology student, having recently come to faith, I know I would have benefited from reading a book like this.

However, early on in reading it became apparent just how ambitious the project was, given the complexity and scale of the mapping exercise. So, for the purpose of this review, I want to ask three questions. Is Rau's map accurate, is it useful, and ultimately, is it achievable?

Is The Map Accurate?

At the level of worldview, Rau places the six models on a natural-supernatural spectrum. He writes,

> The gradient I am proposing, which determines the model of origins chosen, is *the degree of interaction between the supernatural and natural worlds.* Obviously, if there is nothing supernatural, a naturalistic position, there can be no interaction, so we must seek a naturalistic explanation for every phenomenon, including the origin of the universe. On the other end of the spectrum is the view that God not only exists but has supernaturally revealed both his method and timing of creation in the first chapters of the Bible (38, author's italics).

This approach leads Rau to assert that the most consistently "supernatural" model is one that holds to a creation story of literal twenty-four-hour days. However, this presupposes that a natural explanation somehow excludes a corresponding supernatural explanation. If one was to read Psalm 104 and ask how donkeys get water and cows get grass, the answer the psalmist gives not *either* natural *or* supernatural, but *both* natural *and* supernatural. The natural-supernatural spectrum distorts the map. One would suspect that an Old Earth Creationist would dismiss the claim as inaccurate, that his is a "less supernatural" account of origins than a Young Earth Creationist's account.

Within the models themselves, because of their specialised nature, I cannot evaluate their accuracy at every point. They appear to be a good sketch of the main evidence, but it is in the sphere of geology that the terrain is most familiar to me.

It was surprising to see the Cambrian explosion labelled as a significant contribution of Old Earth Creationists. Rau notes, the Cambrian explosion, "until about ten years ago was not even mentioned in textbooks, even though the phenomenon of many different phyla appearing in the fossil record within a very short period had been known for a long time" (160).

This may be explained by the context into which Rau is writing, but the Cambrian explosion was made popular by the American palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould's book *Wonderful Life* in 1990, 24 years ago, and was covered in the syllabus of my thoroughly-secular undergraduate geology degree in the late 90s. Inaccuracy at this level slightly undermines the credibility of the map overall. Within the category of accuracy it is also worth asking whether anything important is missing from the map. Here I was surprised that there was no real mapping of the debate over the age of the earth itself and related evidence. Given that this is the key distinction between the "old-earth" and "young-earth" creation models this seemed an obvious omission.

In 2008, IVP Academic published a book entitled *The Bible, Rocks and Time* by Young and Stearley, in which the geological evidence for the age of the earth was summarised. To map the origins debate without any reference to the evidence of the stratigraphic record does affect the accuracy of the map of the debate.

Is The Map Useful?

A map is only as useful as it is accurate, but the usefulness of a map is also connected to the purpose for which it is required, and especially for whom the map is made. Rau's hope is that this map will go some way towards helping representatives of the six models solve the puzzle together, but the reality is that this book will mostly serve an Evangelical constituency seeking to live faithfully, and handle God's Word accurately, as they engage in the debate for themselves.

Because of this, it is not only important to have a map of the various interpretations of the biblical data, which Rau helpfully provides within the book and as a dedicated appendix, but also to have a map of the underlying theological convictions regarding Scripture, and a map of what is at stake doctrinally for the Christian as an implication of each position. Rau acknowledges that "each of the six models of origins presented here is intimately wedded to a certain theological interpretation of Scripture, so the model and the theology rise and fall together" (189). However, what this actually means in practice is left off the map.

Inevitably, left unmapped, the bias of the author is allowed simply to assert itself. Concerning the origin of humanity, Rau writes representing the Young Earth Creation position,

If Adam was not a single individual, this would affect our doctrine of sin and therefore redemption from sin. Related to this is the question of death, particularly death before the Fall, which YEC considers to be a major issue. While such doctrines are human creations, not divine revelation, they are deeply rooted in church traditions and in many cases treated with almost as much reverence as the Bible itself (150).

According to Rau, that the doctrines of sin and redemption are "human creations, not divine revelation" is not the conviction of one model, or the implication of one approach, but a foregone conclusion floating, unmapped, over the debate. When such a bias occasionally shows itself, without any apparent self-awareness, it rather undermines the usefulness of the map as a whole.

Is a Map Achievable?

This leads us to the question of whether or not what Rau attempts is actually achievable. Failing to state one's own bias is not the same as being objective.

A purely objective map is never achievable, and it would be far more helpful to understand where Rau stands himself and then see the terrain, and engage in the debate, from his perspective.

The book begins with Rau acknowledging that he is "not so naïve as to think that this will resolve the issue" (13). However, towards the end he clearly alludes to the fact that he believes the issue is resolvable, and he has a model of his own that could resolve it. He notes, "So where do I stand? I will only say that as far as I know, no one has yet written a comprehensive justification of the model I support, from a theological and scientific perspective" (191). He wants us to "begin to see the world from a wider, and perhaps eventually different, perspective" (192).

There are points where, despite himself, his own model is revealed. He notes, "we are all working on the same puzzle and must eventually work together if it is to be completed" (154). He speaks of the six blind men examining the elephant: "Each, utterly convinced that his observation was correct, mocked the others as fools. So it is often with the six models of origins" (154). Like a globe being viewed from two different poles, "the two hemispheres have a different notion of which end of the globe ought to be considered the top" (171). It seems to me astonishing that he cannot see the implications of his claim. Rau stands with the jigsaw box in his hand, gazing, fully-sighted, over the six blind men, orbiting extra-terrestrially the globe the rest of us inhabit. At this point one has to ask whether Rau has strayed off the map altogether and up the faraway tree!

Conclusion

As I began, there is much that this book has to offer the reader that will help them into the origins debate. Though an "objective" map is attempted, it is not possible, but neither is it really needed. A map, with its stated bias, is ultimately all that is required, and at least then whoever the reader is, they know which planet they are on.

My frustration with the book comes down to this. Rau clearly believes his model could resolve the debate, and though he is unwilling to plot it on the map he has charted, he believes that his mapping exercise is a step towards us getting there. Although he does not want to add his voice to the debate, he is implicitly adding his voice, but in a way that makes dialogue very difficult. Rather than feign objectivity, *that* is the book he should have written, and given this volume, it would probably be well worth reading.

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REVIEW ARTICLE:
POP CULTURING FOR CHRISTIANS

POPCULTURED: THINKING CHRISTIANLY ABOUT STYLE, MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT
Steve Turner, IVP, 2013, 256pp, £10.99

I can't imagine many people better positioned to write a book on popular culture than Steve Turner. His job as an established journalist and writer who covers the culture beat, particularly rock music, means that he has rubbed shoulders with the likes of John Lennon, Paul McCartney and Cliff Richard, as well as established photographers, Hollywood writers, set designers and the like. He starts out chapter six reminiscing about hanging out with Bowie back in the day. The man has, as they say, street cred.

And he is an accomplished writer. His style is easy and conversational, though it doesn't lack for depth. His imagery is consistently vivid. This is not a scholar's tome on popular culture; this is an eminently readable work on popular culture for the masses.

Conversely, those looking for a systematically-stated theology of popular culture are likely going to be disappointed. But they needn't be; Turner's strength is in his keen observation of, and insights into, the various media and cultural themes that surround us. Furthermore, he has done significant research and he enters into many of the debates surrounding specific popular media with conviction and elegance.

Even when his remarks seem *ad hoc*, there really is a guiding structure, a method to his madness. He begins by laying out reasons why we should care about engaging popular culture (chapter 1). He then defines his field, popular culture (chapter 2). And he lays out biblical principles for thinking these matters through (chapter 3). The main body of the book (chapters 4-13) has to do with different media or issues related to popular culture: cinema, journalism, celebrity, fashion, thrill-seeking, comedy, advertising, technology, photography and the portrayal of Christians in television and film. The book closes with advice to consumers, critics and creators of popular culture (chapter 14) and a short appendix, a Q&A session about the author's personal stake in exploring popular culture.

His overall perspective (articulated in chapters 1-3) is a refreshing alternative to the pietistic dualism that colours so much Evangelical discourse regarding popular culture. Turner has been around popular cultural practitioners and the Christian faith long enough to have a solid

grasp on both the benefits and risks of engaging popular culture. A knowledge of popular culture gives us insight into the *zeitgeist,* the popular mind, and the imagination of our neighbour (20-24). He recognises that a commitment to the universal lordship of Christ means we must be serious about popular culture (18). His emphasis is unflaggingly missional and culture-positive. This is, after all, the same man who wrote *Hungry for Heaven: Rock 'n' Roll and the Search for Redemption,* the first Christian book I ever read that treated rock songs as if they had something meaningful to say.[1] There is a strong doctrine of creation that lies back of these emphases, as well as a depth of understanding of the academic discourse of cultural theory.

The book is full of surprising insights that should drive Evangelicals to deeper reflection. For example, in wrapping up his discussion of biblical principles that should guide our engagement with popular culture, he mentions the parable of the talents from Matthew 25. He applies this to our cultural life: What caused the unfaithful servant to stumble? Fear. Likewise, it is not a badge of holiness if fear keeps us from interacting with our culture. Rather, fear keeps us from faithfully carrying out the (cultural) task that God has given us (56). Much later in the book he challenges us with a perspective on popular cultural consumption that I have never heard from an Evangelical, but one that should be on the front-burner for Christians: "Rather than thinking of popular culture in terms of what we should avoid, maybe we should start thinking in terms of what we absolutely should consume" (226). The book is full of such moments.

Not that he is always on-target. His discussion of popular culture's effect on our thought life, specifically his interpretation of Phil 4:8 ("Whatever is noble" etc.), betrays a lingering dualism. He asserts that "Sometimes we have to sit through some bad stuff in order to get to the good stuff. That's true for the Bible as it is for Shakespeare… The point is to have the good things as our benchmark, to want to meditate on the sweet and awe-inspiring rather than the hateful and destructive" (53). I understand what he's getting at: there is sex and violence in the Bible and Shakespeare, as well as popular culture – things that can tempt us or make us squirm. But I would be rather more hesitant to call anything in the Bible "bad stuff" that we must get past. If the Bible gives a realistic portrayal of sin, and shows how it leads to ruin, I'd prefer to call that "good stuff" as well. If it's in the Bible, it's *all* good. Here, Brian Godawa's chapter on "Sex, Violence and Profanity" in the Bible, from *Hollywood Worldviews,* serves us much better.[2] Godawa calls on us not to be

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[1] Steve Turner, *Hungry for Heaven: Rock 'n' Roll and the Search for Redemption* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1988, 1995).

[2] Brian Godawa, "Sex, Violence and Profanity" in *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom and Discernment,* 2d ed., (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2009). For a

too quick to label cultural contents as "good stuff" or "bad stuff". Rather, we should consider carefully *how* these things are presented, in what context, with what inflection. Sex is part of creation. Adultery, violence and profanity are part of our fallen existence. There are legitimate ways of depicting these in popular culture, just as there are in the Bible.

But that is one misstep in the midst of many, many helpful insights concerning popular culture as a whole. When he turns his attention to particular areas of popular culture, there is likewise much to applaud. These chapters (4 through 13) make up the bulk of the book. Typically, a chapter starts off by considering what is laudable and worthwhile in this field (say, fashion). In other words, he starts off by recognising common grace in popular culture. Next, he considers places in this type of popular culture where there are dynamics and motifs that undermine biblical commitments, set up idols and so forth. Finally, he highlights areas where Christians can speak into this cultural arena in a healing, creative, and life-giving way. He ends each chapter with questions to reflect on, resources to pursue, and suggestions for further action.

What emerges is a balanced, holistic perspective that sometimes cuts against Evangelical expectations, for the good. He is mature and informed enough in his perspective to point out areas where Evangelicals have shied away from developing a type of popular culture to its full potential. My favourite example of this in the book comes from his chapter on comedy:

What few Christians have done is to use comedy to highlight inconsistencies in the way that people like Lenny Bruce and George Carlin did. Instead of going on the offensive Christians either do jokes about church in a church context, Bible jokes as a warm-up for an evangelist or inoffensive comedy where the Christian influence is felt in the absence of swearing, blasphemy and references to sex and drugs, rather than the presence of anything. While the market leaders in comedy are creating material out of the hot issues of the day, Christians are known only for being meek and mild.

The most commonly used commendations on the webpages of Christian comedians are "clean" and "family friendly". Unfortunately, this suggests that no humour can be found in any post-puberty experiences and that Christians are permanently stranded in childhood. It's hard to take on the ills of the world and the mess of our own sinful lives while remaining cute and uplifting. I accept that churches have responsibilities that don't apply to clubs and bars, but a Christian Lenny Bruce is unlikely to be house trained. (151)

This is bracing stuff. The man does not mince words. The heart of his argument is that if we had a more robust theology, if we took sin and grace more seriously, then we would produce better comedy. To which all God's

people should respond with a hearty "Amen!" He likewise delivers wonderful insights into all the diverse worlds of popular culture with which he engages.

But again, there are a few places where his insights miss the mark. For instance, I wish he had spent time on the visual languages used in cinema instead of simply discussing story structure (chapter 4), especially given his eloquent reflections on photography and visual culture (chapter 12). Another example: in his chapter on technology, he traces the fascinating story of cyber-culture's origins in the hippy culture of the San Francisco Bay area. But sometimes his writing takes on the tone of an ageing hippy lamenting "What's wrong with kids these days?" just like the squares of the 1950s did to his generation:

Relationships with people that are conducted in tweets of 140 characters or less can never be profound, and I doubt that a relationship with God that is conducted with a distracted mind can ever gain spiritual maturity (183).

These kinds of absolutistic pronouncements are commonplace in Christian writing on technology and, for the most part, they are simply unhelpful. They betray a real lack of knowledge of the medium or technology. Are many relationships over Twitter superficial? Yes. But I've also had in-depth theological discussions and learned tons (in chunks of 140 characters or less). I've become aware of people whose work I appreciate, and sometimes I get to meet them in real life (which I always find fascinating and rewarding). I've had Twitter acquaintances become trusted friends. I've comforted those who are mourning the death of loved ones. I've even had a friend I met through Twitter *and never met in person* privately confess sin to me and ask me for prayer. Is there a certain thinning of relationships that can take place because of online technologies? Yes, it is certainly a danger of which we must remain mindful. Is there are danger of distraction? Again, yes there is; we must practice discipline. But there is so much potential in these new relational media as well. The real need is for biblical wisdom to speak into these new dynamics, not simply to condemn them as "bad for you".[3] I find this to be a problem wherever Neil Postman is embraced uncritically (as he often is) by Christians.[4]

In the same chapter, he spends a mere 1¼ pages discussing video games. This is nearly an unforgiveable sin in my view. Video gaming is a monster-sized industry whose global sales figures dwarf international movie box

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[3] One example of speaking wisdom into our use of new technology is Quentin J. Schultze's *Habits of the High-Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002). The book is a bit dated now, but still worth reading, for the principles are ageless.

[4] For a critique of Postman's perspective on media, see Turnau, *Popologetics,* chapter 8.

office ($24 billion vs. $10 billion).[5] And that has been the case for years. Further, what little Turner does say about video games betrays a serious ignorance of the medium, lumping all games into a single, undifferentiated blob that overlooks significant differences in genre (e.g. role playing games vs. multi-player online battle arenas), and different gameplay dynamics within genres (e.g. games that have a narrow corridor/rail vs. "sandbox" games that direct the player less). And given the writing and production quality of many of these games, it is hard to play them without feeling that you are in the presence of a popular art form deserving of the most profound attention. Yet he dismisses gaming as a waste of time, something Christians can't really justify when there are so many widows and orphans to feed. Couldn't one say the same about television, cinema, music, photography, or any of the other popular arts? He does not, because *they* are cultural forms that should be enjoyed by Christians (because they give us insight into the popular mind, culture was made to be enjoyed, etc.) – but not video games. In my opinion, this is a significant blind spot in his perspective. Fortunately, there are good resources available to Christians on gaming.[6] If this book goes into a second edition (and I sincerely hope it does), I implore Turner to give the same rich, detailed treatment to this part of popular culture that he gives to other areas. (By the way, one other serious omission in the book is sport. But since I'm guilty of the same omission in my own book on popular culture, I'm not prepared to complain quite so loudly about it.)[7]

But again, these missteps are few and far between. If I were to begin reciting all the places I found helpful and insightful, this review would be rejected on account of length, and I'd just end up restating things that he says in the book in clearer and more vivid prose.

Turner concludes the book with practical advice for consumers, critics and creators of popular culture. He is wise to recognise not one, but three different audiences for his book, and he speaks to each in turn. The advice here is sound, generous and biblical, as it is throughout the book (with a few exceptions).

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[5] Lisa Galarneau, "2014 Global Gaming Stats: Who's Playing What and Why?" Available at http://www.bigfishgames.com/blog/2014-global-gaming-stats-whos-playing-what-and-why/ (accessed 21 April, 2014). There is still debate over whether overall profits from gaming truly outpace movie profits. When we include earnings from merchandising agreements, DVD sales, and other sources, movies still outperform video games. For the other side of the debate, see Quinton Bronkhorst, "Games vs. Movies: Who Wins?" *Business Tech* website, 14 August, 2012, http://businesstech.co.za/news/general/19901/games-vs-movies-who-wins/ (accessed 21 May, 2014).

[6] Two that immediately come to mind are Kevin Schut's excellent book *Of Games and God: A Christian Exploration of Video Games* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013) and the website Gamechurch.com (http://gamechurch.com/).

[7] Curiously, he doesn't devote a chapter to popular music, his journalistic specialty. Perhaps this is because he's already given it book-length treatment. *Hungry for Heaven,* however, is about twenty years old. Mr. Turner, it's time for a new edition, or perhaps a new book.

Even with my caveats and criticisms, I do not hesitate to recommend this book heartily. There are precious few good books on popular culture from a Christian perspective, and fewer still that are as ambitious and wide-ranging as this one. Turner provides a welcome addition to a seriously-underdeveloped field, a field that requires more attention than it typically gets from Evangelicals. This book deserves a wide and enthusiastic readership.

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BOOK REVIEW

Encountering God Together
David G Peterson, IVP, 2013, 192pp, £9.99

Much has been written on the worship of the church, both gathered and scattered, since David Peterson completed *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (IVP, 1992) over twenty years ago. In *Encountering God Together*, his latest volume on the subject, Peterson seeks to advance and apply his biblical theology to the regular gathering of the congregation. Indeed, this new work could well be described as a condensed, developed, up-to-date, applied and practical version of *Engaging with God.* This makes it both accessible and useful to the target audience. The author's aim is that everyone involved in planning and leading church services would think more biblically and creatively about this important ministry in the face of what he describes as "a poor understanding of why we gather, little awareness of how to lead a gathering effectively, and an inadequate grasp of what we should expect from our time together" (11).

To address this deficiency, Peterson sets forth this treatise on the gathering, its purposes, and its elements, encouraging more honest engagement with what scripture reveals concerning these things and how they have been understood throughout church history. The vast majority of the engagement is with scripture. This is interspersed with brief, yet helpful, summaries of historical development and contemporary challenges.

The first three chapters build the foundation, tracing the themes of the gathering work of God, the worship of God, and the edification of the church through redemptive history. Once a biblical theology of the gathering has been established, and worship has been robustly defined, edification emerges as the controlling theme for what follows. The remainder of the book seeks to demonstrate how each element of the gathering should be achieving such edification (strengthening) of the congregation. And so there are chapters on patterns of service, listening to God, praying together, praising God, singing together, baptism and the Lord's Supper, plus a final worked example from Nehemiah 8-9, which is applied to church congregations and their hearing and response to the ministry of God's word today.

Throughout the book, Peterson displays a winning combination of solid bible handling, astute theological reflection and pastoral wisdom, along with a good awareness of some recent trends. His call to pastors to take responsibility for modelling and teaching good practice in this area gathers momentum as his argument and application progress.

Chapter One outlines the theology of the gathering: The author proposes that God's eternal plan is to unite all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). And so God gathers Israel, and later, in fulfilment of his promises, gathers the church of Jesus Christ, who themselves are to anticipate the ultimate gathering in the heavenly assembly (Rev 21:1-4). This anticipation should be found in the weekly gatherings of congregations, which also serve to remind those gathered that God's grace is the basis of their relationship with him. So gatherings should be "gospel-shaped" (21). Peterson then explores three general purposes for the gathering. Notably, at this stage, "gathering to worship" is only one way that he proposes we experience the gathering. As is pointed out, "...since other terms such as 'fellowship' and 'edification' can describe the purpose of the gathering, it is not helpful to use 'worship' as the main or exclusive term" (25). This paves the way for his discussion of worship in Chapter Two, as does his desire to tighten up the translation of the different words that are often rendered "worship" in our English translations.

In the second chapter, Peterson seeks to correct misrepresentations of what worship is, reaching the same conclusion as in his former work, namely that "the pattern of acceptable worship throughout scripture can be defined as *an engagement with God on the terms he proposes and in the way he alone makes possible*" (40, emphasis original). This chapter provides an excellent survey of the different terminology related to worship that is used in both Old and New Testaments. "Homage", "reverence" and "service to God" are traced through the scriptures with examples of each given. Such clarification provided by the word studies is undoubtedly necessary given the loose understanding and use of worship terminology today. However, the call to change "worship" to "service" in the rendering of *latreuein* (for example, Rom 12:1) is not applied in the same way to *proskynein* and *phoboun*, which the author renders as "paying homage" and "revering/respecting". One wonders if Peterson might have followed this to a logical conclusion of contending for clearer translations of the latter two terms. This, it could be argued, may avoid the need to repeat the discussion every time someone asks, "which worship word is this?"

Chapter Three on the theme of edification is very much the peg on which all following chapters are hung. Again the author makes use of the redemptive-historical approach to examine the theological context of edification – how the Messiah's building work is anticipated in scripture and fulfilled by Jesus. Several relevant New Testament passages are surveyed and are used to support the primacy of edification in the gathering (Eph 2:13-22; 1 Cor 3:21; Rev 21:1-4; 22:1-5). The ministry of gifted leaders is described as critical to the process of edification (Eph 4:11-12) and all Christians are encouraged to share in this mutual strengthening process: "Edification occurs when Christians minister to one another in word and deed, seeking to

express and encourage a Christ-centred faith, hope and love. Clearly this ought to take place when the congregation meets together, but also as individuals have the opportunity to minister to one another in everyday life situations." (51-52). Not surprisingly, 1 Corinthians 14 is set forth as a key text in grasping the importance of edification in the gathering. The clearer aspects of Paul's instructions to the Corinthians are dealt with well and clearly support what Peterson proposes. The more challenging aspects could have done with more support for the positions stated, for example the question of who is responsible for weighing the prophecies in 1 Cor 14:29. This does not detract from what is a profitable and well-presented chapter.

The fourth chapter, where the rubber hits the road, is the high point of the book. It proceeds to apply the teaching about edification to the content, structure and flow of the gathering, combining brief historical sketches and further biblical teaching with a range of practical examples. There is plenty here for those who plan and lead church services to benefit from as they heed Peterson's call to take responsibility for the gathering itself, and for teaching and training the whole congregation in this area, especially those who lead different elements of the gathering. What is particularly good to observe in this chapter is Peterson's engagement with those who come to different conclusions concerning the structure and leadership of the gathering. For example, he builds a cogent challenge to Brian Chappell's view (*Christ-Centered Worship,* Baker, 2009) that there is only one legitimate "gospel structure" suitable for the regular gathering of the church, preferring to explore a range of scriptures where the gospel is articulated and various patterns of response are outlined. Peterson also disagrees with the designation of song leaders or music directors as "worship leaders" (contra Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters,* Crossway, 2008). Such engagement across different approaches is rare in contemporary literature on the subject and is therefore welcomed and commended.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven encourage the same biblically-informed preparation for listening to God (the reading of scripture and preaching), corporate prayer and praise as was evident in the previous chapters. The now usual combination of biblical teaching, practical hints and exhortation is directed towards preachers, encouraging attention not only to preaching but to the kind of response to the word they encourage. Some helpful suggestions are given on how and where prayer should be incorporated into the gathering, "enabling participants to relate every aspect of the service to God" (108). Peterson once again draws on his earlier work to encourage church gatherings to express the same confidence in God in their praises as is evident in the Revelation to John.

The chapter on singing that follows contains much biblical and pastoral wisdom and calls for appropriate training and support for those involved in this ministry to be made a priority. For consistency, it would have been nice

to see the same Bible overview of the subject utilised as in the chapters on prayer and praise but this is a minor quibble. The ways in which singing plays its part in edifying the gathered church are gleaned from solid exegesis and application of key texts (Eph 5:18-19; Col 3:16). Unity between pastors and music leaders is encouraged so that together the leadership of the gathering might consistently model the biblical teaching on edification to the congregation.

The ninth chapter on baptism is perhaps the weakest element of the book. The author's aim is to reflect on "what may unite believers and edify the church" (144). But, of course, different traditions would hold that their practice or understanding better edifies the church so there is, in reality, very little common ground for Peterson to apply his argument to. It could also be argued that baptism lacks scriptural support for being part of the regular gathering of the congregation, which also removes it from the main theme of the book. There is more common ground, and a more natural connection to edification, when the Lord's Supper is explored in Chapter Ten. "We do not simply meet to have fellowship with God but to minister to one another as we express our common participation in Christ as our Saviour and Lord. Here is an occasion for edifying the church." (174)

In conclusion, David Peterson has provided a much-needed resource for church leaders and all who participate in church services. It is my opinion that pastors and leaders of congregations will particularly benefit from reading and reflecting on Peterson's challenge. Yes, it is a useful book for church musicians too, and others who take part in the leadership of the gathering, but really this is not a book to be read by such groups in isolation. For it to really achieve its aims, it will be up to pastors to take a lead in teaching and modelling this biblically-informed pattern of edification. Everything that is done when the church gathers says something. Reading and applying Peterson's guide will help church leaders know what their gatherings should be saying, how to achieve such biblical patterns, and how to communicate these things to their congregation.

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