

Foundations

An International Journal of
Evangelical Theology

No 62
SPRING 2012

Contents

The Relationship Between Paul's Soteriology and His Ethics 2

Steven K Mittwede
EQUIP! Team, Ankara, Turkey

Public Bible Reading: A Neglected Gift of Grace 14

Derek Bigg
*Member and former elder of Christ Church,
Haywards Heath, West Sussex, UK*

Gospel Chaplaincy In a Secular World 23

Chris Thomas
*Pastor of Oak Tree Church, Birmingham, UK
& Voluntary Chaplain to West Midlands Police*

The Interpretation of John 3:5 31

Oliver Gross
*Pastor of New Street Evangelical Church,
Welshpool, Powys, UK*

Aggressive Atheism 51

Kieran Beville
*Pastor of Lee Valley Bible Church (Baptist), Ballincollig,
Co. Cork, Ireland*

Review article: Aping Mankind 64

Stephen Clark
*Minister of Freeschool Court Evangelical Church, Bridgend,
UK, Member of the Affinity Theological Team and Chair of
the Affinity Theological Study Conference*

Other Book Reviews 67

Gareth Williams, Paul Yeulett, Rohintan K. Mody

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.

Foundations is published twice each year online at www.affinity.org.uk

It is offered in two formats:

PDF (for citing pagination) and HTML (for greater accessibility, usability, and infiltration in search engines).

Foundations is copyrighted by Affinity. Readers are free to use it and circulate it in digital form without further permission (any print use requires further written permission), but they must acknowledge the source and, of course, not change the content.

Editor

Peter Milsom

peter@affinity.org.uk

Foundations is published by Affinity, The Old Bank House, 17 Malpas Road, Newport NP20 5PA

Telephone: 01633 893925
Website: www.affinity.org.uk
Email: office@affinity.org.uk

Associate Editors:

Iain D Campbell

Free Church of Scotland, Point, and Westminster Seminary

Dan Strange

Oak Hill College, London

Garry Williams

The John Owen Centre, London Theological Seminary

Peter Williams

Tyndale House, Cambridge

Introduction

Welcome to Issue 62, the latest edition of *Foundations* since we became an online journal. Recently, we have also made available, free of charge at www.affinity.org.uk, every article from every edition, dating back to our first publication in 1978. This is a wonderful resource for theologically minded Christians and we hope it will be well used by the church, for God's glory.

Issue 62 contains another collection of stimulating, wise and biblically faithful articles, as well as some book reviews that will point you in the direction of important reading material. As usual, *Foundations* includes contributions from serving church pastors who recognise the importance of theology being worked out in the real life of the local church, world mission and the Christian's daily interaction with fallen humanity. It is our prayer that this issue will again provoke readers around the world to greater love for the Lord, renewed commitment to seeking him through his Word, and a fresh determination to read, pray, live and serve with mind and heart fully engaged, for our Lord Jesus Christ and his church.

Steven Mittwede shows how the relationship between justification and sanctification in Paul's letters helps us to avoid the pitfalls of legalistic religion; at stake, he says '*is the spiritual health of individual believers and local fellowships of believers*'. *Derek Bigg* contributes helpfully and practically on the neglected subject of the public reading of Scripture. *Chris Thomas* writes as a pastor and chaplain on the way in which chaplaincy work reflects a consistent theme throughout Scripture of God's presence in the world he has made. He ends with a pertinent challenge to us all. *Oliver Gross* provides a thorough exegetical study of John 3:5 and comes to a well-argued (and, to some, controversial) conclusion. Finally, *Kieran Beville* gives us a useful survey of the main players in the phenomenon of New Atheism and encourages us, like David facing Goliath, to have courageous hearts. Book reviews from Stephen Clark, Gareth Williams, Paul Yeulett and Ro Mody complete this edition.

With *Ralph Cunnington* due to take up the reins as Editor of *Foundations* in September, we are also going to strengthen the team of Associate Editors at the same time. *Ted Donnelly* has had to step down from this role due to ill health; we thank him for his support in the past and wish him the Lord's blessing for the future. And we will welcome three new members of the team: *Ted Turnau* is a professor of cultural and religious studies in Prague, Czech Republic; *Bob Fyall* is Senior Tutor in Ministry for the Cornhill Training Course (Scotland), specialising in the Old Testament and homiletics; while *Keith Walker* is already a member of Affinity's Theological Team and is the UK Director of SIM (Serving in Mission).

Finally, our new editor is already looking out for contributions to future issues. If you would like to submit something for consideration, full details of how to do so, along with guidelines regarding length and format, can be found on the *Foundations* page of the Affinity website (or paste this link into your browser: <http://bit.ly/LcQhQ0>).

The Relationship Between Paul's Soteriology and His Ethics

Steven K Mittwede, EQUIP! Team, Ankara, Turkey

Any discussion of biblical ethics must ultimately focus on the character of God and, by extension, on the will of God as revealed in the Bible and the example of God in Jesus Christ. Thus, all normative ethical principles presented in the Bible are rooted in God's character and are enjoined upon people of faith.¹ Moses' prayer in Ex 33:13 is revealing: *'Now therefore, if I have found favour in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favour in your sight.'* He understood that right living is possible only through knowledge of God and his ways, and realised that such knowledge is accessible only through God's self-revelation. Accordingly, in this essay I will explore the relationship between soteriology and ethics within the framework of God's self-revelation, particularly as presented in the Pauline corpus.

Arthur Holmes wisely perceives and expounds the distinction between a *rule-ethic* and an *act-ethic*, the former having 'the biblical view of creation in mind and the divine law as its paradigm', and the latter presupposing 'no universal and lasting structures to human life' and 'no distinguishable areas of unchanging responsibility' (as in typical postmodern thought).² The evangelical Christian clearly would see himself operating within the context of a rule-ethic where there are divinely-revealed ethical absolutes. In other words, there is an *ought* that is neither self-imposed nor socially-imposed but, rather, that is divinely revealed and imposed.³

Some ethicists found their constructs of biblical ethics on a specific attribute of God, or upon a specific set of biblical commands or principles.⁴ The problem with *some* such constructs is that they do not give first place to explaining how a person of faith can possibly live according to the divine standard, that is, holiness and moral perfection. If the bar is so high, how can one possibly hope to clear it?

In light of this, it seems preferable to begin with what Bultmann calls the 'divine verdict'.⁵ In the context from which he writes, the divine verdict can only mean the sovereign, gracious work of God in redemption that draws one into God's kingdom. As he concludes, 'all of man's moral perfection can be of no significance without the decisive verdict of God.'⁶

In a similar vein, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, on the subject of 'Doing' writes:

When the Bible calls for action it does not refer a man to his own powers but to Christ Himself. 'Without me ye can do nothing' (John 15.5). This sentence is to be taken in its strictest sense. There is really no action without Jesus Christ... This saying of Jesus demonstrates more clearly than any other saying in the Bible that all action is entirely bound up with Jesus Christ...⁷

Accordingly, in the New Testament, and especially in the Pauline epistles, we see that divine grace (through faith) is the basis for justification⁸, and justification the basis for sanctification.⁹ It is only because one is *in Christ* first that he is empowered for living Christianly.¹⁰ Many Christian theologians and ethicists have recognised this relationship and thus frame Pauline ethics in terms of the interplay of the *indicative* and *imperative* moods.

A Brief History of Indicative-Imperative Interplay

The foundational Pauline corpus notwithstanding, the recognition of the indicative-imperative interplay (*or* interchange, as explained below) – although not using those terms – seems to date back to Irenaeus. In *Against Heresies*, there is evidence that he grasped this interplay insofar as he wrote that heretics and the false doctrines they purvey might be legitimately controverted by following ‘the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, *become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself*.’¹¹ (emphasis added). It seems likely that Irenaeus had 2 Cor 5:21 in mind as he penned those words.

In any case, it might be argued that his reference was singularly referring to justification and redemption, but only the most myopic of readers can fail to appreciate the logical relationship of justification to sanctification. What is in view is empowerment, initially unto juridical freedom from the penalty of sin and, consequently, unto freedom from the power of sin in daily living. Moreover, the Christian life is to be positive and active, not only negative and passive.¹²

Of course, in the medieval pre-Reformation church, a dependence upon good works rather than upon God’s grace for salvation effectively waylaid the possibility of a sound grasp of the indicative-imperative interplay. As stated above, sanctification properly understood must be founded on the gracious, redemptive work of Christ in saving the individual *from* the law of sin and death – thus removing divine condemnation – and *for* freedom according to the law of the Spirit of life.¹³

The clarified theology that issued from the Protestant Reformation facilitated a renewed understanding of Christian ethics. For example, John Calvin – in his exposition of Rom 12:1-2 – indicates that he fully comprehended that ‘the imperative of Paul’s thought is based upon the indicative’:¹⁴ ‘...this exhortation teaches us, that until men really apprehend how much they owe to the mercy of God, they will never with a right feeling worship him, nor be effectually stimulated to fear and obey him.’¹⁵ In other words, only one’s understanding and practical grasp of his position in Christ will yield – nay allow – godly fear and obedience.

Jack Sanders suggests that Bultmann, in his 1924 paper cited above, was the first to draw attention unquestionably to the relationship of imperative to indicative.¹⁶ Therein Bultmann notes that, for Paul, the imperative and indicative belong together, since ‘Paul bases the imperative on the very *fact* of justification’ (the reality of the Christian’s position in Christ).¹⁷ However, although Bultmann teaches that the indicative-imperative structure ‘is basic to Pauline thought’,¹⁸ he seems to fuse the indicative and imperative such that the indicative is ‘realised or laid hold of in the Christian’s experience by the imperative, that is, man’s daily existential decision to walk in the obedience of God by faith in the Christ-event.’¹⁹ Other approaches to the indicative-imperative relationship will be laid out in the following section.

Insights Regarding Indicative-Imperative Interplay

As summarised by Michael Parsons, the positions of Pauline scholars on the subject of the indicative-imperative relationship fall into three distinct categories.²⁰ The fusion of these moods by Bultmann is

discussed briefly above, but other scholars – such as Victor Paul Furnish, Paul Ramsey and Bernard Häring – also take this tack. Furnish reaches the conclusion that ‘the indicative and imperative are one in that the former includes the latter without necessarily identifying them and saying that the one *is* the other.’²¹ Ramsey, on the other hand, construes the indicative and imperative as coinherent in Christ, and sees Christianity as carrying only an obligation to love in an ethical construct seemingly prescient of the situation ethics of Joseph Fletcher.²² Häring’s approach is somewhat different for, although he seems to make a distinction between the indicative and the imperative, he understands the indicative to *become* the imperative.²³

The second category, as presented by C. H. Dodd, understands the indicative-imperative relationship to be one of virtual irrelation. As Parsons summarises, although Dodd recognises that the indicative and imperative *are* organically related, he effectively severs any causal relationship and sees the relationship as simply sequential: first the indicative (*kerygma*) then the imperative (*didache*).²⁴

The final, and most demonstrably biblical, category grounds the imperative in the indicative; thus, the two moods are closely related yet distinct.²⁵ As Doriani aptly points out, for Paul

...the capacity to fulfill one’s duty by acting righteously depends upon God’s prior renewal of character. Paul’s *indicative* statements of what God has done in believers constitute the foundation for *imperative* statements of what God requires of them.²⁶

Parsons surveys Paul’s use of the imperative based on the indicative, and analyses Rom 12:1-2, Phil 2:12-13, Gal 5:25 and 1 Cor 6:12-20 in order to elucidate this relationship,²⁷ but as Doriani points out, ‘the indicative-imperative pattern is most striking when the same idea appears as an indicative in one place and as an imperative in another.’²⁸ For example, in Rom 6:12 there is an imperative: ‘Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies...’; but later in the same chapter (Rom 6:22) an indicative: ‘But now that you have been set free from sin...’. In some cases, the related indicatives and imperatives are even located in different epistles; for example, ‘For as many of you were baptised into Christ have put on Christ’ (Gal 3:27), and ‘But put on the Lord Jesus Christ...’ (Rom 13:14).

In places the indicative and imperative are juxtaposed in a single verse, as in the so-called *locus classicus* for this interplay,²⁹ Gal 5:25: ‘If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.’ Here, Paul placed indicative and imperative side-by-side in a chiasm to emphasise ‘equally the givenness and the responsibility of life and freedom’; ‘In reality, God makes possible the life which he demands.’³⁰

An example of an insightful recognition and analysis of indicative-imperative interplay is Peter O’Brien’s treatment of Phil 2:12-13. He shows that, in spite of what seems to be a paradox, what is in view is an ‘eschatological orientation’ which is ‘the basis for ethical action’. He, too, notes that the imperatives of ‘ethical admonitions’ in Paul’s writings are closely related to, and dependent on, the indicatives, and that the goal of these exhortations is for the believers ‘to become what they already are in Christ.’³¹

Another thought-provoking approach to Pauline ethics is that of Philip Towner. Although he makes no direct reference to the indicative and imperative, his analysis of word groups in the Pastoral

Epistles reaches the same conclusion. He finds that 'in principle Christian existence is the interplay between correct (apostolic) doctrine, as the basis of faith in Christ, and outward, corresponding behavior' and that the Christ-event 'is the source of the observable lifestyle of faith.'³²

Although he, too, does not mention the indicative-imperative relationship per se, it is clear that Richard Longenecker also grasps the Pauline understanding of Christian ethics. Longenecker sees the Christian life as

based upon the fact of a new creation in Christ, directed by the 'law of Christ' and the 'mind of Christ', motivated and conditioned by the 'love of Christ', enabled by the 'Spirit of Christ', and *expressed in a situation of temporal tension between what is already fact and what is yet to be realized.*³³ (emphasis added)

We must guard against thinking that there was a clash of the indicative and imperative in Paul's mind. As Richard Howard points out, 'Any paradox is in our understanding and not in Paul's thought.'³⁴ We should also see and appreciate that indicative-imperative interplay is central and not peripheral; in fact, it is 'the very warp and woof of Pauline thought – specifically in his soteriology.'³⁵

A Variation on the Theme – Interchange

Although she mentions the indicative-imperative ('neatly summed up as the command to "be what you are"'),³⁶ Morna Hooker explains her approach to Pauline ethics under the rubric of *interchange*. She unpacks two of the most difficult Pauline statements, Gal 3:13 and 2 Cor 5:21, and in so doing reaches the conclusion that a 'pattern of exchange is the basis of the Christian life – both as its foundation and as its guiding principle.'³⁷

But the terms interchange and exchange, to what do they refer? Recalling 2 Cor 5:21, Hooker explains that – in the incarnation – 'Christ became what we are in order that we might become what he is.'³⁸ However, she urgently stresses that 'the interchange of experience is not a straightforward exchange' because in Christ we, sinful people, become God's righteousness, and Christ not only becomes sin but also our righteousness.³⁹ On the basis of being 'incorporated into Christ', Christians become rich at the expense of Christ, but as soon as this happens, logically, the riches are restored to Christ insofar as believers are *in him*.⁴⁰

Hooker goes on to explain that Christ, the second Adam, took on flesh (the form of the first Adam) so that men can be conformed to his image in a new creation. Thus, Christ became what we are so that we might share in what he is – the true *imago Dei* – and what we were intended to be from the creation. 'It is because of his obedience and his *δικαίωμα*, that the *δικαίωμα* is fulfilled in us.'⁴¹ As new creatures in Christ, the alienation of men from God is no longer in force. The Adamic existence, with its emphasis on sin and the law, is replaced by life in Christ.

So what are the ethical implications for Christians? Being 'in Christ' is about more than just sharing his status before God, namely his vindication as the Righteous One. Christians share his *moral* righteousness, and are called to be conformed to the image of Christ.⁴² In other words, although freed from the demands of the Mosaic law, there definitely is behaviour that is appropriate for those who are in Christ, and Paul refers us to the example of Christ himself.⁴³

Thus, the Christian life is more than waiting for 'pie in the sky'. Christ's incarnation not only secured that yet-future reality but also provided the example and power for living the life of Christ. The Christian's lifestyle was definitely in view in the redemption provided by Christ because it is the Church that carries on the ministry of incarnation and takes the message of Christ to a hurting, dying world. As Hooker notes,

For Paul, being in Christ means sharing in the dying as well as the living, in the giving as well as the receiving, in the poverty as well as the riches, in the humiliation as well as the glory. That is why conformity to the gospel affects his whole lifestyle.⁴⁴

This reality demands that Christians reject the health-and-wealth gospel, as well as values such as self-reliance and success, which millions of people can never hope to achieve.⁴⁵ The lifestyle – the example of Christ – to which Christians are called is profoundly relevant to our contemporary problems and the problems of every age and place.

Another Twist – The Letter and the Spirit

Stephen Westerholm, in his seminal 1984 paper, suggests that the foundation of Pauline ethics is the letter-spirit antithesis.⁴⁶ He notes that, although the letter-spirit antithesis occurs in only three verses in the Pauline corpus, it serves 'as a handy formula expressing central convictions'.⁴⁷

Following a review of the letter-spirit antithesis in the works of theologians from Origen to Bultmann and Käsemann, Westerholm analyses the pertinent Pauline texts and concludes that what is in view is not two ways of reading the scriptures but, rather, the ways of service enjoined under the old and new dispensations.⁴⁸ In other words, to Westerholm, the letter-spirit antithesis has nothing to do with Pauline hermeneutics but, rather, only with man's obligation to God, and he sees the statement of Rom 7:6 as programmatic. Under the law (*gramma*), the Jew was compelled to live according to its strictures, but under grace the believer is to follow the guidance of the Spirit (*pneuma*).⁴⁹ However, this understanding should not be construed as in any way antinomian. While the Christian is not obligated to fulfil the demands of the law (in fact, he cannot), he has a higher calling: to be a servant of God (Rom 6:22), a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1).⁵⁰ All believers, though possessing the Spirit, still need instruction as to how they are to live as long as they are 'in the flesh'.⁵¹ Thus, the ethical instruction of the New Testament is necessary and of vital practical importance to the Christian.

The letter-spirit antithesis does not conflict or compete with indicative-imperative interplay or interchange as rival bases for Pauline ethics. Rather, these approaches should be understood to differ in focus and definition rather than in substance and goal. The three models are actually complementary and provide different aspects of Paul's soteriology, specifically his understanding of sanctification with its roots in justification. In the letter-spirit antithesis, 'the Spirit is introduced as the mark of Christian ethics', much as justification is the basis for sanctification in the interplay of the indicative and imperative. In both cases, gracious divine provision is the foundation upon which all truly ethical behaviour is predicated.

Pastoral Implications

The consequences of the soteriological framework expounded above are profound, for at stake is the spiritual health of individual believers *and* local fellowships of believers. The development of a

biblical worldview and consequent on-going transformation is an impossibility if the climate that we develop in our churches is bereft of God's perspective on salvation. So, in practice, what does this transformation look like, and how do we facilitate it?

Transformation occurs as we increasingly see God, ourselves, others and the world the way that he does, and treat all of those as he does by appropriating the resources that are our possession in Christ; the 'seeing' and 'treating' constitute imperatives, of course, and the resources that are ours in Christ constitute the indicative necessary for Christian life and ethics, as laid out above. As Lambrecht astutely notes, 'out of Christ's merciful action (the indicative) follows the Christians' task (the imperative) to extol and exalt God.'⁵² So anything that we do in our fellowships which promotes 'God-like seeing' will spur personal and corporate transformation and, consequently, exaltation of God. In order to assist our people in laying hold of the riches that are theirs in Christ,⁵³ there are several steps that we can and should take, with intentionality:

1. Our preaching and teaching⁵⁴ must be front-loaded and super-charged with respect to the 'indicatives' of the Christian life. Legalistic forms of Christianity – really non-Christianity – do just the opposite, placing inordinate emphasis on the 'imperatives', thereby sending a clear but warped message that human effort rather than Christ-mediated grace constitutes the backbone of sanctification.⁵⁵ A corollary of this is that we must also recognise and deal with the widespread, seemingly systemic problem which Paul Tripp calls 'identity amnesia'. Satan works over-time to deceive and accuse believers, and one of his chief tactics is to cloak the believer's true identity in Christ with falsehood, such that s/he forgets the key indicative of Christian existence, namely, that s/he is *both one with Christ and also a new creature in Christ*.⁵⁶

2. In various church contexts (leadership meetings, home groups, formal teaching times, etc.), exhortation to humility in our dealings with our brothers and sisters must be provided steadily. The indicatives of the Christian life may be used as a club just as much as the imperatives. It is both possible and, sadly, likely, that a believer might adopt a triumphalistic, 'holier than thou' attitude when s/he approaches another believer about sin in her/his life. Of course, such flies in the face of clear teaching in Galatians 6:1 ('Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted'), and denies the on-going need of grace in the lives of believers, whether mature or less mature.⁵⁷

3. We should not allow our times at the Lord's Table to become perfunctory, hurriedly dispatched ritual, but, rather, use every opportunity to glory in our union with Christ that was accomplished by his perfect work on the cross.⁵⁸ As Citron aptly summarises,

Christ, who instituted the Sacrament of Baptism as a memorial of our ingrafting into Him, gave the Sacrament of Holy Communion as the sign and pledge of His abiding union with us. Every time we 'show forth his death', we are assured of our union with Him, till this union is made perfect when He comes.⁵⁹

Insofar as the Lord's Supper is a corporate celebration, we actively recall not only our union with Christ⁶⁰ but also the unity we share, in Christ, as brothers and sisters. Thus our thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) around the Lord's Table is an acted-out, two-pronged indicative

(union with Christ and union with other believers), the very celebration of which is an imperative ('Do this in remembrance of me.' – 1 Cor 11:24-26).

4. Our attitude and approach to prayer ought to be informed and motivated by a proper (Pauline) view of indicative-imperative interplay. Yes, prayer is enjoined upon believers of all times and places (e.g., Col 4:2, 1 Thess 5:17). But as Kevin DeYoung astutely concludes,

Prayer will always be hard and will always take discipline, but when I see it as a means to communion with God, it feels more like a 'get to' than a 'have to.' I still need to hear the imperatives about prayer – and even feel convicted when I disobey them – but the indicatives of the gospel make me happy to hear the commands and eager to obey.⁶¹

5. Relationships among fellowships or denominations (that is, with those of a different theological stripe) should be guided by the indicative-imperative interplay. As Jonh Joihin has illustrated via his exposition of Romans 15:7 and the example of the Indonesian churches,⁶² our being received (or welcomed) by Christ (an indicative) is the basis for our receiving of one another in Christ (an imperative), for the glory of God. The reputation of the Saviour is at stake.

6. An over-arching prerequisite for individual and corporate health is that our hermeneutic be sound. On the Emmaus road, our Lord expounded what the whole of the Old Testament said about him; in other words, he communicated to those disciples the organic unity of the Scriptures, the one glorious plan of redemption that attained its fullness in him.⁶³ Michael Emlet, in a much-needed and laudable effort to bridge the often profound gap between sound interpretation and proper application, communicates this truth forcefully:

Too often our attempts to connect Scripture with life leave people in the position of Odysseus, unchanged and still pining for the siren song of the world, the flesh and the devil. I'm convinced that, in large measure, it is because we have ignored the redemptive-historical character of God's story and the narrative structure of people's lives as saints, sufferers, and sinners. As a result, our use of Scripture never really connects the heart of people's struggles with the glorious, unfolding story of redemption that climaxes in the coming of Jesus. Details of the Bible remain disconnected from the details of people's lives when we overlook the redemptive meta-narrative that encompasses them both.⁶⁴

If the clarity of God's progressively revealed plan of redemption – a foundational indicative that undergirds all of biblical theology – is obscured, then our application of biblical truth to actual life situations will be off-target and may constitute adulteration of the word of God, a situation that Paul and his companions took pains to avoid (2 Cor 4:2).

Conclusions

In the Pauline corpus, men are not called to a standard that is impossible to attain, only one that is impossible to attain *naturally*. The call to supernatural living is predicated upon a divine grant of

grace. Only after someone has become a new creature in Christ and is indwelt by the Spirit can he be expected to live supernaturally, to begin and continue in the process of becoming holy in practice, not just in position.

It would be a gross error to conclude that justification is by unmerited divine favour, but sanctification by self-reliant human effort – pulling oneself up by his or her spiritual bootstraps. Spiritual life and progress, wherever and whenever they are found, are fuelled by God's grace. Nor does the Pauline ethic envision a divine-human synergy, with God doing his part and man his. As Herman Ridderbos has written,

Indicative and imperative thus do not represent a certain division of property in the sense that the indicative denotes the divine and the imperative the human share in the new life, or that the imperative arouses the believer to what God has done for him so that from his side, too, he not fail to give an answer... The imperative is grounded on the reality that has been given with the indicative, appeals to it, and is intended to bring it to full development.⁶⁵

Apart from a foundation of divine grace established or accomplished in the life of a person (the indicative), that person cannot meet the demands (the imperatives) of the Christian life.⁶⁶ Thus, sanctification – with all of its ethical commands and principles – rests, and is dependent upon, justification.

But upon the firm foundation of justification, why would not sanctification be perfect and instantaneous? Paul's use of the indicative and imperative does not denote a contradiction nor momentary forgetfulness on his part but, rather, 'a tension, expressing the paradox that the kingdom has arrived and is yet to come.'⁶⁷ Doriani refers to this indicative-imperative interplay as 'the dialectical interaction of this age and the age to come', and suggests that this relationship defines the Christian life.⁶⁸

Michael Horton wisely warns against confusing the indicative and the imperative, and urges us to see that the imperatives are simply calls to believers to become that which they already, in fact, are. Thereby he argues *against* the concept of higher-plateaux for victorious Christians, and *for* understanding that the reality of abundant life is meant for *every* believer, regardless of the size of one's faith or the strength of one's repentance.⁶⁹

Finally, just as Westerholm grasps that the Spirit is the key to the life of the believer, Parsons notes that the Spirit is 'the link between the indicative and the imperative of Christian reality and existence.'⁷⁰ It is in the Spirit and by the Spirit that a Christian can, with the resources that are his by virtue of having been redeemed by Christ, attain the life intended for, and commanded of, him.⁷¹

All Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version*.

¹ E.g., Lev 11:44, Matt 5:48, 1 Peter 1:16. So John Kilner, 'A Pauline Approach to Ethical Decision-Making,' *Interpretation* 43 (1989): 379, who concludes that 'all aspects of this [Pauline] ethics are rooted in the consistently trustworthy character and purposes of God.'

² *Ethics: Approaching Moral Decisions* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984), 53-54.

³ *Ibid.*, 69-78.

⁴ E.g., love is considered *the* fundamental divine attribute by Joseph Fletcher in *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), and the Decalogue the core 'canon' to which all ethical behaviour can be distilled by Robertson McQuilkin in his book *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1995, 2nd ed.). However, McQuilkin *does* see the absolute necessity of divine grace at work in a person's life as the prerequisite for Christian ethical/moral behaviour.

⁵ 'The Problem of Ethics in Paul' in *Understanding Paul's Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches*, ed. Brian S. Rosner, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 [originally published in 1924]), 211-215.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁷ *Ethics* (London: Collins, 1955 [1970]), 43.

⁸ Eph 2:8.

⁹ Of course, as Sherard Burns ('Sanctified by Grace.' <<http://www.homestead.com/blackalliance/sanctified.html>> (originally accessed 23 December 2003, now disabled) points out, we tend to inordinately focus on imperatives (what we ought to do or be) to the exclusion of indicatives (what God has already accomplished for us in Christ) in our thinking about sanctification.

¹⁰ E.g., Richard N. Longenecker ('Pauline Ethics,' in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F.H. Henry, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973, 492) writes that Paul 'never taught the possibility of living the Christian ethic apart from being "in Christ"... Apart from this foundation, the superstructure of the Pauline ethic has no rationale or support.' So S.C. Mott's explanation, thus: 'Ethical behavior is to correspond to what God has enabled them (i.e., Christians) to be through Christ's sacrifice.' ('Ethics,' In *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, Downers Grove: IVP, 1993, 269).

¹¹ In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1885 [1979]), 526.

¹² E.g., putting off the old self (negative) and putting on the new self (positive), as recorded in Eph 4:22-24 and Col 3:9-14.

¹³ Rom 8:1-2.

¹⁴ Michael Parsons, 'Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writing,' *Evangelical Quarterly* 88:2 (1988): 118.

¹⁵ *Romans* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 450.

¹⁶ *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (London: SCM, 1975), 48, n.6.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, 198. So Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: ET, 1955, 332-333), for example: '...the imperative, "walk according to the Spirit," not only does not contradict the indicative of justification (the believer is rightwised) but results from it... The indicative is the foundation for the imperative.'

¹⁸ Parsons, *op. cit.*, 103.

¹⁹ William D. Dennison, 'Indicative and Imperative: The Basic Structure of Pauline Ethics,' *Calvin Theological Journal* 14:1 (1979), 62.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, 100.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

²² *Ibid.*, 107-108; Fletcher, *op. cit.*

²³ *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Vol. - 1 General Moral Theology (Middlegreen: St Paul, 1978), 149-150.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 109-113. So Gary DeLashmutt and Dennis McCallum, 'The Indicative and Imperative Moods,' <<http://www.xenos.org/essays/indic.htm>> (6 September 2011).

²⁶ Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 137-138.

²⁷ Parsons, op. cit., 113-126.

²⁸ Op. cit., 138.

²⁹ Parsons, op. cit., 120.

³⁰ Ibid., 121-122.

³¹ *The Epistle to the Philippians, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 280, 285. So Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Apollos/IVP, 1986 [1994]), 106: 'Human willing and working [in Phil 2:12-13] are made possible by the divine work "within"...'.

³² *The Goal of Our Instruction: The Structure of Theology and Ethics in the Pastoral Epistles* (Sheffield: SAP, 1989), 167.

³³ Longenecker, *The Ministry and Message of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 100-101. So DeLashmutt and McCallum, op. cit., and Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 45: '...human moral action is given a distinct place in the syntax of the divine-human relationship; obedience is a *consequence* of salvation, not its condition.' (emphasis added) The key here is to understand the causal relationship between the indicative and imperative moods. Sanctification depends upon what God has already accomplished in the life of the believer through Christ's redemptive work.

³⁴ 'Some Modern Interpretations of the Pauline Indicative and Imperative,' In *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 11:1, Spring 1976. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported_site/wesleyjournal/1976-wtj-11.pdf > (6 September 2011).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ 'Interchange in Christ and Ethics,' *JSNT* 25 (1985), 5.

³⁷ 'Interchange in Christ,' *JTS* 22 (1971), 349.

³⁸ Ibid., 352.

³⁹ Ibid., 353.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 354; 2 Cor 8:9.

⁴¹ Ibid., 355; Rom 5:12-21.

⁴² Hooker, 'Interchange in Christ and Ethics,' op. cit., 5; Rom 12:1-2.

⁴³ Ibid., 10; e.g., Phil 2:5-10.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 15-16.

⁴⁶ 'Letter and Spirit: The Foundation of Pauline Ethics,' *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 229-248.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 229.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 246.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 243. See also Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 209-218.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 245.

⁵² Jan Lambrecht, 'Syntactical and Logical Remarks on Romans 15:8-9a' *Novum Testamentum* XLII/3 (2000), 260.

⁵³ E.g., Eph 1:3, Gal 3:29 and 2 Pet 1:3.

⁵⁴ This preaching and teaching is not necessarily from the pulpit or lectern, and may primarily occur in the context of reciprocal ministry ('one-anothering'). It is incumbent on shepherds of local fellowships to model and facilitate this.

⁵⁵ As Michael Horton points out, '...we must stop trying to convert believers into these realities by imperatives.' See his 'Union with Christ.'

<<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/questions/horton/>

union.html> (6 September 2011) (originally published in *Modern Reformation*, Jan/Feb 1992; see

<<http://www.modernreformation.org/default.php?page=articledisplay&var1=ArtRead&var2=805&var3=authorbio&var4=AutRes&var5=1>>)

⁵⁶ Gordon T. Smith, in his book *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion & Authentic Transformation*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), properly emphasises the corporate role of the local fellowship in conversion and discipleship: 'Communities of faith are called to foster genuine conversions to Christ, conversions that are good beginnings, effective foundations for the Christian life' (227-228). I suggest that the 'good beginnings' and 'effective foundations' should essentially and manifestly be the indicatives of the Christian life. On this subject, I recommend highly Maurice Roberts' fine essay 'At Home in the Heavenlies' (in *The Thought of God*, Edinburgh: Banner Of Truth, 1993, 95-99).

⁵⁷ Gordon Smith, op. cit. 231, is trenchant: 'We can be a community of grace that accepts people just as they are, fully believing that they will accept their Christian identity and responsibility in their time (that is, in the timing of the Spirit's work in their lives). We must be patient with one another. At the same time, we are free to proclaim that we live under the claims of the gospel. We do not proclaim a cheap grace; rather, we call one another to be full disciples of Jesus Christ.'

⁵⁸ Heinrich Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950, 1978), 652, comments: '*Believing enjoyment* of the sacrament is at once the proper memorial solemnisation of Christ's death, for which Christ founded his Supper and which he commanded. It is therefore not an idle, outward remembrance of Christ, but *a living grasp of his person and of his merit*' (emphasis added). The lengthy quotation from Gulielmus Bucanus that immediately follows Heppé's comment is commended for the hearty nourishment it provides.

⁵⁹ Bernhard Citron, *New Birth: A Study of the Evangelical Doctrine of Conversion in the Protestant Fathers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1951), 195.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 195-196. Citron continues thus: 'When the converted Christian is weakened by the life-long struggle, when he is exhausted by sickness and distress, and when he is overcome by the consciousness of his own unworthiness, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper assures him anew of his communion with Christ.'

⁶¹ <<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2011/08/30/how-to-make-a-command-sink-or-swim/>> (10 September 2011).

⁶² 'Understanding Paul's Ethics: A Case Study of Romans 15:7-13,' *Stulos Theological Journal* 15/2 (2007), 74-77. Available at <http://www.sttb.ac.id/2007/newLook/uploads/Paul%20Ethics%20Stulos%20Journal%20_Jonly%20Joihin_%2061-78.pdf> (10 September 2011).

⁶³ Luke 24:27.

⁶⁴ *CrossTalk: Where Life & Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 178-179.

⁶⁵ *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 255. So Parsons, op. cit., 127. So O'Brien, op. cit., 285-286.

⁶⁶ E.g., Kilner, op. cit., 373, notes: 'Good works always are a fruit of one's new life; new life can never be the fruit of moral living.'

⁶⁷ Doriani, op. cit., 138. Against Dennison, op. cit., 73-74, who rejects the idea of a 'dialectical' relationship.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 138-139. So Towner, op. cit., 152: 'Salvation is neither a wholly past nor wholly future state of affairs. Rather, it is a blessing, which has changed the quality of life, that is to be participated in, in the present age. Its incomplete nature demands that the believer make progress towards attaining the final goal... The resultant understanding of Christian existence was one still infused with the tension of the already-not yet.'

⁶⁹ Op. cit. Horton forcefully distills this from his survey of our union with Christ: 'Therefore, let us distinguish conversion from justification and realize that initial conversion is a passive reception of God's gracious acceptance of us in Christ, while the life-long conversion [NB: transformation] process is an active pursuit of holiness and righteousness, the very thing which the gospel promises that we already possess fully and completely in Christ.'

⁷⁰ Parsons, op. cit., 127. So Dennison, op. cit., 74-78, and Oliver O'Donovan, op. cit., 102-103, 106: 'The Spirit makes the reality of redemption *present*... (and) *authoritative* to us... (and) evokes our *free* response as moral agents to the reality of redemption.'

⁷¹ E.g., Hays, op. cit., 46: 'Ethics cannot be sufficiently guided by law or by institutionalized rules; instead, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-discerned conformity to Christ is required.'

Public Bible Reading: A Neglected Gift of Grace

Derek Bigg, member and former elder of Christ Church, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

We sometimes hear a well-known figure described as having *charisma*. What is this quality? One dictionary defines it as ‘the power to attract or influence people’. So understood, it can be applied to a wide range of individuals irrespective of their moral or spiritual state. During the Second World War the two most charismatic characters were Winston Churchill and Adolf Hitler. They both held sway over millions.

Turning to the New Testament, we find ourselves in a different world altogether. It is a world of spiritual and moral values, where grace (*charis*) reigns supreme and where any *charisma* is a gift of grace, hence the apostle Paul’s clear statement: ‘*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us*’ (Rom 12:6). ‘Gift of grace’ is an entirely appropriate translation of the Greek term *charisma*. Less helpful is the frequently used alternative, ‘spiritual gift’, which can easily be misinterpreted. In New Testament terms, gifts of grace are ‘spiritual’ only in the sense that they are made available to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7-11).

Peter’s treatment of the subject suggests that we should think in terms of two broad categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts (1 Pet 4:11). Both categories are to be found in the passages where Paul addresses this issue (Rom 12:4-8, 1 Cor 12:4-11, 27-31). Particularly apposite for our purposes is Romans 12, where all but two of the gifts in Paul’s list involve ‘serving’ in some shape or form, the most striking feature being their practical nature. They are best taken as illustrative rather than exhaustive, indicating some of the commonest gifts. We might find them in any congregation today.

New Testament teaching on these gifts is remarkably open-ended. Paul describes one gift simply as ‘serving’ (Rom 12:7), which encompasses a host of possibilities. In similar vein, Peter tells us that each person should use ‘*whatever gift he has received to serve others*’ (1 Pet 4:10). This unqualified apostolic language opens the door to the employment of gifts not specified by the apostles themselves. My own church has recognised, and is using extensively, the gift of administration evident in one of its members.

Some gifts, like that of administration, come into play largely behind the scenes. Others find expression in the public arena, the most conspicuous being those employed when Christians gather for worship. On such occasions, one of the gifts used to ‘serve others’ is the public reading of Scripture. There is ample justification for treating it as a gift of grace. If Paul in Romans 12 can regard as gifts the very practical activities of sharing generously with those in need, exercising leadership and showing mercy, we can confidently apply his ‘serving’ category to the equally practical activity of reading the Bible in public. As Scott Newling says in his article ‘Devoted to the public reading of Scripture’ (*The Briefing*, March 2011), ‘Public Bible reading is a gift – and not everyone has it.’¹

As we think about this gift, let us not fall into the trap of separating nature from grace. Since the Lord himself has made each one of us with certain traits and aptitudes, every gift is in reality a natural ability assigned by God’s grace and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. We need to discern and then

use the gifts bestowed on us by our Creator. The aim must always be the faithful administration of God's grace in its various forms (1 Pet 4:10).

Public Bible reading and preaching

You do not convey the meaning of the words *Jesus wept* if your voice makes it sound as though he did not care.

This sentence is taken from a book entitled *Christ-centered Preaching*.² It was written by Bryan Chapell, an experienced American pastor. His concern at this point in the book is to underline the importance of the public reading of God's Word as a preparation for preaching. One brief statement expresses succinctly his understanding of the relationship between the two: 'The first exposition of the text is the reading of Scripture.'³

The point he is making here is that the way in which the Bible is read constitutes in itself a meaningful communication, which may be either positive or negative. Style and body language – even how the reader stands or holds the Bible – cannot be ignored because they embody their own unspoken message. This message ought to be 'Here are some wonderful words from God that I'm eager to share with you.' However, if the message is 'Let's get through this uninspiring part of the Sunday routine as quickly as possible' or 'What I'm reading doesn't really grip me', it will undermine the message of the biblical text itself. Hence Bryan Chapell's incisive exhortation: 'Read the text with the belief that every word carries the power that comes from the mouth of God.'⁴

Public Bible reading and preaching are mutually reinforcing aspects of one and the same task. They go hand-in-hand. Preaching has been defined as 'truth through personality'. This is also an apt description of the public reading of Scripture. The meaning of the biblical text is not imparted solely through the words of Scripture themselves. How those words come across to the listener via the reader's personality is absolutely crucial. Lively preaching should be matched by lively reading of God's Word.

The Greek text of Acts 13:15 describes what usually happened in first century synagogues. The Scripture reading (*anagnosis*) was followed by exhortation (*paraklesis* – translated 'encouragement' by the NIV). The early church adopted this practice but added teaching (*didaskalia*). Thus Paul urged Timothy to devote himself to *anagnosis*, *paraklesis*, *didaskalia* (1 Tim 4:13). *Paraklesis* here is rendered 'preaching' in the NIV.

Scott Newling's treatment of this text in the article referred to above concentrates on the reading aspect without relating it to exhortation/preaching and teaching. It is on this basis that he argues passionately for systematic Bible reading unconnected with the preaching. The spiritual benefits of adopting this practice in most or all Sunday services could be immense. If there are time constraints, why not simply omit one hymn?

Somebody once said that, if there had been a recognised office of reading Scripture in church services, he would have been happy to serve in that capacity and no other. He viewed it as a sacred privilege. Public Bible reading needs as much care as preaching. After all, it is God's Word, not man's word, which is like fire and a hammer, living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword (Jer

23:29, Heb 4:12). Consequently, we ought to ask ourselves whether we give reading the high profile it deserves. Let us never forget that the public reading of Scripture is a vital ministry in its own right, with power to transform lives as the Spirit of truth applies it in his own unique way.

The effects of public reading

In what frame of mind do we engage in public Bible reading? Are we always enthusiastic? To read God's Word thoughtfully and compellingly helps to maintain its cutting edge. That cutting edge may become even sharper if people are encouraged to follow the text in their own Bible. Using both ear-gate and eye-gate certainly has the potential for making maximum impact on mind, heart and conscience.

One veteran in the field of Christian ministry has suggested as an alternative that we turn our faces expectantly towards the reader. This would, of course, be appropriate for anyone who through physical or mental disability is unable to cope with the printed page and can therefore do no more than listen. Then there are those who do not possess a Bible or have never learned to read (rare in the UK but prevalent in many other countries). They will all be completely dependent on what they hear. Such situations call for a loving and purposeful response. If the response is to ensure that the reading is audible, well articulated and pulsating with life, it will benefit everyone who is 'just listening' and not only those with a special need. Equally helpful will be clear signs that the reader's heart is in this exalted task. If it is obvious to the listeners that God's Word is profoundly affecting the reader himself, they will sub-consciously be inclined to let the truth of Scripture penetrate their own hearts.

What happens if the Scripture reading is dull and lifeless? It will not challenge and arouse Christians as it should. If non-Christians are present when the Bible is read in this fashion, they may well say to themselves, 'It's as I always thought. The Bible is boring and irrelevant.' Are we ever guilty of provoking hostility or indifference to the Christian faith by reading in a perfunctory manner?

In *The Briefing* of April 2006, an article was published with the title 'How to read the Bible in church'. The introduction by the editor included this question: 'Why is it that we cringe and complain about the music in our services, but we hardly bat an eyelid when the Bible is poorly read, or even misread?'⁵ The Christian should do everything for God's glory (1 Cor 10:31). Do we glorify God when we read his Word carelessly?

It is worth asking why the Bible is sometimes read inaccurately or unattractively. Here is Stuart Olyott's answer in his booklet *Reading the Bible and Praying in Public*: '... poor reading of Scripture in public reveals that the reader has problems in both his theology and his spiritual life.'⁶ The link between poor reading and unsound theology would be hard to establish; but it is easy to see how spiritual coldness could adversely affect a reader's performance. Is this the only possible diagnosis? I know spiritually healthy Christians who do not read the Bible well in public. The commonest reason is simply that they have not received the gift of grace needed for this ministry.

Our lives ought to demonstrate that we take seriously the two greatest commandments: to love God with all our being and love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt 22:34-40). One way to obey these commandments is through high standards of public Bible reading. If we love God, we will read his

Word with evident fervour. If we love our neighbour, we will endeavour to read Scripture so sensitively and memorably that we foster in our listeners' lives its work of teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). These spiritual objectives are most likely to be accomplished if we observe a long pause after the reading to allow God's Word to sink in and take effect. To quote Stuart Olyott, 'Let the Word of God ring in the silence of each listener's heart!'⁷

Some practical guidelines

No doubt opinions will vary as to what makes a good reading. However, there are certain factors which will always be conducive to achieving God-honouring results. To some extent these factors are plain common sense. They may even be old hat to those with long experience. Nevertheless it is worth re-stating them by way of reminder and also as a fresh incentive to serve our Lord to the very best of our ability.

Preparation

First and foremost, pray that the Holy Spirit will speak clearly and powerfully through the reading so that it affects people's attitudes and way of thinking. Make sure you understand the text and know how to pronounce any difficult words. Consider carefully the length of the passage. A short portion well read is of greater value than a long one that wearies the listeners. A long reading can often be partly summarised or divided into two sections separated by a hymn. To help the vocal cords, drink plenty of water beforehand; but avoid anything that contains caffeine as this makes the throat dry.

Posture

Stand up straight and look as if you mean business – no hands in pockets or any other body language that conveys the impression of a casual attitude. If you are using your own Bible, hold it or position it in such a way that the congregation can see your face (not the top of your head). If possible, make frequent eye contact with those who are not following the text in their own Bible. This will keep you in touch with your listeners and send a clear signal that God's Word is for *them*.

Pace

Read at a moderate pace so that people can absorb what they are hearing. The nature of the text may, however, suggest the occasional change of pace. It is usually helpful to speed up a little in narrative sections, thereby maintaining the momentum of the story, and to slow down when a passage communicates a key thought or reaches a climax. Aid concentration by pausing now and again, especially after a weighty statement, command or question.

Phrasing

Allow the reading to flow naturally by observing punctuation and sentence structure, and by making breaks in the right places. The flow will be disturbed if the reader takes a breath in the middle of a phrase or sentence instead of at the end. Extra care needs to be taken with long sentences so that the message being conveyed comes across as a coherent unit of thought and not a series of disjointed phrases.

Volume

The voice must have enough power to carry to every part of the building. Shouting will not improve the effectiveness of a weak or soft voice but will simply make the congregation feel verbally assaulted. Contrary to what many would assume, it is not an increase in volume but the occasional reduction in volume of a strong voice that will help to keep listeners alert. For best voice projection, read as if you are addressing those in the back row. It is essential to be familiar with any amplifying equipment and to use it efficiently. Any problems with the technology will inevitably be a distraction.

Intonation

Give the passage light and shade by varying the pitch of the voice. The reader should normally lower the pitch (though not the volume) at the end of a sentence and raise it at a comma to indicate that more on the same theme is about to follow. Intonation for a question will depend on the nature of the question itself. A question asking for information cannot sound the same as a question registering disbelief or anguish.

Emphasis

Look for words and phrases that ought to be emphasised in order to bring the passage to life and draw attention to salient points in the original author's message. Emphasis is needed most frequently with adjectives, adverbs and personal pronouns, and also with phrases describing a contrast or something unexpected.

Atmosphere

Try to convey the mood of the passage by expressing feelings of joy, sorrow, wonder, anger, relief, incredulity, triumph, despair, hope, depression or whatever suits the words you are reading. Over-dramatisation would turn the spotlight on the reader rather than the biblical text; but if the right atmosphere is generated, it will enable people to enter into the situation being portrayed as if they were there themselves.

Choosing the right people

Choosing people for public Bible reading has all too often been a random and haphazard affair in our churches. It would be an understatement to say that we do not always use the most gifted people. Regrettably, church leaders sometimes give the impression that they are not even aware of failure at this point. All sorts of factors may lie behind our choice of readers. In some cases it is assumed that whoever is leading the service will take the reading himself, regardless of whether he is suited to the task. Then there are times when the reader is selected just for the sake of 'involving someone else', with no questions asked about the person's experience or ability. Carol services tend to be occasions when several readers are chosen, not on the basis of aptitude and proven skills, but only because each one represents a specific church activity. Whenever more than one reading is being planned, variety may be the sole or main criterion. There can be no objection to variety as such. After all, the ultimate source of variety is our Creator. Nevertheless, we cannot countenance variety at the expense of quality.

Not surprisingly, there are preachers who prefer to take responsibility for the Bible reading themselves rather than handing it over to another person. They have studied the text and worked out how it should be interpreted. Who better than they to bring out the meaning? Three comments may be made in response to this question.

First, standards vary among ministers of the gospel. A gifted preacher is not necessarily a gifted reader. The two roles require different skills. Second, whatever the minister's level of competence, he needs to be open to suggestions for improvement from those who listen to him regularly and be humble enough not to feel resentful or threatened by such feedback. He may not know until someone tells him that he drops his voice, reads too fast, shouts, sounds flat and monotonous or fails to enunciate properly. Third, the minister should be willing to accept that other members of the congregation may have equal or greater ability in public Bible reading. Any who display such ability should use their gift for the benefit of all. A reader who possesses the qualities described in the next section does not need the preacher's in-depth knowledge of the biblical text to be able to read well; and a fresh voice will aid attentive listening.

It is wise to choose readers who can be heard and understood easily by the least able in the congregation. Many of these will be senior citizens who struggle if the reading feels like a hail of machine-gun bullets. As Stuart Olyott says, 'most elderly people have trouble following quick speech'.⁸ The same could be true of some whose mother tongue is not English. Both categories are strongly represented in today's churches.

Discerning the gift

How do we discern the precious but neglected gift of public Bible reading? Should we look for it in both men and women? Stuart Olyott maintains that women should not read the Scriptures in public on the grounds that it would flout New Testament teaching on male headship (1 Cor 11:3).⁹ But is headship not safeguarded if a female reader operates under the direction of a male leader who is himself demonstrably under the headship of Christ? There are practical points to be considered in the employment of both sexes. On the one hand, the male voice has the advantage of greater resonance. On the other hand, women who read regularly to children often develop an attractive style suitable for congregational reading. Careful assessment of the available resources could lead to a judicious blend of male and female. Most crucially, those who take up this ministry must show that they have the necessary gift of grace by displaying a number of personal qualities.

The first quality must surely be a passion for God's Word and the capacity to demonstrate that passion through the reading of the biblical text. If this quality is absent, the reading is likely to feel cold and mechanical. A lacklustre reading will not uplift the congregation and bring them into the presence of God. If someone reads in this fashion, it will convey a negative message about God's Word and the impact it ought to make on us.

The second quality could perhaps best be described as sufficient Christian maturity to grasp the true sense of the biblical text and then communicate it to the congregation in a meaningful and captivating way. This is not a task for novices. There must be evidence of growth in knowledge, understanding and spiritual vitality before an aspiring reader is ready for such a ministry.

The third quality is skill in adapting the style of reading to the literary genre of the passage in question. An emotionally charged psalm should never be read in the same manner as an explanation of animal sacrifices in Leviticus! And lively narrative sections breathe a different atmosphere from that of portions brimming with Christian doctrine.

The fourth quality is a willingness to spend adequate time preparing the reading. This would include weighing up how punctuation and sentence structure will affect phrasing, noting where to pause, slow down or speed up, and pinpointing those words and phrases which require special emphasis. It is always helpful to rehearse beforehand by reading the passage aloud a few times. If it sounds a little too dramatic, it is probably just about right.

A fifth essential quality is the ability to follow the practical guidelines set out above. How do we find out who possesses this ability? A good initial testing ground is a house group or Bible study group. The leader(s) of the group would need to look out for those with obvious potential. If in this or any other context favourable comments are made by several people about somebody's reading, that will be strong evidence of a divinely-bestowed gift. Individuals who display some aptitude for public Bible reading could be encouraged to consider prayerfully the possibility of undertaking this ministry and then invited to an informal session to discuss together the challenges and blessings of such a task. Those who respond positively would no doubt benefit from some training designed to enhance their skills. They might then be formally recognised as a team dedicated to the public reading of God's Word, as is already the case in a number of churches.

The sixth quality, which is perhaps less common than we might think, is competence in reading smoothly without stumbling over the words. Perfection is unattainable in this life; but there are people who hardly ever falter in the public reading of Scripture. A flawless performance avoids the embarrassment of mangled sentences and irritating repetitions.

The seventh and final quality is clear diction and voice production, resulting in an 'open' sound which is easy on the ear. A reader who produces an indistinct or distorted sound will create difficulties for people with any kind of hearing problem. Such people may also struggle when listening to a very strong regional or foreign accent. Let us be sensitive to their needs and look for readers whose delivery will not present a barrier to anyone. Unless compelling pastoral considerations dictate otherwise, nobody with a speech defect or distracting idiosyncrasy should be asked to read the Bible in public.

Long and varied experience suggests that few Christians will exhibit all of these qualities. Those who do will not necessarily achieve exceptionally high standards at every point. We need to be realistic and accept that, as in other human activities, there will be varying degrees of proficiency. We must not, however, allow a realistic approach to become an excuse for lowering our standards.

We have been considering these seven qualities largely in the context of Sunday services. However, as Christopher Idle reminds us in his review of Stuart Olyott's booklet (*Evangelicals Now*, June 2008), the Bible is read publicly in many other settings. These include young people's and women's meetings, weddings, funerals, school assemblies, camps, conferences, conventions and informal

gatherings in prisons and care homes. We must not under-estimate the importance of public Bible reading in such situations, whether those present are Christians, unbelievers or a combination of both.¹⁰

Looking for fruit

Are we expecting spiritual fruit from the public reading of Scripture? If so, we need to take a few simple measures to ensure as far as possible that our listeners will sit up and take notice. Of paramount importance is the selection of suitably gifted readers, men and women with the qualities described in the previous section.

Since many listeners will doubtless be following the text in their own Bible, we must allow time for the slowest person to find the place so that nobody is still searching for the right page when the reading commences. It is advisable to give the reference twice for the benefit of anyone who missed it when first announced.

We must constantly bear in mind that it is our sovereign God who brings forth fruit from our labours. This is just as true with the public reading of Scripture as it is in any other form of Christian service. Let us therefore remind ourselves that we are utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit for spiritual fruit. At the same time let us acknowledge that we, too, have to play our part not only by employing the right people but also by watering this ministry with prayer. We must surely entreat the Lord to speak powerfully through his word of truth. If we need any incentive to this end, one outstanding example from the past will provide it.

The scene is Oxford in the early summer of 1837. The captain of the university cricket team had just completed his three-year classics course and taken his final examinations. As the chest infection which had laid him low for a while was now behind him, he decided to attend the Sunday service in one of the local Anglican churches. It was the usual form of service, with two Scripture readings. The second reading, from Ephesians 2, had an electrifying effect on him. He became aware, when the reader reached verse 8, that God was speaking to him personally. Each phrase was articulated with great emphasis: *'For by grace - are ye saved - through faith; - and that not of yourselves: - it is the gift of God.'* Those words struck home with divine authority; and our young scholar left the church a changed man. Transformed by the Spirit of God, he now trusted in Christ alone for salvation. The Lord had brought forgiveness and peace to a previously heedless student. That student would shortly celebrate his graduation. However, neither his graduation nor his sporting prowess meant as much to him as his new-found faith. Such was the impression made on him by the apostle Paul's sublime statement in the second chapter of Ephesians that it featured many years later as the last line on his tombstone.

Who was that young man? None other than John Charles Ryle, who in 1880 became the first bishop of Liverpool and whose writings still teach Christians today what it means to live a godly life. How was he converted? Not through preaching, parental influence or the faithful witness of a friend. Such means are often used by God; but on this occasion it was simply the public reading of Scripture. Are we longing for some Ryles of our own when we plan this part of our Sunday ministry? If so, let us work and pray accordingly.

Note: The author has produced a condensed version of this article, suitable for any church member prayerfully considering the ministry of public Bible reading as an avenue of Christian service. He will gladly send this to anyone who requests a copy. Email him at: derekbigg@hotmail.co.uk

¹ Scott Newling, *The Briefing*, March 2011, published in Australia by Matthias Media in partnership with The Good Book Company, who produce the UK & Europe Edition. For further reading on the subject of this paper, church leaders would profit from reading this exposition in full.

² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), Appendix 5.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Simon Roberts, *The Briefing*, April 2006.

⁶ Stuart Olyott, *Reading the Bible and Praying in Public* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2008).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Christopher Idle, *Evangelicals Now*, June 2008.

Gospel Chaplaincy In a Secular World

Chris Thomas, Pastor of Oak Tree Church, Birmingham & Voluntary Chaplain to West Midlands Police

The Venerable Bede informs us that in the 8th century, a priest called Utta accompanied a princess on a sea voyage from Northumbria: an early reference to a chaplain and his¹ work. During the years of Christendom, chaplains have ministered in a wide variety of settings, living and working alongside people of every conceivable different point along faith's spectrum, but until recently always within a fundamentally Christian understanding and value system. Much faithful work, and many blessings have proceeded from these ministries. However, for an evangelical ministering now there is an urgent need to re-examine chaplaincy for at least three reasons:

1. Christendom is on the wane and secularism is in the ascendancy. Chaplaincy is now conducted within pluralistic secularism rather than a Christian context, but chaplaincy traditions, assumptions and exemplars are largely located in Christendom. As this transition continues to work through, chaplains will need to be sure of their biblical moorings.
2. The predominant ecclesiology of many chaplains, who have contributed much helpful thinking and practice, seems to have been Anglo-Catholic. A consciously evangelical pastoral theology does not seem to have been applied to chaplaincy. Evangelicals need to develop this for the integrity and credibility of their own ministries, and to contribute to the chaplaincy of the wider church.
3. Few, if any, writers of any persuasion seem to have attempted a biblical-theological examination of Chaplaincy. This may not be a critical weakness among the many gifted Chaplains who unconsciously sense what their calling requires of them, but for the rest of us it probably is.

The aim of this paper is to inform and equip evangelicals and others in developing a gospel approach to chaplaincy in a secular age. It will do so first by identifying the chaplain's current role (Part 1) and then second, matching a biblical-theological template to it (Part 2). This approach is necessary because we come to an existing ministry, rather than seeking to develop a new one from biblical 'first principles'. Some practical suggestions will be also made, and both principles and practice discussed in relation to chaplaincy may also bear on the church's and the Christian's wider place in the world.

Part One: A Chaplain's Role

Definition

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a chaplain as *a member of the clergy attached to a private chapel, institution, regiment, etc.* Most of these host 'institutions' require that chaplains are ministers in good standing with their churches, appointed by an institution's leadership for the benefit of the institutions they serve. Implicit in that appointment is the value to an institution of having someone to attend to the spiritual dimension of its people, whether that is seen in eternal terms, moral terms, cost-benefit terms, or simply a vague superstition.

Chaplaincies

In contemporary UK culture it is the 'diversity agenda' (often suspiciously regarded by Christians) which, in making allowance for spiritual needs, gives chaplaincy work justification. The bottom line is that institutions are prepared to provide, and even pay for, a spiritual ministry, sometimes in the most secular environments². Some institutions try to recruit chaplains from religious constituencies so as to represent roughly the make-up of the people whom they serve. It is usual for a chaplain's terms of reference to require him to serve all within the institution³ rather than only those of the particular church⁴ from which they are sent, even though it is the sending church which gives them their qualification to serve. Finally, most chaplaincies are multi-faith and ecumenical. This needn't preclude evangelical participation, but it does take careful thought at times.

Relationship to the parent church

The chaplain is not a freelance Christian. The requirement to be a minister in good standing with a church or denomination is probably seen by the host institution as simply a safeguard to ensure they are getting someone reliable and qualified. The chaplain and church value their mutual relationship for other reasons: the church valuing the opportunities and openings for extended gospel ministry by one of her own, the chaplain valuing and relying upon the church to support him in prayer and practicalities. Chaplains represent Christ in his church to the world; that is the very nature of the work.

Evangelical Paradigms

Evangelical ministers identify from the Scriptures that they are called to preach Christ and him crucified. This is easily traced from apostolic example and command, and proficiency here is a key component of the call to the ministry, however perceived and recognised. However, majoring on gospel preaching is not a model of ministry expected from chaplaincy, nor would it be effective. Worship activities may result from an effective chaplaincy in a secular setting, but they cannot be its focus. Proselytising/evangelism is usually prohibited, and anything which could be construed as coercion is most certainly out of court. Hence, a chaplain is a witness, not a missionary – and so the role is very similar to that of most of our church members. So, a chaplain's role can be seen as ways for gospel ministers personally to match texts such as Gal 6:10, or to apply Paul's emphases in Titus 2-3, living lives which exemplify and commend the gospel. Part 2 of this paper supplies broader chaplaincy biblical examples and principles, but the broad brush strokes are as follows:

Creation and Fall: God made a very good creation (Gen 1:31), in which human society and enterprise flourishes by God's common grace (Gen 4:17-22), albeit tainted by human sin (v23) in every way. The defacing of creation by human rebellion has not effaced God's sovereignty over, claim to, or interest in this world (John 3:16). So a chaplain is God's witness to God's blessing, rule and care.

Election: God's saving and common⁵ grace is focussed in, and channelled through, a chosen man (Gen 12:2f – Mt 12:18), and a chosen nation (Ex 19:5f). God chooses people of grace as means of grace to those outside his kingdom. Election brings distinction to, and frequently, conflict with, the world from which we have been called. Hence, there will be tension in a chaplain; on the one hand, awareness that God's blessings should come through him to individuals and to the institution he serves, and on the other awareness that he must be deeply distinct if he is to bring God's grace to others. Remembering his prime loyalty to God

is key to ministering within that tension. The chaplain is called by God to bring his grace, common and saving, to those he serves in faithfulness to his truth and righteousness.

Atonement: On the cross and through the resurrection, Christ became our substitute, making atonement for sin (2 Co 5:21). He also gave us an example (1 Pet 2:21), secured absolute victory (1 Co 15:54, Col 2:15) and brought in the New Creation (2 Co 5:16f). Chaplains are earthen vessels containing great treasure, living examples of gracious perseverance in the New Creation secured by Christ's atonement. When curiosity is aroused, we are free to give a reason for all this (1 Pet 3:15f), and offer Christ in his gospel as the Bread of Life, in the expectation that abundance will enter the lives of those who receive him (John 6:35, 10:10). This gospel outcome is the prayer, hope and aim of an evangelical chaplain, but this does not invalidate his patient 'common grace' work mandated by the other considerations noted; evangelical chaplains should neither despise nor abuse the opportunities simply to do good, even if they never see conversions. Chaplains need to be content to imitate Christ (Acts 10:38) in his...

Incarnation: God himself entered this world in Christ. As his elect people have maintained God's footprint among the nations for thousands of years previously and since, so in Christ, God personally planted his feet here. Incarnation was primarily God's means to make Christ the High Priest of salvation, but his priestly office extended beyond Calvary, both forwards and backwards. The Incarnation was about more than one day; *Immanuel – God with us* was fulfilled in his physical presence here for thirty three years; it was again fulfilled as he rose into this world, still clothed in a human body; it is fulfilled now by his spiritual presence. So, a chaplain's consistent presence in the host institution is at the core of his calling; from his presence flow all the opportunities needed to bring God's rich grace to those he serves as the elect witness to the atoning work of Christ in the fallen world that God still sustains.

The overriding paradigm of chaplaincy then, is 'presence', its slogan, '*Immanuel*' – God with the people among whom we move; presence in God's world, among people he loves, for whom he cares; presence among people to identify with, serve, and be gracious towards; presence so that when we have opportunity, and without contravening the understanding we have with the institution and people who have welcomed us, we can offer the crucified and risen Saviour to them. So what biblical-theological principles help us to honour the true *Immanuel* in chaplaincy?

Part Two: Biblical-Theological Principles of Chaplaincy

Method

The biblical-theological method takes Jesus as the prime referent and supreme authority for all Christian ministry (and everything else!). So we consult him first, then understand him better by exposing ourselves to the OT which cradled his worldview. Next we turn to the apostolic church in Acts and the Epistles to see how he works by his Holy Spirit to make this world his kingdom. Finally, Revelation displays the path to the terminus, the consummated New Creation. We are guided and controlled throughout by our analogy of faith – all the other branches of evangelical theology (systematic, pastoral, historical etc.)

Framework

In the following section, we identify Jesus as the *Chaplain to the World*. Under an evangelical analogy of faith, we will make observations about his Old Testament background and New

Testament development as we trace Jesus' life and ministry through its stages. Reading the whole Bible through a chaplain's eyes yields much more that could be said; for brevity, we will sample rather than exhaust the material available, checking that our understanding of Jesus in the chaplaincy context is true.

Jesus, Chaplain to the World

Jesus' life and ministry had three cardinal points: Incarnation, Crucifixion and Glorification; the latter in its stages of Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost, and Return. Central in these is his death, which was both the principal purpose of his Incarnation, and the precondition of his Resurrection. The primacy of his death is implicit, if not explicit, in the purpose statements⁶ he himself gave; the gospel centres on the substitutionary death of Christ applied for the salvation of sinners. However, Jesus' ministry was more than one Good Friday and Easter; while we recognise that primary reason for his thirty three years was for him to learn obedience and for his body to be prepared for sacrifice, the cross was not all of which his ministry was comprised. We must give proper weight to all his example and teaching, including the thirty years of almost complete silence. For chaplaincy to be gospel ministry, it will be patiently cross-centred, even if our years of preparation and waiting seem as frustrating, exasperating and even as fruitless as the Lord Jesus' first thirty years may have appeared to the watching angels.

Cardinal Point 1 – Christ's Incarnation

Pre-Incarnation: The triune God relates to creation and humanity as Creator and light-giver (Gen 2:7, Ps 104:27-30). In the NT, we learn that Christ is the source of common grace indiscriminately (John 1:3ff, 9, Col 1:16f), as befits the only-begotten of the Father who loves and blesses the evil and the good (Mat 5:44f). The grace of the triune God in the gospel is built upon the goodness of the creation; before there could be saving grace, there was common grace. To deny such general goodness has serious consequences (1 Tim 4:1-5). Jesus' positive attitude towards creation and the ordinary people in it was obvious to those around him. His readiness to receive God's goodness through created things brought him under the (false) accusation of being a drunkard. His love for people of the world earned him the precious title of 'friend of sinners'. Chaplains are confident they minister in part of God's good creation, as fellow-sinners and friends to sinners, as much dependent on God's grace for every breath as anyone else; but we are definitely in Immanuel's land.

'God with us' before Christmas: At his incarnation, God's promise (Is 7:14) of *Immanuel*, 'God with us' was fulfilled. But his practice of *Immanuel* long preceded Isaiah's prophecy. God's chaplaincy was through:

1. lonely Enoch or Noah (Gen 5:24, 6:9) walking with God; likewise, the chaplain's spiritual walk is essential to his experience and representation of God's presence.
2. the Lord's presence with and through the patriarchs (Gen 18:17ff, 31:42, 41:39f); chaplains can identify with, for example, Abraham's chaplaincy failures (Gen 12:10-20) and successes (Gen 18:23-33).
3. Moses and the chosen nation (Ex 3:12 – the verse contains both the singular and plural 'you') experiencing the trials of being the people of 'God with us' in a hostile world:
 - a. The tabernacle (Ex 40:35) and temple (2 Chr 6:20) demonstrated the Lord's presence in mobile and static circumstances among his chosen people and, through them, in

his world. By this we learn his gracious presence is mediated to the world through his covenant people, both individually and corporately. This indirect (or mediated) mode of God's saving dealing with the world through his chosen servants is demonstrated and taught by Jesus, and continued through Christians and his church (John 16:7f). God dispenses his common grace more directly (Acts 14:17, 17:28). As we've seen, the chaplain is one of God's elect, extending his church's gracious ministry in his name.

- b. In the remainder of the OT, 'God with us' is located *geographically* and *ethnically* in Israel, but also *personally* in the offices of *priest* (teaching, operating the sacrificial system, and maintaining the 'place' of Dt 12:5); *king* (ruling in God's name and under his anointing (1 Sam 24:6, [1 Ki 10:9]); and *prophet* (speaking God's Words, but also as the locus of God's active rule [Elijah is the classic case as he preaches, prays, acts, executes]). These offices in the first instance ministered to the covenant people, and then indirectly to the world as we noted above.
- c. This three-fold office works well in David's reign, and chaplains can learn from the worshipping, teaching king; the true prophets who certainly 'speak truth to power'⁷ and encourage faith in king and people, and the effective priests frequently enquiring of the Lord. Chaplains can also be warned by the selfishness and idolatry of David and later kings, the bored ritualist priests, and the cowardice and dishonesty of false prophets.
- d. God was revealed and present in Wisdom ministry, which complemented the Torah, especially as it disallowed over-mechanical interpretations of the Mosaic Covenant's blessings and curses. Hence Job and Psalms develop a refined doctrine of Providence, so essential to skilful living on earth. And of course, they have much else to say on living in a world of thorns and thistles. Proverbs shows God's wisdom to be the 'operating system' for creation, and the path of safety and blessing for those who heed it. Chaplains need, and may dispense, this wisdom – and as they reflect on these scriptures, will be chastened by the mistakes of Job's friends, warned by the corruption of Ahithophel, and encouraged by the example of Daniel.

Old Testament Summary: The promises given to Abraham are the clear, early manifesto of 'God with us'. The formation of the nation of Israel at the exodus was the next great step in God being with the people of this world, but a tension is immediately evident as the world's enmity had to be crushed for Israel to be established. Israel herself as a nation had the *Immanuel* principle instilled within her through the formal presence of ark, temple, prophets, priests and kings. The sinfulness of Israel's people meant that God's presence amongst his own people led more frequently to judgment rather than blessing, and consequently it was only on rare occasions that the world recognised that Israel was God's blessing, and not just an irritation. The high point comes in Solomon's reign when the Queen of Sheba recognises not only Solomon's wisdom, but also his relationship to the Lord. The low point is recorded by Ezekiel who records what Paul would turn into the accusation that *God's name is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you Jews* (Ezek 36:20ff/Rom 2:24). But nonetheless, God's purposes were not thwarted, and at the close of the inter-testamental period when Jesus came, for all the failure of second-temple Judaism, synagogues honoured God and attracted God-fearers. The old covenant had done its work despite the sinfulness of the covenant

people, and the stage was set for Jesus to be born under the law and fulfil God's promise to Abraham to bless the nations.

Birth to Baptism: In the person of Jesus, God was *present* with people, and not just his chosen people, as Matthew quickly shows us through the visit of the Magi, which account also shows us the tension God's Chosen One experienced whilst in the world he loved. Jesus entered the spiritual milieu of the OT; he came to those who rejected him and sought to kill him – the ancient war of the Serpent against God, carried on within humanity through murder, lies and other schemes (John 8:44, Eph 6:12) was brought to bear on him, as it would be until he died. Chaplains, whilst welcomed by an institution of this world, remember that human cultures reflect God's goodness and image, but also oppose his kingdom by many schemes.

From Jordan to Gethsemane: Through the Holy Spirit coming upon Christ at his baptism, *God was with* many more people, as Jesus taught them and did good to them; and his teaching, while primarily to provide for his disciples and church, is full of wisdom which blesses all who will learn from it, whether they are believers or not. Likewise, Jesus' personal relationships, and certainly his miracles, blessed those around him indiscriminately with love and care. Jesus also fearlessly critiqued the Jewish establishment which was his 'host institution': Herodians, Sadducees and Pharisees alike. In sum, even before Jesus had died, he had made Palestine a better place by bringing the presence of God to its various peoples. In preparing for the cross by entering creation, Jesus had helped people and began to redeem the world. So, chaplains bring Christ and his kingdom personally with them; sharing his wisdom, and that of the Scriptures which testify of him; being generous and doing good (if not miracles!) to all. Prophetic words of comfort and rebuke are another duty of chaplains.

Disciples: In calling his disciples and devoting himself to them, Jesus takes particular responsibility for believers. His main aim in this was to raise up an apostolate to carry on his work and build his kingdom, and chaplains should have a particular care for the Lord's people in our host institution. Indeed, under the current diversity philosophy, meeting the needs of Christian people may be the principal justification for chaplains being present in an institution. We can show special interest in believers without embarrassment; we have a special duty to pray for them (Jesus' prayers [as far as we know their content] were for his disciples). Believers are then strengthened to carry on his kingdom work as his witnesses in the institutions we serve.

Cardinal Point 2 – Christ's Crucifixion

Atonement: On the cross, Christ was *making peace through his blood, shed on the cross* (Col 1:20). This peace is, in the first instance, vertical but it has horizontal implications, most obviously between those who are brother and sister in Christ. However, we learn, and can (and should) exemplify and teach peace-making, reconciliation and forgiveness. Chaplains should be able to bring the oil of Gilead to bear upon the wounds and ruptures of human life and relationships in any institutions.

Example: Chaplains are under the authority of the leaders of the institutions they serve, and in common with other employees, will be exposed to the petty and not-so-petty strictures imposed by flawed bosses and sinful colleagues. We must be willing humbly to follow Peter's direction to follow Christ's example when this happens; to respond with grace to aggravation comes from a chaplain's

second nature. Indeed, personal suffering is key to all effective ministry (Col 1:24f) – so chaplains expect daily crucifixion and, from that, gracious blessing.

Cardinal Point 3 – Christ’s Glorification

Resurrection: The Resurrection confirms that this creation, and all the human activities and enterprises that God ordained within it, are not only the theatre of his activity, but also the object of his redemption. That includes the chaplain’s host institution. Resurrection, Pentecost and the church which came from those events, are now God’s means of *Immanuel*; indeed God’s presence through his church in the world is both more extensive and intensive than ever before. But the church is also a signpost ahead to the glory of the new creation, and Christ’s life and ministry in her are the first-fruits of, and witnesses to, the transformation that will come at his return. As an extension of the church’s mission and ministry, the chaplain is a standing witness to Christ’s, and the general, resurrection.

Vindication: The resurrection vindicated Christ. He was content to die, trusting God to raise him. Chaplains don’t need to justify themselves by activities, words, contributions or qualification. We are content for God to vindicate us in due time, and meekly endure alongside those who also meet the consequences of being misunderstood by the host institution and its assumptions.

Ascension: Christ ascended and was enthroned to exercise supreme authority to bring in God’s kingdom through his church. This gives chaplains confidence in prayer, and confidence that God’s project to transform *the kingdom of this world into the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ* (Rev 11:15) will be accomplished; as Chaplains minister in this world’s institutions, we know we are part of the coming of his kingdom. The outpost may be lonely; the outcome will be glorious!

Pentecost and the Church: The sending of the Spirit marked the effective beginning of the church’s ministry. She bears witness to the coming age in many ways; she receives the blessings of being under the lordship of Christ, being fed and cared for by him. She understands the spiritual context of humanity which is hidden from, yet so perplexes and frustrates, our race. She has prayerful access to the power of God. She has been given spiritual gifts unavailable to the rest of humanity. She bears spiritual fruit, much of which is seen in the contexts of human suffering and human relationships, both of which pose the greatest challenges to human resources. She reminds humanity that this world is passing, and that we must give account of what we have done to God himself. She offers redemption through the Gospel of Christ to all without discrimination. All these ministries do much to improve human lives, and so it’s no surprise that institutions seek Christian ministers from churches as their chaplains so that they might share in the blessings which come from the kingdom of God alone. As we have seen above, chaplains represent Christ in his church to the world; they can do so because of Christ’s presence in them and in his church by his Spirit.

Christ’s Return: Chaplains remember that Christ’s return is when they and the people they minister to will be judged. They remember and bear witness that this age is passing but that the next is eternal. Christ’s glory on that day makes sense of frustrations, lends urgency and gives significance throughout our ministry in this day (1 Cor 15:58).

Summary and Conclusion

Evangelical ministers have every reason for confidence as chaplains. The world has opened a door to us, and in that we should see the providential hand of God. Whilst the change of ministry paradigm from preaching to presence can be disconcerting, we are not being unfaithful to our calling. The triune God who has unlimited patience (1 Tim 1:16) has always been content to be present among our race. Even when he appeared on earth in human flesh, he waited thirty years before he proclaimed the kingdom. In any event, the responsibilities we have towards sinners – the love we feel towards lost souls in their confusion, the weakness of the saints God has placed in the institutions we serve, the urgency that Christ's impending return imparts – all these exert a right pressure to keep chaplains zealous as well as patient. As chaplains grapple with the challenges of being witnesses, we also become better pastors to our people. May God raise up many more gospel men and women to serve him as chaplains in this secular age.

And by the way, might *you* be one of them?

¹ For simplicity, male pronouns will be used throughout, but women may be well suited for chaplaincy in many settings unless a particular job description required preaching and teaching to men (unusual in current chaplaincy). A chaplain usually carries no authority and so the headship principle does not seem to be at stake.

² Chaplaincies can be paid or voluntary. Paid chaplaincies are found in universities, hospitals, the armed forces, and a few larger firms (e.g. British Airports Authority), voluntary chaplaincies in a host of charity, government, and commercial organisations. A local church pastor's relationship with a local school and perhaps other institutions can also be similar to a voluntary chaplaincy, in fact if not in name.

³ Sea Cadet Chaplains, as their naval counterparts are '*the friend and advisor of all on board... to provide guidance and leadership in spiritual, moral and community matters*'. Police '*chaplains are people of faith, which informs what they do. They only act in a religious way if appropriate and when asked to do so.*' (Both quotations are taken from the respective chaplain manuals.)

⁴ Most chaplaincies are now multi-faith, hence for 'church' also read 'faith community'.

⁵ Does the church have a role in dispensing common grace? Her calling is to minister saving grace through the gospel, yet as we work at that gospel priority, we shall come across many who need to receive God's goodness which we should offer them in the name of the Lord, Matt 14:14ff (esp v.16), Acts 3:6, Gal 6:10.

⁶ Mt 5:17, 10:34ff, 15:24, Mk 1:38, 2:17, 10:45, Lk 9:56, 12:49, 19:10 and parallel passages.

⁷ This phrase appears to come from an 18th century charge to Quaker believers.

The Interpretation of John 3:5

Oliver Gross, Pastor of New Street Evangelical Church, Welshpool, Powys

‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’ (John 3:5).¹ This sentence of the Lord Jesus Christ is undoubtedly ‘a saying of much disputed interpretation.’² Notwithstanding this fact, I believe there is evidence sufficiently strong to enable us to arrive at a definite conclusion; namely, that our Lord’s reference here is to water baptism and Spirit baptism respectively. To be as clear as possible, I take ‘born of water’ to mean firstly John’s baptism but ultimately Christian baptism; and ‘born of the Spirit’ as the one experience variously termed the baptism, gift and sealing of the Holy Spirit. Unanimity does not exist on either of these points, though there would seem to be more agreement on the latter, at least amongst Reformed believers.³ I am as respectful of this difference of opinion as I am confident that the view I advance here will receive a fair hearing from my fellow Christians.

I will present evidence for this interpretation of John 3:5 from: i) the Gospels; ii) the Acts; iii) the Epistles; iv) the Old Testament, before returning to John 3 to evaluate two other common views of verse 5. Then, to prove that the position argued for here is not a historical novelty, the comments of various interpreters will be quoted. I will attempt to clear up several potential misunderstandings before, finally, outlining a few areas in which changes to (or at least further reflection on) our current evangelical practice are desirable in the light of this study.

1. Evidence from the Gospels

The use of *hydōr* in John 1-3

The Greek word *hydōr* (gen. *hydotos*, ‘water’) is found twenty-one times in the NU Greek Text of the Gospel of John.⁴ Not including the verse under review, in seven instances (4:10, 11, 14 [x3], 15; 7:38) ‘water’ is used metaphorically or ambiguously, and in thirteen cases literally; that is, almost twice as much. More significantly, in all its seven occurrences in chapters 1-3 (again, omitting 3:5) *hydōr* clearly refers to physical water, such as that in a river or drawn from a well to wash with or to drink. The three instances in chapter two (vv.7, 9 [x2]) concern the water that Jesus turned into wine, but the three in chapter one (vv.26, 31, 33), as well as 3:23, refer to the water used in John’s baptism. Of course, the meaning of a word in a disputed text is not to be decided simply by consulting its semantic range and going with the majority report.⁵ But the fact that: a) all the occurrences of ‘water’ *before* 3:5 refer to physical water; b) so does the one immediately *after*; c) the majority of these concern *baptising* in water; and d) one of them (1:33) has ‘water’ virtually *alongside* ‘Spirit’, is at least somewhat suggestive that the meaning in 3:5 is likely to be the same.

Indeed, John’s statement in 1:33 has been called ‘the key’⁶ to unlocking Jesus’ meaning in 3:5. The Baptist says, ‘I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit”.’ (cf. 1:31-32) I agree with William Hendriksen that 1:33 is the key to interpreting 3:5, so that there, too, water baptism and Spirit baptism are in view. Don Carson’s⁷ cursory dismissal of this particular argument on the basis that in the former ‘water’ and ‘spirit’ are contrasted whereas in the latter they are co-ordinated, is too simplistic. In chapter 3 also ‘water’ is downplayed, occurring only

in v.5, whereas 'Spirit' is repeated in both v.6 and v.8; here too the latter is being emphasised over the former. And although in 1:33 John somewhat unfavourably compares his baptism with that of God's Son, he nevertheless affirms that it was God the Father himself who commissioned him. Without John's ministry Christ would not have been revealed to Israel (1:31); his 'was a baptism... which pointed people forward to the work that Jesus would do.'⁸ It is not surprising then that in 3:5 Jesus should acknowledge the importance, albeit secondary, of his cousin's baptism (Matt 21:23-32), which he presently adopted (John 3:22, 4:1-2) and later expanded (Matt 28:19).

The baptism of John

'Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist' (Matt 11:11). In the light of this saying alone, it is remarkable that anyone would suggest that John's baptism was insufficiently important to be the subject of Jesus's phrase 'born of water'. Andreas J. Köstenberger says that baptism 'would not have been a meaningful subject for Jesus to discuss with Nicodemus.'⁹ I beg to differ. Nicodemus was a prominent Pharisee (John 3:1) and in 1:19-28 we are told that it was the Pharisees in particular who had sent priests and Levites to the Baptist to interrogate him concerning his identity and authority. Indeed, they themselves together with the Sadducees came out *en masse* to John's baptism at the Jordan (Matt 3:7), presumably to undergo it and so maintain their reputation for piety before the crowds. After John's stinging rebuke, demanding from them heartfelt repentance leading to moral reformation (Matt 3:7-10), the religious leaders turned against him, saying, 'He has a demon' (Luke 7:33). The terrible truth is that in despising John and his baptism, 'the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him' (Luke 7:30, NKJV).¹⁰ This was in contrast to the common people and even the tax collectors, who 'declared God just, having been baptised with the baptism of John' (Luke 7:29).

When questioned about his authority by the chief priests and elders in the temple, Jesus responded with his own question: 'The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?' (Matt 21:25) Though his interlocutors are unwilling to answer, Jesus makes his own view very plain: 'For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him' (Matt 21:32). Crucially, notice what Christ says in verse 31: 'Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go *into the kingdom of God* before you.' So in Matthew 21:31-32, to enter the kingdom of God is to submit to John's baptism. In John 3:5, 'unless one is born of water... he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' It is likely, then, that to be born of water and to be baptised by John are the same thing.

There is no need, however, to restrict the meaning of 'born of water' to John's baptism; the reference is to water baptism *per se*, whether John's or that of Jesus and his disciples, for both have the authority of heaven behind them. So John 3:22-23: 'Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized.' It is frequently asserted that for Jesus to refer to *Christian* baptism as 'born of water' would be understandably baffling to Nicodemus, but any confusion on this point would have been short-lived. Before long, 'the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples)' (John 4:1-2). These same disciples would in due time be baptising not only Jews but 'all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt 28:20). This full-orbed Trinitarian baptism would be the richest fulfilment of that experience termed by the Lord, 'born of water'.

Christian baptism, then, was an advance on John's baptism, being not so much contrasted as connected with Spirit baptism.¹¹ Yet for both, the essential element of water was the same. Jesus' saying 'born of water' in John 3:5 is both a rebuke to Nicodemus' likely refusal to submit to John's baptism, and an affirmation that sacramental cleansing in water, being a token of repentance, was something God would still require of those who would enter his kingdom, even to the end of the age.

The baptism of Jesus

Before moving on to the 'end of the age' (1 Cor 10:11), that is, the post-Pentecost period, there is one particular baptism recorded in the gospels that merits special attention. Remarkably, it is the only case where the baptisand is identified:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.' (Mark 1:9-11)

Here at the beginning of the gospel we see that 'water' and 'the Spirit' are once again in intimate connection in the context of baptism. Just as at the original creation 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters' (Gen 1:3), so he is again present at the commencement of the new, for the baptism of Jesus signals the arrival of the world to come.

'Therein He commenced His messianic ministry with a view to the bringing in of the new creation; therein He was acknowledged by the Father as the Christ; therein the Spirit came to Him, to manifest through Him the Kingdom in grace and power.'¹²

Christ's experience is to some extent repeated for Christians, for where the Lord leads we must follow. Alec Motyer notes that 'at the baptism of the Lord Jesus water-baptism and Spirit-baptism are united, and therein is the pattern of New Testament baptismal blessings.'¹³ There are some important differences, however, between his baptism and ours. Whereas we enter and become subjects of the kingdom of heaven at our baptism, Jesus is already the king when he comes to his (Matt 2:2). We become sons of God when through believer's baptism we put on Christ (Gal 3:26-27); but Christ himself is already God's Son (Matt 2:15), being eternally begotten of the Father. We come to 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Mark 1:4; cf. Acts 2:38); Jesus committed no sin and needed no repentance (1 Pet 2:22). The Holy Spirit is given to us to regenerate and renew our sinful natures (Titus 3:5); the Lord always possessed a perfect human nature (Heb 7:26). His Spirit-baptism was only to empower him for service (Acts 10:38; Isa 42:1).

These qualifications do not alter the fact that the conjunction of 'water' and 'the Spirit' at Jesus' own baptism is another indication that 'born of water and the Spirit' in John 3:5 is a reference to water baptism and Spirit baptism.

2. Evidence from the Acts

The frequent connection between water baptism and Spirit baptism we have observed throughout the Gospels continues into the Acts. Luke's second volume begins with the Lord Jesus ordering his

disciples to remain in Jerusalem, 'for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now' (1:5; cf. 11:16). If one was only familiar with Luke's gospel up to this point, one might expect to see him record the demise of the old practice of water baptism and the new phenomenon of Spirit baptism taking its place. Certainly the Lord Jesus is drawing a contrast here, as John himself did (Luke 3:16), between John's baptism and his. However, we are not far into Acts before it becomes apparent that Christian water baptism ('in the name of Jesus') takes over from John's water baptism, being intimately connected with the baptism of the Spirit.

The 120 disciples

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

The 120 or so disciples who were assembled together on the day of Pentecost were clearly believers in Jesus, justified by God through faith and experiencing something of the work of the Holy Spirit (1:12-26; John 13:10; 14:17). Nevertheless, according to Christ himself, not until that day would they be baptised with the Holy Spirit and receive power to be his witnesses (1:8). It cannot seriously be doubted that these first Christians had previously been baptised in water, either by John or by the apostles or both. They had been 'born of water' some time ago; now at last they were also 'born of the Spirit' (cf. John 1:12-13; 7:39).

The 3,000 converts

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for (Gk: *eis*) the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.' And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.' So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:37-41).

Concerning 2:38, Ardel Caneday notes that there has been 'a proliferation of novel attempts to avoid accepting the text's association of repentance and baptism'¹⁴ leading to forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Some have suggested that *eis* should not be rendered 'for' or 'unto' as in major translations, but rather 'because of'. Others maintain that it is grammatically possible to understand Peter's words as follows: 'Repent (and be baptized each of you on the name of Jesus Christ) for the forgiveness of sins', thus dissociating baptism from forgiveness. The NIV does not add brackets here but does insert an extra full stop, thus making 'And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' a separate sentence, loosening the connection with baptism. There are other unusual renderings but as Caneday rightly says, 'each of these interpretations looks like an attempt to avoid the obvious sense of the verse.'¹⁵ Which is? 'The penitent believer baptized in the name of Jesus Christ may expect to receive at once the Holy Spirit, even as he is assured of the immediate forgiveness of his sins.'¹⁶

The experience of the 3,000 converts on the day of Pentecost was thus as follows: they heard, believed, repented, were baptized in water, then baptized in the Holy Spirit. They were born of 'water' and 'Spirit'!

The Samaritans

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ... When they believed Philip as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women... Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:5, 12, 14-17).

The experience of the Samaritan converts was unusual even by New Testament standards. However, what is untypical is not the order in which they experienced conversion (faith/repentance – water baptism – Spirit baptism) but the postponement of their reception of the Spirit. What was the reason for this delay? Although implicit rather than explicit, it must have something to do with the authority of the apostles (v.14ff). They were the ones to whom Christ had said, ‘You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ (1:8). They, and Peter in particular, were entrusted with ‘the keys of the kingdom of heaven’, to admit and refuse entry in unison with God (Matt 16:19; 18:18f). This is not at all to say that Philip was out of line when he took the initiative to go to Samaria. It was necessary however that those who were the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) should play a vital role in this momentous advance, not only because it was pragmatic to do so (avoiding a rift with the Jerusalem church) but moreover because it was proper.

For our purposes, note in particular v.16: ‘For he [the Holy Spirit] had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.’ The Samaritans, too, were born of ‘water’ and ‘the Spirit’ – in that order. Nevertheless, the account of Simon the Sorcerer (vv.9-24) warns us against construing the relationship between water and Spirit baptism in an automatic, *ex opere operato*, fashion.

Saul of Tarsus

So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized (Acts 9:17-18).

Saul’s experience is routinely cited as an example of someone receiving the Holy Spirit before being baptised in water. This may have been so, but not necessarily; and, in my opinion, not likely! When the text is read carefully it will be seen that although Saul’s receiving the Spirit was to be achieved by Ananias’ visit, it is not clear how exactly that goal was attained. Certainly Saul’s physical sight was restored through the laying on of Ananias’ hands: ‘immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight’ (v.18a; cf. v.12). Luke however does not add at this point, ‘and he was filled with the Holy Spirit’; but rather, ‘Then he rose and was baptized’ (v.18b). This is not something that Ananias had previously mentioned – but had he implied it? Could it be that he understood the way in which Saul would receive the gift of the Spirit was through the now penitent persecutor (v.11) being baptised in water? This would tie in with the order observed so far in Acts, and also with the tenor of his comments recounted by Paul in 22:13-16. There again, only the restoration of Paul’s sight is specified to be the result of the laying on of hands: ‘[Ananias] came to

me, and standing by me said to me, “Brother Saul, receive your sight.” And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him’ (v.13). Then he utters words not recorded in chapter 9: ‘The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard’ (vv.14-15). Significantly, Ananias concludes with this: ‘And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name’ (16). There is no mention of the impartation of the Spirit in this account of Saul’s conversion, but the implication seems to be that this happened as soon as, rather than before, Saul was cleansed from his past in baptism. This may have been through a subsequent laying on of hands by Ananias, as with the Samaritans; or as the direct act of God himself, as with the 120 disciples.

All of this notwithstanding, it is just possible that the standard evangelical line may be correct and that Saul received the Holy Spirit at the same time as his sight. We have already noted that the Spirit could be given in this way and we shall soon see another clear example of this. However, if this view is correct then we have a precedent for the gift of the Holy Spirit being given through the hands of one who, though an exceptional Christian, was not an apostle (9:10; 22:12). This suggests that the bestowal of the Spirit in this way might not be a phenomenon that died with the apostolic band!

Whatever the precise order, in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus there were two familiar features: baptism in water and baptism with the Spirit. Even an arch-persecutor could be ‘born of water and the Spirit’ and so enter the kingdom of God!

Cornelius and his household

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ‘Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10:44-48a).

This was a remarkable incident in more ways than one. First of all, the recipients of the Holy Spirit were Gentiles; although Cornelius was a God-fearer – and I would suggest a genuine OT believer (10:1-4, 34-35) – he was not a Jew, nor even a convert to Judaism, being uncircumcised (10:28; 11:2-3). Secondly, and only a little less noteworthy, they were unwashed Gentiles, literally! In all likelihood these are the only people of whom the NT bears witness that they received the Holy Spirit *before* baptism. The oft-repeated claim that the early church only baptised people on the basis that they had already received the Spirit is, as we have seen, seriously mistaken. No, as a general rule they baptised them *in order that* they might receive the Holy Spirit! Yet clearly, in this one case, the aforementioned assertion is true. The Apostle Peter, no less, commanded baptism because he and everyone else present had seen and heard abundant evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ (v.47, NKJV) ‘If they had received the reality, how could they be denied the sign?’¹⁷

Two very important applications are to be noted here. Firstly, and reverently, we must never put God in a box! The triune God is absolutely sovereign in the matter of salvation; he can circumcise the hearts of uncircumcised Gentiles; he can pour out his Spirit on those with unbaptised bodies. Here

we see a notable realisation of Christ's figure of speech: 'The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit' (Jn 3:8). Cornelius and his household were not the last of whom it could be said that God had 'cleansed their hearts through faith' (Acts 15:9) though their bodies were not 'washed with pure water' (Hebrews 10:22). 'What God hath cleansed, call not thou common' (10:15, AV).

Secondly, this passage uniquely reinforces the case for the view of John 3:5 being argued here. Peter's reaction to the Spirit baptism of Cornelius was not, 'Oh well, we can forget about water baptism now.' Rather: 'Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' (v.47) Even those who have already received the gift of the Holy Spirit are still obliged to submit to the ordinance of baptism. In whatever order, we must be 'born of water and the Spirit.'

The Ephesian disciples

And [Paul] said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They said, 'Into John's baptism.' And Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying (Acts 19:2-6).

The last of the 'mini-Pentecosts' in Acts concerns not an ethnic group but a religious one. These 'disciples' (v.2) that Paul encountered in Ephesus actually turned out to be followers of John not Jesus. They seem to have been unaware of the identity of the Christ or even of the existence of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ The latter is especially surprising given that John clearly taught on the subject (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). Perhaps they were particularly ill-informed followers of the Baptist, living so far away from Judea? If so, it might just be the case that not every convert of John's was also required to undergo Christian baptism (this is the only explicit instance of such in the NT; cf. 18:24-28).¹⁹ Whatever the case may have been with their fellows, these disciples of John first submitted to water baptism in Christ's name before receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, mediated through the hands of Paul (vv.5-6). Their experience, recorded towards the end of Acts, confirms yet again the pattern outlined by Peter at the beginning (2:38), and indeed envisaged by the Lord Jesus long ago in that nocturnal conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:5).

3. Evidence from the Epistles

There are number of interesting passages in the Epistles where water baptism seems to have an instrumental function rather than a symbolic or 'sealing' one (Rom 6:3-4; Eph 5:25-27; Col 2:11-13; 1 Pet 3:21).²⁰ Here I will only highlight those that are most striking in their likeness to John 3:5.

1 Corinthians 6:11

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practise homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were

sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Paul in this passage reminds the Corinthians of who will and who will not enter the kingdom of heaven when it comes in its fullness at the end of the age (cf. vv.2-3). Various kinds of sinners are marked out and excluded from any hope of attaining eternal life (vv.9-10). In fact, there were those now in the church of Corinth who had once pursued these very lifestyles – and some who were in danger of turning back to them. In a glorious contrast the apostle recalls how the God who is Trinity had wondrously transformed them at the time of their conversion. The three verbs in verse 11 refer to different aspects of the same decisive event: these scandalous sinners had been washed clean from their moral filthiness and pollution; they had been definitively sanctified, set apart as holy to the Lord; and he himself had pronounced them to be just, forgiving their sins. All this was done ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God,’ i.e. when they were baptised in water and baptised in the Spirit (cf. Acts 8:16). Bishop Lightfoot points out that: “‘In the name’ is the external essential, as ‘in the Spirit’ is the internal essential of Christian baptism.”²¹ As ever, Paul agrees with his Lord: ‘Unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’!

Galatians 3:26-27; 4:6

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ... And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ (Galatians 3:26-27; 4:6).

These verses, though located in different chapters of Galatians, occur in the context of the same argument. The apostle is contrasting the slavery and immaturity of God’s people under the OT with the liberty and maturity that is now theirs in the NT. Two tremendous events have secured this happy transition: the sending forth of God’s Son (4:4), and the sending forth of God’s Spirit (4:6). Notice the reason why the Holy Spirit was given: ‘Because you are sons...’ (4:6). How did the Galatians become sons of God? Through believer’s baptism (3:26-27). Geoffrey Wilson captures Paul’s argument here: ‘Why should the Galatians now submit to circumcision when they have already clothed themselves with Christ in baptism? “You have all put on” (middle voice) denotes responsible action, for in their obedience to the command of Christ they had given conscious expression to their faith in him [Matt. 28:19].’²²

‘Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband’ (4:27). Yes - children ‘born of water and the Spirit’!

Titus 3:5

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3-7).

In this theologically luxurious and quite beautiful passage the key phrase for our purpose is ‘by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.’²³ The similarity of this verse to John 3:5 is well known, but what is there to support the view that both verses are speaking of water baptism and Spirit baptism? Several points:

1. The verbal form of the noun translated 'bath' or 'washing' (*loutron*) is elsewhere used of the physical act of baptism (Acts 22:16; Heb 10:22; 1 Cor 6:11). The noun itself is used in Eph 5:26 - 'by the washing of water with the word'; in all likelihood another reference to baptism.
2. Paul says it was by this washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit that we were *saved*. That baptism, in some sense, saves us is taught in 1 Peter 3:21 – 'Baptism... now saves you.'
3. The renewing of the Holy Spirit refers to the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit (v.6 – 'whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour'; cf. Acts 2:33 – 'having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you are seeing and hearing').²⁴ As we have seen, the gift of the Spirit is something that always *follows* faith and usually baptism also.
4. Paul also links justification with this washing and renewal (v.7, 'that having been justified by his grace...'). Baptism is connected with the forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38; 22:16; Col 2:11-13; perhaps Rom 6:3-7, 'He who has died [in baptism] has been freed [literally, 'justified'] from sin'.

Tom Schreiner remarks on these verses: 'We see once again the initiatory character of baptism, in that it designates the boundary between the old life and the new. The newness of life is also traced to the work of the Holy Spirit... so that he is the one who grants new life to believers. The new life of believers is fittingly described in terms of washing, which recalls baptism where sins are washed away. Baptism in Titus, then, is closely associated with the work of the Spirit...'²⁵

Hebrews 6:1-2

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement (Hebrews 6:1-2).

The sixth chapter of Hebrews features far more often in debates over perseverance and eternal security than of baptism. Yet, remarkably, this is the only passage in the NT that explicitly includes all four of the crucial components of conversion – repentance, faith, water baptism and Spirit baptism.²⁶ The first two are in verse 1 and are plain to see; the other two are in verse 2 but may not be immediately apparent.

When we recollect all that we have seen so far however, especially in the Acts, it will be seen that 'instruction about washings' (*baptismōn*) and 'the laying on of hands' refer to water baptism and Spirit baptism respectively. Christian baptism needed to be distinguished from other ablutions performed by Jewish sects, e.g. the Essenes, and also from John's baptism (Acts 19:3-5). Although the Spirit could be given immediately by God (Acts 2:1-4; 11:15-17), the customary way for this to happen, so it would seem, was through the imposition of hands (Acts 8:17; 19:6). Reference here to ordination ceremonies (Acts 6:6; 9:17; 13:3) would seem out of place alongside such weighty subjects as 'the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement.' By contrast, being 'born of water and of the Spirit' is essential for entrance into the kingdom of God, which will arrive in its fullness when Christ returns to raise and judge the dead (2 Tim 4:1). It is likely then that in both Hebrews 6:2 and John 3:5 water baptism and Spirit baptism are in view.

4. Evidence from the Old Testament

Ezekiel 36:24-28

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:24-28, NKJV).

It is very likely that Christ was alluding to this Scripture in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. When the Pharisee expresses his frustration and inability to understand (v.9), the Lord replies: 'Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?' (v.10) Nicodemus ought to know what Jesus is talking about because it was foretold in the Old Testament. As a prominent instructor of the Jews, he of all people should be familiar with Ezekiel's prophecy! The New Covenant announced by the prophets is about to be inaugurated by the Messiah, and the only way to benefit from it is to experience a rebirth: 'born again... of water and Spirit.'

It is frequently asserted that the 'clean water' of Ezekiel 36:25 is a purely spiritual cleansing, performed by God himself, and therefore cannot be identified with water baptism, which is a physical act.²⁷ In response, it is very important to understand that both John's baptism and Christian baptism, though outward and physical rites, are intimately associated with spiritual blessings (Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:11-13 etc). Without faith baptism is indeed unprofitable, but a believer's baptism is something different. According to Louis Berkhof: 'A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ in which, by sensible signs, the grace of God in Christ is represented, sealed, and applied to believers, and they, in turn, express their faith and obedience to God... Where the sacrament is received in faith, the grace of God accompanies it.'²⁸ Although administered by men it is a baptism 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts 8:16; 19:5; 1 Cor 6:11); and indeed, 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Mt 28:19). Jesus' baptism no less than John's is 'from heaven' (Mark 11:30-31). God owns and acts in the event, only where penitent faith is present.

There is also another NT text that is reminiscent of Ezekiel 36 and may be a deliberate allusion to it. Hebrews 10:22 says: 'Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water'. Whereas Christians are cleansed inwardly ('our hearts') by the blood of Christ (cf. 9:14; 12:24), their outer selves ('our bodies') are washed with 'pure' (i.e. 'clean', see Ps 24:4a) water. Although not admitted by all commentators, this washing is most likely a reference to baptism.²⁹ Its similarity to Ezekiel 36:25, almost certainly in the background in John 3:5, suggests that baptism is also being referred to in these verses.

The NT does not support a Platonic cleavage between the physical and the spiritual. There are no valid grounds, therefore, for refusing to see Ezekiel 36:25 as being fulfilled in the baptism of John and ultimately Christian baptism. As this OT passage is almost certainly alluded to by Jesus in John 3:5, we have a strong indication that Jesus' phrase 'born of water and the Spirit' refers to water baptism and Spirit baptism.

5. Alternative interpretations

Besides the understanding of John 3:5 advanced above, there are two other quite common interpretations of our text. Neither of them, in my opinion, is more compelling.

The first alternative approach is to understand Jesus as *contrasting* physical birth ('born of water', i.e. amniotic fluid, 'the breaking of the waters' in childbirth] with spiritual birth ('born of the Spirit'). Support for this view is found in the verses immediately preceding and following v.5. Nicodemus incredulously raises the subject of a second physical birth (v.4), and in v.6 Jesus plainly does contrast physical and spiritual birth: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'.

At first sight this may seem persuasive, even conclusive. However, the following considerations weigh heavily against this view:

1. There is no evidence that 'born of water' was ever used of physical birth in the ancient world. There is an occasional reference to semen as 'water' (and as 'dew' or 'rain'), but this would refer to insemination rather than birth; the father's role, not the mother's.
2. There was a common way of referring to physical birth: not 'born of water' but 'born of woman' (see Job 14:1; 15:14; 25:4). Jesus himself used this expression (Mt 11:11; Lk 7:28) and he could have done so here if that is what he meant. Or, indeed, why did he not say, 'born of flesh and the Spirit' in v.5, as he does in v.6? Why confuse Nicodemus further by using different words for the same thing?
3. Even in response to Nicodemus' question in v.4, would it really be a point worth making that 'A man cannot enter the kingdom unless he is first born physically'? 'A man', by definition, is already someone who has been so born. Jesus stresses, 'Unless a man is born of water...' (AV), implying that it is possible not to be so born. One cannot refuse to be born but men can, and do, decline to submit to baptism (Luke 7:30).
4. The grammar indicates one birth rather than two. Jesus does not say 'born of water and born of the Spirit', nor even 'born of water and of the Spirit'; but 'born of water and Spirit'. One preposition (*ek*, 'out of') governs both words, the implication being that what is contemplated is one birth with two aspects.
5. This interpretation does not take into account the points observed above: the use of 'water' in John 1-3 to refer to normal, physical, drinking or washing water (especially that used in baptism); the occurrence of 'water' and 'Spirit' in a baptismal context throughout the NT; and the very likely allusion to Ezekiel 36:25-26 by Jesus. In fact, if this view of John 3:5 is correct, Christ cannot be reminding Nicodemus of that OT passage, for 'water' there is clearly not the 'water' of childbirth! But why, then, the admonition in v. 10-12?

Whereas this first alternative interpretation regards 'water' and 'flesh' as synonyms, the second, and more credible, is that 'water' and 'Spirit' are synonyms: 'Unless one is born of water, *that is*, the Spirit'. So this view holds that in John 3:5 Jesus is *identifying* 'water' and 'Spirit', e.g. 'the Spirit working like water', 'the water of the Spirit'.

There is much more to be said for this second alternative than the first. The Spirit of God is probably

likened to water in Isaiah 44:3, an example of poetic parallelism. It is alleged that this literary device is also being used in Ezekiel 36:25, which provides the OT background to Jesus' saying. Luke 3:16 is cited as a NT example of parallelism or epexegetis, in this case the Spirit being likened to fire. Moreover, Christ speaks of 'living water' in John 4:10-14, contrasting this with physical water. Then in 7:37-39, he identifies the Spirit as this living water, 'whom those who believed in him were to receive' (v.39).

Nevertheless, in spite of these weighty points, this second interpretation is not without its problems:

1. The Holy Spirit *is* likened to a physical element in John 3: the wind! 'The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit' (v.8). Both 'wind' and 'Spirit' translate the same Greek word (*pneuma*). Given that Jesus is clearly illustrating the work of the Spirit by comparison with the wind (cf. Ezek 37), would it not be confusing if he was doing likewise with water?
2. In John's gospel, where *hydōr* ('water') does refer to spiritual 'water' it is qualified by an additional adjective (e.g. 'living', 4:10) or phrase (e.g. 'the water that I shall give him', 4:14) or even by a noun (e.g. 'streams/rivers', 7:38). Otherwise it has its normal sense of physical water.
3. Although in chapters 4 & 7 the Spirit is in view, chapter 1 speaks of baptismal water with v.33 referring to both water baptism and Spirit baptism. Significantly, in 3:22-23, immediately after the incident with Nicodemus ends, John records that both Jesus and John were baptising people in water. So, notwithstanding the spiritual water of chapters 4 & 7, the nearest relevant 'water' references to 3:5 are speaking of physical, baptismal water.
4. This interpretation, like the previous one, ignores the fact that 'water' and 'Spirit' are found frequently throughout the NT in the context of baptism. What is more, they normally happen in that order, i.e. water baptism followed by Spirit baptism (Acts 2:38), which is also the sequence suggested by John 3:5.
5. The alleged parallel with Luke 3:16 is questionable. First of all, it reads 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire', whereas John 3:5 says 'born of water and [the] Spirit', i.e. in one the Spirit is mentioned first and in the other last. More significantly, it is not at all clear that in its context Luke 3:16 means 'the baptism of the Spirit, which will be like fire'. This is possible, given the tongues of fire that appeared when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost (Acts 2:3). However Luke 3:17 refers to the chaff (i.e. unbelievers) being burnt 'with unquenchable fire'. It is likely that 'fire' in v.16 is the same as in v.17, that is, not a metaphor for baptism in the Spirit but a baptism of judgement (12:50; cf. Mark 10:38).

My conclusion, then, is that in John 3:5 the relationship between 'water' and 'Spirit' is not one of *adversity* on the one hand (view 1), nor *identity* on the other hand (view 2), but of **unity**. One preposition governs both nouns because water baptism and Spirit baptism belong together, for there is only 'one baptism' (Eph 4:5). They are to be distinguished, but not separated. Jesus does allude to the prophecy of Ezekiel 36 because the water baptism that his disciples and John were administering was part and parcel of its fulfilment. Yet the close association between the physical rite and the spiritual reality is not mechanical or magical, for God the Holy Spirit is sovereign and is free to work in unexpected ways, e.g. in the experience of the Samaritans and Cornelius' household.³⁰

6. The testimony of tradition

Although only Scripture is infallible (2 Tim 3:16), the exegetical insights of those who have gone before us are invaluable. Indeed, if someone were to come along with an interpretation that no one had ever thought of before, it is all but certain that the novelty is wrong!

Does the understanding of ‘born of water and the Spirit’ advocated here have any historical precedent? The reality is that this has been by far the majority view of biblical scholars from the earliest times³¹ through to the present day³², including some notable evangelical worthies. Here is a selection of quotes extending from the patristic era, through the Reformation, to the modern age:

Justin Martyr: ‘As many as are persuaded and believe that the things are true which are taught by us [Christian teachers]... are instructed to pray and entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their past sins, and we pray and fast with them. Then they are brought by us to where there is water, and are born again in like manner in which we ourselves were born again. For in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water.’³³

Irenaeus: ‘For our bodies have received the unity which brings us to immortality, by means of the washing [*of Baptism*]; our souls receive it by means of [*the gift of*] the Spirit. Thus both of these are needed, for together they advance man’s progress towards the life of God.’³⁴

Basil the Great: ‘This then is what it is to be born again of water and of the Spirit, the being made dead being effected in the water, while our life is wrought in us through the Spirit. In three immersions³⁵, then, and with three invocations, the great mystery of baptism is performed... It follows that if there is any grace in the water, it is not of the nature of the water, but of the presence of the Spirit.’³⁶

John Chrysostom: ‘The cleansing is called the bath of regeneration. God saves us, says St Paul, through the bath of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. It is also called enlightenment, and again it is St Paul who calls it this... It is also called baptism. For all you [who] have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ.’³⁷

Martin Luther: ‘Water doesn’t make these things happen, of course. It is God’s Word, which is with and in the water. Because, without God’s Word, the water is plain water and not baptism. But with God’s Word it is a Baptism, a grace-filled water of life, a bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit, as Saint Paul said to Titus in the third chapter: Through this bath of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit...’³⁸

George Whitefield: ‘It is plain beyond all contradiction, that comparatively but few of those that are ‘born of water’ are ‘born of the Spirit’... many are baptized with water which were never baptized with the Holy Ghost.’³⁹

Josiah Pratt: ‘Titus iii. 5 – *Saved us by the WASHING OF REGENERATION, and RENEWING OF THE HOLY GHOST.* John iii. 5 – *Born of WATER and of the SPIRIT.* There are means, both EXTERNAL and INTERNAL, by which we are brought into a way of salvation. Baptism is the

EXTERNAL SIGN and SEAL of the new covenant, and whereby we are admitted into the Church of Christ, and entitled to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, which is represented and sealed to us by baptism.’⁴⁰

R. H. Lightfoot: ‘When Nicodemus understands the Lord’s words in their most literal sense... the Lord defines the rebirth as one by means of water and spirit... the instructed reader cannot fail to think of the rite of initiation into the Christian Church, a rite issuing in the endowment of its members with the Holy Spirit.’⁴¹

B. F. Westcott: ‘Christian baptism, the outward act of faith welcoming the promise of God, is incorporation into the body of Christ, and so the birth of the Spirit is potentially united with the birth of water. The general inseparability of these two is indicated by the form of the expression, *born of water and spirit*... as distinguished from the double phrase, *born of water and of spirit*.’⁴²

G. Campbell Morgan: ‘Then Jesus went on, very beautifully answering him in the realm of interpretation. Listen to him. He said, ‘Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.’ Mark the continuity. You have been attending the ministry of one who baptised you in water, and told you Another would baptise you in the Spirit. Except you are born of all that the water signified, repentance; and that which the Spirit baptism accomplishes, regeneration, you cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.’⁴³

D. M. Lloyd-Jones: “‘Born of water” is baptism, if you like, repentance. It is a man or woman saying, “I see now that I am blind; I am vile and foul; I need to be cleansed, I cannot stand before God, I need to be washed, I need to be renewed.” That is repentance!’⁴⁴

William Hendriksen: ‘The key to the interpretation of these words is found in 1:33 (see also 1:26, 31; cf. Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16) where *water* and *Spirit* are also found side by side, in connection with baptism.’⁴⁵

R. V. G. Tasker: ‘In the light of the reference to the practice by Jesus of water baptism in verse 22, it is difficult to avoid construing the words *of water and of the Spirit* conjunctively, and regarding them as a description of Christian baptism, in which cleansing and endowment are both essential elements... The outward and visible sign in the Christian Church of the new birth is baptism.’⁴⁶

G. R. Beasley-Murray: ‘The reference to new birth by water and Spirit inevitably directs attention to Christian baptism.’⁴⁷

Alec Motyer: ‘The Holy Spirit is linked with baptism in Jn. iii. 5; Acts ii. 38, ix. 17, 18, x. 47; 1 Cor. xii. 13; 2 Cor. i. 22; Eph. i. 13; Tit. iii. 5... The Spirit is present at baptism, and it is He who accomplishes the spiritual operations of which the water is the sign and seal (e.g. 1 Cor. xii. 13; Tit. iii. 5).’⁴⁸

Gordon J. Keddie: ‘In connecting water baptism with the Holy Spirit, Jesus relentlessly pressed the need of inward, Spirit-driven change upon the hapless Pharisee (cf. Ezek. 36:25-27; Luke 3:16).’⁴⁹

Bruce Milne: 'If our interpretation of 'water and the Spirit' (v.5) is correct (*viz.* an allusion to Ezk. 36:25-27) then baptism in water was an obvious vehicle to convey entry to the new life of the promised kingdom.'⁵⁰

Brian Russell: 'The language the rabbis used of the newly baptised proselyte is most instructive. They said he is "like a new-born child", "a new creation", that he has been "raised for the Lord". Accordingly, Gentiles who became Israelites in this way were described as "born of water" and not of blood. Hence our Lord's use of the term in John 3:5, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." According to Jesus, it's not enough to be baptised in water to enter the kingdom of God; one must also be baptised in the Spirit and be born anew spiritually.'⁵¹

7. Points of clarification⁵²

One senses at times that what drives the alternative interpretations of John 3:5 is the fear of 'baptismal regeneration'. Some reading this may be wondering whether the position adopted in this article is not a species of this error, or at least opens the door to it. It is necessary to define what we mean by this term. To affirm that everyone who receives Christian baptism is thereby regenerated, regardless of their spiritual state, is indeed a significant error that flies in the face of the Scriptures. But the truth of the claim that the NT's doctrine of conversion comprises both repentance and faith, water baptism and Spirit baptism – normally, though not invariably, in that order – is surely plain for all to see. One may not wish to equate the last two components with the birth 'of water and the Spirit' (John 3:5) and 'the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5) as I have done, but that this is a biblically defensible position and an acceptable one for an evangelical to take should not, I think, be doubted.

Another mistake would be to assume that this view entails the belief that anyone who has not been baptised is lost. Stanley Fowler makes a very important point when he says: 'The sacramental character of baptism functions only positively ('be baptised in order to be saved by Christ'), not negatively ('if you are not baptised, then you cannot be saved').'⁵³ Repentance (Ps 51:17) and faith (Acts 16:31) are the essence of conversion, so that whoever truly has these will surely not be disqualified for lacking baptism (e.g. the thief on the cross, Luke 23:39-43). God can, and does, save whom he will, even without baptism (in the case of infants and others, even without repentance and faith!). Therefore we should not be greatly alarmed if our experience of conversion differs somewhat from the NT pattern. God is sovereign in salvation and is free to work outside the normal channels of his grace (John 3:8). We see somewhat varying experiences even in the apostolic age, so should not be surprised if it is so in our day.

Finally, some may still be anxious about giving water baptism too much prominence, for wouldn't this lay the foundation for a legalistic religion of works? What about *sola gratia* and *sola fide*? These slogans do capture the heart of the gospel but the Reformers would be shocked at the way in which some of their spiritual descendants have enlisted them in the cause of severing baptism from salvation. Luther especially put much emphasis on the two genuine sacraments – too much in my opinion! Still, we must reckon with the fact that 'Lutheran theology has taught both the strongest form of justification by faith alone and the highest view of baptismal efficacy,' so that, 'the idea that

salvation by faith alone is incompatible with sacramentalism is at least historical nonsense.’⁵⁴ There is a necessity about baptism, but it is a *relative*, not *absolute*, necessity, something that Calvin saw clearly.⁵⁵ The Reformation as a whole did involve a break with exalted Roman Catholic notions of the sacraments, but managed to avoid swinging to the opposite extreme on this issue. It was the Radicals who took up an anti-sacramental position that has somehow managed to become the dominant evangelical position today, even among the Reformed.⁵⁶ In my opinion, the Anabaptists were right on the issues of the proper mode and subjects of baptism, but it was the magisterial Reformers who retained a more biblical view of its efficacy. They did so because some of the strongest NT affirmations of a wholly gratuitous salvation are found cheek-by-jowl with a robust doctrine of baptism (e.g. Titus 3:3-7; Eph 2:1-10, cf. Col 2:11-15).

8. Practical Applications

Preaching. ‘Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel’ (1 Cor 1:17). The primary task of the Christian minister is not to administer the sacraments but to announce the Saviour. ‘Paul does not denigrate the practice of baptism per se, but baptism must be subordinated to the gospel so that it does not sabotage the gospel, that is, Christ crucified for sinners.’⁵⁷ Just getting people wet is not going to get them into the kingdom; getting them to put their trust in Christ is – which faith will then be expressed in baptism (1 Pet 3:21). This statement of Paul’s must however be balanced by the Great Commission, where Christ does direct his apostles to baptise new disciples (Mt 28:18-19; cf. Jn 4:1-2). Indeed, the call to submit to baptism is an explicit feature of two of the NT’s own evangelistic messages (Acts 2:38; 22:16), the latter of which was addressed to Paul himself.

Yet it is very rare today to hear a gospel preacher impress the need to be baptised on the consciences of his unconverted hearers, for many evangelicals would consider this to be at best confusing the issue and at worst heresy. At the same time the popularity of altar calls, decision cards, raised hands, etc, have in some circles taken the place of baptism as the physical expression of the spiritual act of coming to Christ. These ‘new measures’, as crass as they sometimes can be, do bear witness to the very human need for a tangible step of commitment and seal of assurance. God did, after all, give us a body as well as a soul (Gen 2:7); that he remembers we are dust is the reason he has given us sacraments at all (Heb 10:22).

My point is simply that we should not ‘go beyond what is written’ (1 Cor 4:6). If those who turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6) did not hesitate to call on their fellows to be baptised, neither should we.

Baptising. As with our preaching of baptism, why have we similarly departed from the apostolic practice of baptism? I do not refer to the mode but to the *timing*. ‘In apostolic times it is plain that baptism followed immediately upon confession of faith in Christ. The repeated accounts of baptism in Acts give ample proof of this.’⁵⁸ It is remarkable that there has been so much zeal in some quarters to imitate the primitive practice of immersion, but no corresponding desire to baptise immediately upon profession of faith, or at least as soon as possible afterwards. The postponement of baptism does indeed have a long history, going back to the catechumenate of the late 2nd century.⁵⁹ These days we run baptismal classes, sometimes extending over months. This is all a far cry from the NT pattern, so why do we not return to it? Various justifications for delaying baptism

today are given, including: the superior discernment of the apostles; the likelihood of persecution in the 1st century; the majority of converts being already well-informed Jews. But the apostles and evangelists could and did make mistakes (Simon Magus; Demas) and Gentile converts were baptised as quickly as Jewish ones (Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8). An awareness on the part of those seeking baptism that they are likely to face persecution might well make us more confident of their motives. Still, the fact that we live in a less (though increasingly) hostile climate than the early church did surely cannot by itself justify such a radical departure from apostolic practice. Perhaps it is unfair, but I suspect that a more likely reason for the prevailing practice is simply a reluctance to go to the trouble of filling the baptistry too often, having to ask the congregation to sit through a longer service than usual, and not least the fact that friends and family members always need plenty of notice if they are going to be there. Reforming cherished traditions can be quite a daunting prospect!

Water baptism and Spirit baptism both properly belong at the outset of the Christian life, not several months or years down the line once the professing disciple has proved himself. I am not suggesting we throw caution to the wind and baptise all and sundry. Every baptisand should be made fully aware of what they are getting themselves into and 'count the cost' (Luke 14:28) of following Christ. Just as John the Baptist left the Jews in no doubt as to what repentance must look like (Luke 3:7-14), so must the Christian minister with those who come to his baptism. 'No cross; no crown'; and until this is grasped, no baptism! But if the apostles could fulfil this responsibility in a few hours (Acts 16:32-33), cannot we?

Laying on of hands. All I want to say on this is to ask the question: Why is this notable apostolic practice, this 'elementary doctrine of Christ' (Hebrews 6:1-2), now notable by its total absence from our churches? It is, of course, still common in ordination and commissioning services but this only serves to make its absence from Christian initiation all the more curious. I am conscious that I may be speaking out of ignorance here: perhaps there are congregations in Affinity that do practice the imposition of hands in this context? Or maybe there are sound theological reasons why this should no longer take place? In any case it seems to me that some careful thinking needs to be done in this area. Perhaps this could be the subject of a future article?

Conclusion

The interpretation of John 3:5 advanced above is neither the most common nor comfortable for us as evangelicals, but I am persuaded it is correct. In my opinion it is the only one that takes into account all of the relevant biblical data from the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles and the Old Testament. It is therefore more persuasive than the two other major views of the passage. The concurrence of the greater part of the universal church, from the earliest times to the present, confirms this. Therefore I sincerely commend it to the church of today for serious and prayerful consideration – and appropriate remedial action.

HYMN

'The servants of God are baptized'

The servants of God are baptized,
With Jesus made visibly one;
Come, Spirit, and clothe them with power,
The world and its pleasures to shun.

The servants of God are baptized,
Salvation revealed and displayed;
Come, Spirit, and seal on their minds
The sacrifice Jesus has made.

The servants of God are baptized,
United with Christ in His death;
Come, Spirit, descend on their souls
And fill with Your life-giving breath.

The servants of God are baptized,
Immersed in the tomb with their Lord;
Come, Spirit, and open their eyes
To walk in the light of God's word.

The servants of God are baptized,
They rise up with Christ to new life;
Come, Spirit, abide in their hearts
For days of temptation and strife.

The servants of God are baptized
With Christians made visibly one;
Come, Spirit, and rest on us now
To worship God's glorious Son.

Nick Needham, b. 1959 © Author⁶⁰

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®) copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here is your King!* The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 76.

³ 'Some have suggested that baptism in or by the Spirit is something that follows conversion but, in fact, it should be identified with the new birth.' Gary Brady, *Being Born Again* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2008), 73.

⁴ 1:26, 31, 33; 2:7, 9 [x2]; 3:5, 23; 4:7, 10, 11, 13, 14 [x3], 15, 46; 5:7; 7:38; 13:5; 19:34.

⁵ For a similar reason it is not harmful to my argument to admit that, excluding 3:5, John uses *hydatos* seven times in recording Jesus' speech (2:7; 4:10, 13, 14 [thrice]; 7:38) and in only two of these (2:7, 4:13) does it refer to physical water.

⁶ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 134.

-
- ⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: Apollos, 2006), 192.
- ⁸ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: IVP, 1988), 158.
- ⁹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, 'Baptism in the Gospels', in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 29.
- ¹⁰ Scripture taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- ¹¹ Robert H. Stein, 'Baptism in Luke-Acts', *Believer's Baptism*, 35-36.
- ¹² G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1962), 64.
- ¹³ J. Alec Motyer, 'Baptism', in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: IVF, 1962/1974), 131.
- ¹⁴ Ardel Caneday, 'Baptism in the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement', in Thomas R. Schreiner & Shawn D. Wright (Eds.), *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 311.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 108.
- ¹⁷ John Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit* (London: IVF, 1964), 14.
- ¹⁸ It is possible that their reply to Paul in v.2 (literally, 'We heard not that Holy Spirit is') should be understood as: 'We had not heard that the Holy Spirit is *now here*' (cf. Jn 7:39; 16:13). See J. David Pawson, *The Normal Christian Birth* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1989).
- ¹⁹ Though see John 3:25-26 and comments on Hebrews 6:1-2 below.
- ²⁰ Cf. The 39 Articles of the Church of England, *Article XXVII. Of Baptism*: 'Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Spirit, are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God...'
- ²¹ Quoted in Geoffrey B. Wilson, *New Testament Commentaries (Vol 1): 1 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2005), 252.
- ²² Ibid., *New Testament Commentaries (Vol. 1): Galatians*, 538.
- ²³ Gk: *dia loutrou palingenesias kai anakainōseōs pneumatōs hagiou*.
- ²⁴ This is one of the most compelling reasons to equate the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the new birth.
- ²⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, 'Baptism in the Epistles: an Initiation Rite for Believers', *Believer's Baptism*, 85.
- ²⁶ See Stein, 'Baptism in Luke-Acts', 41; Stephen F. Winward, *The New Testament Teaching on Baptism* (London: The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1952), 56-57.
- ²⁷ E.g. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), 702.
- ²⁸ Louis Berkhof, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1938/2005), 137, 136.
- ²⁹ David W. Chapman, comment on Hebrews 10:22 in *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2378.
- ³⁰ Cf. WCF XXVIII.VI: 'The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time.' John 3:5, 8; Gal 3:27; Tit 3:5; Eph 5:25-26; Acts 2:38, 41 are the Scripture proofs cited by the Westminster divines in support of this.

-
- ³¹ Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 71ff; N. R. Needham, *2,000 Years of Christ's Power: Part One* (Revised edition) (London: Grace Publications Trust, 2002), 182-184.
- ³² Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 192.
- ³³ *First Apology*; in Toon, *Born Again*, 72.
- ³⁴ *Against the Heresies*, III, xvii, 2 (c. 190). Trans. Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 129.
- ³⁵ To this day, the Eastern Orthodox churches baptise by three-fold immersion.
- ³⁶ *On the Holy Spirit* (35); in H. F. Stander & J. P. Louw, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Leeds: Reformation Today Trust, 2004), 132.
- ³⁷ *Baptismal Instructions*, ed. and trans. P. W. Harkins, p. 138; in Toon, *Born Again*, 76.
- ³⁸ *Small Catechism*, Section 4; in N. R. Needham, *2,000 Years of Christ's Power: Part 3* (London: Grace Publications Trust, 2004), 174-75.
- ³⁹ *Sermons on Important Subjects*, new ed., ed., Joseph Smith, 496-97.
- ⁴⁰ John Henry Pratt (ed.), *The Thought of the Evangelical Leaders: Notes of the Discussions of the Eclectic Society, London during the years 1798-1814* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1856/1978), 370.
- ⁴¹ *St John's Gospel: A Commentary*, 116.
- ⁴² *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1903), 50.
- ⁴³ *The Gospel According to John*, 58.
- ⁴⁴ *The Kingdom of God* (Cambridge: Crossway Books, 1992), 203-204. DMLJ did not equate 'born of Spirit' with Spirit baptism.
- ⁴⁵ *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 134.
- ⁴⁶ *The Gospel According to St. John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Leicester: IVF, 1976), 71.
- ⁴⁷ *Baptism in the New Testament*, 229.
- ⁴⁸ 'Baptism', *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: IVP, 1962/1978), 131.
- ⁴⁹ *A Study Commentary on John*, Volume 1: John 1-12 (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2001), 131.
- ⁵⁰ *The Message of John* (Leicester: IVP), 80.
- ⁵¹ *Baptism: Sign and Seal of the Covenant of Grace* (London: Grace Publications Trust, 2001), 17.
- ⁵² On all three of these points, see Ardel Caneday's very helpful comments in *Believer's Baptism*, 324-328.
- ⁵³ Stanley K. Fowler, *More than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptist Sacramentalism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2002), 143.
- ⁵⁴ Fowler, *More than a Symbol*, 204.
- ⁵⁵ Comment on John 3:5, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 110.
- ⁵⁶ See Robert Letham, Book Review, in *Foundations*, Autumn 2011, Issue 61, at <http://www.affinity.org.uk/foundations-issues/issue-61-article-8---book-review---the-peoples-theologian-writings-in-honour-of-donald-macleod>
- ⁵⁷ Schreiner, *Baptism in the Epistles*, 80.
- ⁵⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), 136. See Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36-39; 9:18; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5.
- ⁵⁹ Samuel M. Powell, *A Teacher's Guide to Understanding the Sacraments* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2011), 28.
- ⁶⁰ Needham, *2,000 Years of Christ's Power: Volume One*, 119.

Aggressive Atheism

Kieran Beville, Pastor of Lee Valley Bible Church (Baptist), Ballincollig, Co. Cork, Ireland

Recently I read again the story of the encounter between David and Goliath in the Valley of Elah and how the champion of the Philistines taunted the people of God. Goliath was arrayed in impressive armour of bronze and heavily armed. But David, who declined to wear the armour of King Saul, approached this awesome opponent in the name of the Lord. What impressed me most about the account is how David was grieved in his spirit that the Lord's name should be profaned in such a way. He had an unshakeable confidence that God would grant him victory in this amazing confrontation. Goliath taunted the army of Israel and this had the effect of discouraging God's people. The most unlikely person (a shepherd boy) had the most astonishing victory over the most powerful adversary in an unpredictable manner – with a sling-shot. The words of that youth are a trumpet-call for the valiant who have more confidence in their God than fear in the face of awesome odds: 'You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts... whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand...' (1 Sam 17:45-46).¹

David emerged from obscurity and the shadow of the contempt his brothers had for him. An unlikely person worked an improbable victory that day in the Valley of Elah. David selected five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. However, he also possessed five notable qualities. He entered that valley with confidence in God, experience in defending the flock, a spirit that was grieved to hear the Lord's name being profaned, a courageous heart and a desire 'that all the earth may know that there is a God...' (1 Sam 17:46). Thus armed, David stepped into the valley to face a formidable foe and God granted him success. Those who possess such qualities are needed today to act as valiant champions in the cause of the Lord. It is my hope that God will grant success today to those courageous shepherds of the flock who step forward to defend the honour of the Lord against the giants who mock God and deride faith as an intellectual cop-out – the New Atheists.

What is atheism?

Atheism is sometimes defined as the rejection (or absence) of belief in the existence of God. But it is more accurate to define it as *belief* that there is no God.² Whereas a theist is someone who believes in God, an atheist is someone whose disbelief in God is central to his worldview. Atheism, therefore, is not merely uncertainty or doubt about the existence of God such as agnosticism or scepticism. Although atheism is a minority view in Western culture, it is nevertheless growing in popularity. Historically, atheism would have been scandalous, but today it is far less objectionable and, in some circles, well-respected.

Historical overview

The Greek word *atheoi*, as it appears in the Epistle to the Ephesians, 'remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world' (2:12) is usually translated into

English as 'without God'. In ancient Greek the adjective *atheos* meant 'godless'. It was first used as a term of censure roughly meaning 'ungodly' or 'impious'. In the fifth century BC the word began to indicate more deliberate and active godlessness in the sense of 'severing relations with the gods' or 'denying the gods'. Atheists were those who impiously denied or disrespected the local gods, even if they believed in other gods. Thus the word 'atheist' was originally used pejoratively and as such was an insult. Nobody would willingly have assumed such a title.

The Greek philosopher Epicurus (c. 341–270 BC) disputed many religious doctrines, including the existence of an afterlife or a personal deity. He considered the soul purely material and mortal. While Epicureanism did not rule out the existence of gods, it asserted that if they did exist, they were unconcerned with humanity.

The Roman poet Lucretius (c. 99–55 BC) agreed that, if there were gods, they were unconcerned with humanity and unable to affect the natural world. For this reason, he believed humanity should have no fear of the supernatural. He expounded his Epicurean views of the cosmos, the soul, mortality, and religion in *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things), which popularised Epicurus' philosophy in Rome. Disciples of Epicurus were essentially devotees of sensual enjoyment.

The meaning of 'atheist' changed over the course of classical antiquity. During the Roman Empire Christians were accused of being atheists for not worshiping the pagan deities and many were executed for their rejection of the Roman gods in general and Emperor-worship in particular.³

The Renaissance did much to expand the scope of free thought and sceptical inquiry. Individuals such as Leonardo da Vinci sought experimentation as a means of explanation, and opposed arguments from religious authority. He was one of several critics of the church during this period. But generally the Renaissance and Reformation eras witnessed a resurgence in religious fervour, as evidenced by the proliferation of new religious orders and the emergence of Protestantism.

Criticism of Christianity became increasingly frequent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in France and England. Some thinkers who emerged from a Protestant tradition (such as Thomas Hobbes) espoused a materialist philosophy and scepticism toward supernatural occurrences, while the Jewish-Dutch philosopher Spinoza rejected divine providence in favour of naturalism. The philosopher David Hume developed a sceptical epistemology grounded in empiricism, undermining the metaphysical basis of natural theology.

The French Revolution took atheism and anti-clericalism into the public sphere. There was a restructuring and subordination of clergy with respect to the civil authority of the state. The enforcement of it led to anti-clerical violence and the expulsion of many clergy from France. The Napoleonic era institutionalised the secularisation of French society, exported the revolution and inspired the founding of other republics.

Before the eighteenth century, the existence of God was so universally accepted in the western world that even the *possibility* of true atheism was questioned. According to this view, atheists were simply in denial. But the eighteenth century atheist Paul-Henri Thiry, asserted:

The source of man's unhappiness is his ignorance of Nature. The pertinacity with which he clings to blind opinions imbibed in his infancy, which interweave themselves with his existence, the consequent prejudice that warps his mind, that prevents its expansion, that renders him the slave of fiction, appears to doom him to continual error. (*The System of Nature*, p. 57)

In the nineteenth century, atheists contributed to political and social revolution, facilitating the upheavals of 1848, the *Risorgimento* in Italy and the growth of an international socialist movement. Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) would greatly influence philosophers such as Engels, Marx and Nietzsche.

Atheism in the twentieth century found recognition in a wide variety of other, broader philosophies, such as existentialism, secular humanism, nihilism, anarchism, logical positivism, Marxism, feminism and the general scientific and rationalist movement.

Atheism and totalitarian regimes

The philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach and the psychologist Sigmund Freud (amongst many others) argued that belief in God and other religious beliefs are human inventions, created to fulfil various psychological and emotional needs. Many Buddhists share this view. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, influenced by the work of Feuerbach, argued that belief in God and religion are social functions, used by those in power to oppress the working class. For such philosophers, psychologists and social theorists the concept of God implies the abdication of human reason; an abandonment of liberty has led to the enslavement of mankind.

The twentieth century also saw the political advancement of atheism, spurred on by the works of Marx and Engels. The Bolsheviks in Soviet Russia were inspired by an ideological creed that professed that religion weakened society and they resolved to eradicate it. After the Revolution in 1917 Orthodox hierarchy were summarily executed and children were deprived of any religious education outside the home. Increasingly draconian measures were employed to suppress religion. In addition to direct state persecution, the *League of Militant Godless* was founded in 1925, resulting in churches being vandalised. While the Constitution of 1936 guaranteed freedom to hold religious services, the Soviet state under Stalin did not consider education a private matter; it outlawed religious instruction and waged campaigns to persuade people, at times violently, to abandon religion. By 1938, eighty bishops had lost their lives, while thousands of clerics were sent to labour camps.⁴ Many Muslim mosques and Jewish synagogues were also shut down.

As well as the communist bloc countries of the Soviet Union, several other communist states (including China and North Korea) endorsed state atheism, deeming religion to be a subversive threat to the *status quo*. In 1967 Enver Hoxha's regime conducted a campaign to extinguish religious life in Albania. By the end of that year over two thousand religious buildings were closed or converted to other uses, and religious leaders were imprisoned and executed. Albania was declared to be the world's first atheist country by its leaders, and Article 37 of the Albanian constitution of 1976 stated, 'The State recognises no religion, and supports and carries out atheistic propaganda in order to implant a scientific materialistic world outlook in people.'⁵

Stalin (Russia), Mao (China), Pol Pot (Cambodia) and a host of others, all committed atrocities in the name of a communist ideology that was explicitly atheistic. Their bloody deeds were perpetrated in an attempt to create a new secular order, a utopia free of the curse of religion. This was not mass murder by people who happened to be atheists; atheism was a central part of their ideological inspiration.

Although since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) the number of actively anti-religious regimes has reduced considerably, the history of the twentieth century offers sobering lessons: The exclusion of God, religion and virtue from society leads ultimately to a poorer vision of humanity.

Atheism Today

Demographic distribution

It is difficult to quantify the number of atheists in the world as respondents to religious-belief polls may define atheism differently. A 2005 survey published in *Encyclopedia Britannica* found that the non-religious made up about 11.9% of the world's population, and atheists about 2.3%.⁶ This figure did not include those who follow atheistic religions, such as some Buddhists.

A 2006 poll published in the *Financial Times* gives rates for the United States and five European countries. The lowest rates of atheism were in the United States at only 4%, while the rates of atheism in the European countries surveyed were considerably higher: Italy (7%), Spain (11%), Great Britain (17%), Germany (20%), and France (32%). These figures are similar to those of an official European Union survey, which reported that 18% of the EU population does not believe in god.⁷ Other studies have placed the estimated percentage of atheists, agnostics, and other nonbelievers in a personal god as low as single digits in Poland, Romania and Cyprus. In Scandinavian countries the percentage of the populations describing themselves as atheists is very high (up to 85% in Sweden, 80% in Denmark, 72% in Norway, and 60% in Finland).⁸ According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 19% of Australians have 'no religion', a category that includes atheists.⁹ Between 64% and 65% of Japanese are atheists or agnostics.¹⁰

Godless gurus

Many celebrities in contemporary society are atheists but there are others who have achieved celebrity status by virtue of the fact that they are exponents of atheism. They are part of a movement that has come to be known as New Atheism, in which the mood has changed from passive non-belief to something more dogmatic and aggressive. They advocate the view that religion should be countered, criticised and exposed by rational argument; it is a superstition and they are dedicated to its eradication.

Poisoned penmanship

Following the recent death of Christopher Hitchens (a conspicuous New Atheist voice) the obituaries described him as an articulate journalist, incomparable critic and masterful rhetorician. Hitchens was an intellectual with a world platform from which he advanced atheism. His works include *God is Not Great* and *The Portable Atheist*. Referring to Mother Theresa as 'a lying, thieving, Albanian dwarf' is

typical of the poisoned penmanship he used to promulgate contempt for people who hold religious views. Hitchens is a harbinger of what is to come as aggressive atheism advances.

Such antipathy to a religious perspective of any kind has spawned pseudo-intellectuals who feel it is open season on people of faith. Many of these zealots are equally dogmatic in their opinions as those they criticise. But I have found that most of these devotees are profoundly ignorant of philosophical theology in the fields of ontology (that branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being) and epistemology (the philosophy of knowledge).

Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, is probably the most well known advocate of atheism today, believing that science and religion are mutually incompatible. He is committed to the evolutionary theory of Darwin as a means of undermining religious belief.¹¹

Some of these celebrity new atheists and their cult of devotees use the word 'fundamentalism' as a pejorative and convenient label to express contempt for people whose religious convictions shape their worldview. Such a broad definition includes suicide bombers and ordinary Christian worshippers. As such, they lack perspective and the nuances one might expect from intelligent debate. Ironically, these outspoken atheists have a form of evangelical zeal and a strident tone that has much in common with the 'fanaticism' they despise. They no longer speak like the besieged who have retrenched into defensive enclaves; atheism is now a dogmatism that crushes the interrogative spirit and insists that its doctrinaire views are the only legitimate creed. As a belief system (for what it asserts in relation to the origin of the universe is, in fact, an unproven and un-provable theory) it is itself a form of orthodoxy which is intolerant of any disagreement. Those who do not subscribe to its views are deemed heretics and treated as outcasts who are ostracised and ridiculed. Some of the things they say about religion are so provocative that they constitute incitement to hatred, *de facto* if not *de jure*.

Several years ago I bought a book about atheism, written by an atheist. The Preface includes the following statement:

This book is intended for a variety of different readers, including atheists looking for a systematic defence and explanation of their position, agnostics who think they might be atheists after all, and religious believers who have a sincere desire to understand what atheism is all about.¹²

As I belonged to the last category in this list I thought this will be helpful to me, but as I read the book I was surprised and disappointed to read Baggini's vitriolic attack on evangelical faith. He speaks of, 'The crass simplicity of this world view' and describes it as 'comforting idiocy'.¹³ This is typical of the kind of attack one can expect from New Atheism. I felt cheated because the book was not what it promised in the Preface. I had, after all, a sincere desire to better understand atheism. Instead of a balanced dialogue the book rubbished belief in God, describing it as 'wishful thinking', 'self-delusion' and akin to believing in goblins and hobbits.¹⁴

Altruism, philanthropy and charity

Genuine faith has inspired altruism, philanthropy, and charity and acted as a stimulus in developing an enduring system of jurisprudence. There is a faith that is reasonable and welcomes intellectual

inquiry and contributes positively to the debate on issues such as social justice, human rights and the environment. Faith has produced development agencies that work tirelessly and selflessly in underdeveloped countries. Nevertheless, these neo-atheists trawl through history for supporting data to underpin their atheistic presuppositions. They ignore the positive contribution of religion to the development of society, particularly in the field of doxological science (i.e. science conducted to the glory of God).

Many of them do not have an objective approach in accumulating and evaluating data. They are biased, subjective and much of their anti-religious diatribe is more philosophical in nature than scientific and many of these people are not competent in the field of philosophy.

Rogues gallery

There are many influential atheists today but here is a sample of who's who:

Daniel Dennett is a philosopher who has argued for materialistic atheism in everything from human consciousness to evolutionary biology. He has written, *Breaking the Spell* and *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*.

Stephen Hawking is one of the world's greatest theoretical physicists. His book, *A Brief History of Time*, had a phenomenal impact when it was first published in the late 1980s. In that work he raised the prospect of a self-creating universe. This theory has since developed at length. His consistent theme is the extraneousness of the God hypothesis. Another of his influential books is *The Grand Design*.

Steven Pinker is a cognitive scientist who deconstructs all elements of human thought that might be construed as pointing to a non-material origin. With a Harvard professorship and a steady stream of popular books arguing for a materialistic view of cognition, he has been a remarkably effective apologist for atheism. Some of his best known works are *How the Mind Works* and *The Blank Slate*.

Michael Shermer, a former evangelical Christian, promotes scepticism that eliminates any vestige of supernaturalism. Founder and publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, he is an indefatigable voice for atheism through popular books, highly visible debates and television interviews, and a monthly column with *Scientific American*. His books include: *Why People Believe Weird Things* and *The Science of Good and Evil*.

Steven Weinberg is a Nobel laureate physicist and deemed to be one of the great scientists of our time. He is also a remarkably good writer, as demonstrated in his popular books on physics, which advance an atheistic view of the universe. According to him, science's greatest cultural achievement will be to eradicate religion. His books include *The First Three Minutes* and *Lake Views: This World and the Universe*.

Paul Kurtz is a preeminent advocate of secular humanism, which eschews religion in the quest for human flourishing. He has been director of the Council for Secular Humanism, edited the *Skeptical*

Inquirer, and founded *Prometheus Press*. His books include: *What is Secular Humanism?* and *Science and Religion*.

Lawrence Krauss is the darling of US television networks whom they frequently engage to discuss the relation between science and religion. A physicist with solid credentials as well as a ready pen, who has written many popular science books, Krauss has effectively used this platform to promote atheism. His books include, *Hiding in the Mirror* and *The Physics of Star Trek*.

Edward O. Wilson is the inventor of sociobiology and the inspiration behind contemporary evolutionary ethics. He started life as a Southern Baptist only to become an ardent supporter of evolutionary naturalism under the inspiration of Charles Darwin. A two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, he sacralises nature and argues that it should replace traditional conceptions of God. His books include, *Sociobiology* and *The Future of Life*.

P. Z. Myers is an associate professor of biology at the University of Minnesota. He was catapulted to atheist stardom through his popular (and outrageously blasphemous) blog 'Pharyngula'.

John Brockman is the literary agent and publicist for all the leading atheist authors. Through his Edge Foundation he channels the energies and talents of his authors, advancing what he calls 'the third culture,' an effort to integrate humanistic and scientific thought that excludes traditional religious belief. His books include, *This Will Change Everything* and *What We Believe but Cannot Prove*.

Philip Pullman is an Oxford-educated, best-selling author. He sees himself as 'undermining the basis for Christian belief.' Viewing C. S. Lewis's *Narnia* series as religious propaganda, he has written his *Dark Materials* trilogy as an atheistic foil. He has also written a fictional account of Jesus, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* representing Christ as a cynically manipulating deceiver.

Barbara Forrest is an active secular humanist who came to prominence as the leading philosophical voice against the form of creationism known as intelligent design. Criticising intelligent design as religious propaganda and as an attempt to insert God into educational curricula, she has been effective at making conceptual space for atheism. She has written, *Creationism's Trojan Horse*.

David Sloan Wilson is a biologist and anthropologist who argues for the pervasiveness of selection in the evolutionary process. In consequence, he sees religion itself as an adaptation that can motivate humans to cooperate and behave altruistically. At the same time, he denies that religion has any basis in transcendent reality. His books include, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* and *Darwin's Cathedral*.

Ray Kurzweil is an author, inventor and entrepreneur. He sees technology as fulfilling all aspirations previously ascribed to religion, including immortality. He argues that computing machines will soon outstrip human cognitive capacities, at which point humanity will upload itself onto a new, indestructible digital medium (an atheist version/vision of 'resurrection'). His books include, *The Age of Spiritual Machines* and *The Singularity is Near*.

The hiddenness of God

Without faith, God is hidden and even with faith there are times when God seems to be concealed. The idea of God's hiddenness is expressed in Scripture, for example, the lament of the Psalm, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.' (Psalm 22:1-2). Isaiah also expresses this sentiment, 'Truly, you are a God who hides himself' (Isaiah 45:15). But both authors (David and Isaiah) knew God well. This merely reflects moments in their experience. God's Hiddenness is not a valid excuse for non-belief.

One of the first philosophers to contemplate the problem of hiddenness was Anselm of Canterbury who in his *Proslogion* complains:

I have never seen thee, O Lord my God; I do not know thy form. What, O most high Lord, shall this man do, an exile far from thee? What shall thy servant do, anxious in his love of thee, and cast out afar from thy face? He pants to see thee, and thy face is too far from him. He longs to come to thee, and thy dwelling place is inaccessible. He is eager to find thee, and knows not thy place. He desires to seek thee, and does not know thy face. Lord, thou art my God, and thou art my Lord, yet never have I seen thee. It is thou that hast made me, and hast made me anew, and hast bestowed upon me all the blessings I enjoy; and not yet do I know thee. Finally, I was created to see thee and not yet have I done that for which I was made.¹⁵

A person may be stubbornly blind to evidence of the divine, but the claim is that some non-believers have tried hard to believe in God. Schellenberg introduced the distinction between culpable and inculpable non-belief, where the latter is defined as 'non-belief that exists through no fault of the non-believer.'¹⁶

However, human beings possess an intuitive sense of God. This *sensus divinitatis* (sense of divinity) means that the presence of God is universally perceived by all humans. Paul Helm explains, 'Calvin's use of the term "sense" signals that the knowledge of God is a common human endowment; mankind is created not only as capable of knowing God, but as actually knowing him.'¹⁷ Thus there is no inculpable or reasonable non-belief. Jonathan Edwards (the eighteenth-century American theologian) claimed that while every human being has been granted the capacity to know God, successful use of these capacities requires an attitude of 'true benevolence', a willingness to be open to the truth about God. Thus, the failure of non-believers to see 'divine things' is due to 'a dreadful stupidity of mind, occasioning a sottish insensibility of their truth and importance.'

Cognitive idolatry

Today's aggressive atheists demand that God should prove his existence. A detailed treatment of these kinds of demands, and their moral implication, is provided by Paul Moser who calls this 'cognitive idolatry'.¹⁸ He defines idolatry as 'our not letting the true God be Lord in our lives' and instead committing to something other than God by pursuing a quest for self-realisation on our own terms:

Cognitive idolatry relies on a standard for knowledge that excludes the primacy of the morally self-transforming knowledge of God central to knowing God as Lord. It rests on an epistemological standard, whether empiricist, rationalist, or some hybrid that does not let

God be Lord. Such idolatry aims to protect one's lifestyle from serious challenge by the God who calls, convicts, and reconciles. It disallows knowledge of God as personal subject and Lord to whom we are morally and cognitively responsible. It allows at most for knowledge of God as an undemanding object of human knowledge.¹⁹

Dangerous dogmatism

New Atheism is a form of dogmatism which could be described as scientific imperialism. Michael Novak reviewing books by Sam Harris, Daniel C. Dennett and Richard Dawkins writes: 'all three pretend that atheists "question everything" and "submit to relentless, almost tedious, self-criticism."' Yet in these books there is not a shred of evidence that their authors have ever had any doubts whatever about the rightness of their own atheism.²⁰ Stephen Jay Gould criticised Richard Dawkins for having a 'Darwinian fundamentalism' and 'uncompromising ideology'.²¹

Harris has been criticised by some of his fellow contributors at *The Huffington Post*. In particular, R. J. Eskow has accused him of fostering intolerance towards faith, potentially as damaging as the religious fanaticism which he opposes.²² Madeleine Bunting wrote in *The Guardian* that books by the so-called 'Four Horsemen' of the New Atheism (Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens) are 'deeply political,' sharing a 'loathing' of the role of religion in American culture and politics. Quoting Harris as saying, 'some propositions are so dangerous that it may even be ethical to kill people for believing them,' Bunting says '[t]his sounds like exactly the kind of argument put forward by those who ran the Inquisition.'²³ Quoting the same passage, theologian Catherine Keller asks, '...could there be a more dangerous proposition than that?'²⁴

If there is no God

In Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* there is the famous argument that if there is no God, all things are permitted: "'But what will become of men then?' I asked him, 'without God and immortal life? All things are lawful then, they can do what they like?'" In his Templeton Prize address Alexander Solzhenitsyn said:

Over a half century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of old people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.' Since then I have spent well-nigh fifty years working on the history of our revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.'²⁵

Well-functioning human beings are typically aware of actions as being right and wrong. Furthermore, this awareness binds them to certain obligations. A proposition such as, 'torturing babies for fun is wrong' is generally regarded as a statement of fact, a position known as moral realism.²⁶ The existence of God provides a better explanation for this than various alternatives.

Social organisation strategies in the West (such as systems of jurisprudence) have evolved over time and are based on the transcendent ethical code of the Commandments. If morality is transcendental in nature then theism provides the best explanation for this. Thus, the existence of morality provides

good grounds for belief in God. He made people in his image and morality reflects something of his nature. Thus morality is best explained within a theistic hypothesis; if God does not exist, then objective moral values do not exist. But objective values *do* exist and thus we must conclude that God exists.

Belief in God cannot be adequately explained in terms of psychological and sociological hypotheses. Although I believe there is sufficient evidence for the existence of God to warrant sincere investigation it must also be said that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.²⁷ Faith is more than a shared neurological and cultural framework based on cognitive processes in the brain. Even if it were then it could be argued that those who don't possess it are cerebrally deficient. This runs counter to the widely held view of atheists that believers are stupid. Belief in God is one of the most powerful impulses in human development and a strong impetus to personal transformation and collective progress. There are countless examples of its transformational power and faith should be acknowledged as a constructive force that makes a positive difference in the lives of individuals and communities.

David and Goliath

It was noted earlier that in his confrontation with Goliath David possessed five noteworthy qualities: confidence in God, experience in defending the flock, a spirit grieved to hear the Lord's name being profaned, a courageous heart and a desire 'that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel' (1 Sam 17:46). In closing it might be helpful to make some pastoral observations on those points.

What does it mean to have confidence in God?

Having sufficient confidence in God to enter such an arena is not the same as possessing self-assurance based on intellectual ability, level of education or aptitude for communication. Rather it comes from knowing who God is – a spiritual perspective which understands the relative proportion of things such as human wisdom in relation to the infinite wisdom of God. Knowing God comes from a meaningful relationship with the Lord which is cultivated (through prayer and reading Scripture) in times of intimate and dynamic communion. Such frequent encounters with God fortify the soul for battle.

What does it mean to defend the flock?

It is a pastoral duty not only to feed the flock but to also fend off predators. The welfare of God's people is well served by those who preach pastorally and prophetically. Christ-centred, Spirit-filled expository preaching of God's Word will minister to the mind as well as heart and will. Preaching that bridges the worlds of the ancient text and the contemporary context will have an apologetic emphasis, dispelling doubt, defending faith and creating a safe space for critical examination of relevant intellectual issues at all levels. Just as David refined his skill in the regular performance of his duty to the flock, so too the spiritual shepherds of today need to develop in their roles as defenders of their people.

What does it mean to have a spirit that is grieved to hear the Lord's name profaned?

Those who cultivate a close relationship with God will be possessed with something of the mind and heart of the Lord. Such was the case with Paul in Athens; Acts 17 records that he *was* 'greatly

distressed to see that the city was full of idols' (v.16, NIV). Seeing as God sees will result in feeling as God feels. The next verse tells us how Paul responded to the situation: 'So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day'. How reminiscent this is of God's own gracious invitation to engage with those estranged from him: 'Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool' (Isaiah 1:18). Believers need to engage in this same kind of rational dialogue in both sacred and secular space so that spiritual/biblical discourse has an apologetic emphasis that addresses questions people are asking.

What does it mean to have a courageous heart?

Engaging in the embattling apologetics of New Atheism is a daunting prospect for most believers and 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'. But having a courageous heart means preferring a potentially humiliating defeat rather than cowardly observing the Lord's name being traduced. David had a desire 'that all the earth may know that there is a God...' (1 Samuel 17:46). The apostle Paul said 'we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12). Who would not be afraid of such a fight? But God has supplied the armour. In the very next verse Paul says 'Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm' (v.13). The word 'Therefore' emphasises the necessity for spiritual weaponry in this war of worldviews. In vivid terms he explains that truth, righteousness, faith and the Word of God are necessary in this cosmic combat.

David stepped forward in the name of his God and although the opposition was frightening to others, it was not overwhelming to him. A great victory was wrought that day which inspired the people of God and instilled fear in the hearts of those who were their enemies. Such exemplary qualities are needed today at a time when the deity is being publicly mocked. Let us do all that we can to champion the cause of the Lord today!

What does it mean to have a desire 'that all the earth may know that there is a God'?

The apostle Peter charged believers about the necessity of 'always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect' (1 Peter 3:15). This is not an instruction just for pastors, missionaries and those engaged in apologetics. This is what all believers must do and we need to consider our own role in encouraging atheism by our moral shortcomings and intellectual laziness. Those who profess faith in God need to reveal something of that divine nature and not conceal it or distort it. Let us love the Lord with all our hearts, souls and minds.

The believer's hope is a reasonable faith in the existence of God and must be presented as such in a spirit of humility. Christians must create a safe space for those with intellectual doubts to ask questions and find answers without recrimination. To respect other people's views does not necessarily mean that we agree with them. Making God known in contemporary culture will involve dialogue in the public forum as much as in the pulpit and pews. The secular humanist desire to write

the obituary for religion is futile. It is not so much that God is back but rather that he has never gone away.²⁸

Religion is experiencing a resurgence in the twenty-first-century and this provides a new opportunity to make the true God known, not only through everyday interaction with friends, colleagues and neighbours but also preaching and teaching within the church, Christian publications and training seminars. The virtual community of our global village (with its social networks, websites and blogs) means that everybody has opportunity to speak out so that 'all the earth may know that there is a God'

¹ Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission.

² The word 'atheist' is derived from Greek, 'a' means 'not' and 'theos' means 'god'. Thus its very name expresses its negativity.

³ Similar to what is happening in North Korea today.

⁴ C.f. Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes* (HarperCollins, 2006), 41-43.

⁵ R Elsie, *A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology, and Folk Culture*, (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 18.

⁶ This 11.9% 'Nonreligious' refers to persons professing no religion, nonbelievers, agnostics, freethinkers, uninterested, or the lapsed religious secularists who are indifferent to all religion but not militantly so. The 2.3% 'Atheist' refers to persons professing atheism, scepticism, disbelief, or irreligion, including the militantly antireligious who are opposed to all religion. Although there are millions of Christians and millions of people of other faiths in China the vast majority of people are irreligious. Including them in the statistics would change the percentages significantly. However, is irreligion not an imposed order? As religion is licensed and monitored to ensure compliance with strict regulations much of the Christian church in China is, of necessity, underground and therefore under the radar of accurate/reliable statistical analysis.

⁷ *Social values, Science and Technology*, 7–11. This survey was requested by Directorate General Research and coordinated by Directorate General Press and Communication. The fieldwork was conducted January - February 2005 and Published in June 2005. It is available on the internet in PDF at the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_225_report_en.pdf (Retrieved 1/3/2012).

⁸ Phil Zuckerman, Michael T. Martin, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press), 51.

⁹ 'Characteristics of the Population', Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006.

¹⁰ 'Worldwide Adherents of All Religions by Six Continental Areas', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2005.

¹¹ C.f. Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion* (SPCK, 2007).

¹² Julian Baggini, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction*, Preface (no page number), (Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹³ Op. cit., 10.

¹⁴ Op. cit., 21 and 17 respectively.

¹⁵ Daniel Howard-Snyder, Paul K. Moser, cited in the introduction to *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ John L. Schellenberg, (2005). 'The hiddenness argument revisited (I)', *Religious Studies*, Cambridge University Press, 41 (2), 201-215.

¹⁷ Paul Helm, 'John Calvin, the Sensus Divinitatis, and the noetic effects of sin', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43 (2), 1998, 87–107.

¹⁸ Paul Moser, 'Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding', *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Michael Novak, 'Lonely Atheists of the Global Village', *National Review*, March 19, 2007.

²¹ Stephen Jay Gould, 'Darwinian Fundamentalism', *The New York Review of Books*, June 12, 1997.

²² R. J. Eskow, 'Blind Faith: Sam Harris Attacks Islam', *The Huffington Post*, 11 October 2005; 'Reject Arguments for Intolerance – Even from Atheists', January, 2006, *The Huffington Post*.

²³ Madeleine Bunting, 'The New Atheists Loathe Religion Far Too Much To Plausibly Challenge It', *The Guardian*, 17 May, 2007.

²⁴ Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Fortress Press, 2008), 5.

²⁵ John S. Feinberg, Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, (1993), 2nd edition (updated and expanded) (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 697.

²⁶ C.f. Richard Boyd, 'How to Be a Moral Realist', *Essays on Moral Realism*, edited by G. Sayre-McCord (1988), 181-228.

²⁷ C.f. Alister McGrath, *Why God Won't Go Away: Engaging with New Atheism* (SPCK, 2011); Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism* (Penguin, 2008); Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (Pocket Books, 2007); Anthony Flew, *There is a God* (HarperOne, 2007).

²⁸ C.f. John Micklethwait and Adrian Woolridge, *God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World* (London: Penguin, 2009). This work succeeds in triumphantly debunking the myth of an emerging secular civilization. See also Alister McGrath, *Engaging with New Atheism: Why God won't Go Away* (London: SPCK, 2011), also Harvey G. Cox and Jan Swyngedouw 'The Myth of the Twentieth Century: The Rise and Fall of Secularization', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1/2 (Spring, 2000), 1-13, published by Nanzan University.

Review article

Stephen Clark, Minister of Freeschool Court Evangelical Church, Bridgend, UK, member of the Affinity Theological Team and Chair of the Affinity Theological Study Conference

***Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinitis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity*, Raymond Tallis, London: Acumen Publishing, 2011, 400pp, £25.00**

'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me – no, nor woman neither...'

Shakespeare's Hamlet may have been given to hyperbole, and yet there is something profoundly biblical about his description of humanity: on the one hand, he glories in the grandeur of man made in God's image ('in apprehension, how like a god') but at the same time he knows that we are dust; we share much with the animal kingdom and yet we are 'the paragon of animals'. And, just for good measure, again and again Shakespeare portrays, with frightening clarity, the depths of depravity to which this god-like being, formed of dust, can sink: 'But man, proud man, dress'd in a little brief authority, most ignorant of what he's most assur'd, his glassy essence, like an angry ape, plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven as makes the angels weep...'

Things have moved on (or seriously backwards, depending on your point of view) since Shakespeare's day. Man has been drastically cut down to size: since Darwin's time he has been portrayed by Desmond Morris as 'the naked ape' (or, not much better, by Sir Solly Zuckerman as 'the trousered primate'), while more recently his mental activity has been reduced to, and identified with, neuronal activity in the brain, and this, in turn, has been explicated by invoking the model of the computer and information technology. A myriad pop science books have popularised this idea of humanity. If Nietzsche proclaimed 'the death of God' in the nineteenth century, it is hardly surprising if we have witnessed the death of man (made in God's image) in the twentieth and twenty first century. Thus B.F. Skinner: 'To man *qua* man we readily say good riddance.'

All of which is supremely important for the Christian in general, and for the Christian evangelist and apologist in particular: for not only does this kind of thinking come into head-on collision with the biblical description of humanity, it also has serious implications for the presentation of the Christian gospel. If we are nothing but an evolved animal with a highly sophisticated kind of computer – that is to say, if we and our behaviour are to be reduced to, and explained, by the way that our brains have evolved – then this strips away both our dignity and our uniqueness. It also, at the very least, raises questions as to whether the concept of responsibility is really that meaningful: machines, after all, lack moral capacity. With a wave of the neurobiologist's wand the idea of humanity in sin disappears: for human beings are not so human, after all, and sin ceases to be meaningful.

Enter Raymond Tallis. *Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinitis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity* is a *tour de force* which demonstrates the inadequate scientific basis for this popular view of what it means to be human, as well as identifying the philosophical confusions which abound

when consciousness is reduced to, or identified with, neuronal activity in the brain. Tallis is well qualified to write such a book. Formerly Professor of Geriatric Medicine at Manchester University, with a special interest and expertise in treating stroke victims and those suffering from epilepsy, he is fully conversant with what MRI can do, as well as with what it *cannot* do. He gives a most illuminating and helpful introduction to certain aspects of neuroscience and to what MRI does. He demonstrates that the explosion of *neuro* prefixed studies (some professors of literature even seeking to explain and account for the poetry of John Donne in terms of neuronal activity) is a silly fad, pursued by those who have been seduced by pop pseudo-science into thinking they are saying something very profound when, in reality, Tallis demonstrates that they do not know what they are talking about.

But it is not only the uninformed whom Tallis excoriates: academics, distinguished neuroscientists, as well as distinguished biologists and neuroscientists who write at the popular level (such as John Gray [*Straw Dogs*], Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker) come somewhat limp out of Tallis's grip. His exposure of the sleight of hand practised by some writers who take the term 'information', in the sense of that which conveys meaning, and then employ it in the way in which it is used in computer science, is quite masterly. Part of the reason for the effectiveness of Tallis's critique of what he calls 'neuromania' is that, in addition to being expert in the area of neuroscience, Tallis is fully at home in the world of philosophy. He pinpoints the category errors and the confusion of thought which abound when those who should know better confuse 'the self' with its brain. There is a fascinating thought experiment in which Tallis shows that it is, quite simply, illogical to equate, identify, or reduce consciousness to neuronal activity in the brain. Small wonder, then, that the 'blurb' carries high commendation not only from a leading neuroscientist but also from philosopher Roger Scruton. Tallis is a true polymath.

In addition to the intellectual disease, which he denotes by the term 'neuromania', he also identifies another disease that is damaging the minds (yes, that's the right word: according to Tallis, we have a mind) of many: *Darwinitis*. To try to explain why John falls madly in love with Jane, chooses to live in a certain suburb and travel to work each day by car, in terms of an evolutionary past and the way that this has 'hardwired' our brains, is, according to Tallis, just plain silly, and he has no difficulty in proving why this is so.

You may think that Tallis is a conservative Christian or, at the very least, some kind of Cartesian dualist who is critical of Darwinism. But you would be mistaken. He is, in fact, a confessed atheist, and proud of the fact; he believes in the theory of evolution; and he is not a Cartesian dualist. But this is what makes his book such fascinating reading. Here is an evolutionist who is critical of the way in which many of the advocates of that theory invoke it as the explanation for everything about us. Here is an atheist who appears to be embarrassed at the way that some of his fellow atheists advance their cause. Here is someone who is not a Cartesian dualist but who provides a powerful critique of the way in which many today would reduce us to the level of a machine. As such, Tallis joins the ranks of a distinguished line of writers who, while not professing Christian faith or even any religious faith, have been critical of the way in which some have, under the respectable cloak of science, sought to advance philosophical positions which have no real foundation in science: one thinks of the Nobel Prize winning neuroscientist, the late Sir John Eccles, and of his philosophical mentor, the late Sir Karl Popper, and of Oxford mathematician, Professor Roger Penrose.

The Israelites sometimes plundered their enemies and the enemies of the Lord. The apostle Paul could quote pagan poets who, because of common grace, had valid insights into the nature of God and humanity. Of course this does not mean that he agreed with everything that they said. So with Tallis's book; there will be things with which an evangelical Christian is bound to disagree. Tallis, after all, is a confessed humanist; and the basis upon which he argues for the uniqueness of humanity and the value of human culture does not take account of that which truly distinguishes us from other animals and the most sophisticated machines, viz., that we have been created in God's image. He does, nevertheless, present a powerful critique of the idea that is being drip-fed by pop science into the popular consciousness, namely that there is nothing that is unique about human beings. As Nehemiah had to clear away rubbish and rubble before the rebuilding of the wall could be completed, so, in the work of evangelism, faced, as we sometimes are, with people who have been brain-washed into believing what pop science tells them, there is great need and can be great value, before presenting the gospel, in clearing away the intellectual rubbish and rubble that gets in the way of people hearing the message. Tallis's book is, at points, an ally in this work. In his memorable British Evangelical Council address, *The State of the Nation*, the late Dr Lloyd-Jones pressed John Eccles's philosophical work *Facing Reality* into service in this way. We, in another generation, could do a lot worse than do the same with this masterly work by Ray Tallis. It is highly recommended reading.

Book review

Gareth Williams, Pastor of Bala Evangelical Church, North Wales, UK

***Christ-centred Biblical Theology*, Graeme Goldsworthy, Apollos (IVP), 2012, 250pp, £14.99**

Graeme Goldsworthy, and those through Moore College who have developed the kind of biblical theology it has become known for, owe a considerable debt to their mentor Donald Robinson (p.14), former vice-principal of Moore (1959-73) and, later, Archbishop of Sydney (1982-93). This book is a personal tribute to him, and aims, as Robinson apparently did, to inject biblical theology, and his particular notion of it, into our veins.

Whilst there is repetition and recapitulation in the book, especially with regards to Donald Robinson's ideas, the book is nevertheless fresh and stimulating. For those familiar with the subject, the repetition could suggest that some of the chapters might have been more clearly arranged; for those less familiar, the repetition will help to enforce and clarify central concerns. The book builds on Goldsworthy's previous works, most notably his *According to Plan* and *Gospel-Centred Hermeneutics* and, like those works, opens gates further into contemporary fields of biblical theology.

For Goldsworthy and many others, biblical theology presupposes the unity of Scriptural revelation and understands that revelation to be progressive. It purports to provide 'a 'big picture' that makes sense out of the '...bulk and variety of the biblical literature... [and seeks] to view the whole scene of God's revelation from the heights... and allow God to show us his one mighty plan from creation to new creation' (p.19). This 'plan' is what biblical theology seeks to understand. Is there one principal theological message within it, or are there several messages? Goldsworthy leans to the former, but recognises that others see, rather, a multiplex progression of irreducible theological themes. He is aware that his own position is open to the charge of reductionism, and therefore, of being simplistic, and acknowledges the dangers inherent in seeking to ascertain a biblical centre (p.102f, p.196), or, perhaps, an organising principle – knowing that one 'small' piece of textual evidence can 'throw the system'. Notwithstanding, he is persuaded that the whole Bible has one over-arching theological theme, or message. His aim in the book is to open out the question of the nature of 'the Bible's unity in diversity, and the role of Jesus Christ as the centre to which all Scripture leads' (p.32, p.40). Connecting the narratives of Israel with the Gospels, he seeks to point out revelation's progression from creation to new creation, by focusing on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He believes that this biblical theology is 'at the heart of evangelical hermeneutics and is absolutely indispensable in expository preaching... the heartbeat of effective pastoral ministry' (p.23, and some excellent practical points, p.193f).

Biblical theology's premise is that the Bible must be allowed to speak for itself, from within its own genres and structures. There is likely to be a distinction, then, between the study of the Bible in its own terms (p.22) and the church's doctrinal formulae of it. Compared with the traditionally more familiar systematic theology, biblical theology (it claims) more evidently allows Scripture's own theological emphases to emerge and makes theological interpretation less prone to philosophical

encrustation; Goldsworthy seeks a theological framework which maximally off-loads unbiblical baggage.

Robinson's system was not entirely his own. A. Gabriel Hebert (an Anglo-Catholic), based on an earlier work by W. J. Phythian-Adams, was simultaneously developing a threefold structure, such that Goldsworthy properly sees a Robinson-Hebert model (p.21f). Both were influenced by O. Cullman and C. H. Dodd (pp.21, 78f). The 'big picture' in this model is the outworking of God's promise to Abraham (pp.22-23). Its threefold structure is

(a) the historical experience of the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham through the Exodus to the kingdom of David's son in the land of inheritance, (b) the projection of this fulfilment into the future of the day of the Lord, by the prophets, during the period of decline, fall, exile, and return, and (c) the true fulfilment in Christ and the Spirit in Jesus' incarnation, death, resurrection, exaltation and in his parousia as judge and saviour in a new heaven and new earth' (pp.22-23, 170).

Simplified by Goldsworthy, this is 'biblical history from creation, and especially from Abraham, to Solomon; the eschatology of the writing prophets; and the fulfilment of all things in Christ' (p.25, detail on pp.111-169).

Such an understanding of biblical theology was predated, however, by Geerhardus Vos (p.80f), whose approach was taken up by John Murray (p.112), and more recently by Edmund P. Clowney (pp.84f, 111-114ff). This Westminster approach sees the progression of revelation more evidently in terms of epochs (with their ever-expanding horizons of context), whereas Moore generally sees the theological theme(s) running longitudinally, with greater fluidity, through the epochs. The question Goldsworthy and others wish to answer is, which of these two or other systems most accurately reflects and conveys the Bible's own revelation?

There seems little doubt that writing either a New Testament theology or an Old Testament theology is easier than writing a comprehensive and coherent Biblical theology (p.94), but, as Goldsworthy argues, a New Testament theology cut loose of its Old Testament moorings is of questionable value, as also is an Old Testament theology not coalescing in Christ (so pp.225-227). A satisfying biblical theology, he argues, embraces both. Goldsworthy acknowledges warmly the recent efforts made, amongst others, by Charles Scobie (who does not see a single over-arching theme of the Old Testament, pp.93-96), Sydney Greidanus (who has a multiplex approach, pp.92-93 and pp.104-108, typo. p.104), William J. Dumbrell (who holds a covenant framework yet with multi-themes; pp.90-92) and Willem VanGemeren (developing Westminster's redemptive-historical approach, pp.89-90). N. T. Wright receives somewhat cursory treatment but is represented, Goldsworthy believes, by Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen (who see the Bible as a six-act story, narrative or drama, with the kingdom of God its central theme, and the covenant a subsidiary one, pp.97-98). In a helpful discussion on biblical typology, Goldsworthy shares particularly G. von Rad's conclusions: whilst typology has to do with an intensification of essential truths contained within persons, events and institutions, it is better to see the whole Old Testament as a developing typological repository, all themes finding their ultimate fulfilment in the antitype of the person and work of Christ (pp.179-184). Hence, for Goldsworthy, at least, biblical theology is Christ-centred.

It seems to this reviewer that whilst an 'inductive' approach to ascertaining the theology of the Bible is entirely appropriate, it becomes increasingly difficult, once a particular schema has emerged, not then to look for it in every nook and cranny of Scripture, and even more difficult not to impose it on the interpretation of the text. And the perennial presuppositional problem remains: Is the Bible essentially Theo- or Christo-centric? Is God in the Old Testament clearly Trinitarian or do we see this only with New Testament hindsight? And given the New Testament's clarity, to what extent to do we then read Christ in (or into) the Old Testament, and how ought we to read him so? Goldsworthy is fully aware of these questions. He respects V. Poythress' *God-centered Biblical Interpretation*, for example (p.44), and embraces Calvin's ultimate presuppositional start-point in the *Institutes* (p.41). Instead of the threefold structure, arranged around the centrality of Christ, however, some may prefer to see the organising paradigm of Scripture as 'covenantal,' others 'redemptive,' based on an 'Exodus-new Exodus' motif. And given God's revelation through both of these, and set within a creation-new creation framework, a theocentric approach may lead some to seeing the attributes of God as having centrality, which could, of course, attract the imposition of systematic criteria. For a comprehensive biblical theology, some systematic input is unavoidable (cf. p.42). Just as evangelicals believe both Creation and Scripture to have the same Author, we take it that pure biblical and systematic theology ought, ultimately, to present the same truth – but at least one of them will need to bend for this to be achieved.

From the point of view of a completed canon, and the use the New Testament makes of the Old Testament, there are clear grounds for reading Christological significance back into the Old Testament. For Goldsworthy, preaching the Old Testament's testimony to Christ takes precedence over preaching its testimony to authentic Christian life today (p.30-32), despite Paul's having stated 'these things were written for our instruction' (1 Cor 10:11). Whilst favourably citing VanGemeren as saying, 'Christian students of the Old Testament must pass by the cross of Jesus Christ on their return to the Old Testament, and as such they can never lose their identity as a Christian' (p.89), Goldsworthy emphasises more the centrality of Christ's Person than his work (although it is taken that his frequent use of 'Christ' subsumes Christ's 'Person and work', cf. p.184). His, 'Thus I stand by my initial suggestion that the central theme of Scripture is the kingdom of God defined simply as God's people in God's place under God's rule,' (pp.71-75) jars somewhat with the christocentricity underlined elsewhere in the book (e.g., p.80). The reader has to make the connection between the kingdom 'theme' and Christ as 'the centre to which all Scripture leads.'

No-one is likely to agree entirely with Robinson's insights on 'Israel and the Church' (pp.201-206) and 'Baptism' (pp.208-213), but they provoke response in a refreshing manner. The book closes with two examples of biblical-theological themes worked through the Old Testament and into the New Testament within the threefold structure, namely the temple (esp. p.220) and prayer (esp. p.222).

There is plenty here for everyone to muse upon, to reflect upon and maybe to re-think through, such as the place biblical theology should occupy in a college curriculum (pp.33-37) – there are, apparently, some 5,000 students in Latin America alone presently studying these methods through Moore.

Book review

Paul Yeulett, Pastor of Shrewsbury Evangelical Church, Shropshire, UK

***To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*, David K. Clark, Crossway, 2003, 464 pp, \$35.00.**

This is part of a series entitled Foundations of Evangelical Theology, published by Crossway Books. Four books have been published so far and a further six are in the planning stages.

It needs to be stressed at the outset that Clark's work, unlike the other titles in the series, is not a text book of theology *per se*; rather it is a book about how to do theology. For this reason it reads more like a work of philosophy than theology. Central to his thesis is the understanding that 'theology' is something more than 'doctrine'. The series introduction itself acknowledges that 'systematic theology is not divine revelation. Theologizing of any sort is a human conceptual enterprise' (p.xv). So in this regard Clark draws a distinction between *scientia*, the science or knowledge of God and *sapientia*, the wisdom which results in 'the formation of God's life and character in human believers and communities' (p.87). Throughout this book Clark urges the reader to move beyond the raw materials of *scientia* and pursue God-honouring *sapientia*.

By any account Clark's book is a *magnum opus*. It is a book to be read on a long train journey, or perhaps during many uninterrupted evenings sitting by the fire, if such luxuries are available. Each chapter probably needs to be read through at least twice before its contents will become part of the reader's mental furniture. It is no surprise to discover that this work was 'the better part of a decade' (p.xix) in the making.

When I was studying theology at an undergraduate level I took an elective course on the subject of hermeneutics and encountered many of the themes that Clark handles here. Having read the first few pages, I immediately began to wish that this had been one of the required textbooks for the course. The titles of his twelve chapters illustrate both the great breadth of Clark's expertise and the vastness and diversity of the fields with which theology interacts. Perhaps the best advertisement for alluring prospective readers would simply be to list these chapter titles, because they are quite mouth-watering:

1. Concepts of Theology; 2. Scripture and the Principle of Authority; 3. Theology in Cultural Context; 4. Diverse Perspectives and Theological Knowledge; 5. Unity in the Theological Disciplines; 6. Theology in the Academic World; 7. The Spiritual Purpose of Theology; 8. Theology and the Sciences; 9. Theology and Philosophy; 10. Christian Theology and the World Religions; 11. Reality, Truth and Language; 12. Theological Language and Spiritual Life.

Each chapter ends with a brief conclusion, which also functions as a bridge into the next chapter, so that the reader's interest is carried forward. However, it might have assisted the reader more if these conclusions consisted of more pithy summaries, perhaps in the form of bullet points. This way, the chief findings of each chapter might 'stick' in readers' minds more readily.

To say that this book is written for a highly academic readership is not a criticism in and of itself, but it does mean that its usefulness may be somewhat restricted unless pastors who have mastered its contents can put some of its best principles – and there are several valuable principles – into concrete action. Clark is at his most lucid when he is employing anecdotes and illustrations. For the pastor, a greater number of such fleshed-out applications would be extremely welcome. It is quite apparent that Clark's intended readership resides in the academy rather than the church. Although he states his belief that 'the home of theology is the church', Clark's own theology seems to be away from home most of the time. His lament over 'the isolation of Christian theology in general (and evangelical theology in particular) from the academy' (p.198) is itself very eloquent, because throughout this book his central aim appears to be securing the intellectual acceptance – by the academy – of this 'evangelical theology'.

We need to ask quite seriously whether that is ever an attainable or even a truly honourable objective. For example, Clark does not want to see science and theology at war with one another. Neither, I am sure, do most of us, but how can this warfare ever be satisfactorily ended? The 'complementarity approach' between theology and science (p.278) appears plausible to Christians who are scientists, but it cannot truly appeal to scientists who have rejected out of hand all spiritual explanations of reality. Clark admits that 'defenders of scientism ridicule the idea that science could benefit from theology' (p.287). What could cause these 'defenders of scientism' to change their minds other than a fundamental change of presuppositions – viz. an evangelical conversion? Clark seems rather anxious to demonstrate, above all else, that he is listening intently to the post-modern voices all around him. Typically he rejects all the 'hard' expressions of postmodernism – multiculturalism, perspectivalism and foundationalism – but is willing to accommodate himself to 'soft' versions of these philosophies. What are his motives – intellectual respectability or the desire to be faithful to the God of the Bible? Can these two coexist comfortably?

Clark is keen to emphasise that 'the Bible itself (as best we can understand it) must finally judge any insight that arises from any cultural frame of reference' (p.119). But does the Bible only have a role to play at the end of the process? Must not the Scriptures be formative of our philosophy as well as adjudicative? Clark's entire thesis would have persuaded me far more if he had grounded his own reflections in his understanding of the Bible as his primary text. In certain respects the Thomist approach described in the final chapter: 'He (Aquinas) did not look to Scripture and build a case that Scripture uses language in a particular way' (p.389) is descriptive of Clark's own method. The Scriptures are opened up for illustrative purposes rather more than they are to establish points of doctrine.

It is also somewhat ironic, though perhaps inevitable, that Clark's method, as well as his style, feels resoundingly 'modernist' despite his sympathetic stance towards aspects of a post-modern approach. In Chapter 1 he makes the basic point that an inductive style of theology is inadequate for communication in today's world. Here, as in several other works on this subject, Charles Hodge is held up as the chief exemplar of the inductive method. In this regard Hodge has been much maligned, and I believe that Clark's statement that Hodge 'assumed that the human mind is relatively passive' (p.49) in the inductive process is not entirely fair to the latter. What is undoubtedly true is that Hodge was not exposed to the rich tapestry of multiculturalism, far less the

postmodernism, which constitutes the contemporary milieu. But that should certainly not cause us to discard him.

The irony here is that it is hard to see how a book of this kind could ever be written without a method that makes so much of propositions. The main difference between Hodge and Clark is that the former seeks to obtain his propositions from Scripture alone. Clark would maintain that this is effectively impossible because we all bring our cultural baggage with us to the interpretive process. The question we must surely ask is this: does not the Scripture, in all its variety of genre, furnish us with propositions that are intelligible, authoritative and ultimately unanswerable? 'Let God be true, and every man a liar' (Rom. 3:4). Which propositions will win the day: Biblical ones or post-modern ones?

Clark's twelve-point conclusion at the end of the book makes for interesting and provocative reflection, though I was disappointed by this statement: 'I find myself compelled to believe that the way of historic faith in Jesus Christ is the most humane path to spiritual life' (p.423). Here is undoubtedly a conciliatory step too far in the direction of unbelieving academic colleagues.

Nevertheless, the potential usefulness of this book is very considerable. What is needed now is for pastor-scholars to pick up some of its themes, subject them to careful critique, and run with them in a church context. There follow a few observations in this regard (and I write as a pastor).

In Chapter 7, *The Spiritual Purposes of Theology*, Clark deals with the fraught issue of how to 'define evangelical self-identity and to specify our place on the theological spectrum' (p.223). In this context he identifies two different modes of thinking, consideration of which is quite thought-provoking. One is 'bounded set thinking' in which, for example, a person belongs to a certain category or group because he holds certain beliefs or practises certain types of behaviour. The second is 'centered (sic) set thinking' in which, on the other hand, the key consideration is how a person is moving relative to some defined centre. Reflection on these two modes of thinking, and the tension between them, would be a useful exercise in a variety of pastoral contexts. Are we quite happy with our church members just as long as they tick certain 'boxes', submitting to the church constitution and behaving acceptably; or are we observing the trajectory that their lives are taking? In relation to the latter, Clark suggests that the most important question which we can ask professing Christians is simply this: 'Whom do you truly love?' (p.227); a good question for us all to ask ourselves, frequently.

Clark is undoubtedly right to highlight the issue of *Unity in the Theological Disciplines* (Chapter 5). He shows that the differing perspectives and presuppositions brought by the practitioners of different fields can lead to confusion and contradiction. Every pastor needs a certain level of competence across these fields, and some work needs to be done in establishing parameters within which these disciplines operate within an unashamedly evangelical context.

His demolition of the realist pluralism of John Hick (pp.332-7) and the nonrealist pluralism of Gordon Kaufman (pp.337-45) are devastating in their effect. Not only that, but the viewpoints which they represent are shown to be clearly out of kilter with the way the majority of 'religious' people think, especially outside the Western world. I can remember encountering a disciple of Don Cupitt in a

university context several years ago and being astounded that ‘nonrealists’ actually exist! Clark will come to our aid powerfully on this subject.

As a philosopher of language Clark excels, and it is in the final two chapters that the most helpful applications of all emerge. Clark’s discussion on *Speech Acts* (pp.410-417) is one of the most compelling of all the sections in the book. Kevin Vanhoozer, among others, has done outstanding work in this field, but it would be good to see some of this theory being applied more specifically to the act of preaching. At the very least, the pastor who works his way through this book will certainly start to find that he is giving more careful attention to his choice of words when he preaches. Yet even here there needs to be a note of caution, because it is not our words alone that communicate life and power, but the Holy Spirit working through them.

Perhaps a book which was ten years in the making deserves to be ten years in the reading, digesting and disseminating! This book requires a considerable amount of distillation if it is to attain to its full potential. And one key consideration here is that busy pastors simply haven’t the time to wade through books of this density more than once, if they manage it at all. It could be that a more collegiate approach – for example seminars that address Clark’s themes – would be the best way to enable pastors to digest this weighty, but extremely valuable, content.

Book review

Rohintan K. Mody, Vicar of St Paul's Church, Throop, Bournemouth, UK

***Only One Way?: Three Christian Responses on the Uniqueness of Christ in a Religiously Plural World*, Gavin D'Costa, Paul Knitter & Daniel Strange, SCM Press, 2011, 240pp, £25.00.**

The questions of the uniqueness of Christ and the existence of other faiths are, perhaps, the most important theological, missiological, and pastoral questions we face today. This book is a clear and fine contribution to the debate.

The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 contains the position papers. These papers outline the different approaches the authors, Gavin D'Costa, Paul Knitter, and Dan Strange have to the question of different religions by focusing topics such as their own background, theological method, God, the Trinity, Christ, salvation, mission, and interfaith dialogue. Part 2 contains critiques by each author of the other two authors to enable readers to make their own judgements on the questions being discussed. In Part 3 there are three final defences, presented by each author in light of the critiques. The level of interaction in the book, which is clear, gracious, and hard-hitting, enables readers to be exposed to both the strengths and weaknesses of each case. All the essays are well-written and good expositions of the different positions in the debate.

Gavin D'Costa sees it as his primary task to convey the teaching of the post-Vatican 2 Roman Catholic Church on the subject of the uniqueness of Christ and other faiths. D'Costa explains that while Christ is unique and the Church is necessary for salvation, nevertheless it is possible for those who die not knowing Christ to be saved, if they are 'potentially' in the Church. Thus, other religions may be a 'preparation' for the Gospel. The doctrines of purgatory and limbo may provide a solution to how some of other faiths may have a vision of Christ after death and so be saved.

Paul Knitter, although also a Roman Catholic, presents a very different perspective. He believes that theology is a mutual conversation between Christian experience and beliefs. For him, our theological beliefs are 'symbols' of God or Ultimate Reality. Thus, the Trinity, Christ, etc. are the atonement symbols of a deeper Christian reality. Knitter is indebted to Buddhism and to panentheism. Knitter has a 'non-dualistic,' 'co-inhering' understanding of God and the world, which 'deconstructs' traditional Christian understandings. Therefore, Knitter questions the 'uniqueness' of Christ, if it means that he is the 'only' saviour. For Knitter, inter-faith dialogue is accepting and learning from different faiths.

Dan Strange's paper is from a 'Protestant Reformed orthodox' or 'conservative evangelical' perspective. In terms of method, Strange argues for the primacy of Scripture, as interpreted in the creeds and Reformation solas. From this starting point, Strange argues for YHWH's transcendent uniqueness as the Trinitarian God. Strange stresses that religions are 'an idolatrous refashioning of divine revelation.' Christ and his work is unique, and faith in him is necessary for salvation. Christ is the 'subversive fulfilment' of other religions. Therefore, evangelism, mission, and critical engagement with other faiths are key tasks for the church.

In the interaction sections in Parts 2 and 3 of the book, Knitter's position comes under fierce attack from D'Costa and Strange, for its focus on human experience to the detriment of a transcendent authoritative revelation, and as being outside Christian orthodoxy. Indeed, with the best will in the world, it is difficult to see how Knitter's position is a specifically 'Christian' response to the uniqueness of Christ and other religions. The attacks by Strange and D'Costa on Knitter give the book a lop-sided feel (indeed, Knitter sees the criticisms of Strange and D'Costa as coming from the same stable.) Strange attacks D'Costa's reliance on the teaching of the Roman Catholic magisterium, which, Strange believes, risks playing down the power of sin, and exalts the power of human goodness. D'Costa criticises Strange's Calvinist commitment to total depravity and predestination/reprobation, which means that all non-Christians will be lost.

For me, the book highlights the importance of one's theological presuppositions for the questions of the uniqueness of Christ and other religions. If your starting point is that of religious experience (whether as a liberal Christian or as a non-Christian) then you will come to Knitter's pluralistic position of other religions being symbols of contact with Ultimate Reality. If you are a mainstream Roman Catholic (and, perhaps, an Arminian or 'open' evangelical) then you will agree with D'Costa's position of trying hold to both the uniqueness of Christ while allowing for the possibility of people of other faiths being saved. If you are a Reformed, conservative evangelical then you will conclude with Strange that only faith in Christ is sufficient for salvation and that other faiths are idolatrous.

I would recommend this fascinating book as a fine introduction to these critical issues.