

## Contents

### THEME: Spiritual Disciplines and the Gospel

The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry

BEVERLY VOS

page 100

Practicing Ministry in the Presence of God and in Partnership  
with God: The Ontology of Ministry and Pastoral Identity: a  
Trinitarian-Ecclesial Model

JOHN JEFFERSON DAVIS

page 115

The Problem of Evil from a Gospel Perspective

JAMES P DANAHER

page 137

Law and Gospel: The Hermeneutical/Homiletical Key to  
Reformation Theology and Ethics

THOMAS K. JOHNSON

page 143

Rethinking Postliberal Theology: Comparing and Contrasting  
Lindbeck and Vanhoozer

RICHARD A. PRUITT

page 161

Justifying Advocacy: a Biblical and Theological Rationale for  
Speaking the Truth to Power on behalf of the Vulnerable

ANDREW SLOANE

page 176

Reviews page 187

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY VOLUME 36, NO 2, April 2012

# Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews reflecting  
global evangelical theology for the purpose  
of discerning the obedience of faith*



Volume 36 No. 2 April 2012



0144-8153(201204)36:2;1-O

## ABSTRACTS/INDEXING

This journal is abstracted in Religious and Theological Abstracts, 121 South College Street (P.O. Box 215), Myerstown, PA 17067, USA, and in the Christian Periodical Index, P.O. Box 4, Cedarville, OH 45314, USA.

It is also indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606 USA, E-mail: atla@atla.com, Web: www.atla.com/

## MICROFORM

This journal is available on Microform from UMI, 300 North Zeeb Road, P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346, USA. Phone: (313)761-4700

## Subscriptions 2012

\*Sterling rates do not apply to USA and Canada subscriptions. Please see below for further information.

	Institutions and Libraries		Individuals	
Period	UK	Elsewhere Overseas*	UK	Elsewhere Overseas*
One Year:				
hard copy	£61.00	£67.00	£41.00	£45.00
electronic version	£61.00	£67.00	£41.00	£45.00
joint subscription	£74.00	£80.00	£49.00	£53.00
Two/Three Years, per year				
hard copy	£56.00	£60.00	£37.00	£40.00
electronic version	£56.00	£60.00	£37.00	£40.00
joint subscription	£67.00	£72.00	£45.00	£49.00

### All USA and Canada subscriptions to:

EBSCO Subscription Services, P.O. Box 1493, Birmingham, AL 35201-1943, USA

### All UK and International subscriptions to:

Paternoster Periodicals, c/o AlphaGraphics, 6 Angel Row, Nottingham NG1 6HL UK

Tel: UK 0800 597 5980; Fax: 0115 852 3601

Tel Overseas: +44 (0)115 852 3614; Fax +44 (0)115 852 3601

Email periodicals@alphagraphics.co.uk

### Subscriptions can be ordered online at:

www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk (Non USA and Canada subscriptions only)

### Special Offer

All orders placed via our websites will receive a 5% discount off the total price.

Rates displayed on the websites will reflect this discount

## Important Note to all Postal Subscribers

When contacting our Subscription Office in Nottingham for any reason

**always quote your Subscription Reference Number.**

## Photocopying Licensing

No part of the material in this journal may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of Paternoster Periodicals, except where a licence is held to make photocopies.

Applications for such licences should be made to the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.

It is illegal to take multiple copies of copyright material.

## Micah's Challenge

### The Church's Responsibility to the Global Poor

Edited by Marijke Hoek and Justin Thacker

'He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8)

This is Micah's challenge to Israel in his day and to the Church in our day. God called them and us to act with justice, mercy and humility in dealing with the poor. This book pulls together prophetic voices from Jim Wallis to Tony Campolo and from Ronald Sider to René Padilla and Joel Edwards to explore the theological, ethical and practical dimensions of Micah's challenge. The heart of the book is an exploration of 'acting justly', 'walking humbly', and 'loving mercy'. That call is set within a broader biblical and theological framework and followed by reflections on how we might live it out today. *Micah's Challenge* offers a passionate, biblical, and challenging call to think afresh and to act redemptively as individuals and as Christian communities.

Foreword by Gordon Brown MP, Prime Minister of Great Britain.

The Micah Network is a group of 300 Christian relief, development and justice organisations from 75 countries. This book aims to lay bare the Christian foundations of their diverse missions.

***'Micah Challenge is harnessing faith to unite Christians globally ... to deepen ... commitment to people living in poverty through prayer, service and advocacy ... I warmly welcome this book'***

Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

**Marikje Hoek** works for Network, part of the Evangelical Alliance, and is a visiting lecturer at Regents Theological College, Nantwich. **Justin Thacker** is Head of Theology at the Evangelical Alliance.

978-1-84227-606-8 / 216 x 140mm / 224 pp / £9.99

## Grace and Global Justice

### The Socio-Political Mission of the Church in an Age of Globalization

Richard Gibb

What does it mean for the twenty-first-century church to conceive of itself as a community defined by the covenant of grace? *Grace and Global Justice* explores the ramifications of this central Christian doctrine for the holistic mission of the church in the context of a globalized world. Gibb shows how the church can be a voice for justice on behalf of the global poor by affirming its mission as a community of grace.

***'Extremely insightful.'***

Richard Mouw

***'An insightful and pertinent analysis.'***

Alan Torrance

**Richard Gibb** is Assistant Minister of Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh, UK.

978-1-84227-459-0 / 229 x 152mm / 266pp / £19.99

**Paternoster, Authenticmedia Limited, 52 Presley Way, Crownhill, Milton Keynes, MK8 0ES**

# Evangelical Review of Theology

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Volume 36 • Number 2 • April 2012

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical  
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



for  
WORLD EVANGELICAL  
ALLIANCE  
Theological Commission

ISSN: 0144-8153  
Volume 36 No. 2 April 2012

Copyright © 2012 World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission

**General Editor**

Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, Germany

**Executive Editor**

Dr David Parker, Australia

**Committee**

Executive Committee of the WEA Theological Commission

Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, Germany, Executive Chair

Dr James O. Nkansah, Kenya, Vice-Chair

Dr Rosalee V. Ewell, Brasil, Executive Director

**Editorial Policy**

The articles in the Evangelical Review of Theology reflect the opinions of the authors and reviewers and do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or the Publisher.

**Manuscripts, reports and communications**

should be addressed to the Editor

Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, Friedrichstrasse 38, 53111 Bonn, Germany.

The Editors welcome recommendations of original or published articles or book reviews that relate to forthcoming issues for inclusion in the Review. Please send clear copies of details to the above address.

Email enquiries welcome: [chair\\_tc@worldea.org](mailto:chair_tc@worldea.org)  
<http://www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/commissions/tc/>

Typeset by Toucan Design, 25 Southernhay East, Exeter EX1 1NS  
and Printed in Great Britain for Paternoster Periodicals  
by AlphaGraphics, 6 Angel Row, Nottingham NG1 6HL

# Editorial: Spiritual Disciplines and the Gospel

THE IMPORTANCE OF the 'Spiritual Disciplines' for Christian ministry is our lead article in this issue. Beverly Vos, from Tasmania, points out that these disciplines are of 'prime importance' because they are a proven way of helping us 'to become more like Christ'—the heart of effective ministry.

This is a good introduction to a major study by John Jefferson Davis (USA) which draws attention to the way ministry must be practised 'in the presence of God and in partnership with God'. Drawing on insights from a range of areas, the author presents convincing theological argument 'for an *ontological* understanding of the nature of ministry and pastoral identity, in contrast to prevailing *functional* views' which is urgently needed today.

Evil is a constant companion in this life so James Danaher (USA) urges us to consider it from a gospel perspective. 'Jesus [did] not come into the world to destroy evil and suffering, but to show us how we can transform evil and suffering and therein be made evermore into God's forgiving and loving likeness.' This too is an important perspective for a world that is rent by violence and hatred.

Another constant issue for ministry is the relation between law and gospel. In fact, Thomas Johnson believes it is the historical key to understanding the Reformation, but more importantly is the normative key for understanding the gospel. In his focused study of Luther and Calvin, he presents a solid rationale for what he believes is

a 'proven tool' for understanding the Bible, pastoral care and public witness.

Going further into the practical application of gospel principles, Andrew Sloane (Australia) presents 'a biblical and theological rationale for speaking the truth to power on behalf of the vulnerable'. This systematic and theological defence of 'advocacy' is unique in its field and is worth serious attention, not only because it fills an important gap but all the more because it is 'grounded in the gospel—both in its form and content'. Furthermore, it 'works by identification with the poor' and is not only 'a legitimate expression of the gospel' but a 'costly embodiment of it'.

While our final article may seem like a theoretical discussion of theological method unrelated to our main focus, the point at issue in the parallel studies of Lindbeck and Vanhoozer by Richard Pruitt (USA) is the dynamic relationship between biblical text and the life of the Christian community. As Pruitt notes, '...the church discovers its identity... in reading the story of the Bible and, from that reading discerns, learns, and teaches how Christian believers are to behave and act.'

If our use of Scripture determines how we believe and act, then the spiritual disciplines are not merely matters of the private life but they encompass all of life and require personal attention, sound theological method and dedicated practical application.

**Thomas Schirrmacher, General Editor**  
**David Parker, Executive Editor**

# The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry

Beverly Vos

**KEYWORDS:** *Spiritual transformation, solitude, silence, meditation, fasting, celebration, confession.*

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY is 'carrying on the work that Jesus himself did'.<sup>1</sup> Jesus proclaimed and manifested the kingdom of God (Mt. 4:23), and commanded his followers to 'go into all the world and make disciples' (Mt. 28:19-20). One of the primary activities of Christian ministry is to make and grow disciples of Jesus. But in order to be effective at making disciples, we need to become disciples ourselves. If, as Bobby Clinton says, 'we minister out of who we are',<sup>2</sup> then our effectiveness in leading others into spiritual growth is entirely dependent upon the extent of our own spiritual growth. This paper explores the role of the spiritual disciplines in Christian ministry today for

ministers and Christian believers.

Willard writes of an imaginary church with a sign out the front declaring: 'We teach all who seriously commit themselves to Jesus how to do everything he said to do'.<sup>3</sup> How strange, how ridiculous this sounds. Is this not exactly what the church should be doing, so why must we declare it on a billboard? But our churches today fall far short of this. Often all we preach is a conversion gospel which says, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved!' Often we give the impression that discipleship is a terribly difficult thing and very 'costly'.<sup>4</sup>

Discipleship is not something we can accidentally drift towards or into. It is something we must give our full attention to, intentionally determining to make ourselves Jesus' apprentices, no matter what the cost.<sup>5</sup> Being disci-

---

1 Dallas Willard, *Spirituality and Ministry*, notes of lectures delivered at the Australian College of Ministries (2007).

2 J. R. Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 1988), 32.

---

3 Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1998), 344-5.

4 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 320.

5 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 327.

---

**Beverly Vos** currently lives in Launceston, Tasmania and is a Paediatric Nurse and Midwife, currently undertaking her MA in church leadership with the Australian College of Ministries (ACOM). She worships at Door of Hope Christian Church in Launceston. She has an interest in cross-cultural missions and holistic community development. This article has its origins in an MA assignment she wrote for an ACOM course intensive taught by Professor Dallas Willard in Sydney in July, 2008.

ples and making disciples is the core business of Christian ministry. We have Jesus' example to prove it.

## I Being Disciples

Willard says that Jesus called us 'not to do what he did, but to be as he was, permeated with love. Then the doing of what he did and said becomes the natural expression of who we are in Him.'<sup>6</sup> We should learn from Jesus how to live our life as he would if he were us. We should learn as Paul says, to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col. 3:17). This means placing a priority on contributing to and understanding our own spiritual formation as a fundamental part of Christian ministry. Thomas à Kempis states that 'Christ counsels us to follow his life and way' and that his life should 'be our first consideration'.<sup>7</sup>

Willard suggests that 'a life of victory over sin and circumstances is available to all of us', through faithfulness to spiritual formation in Christ, as revealed in the Bible and many godly examples throughout history.<sup>8</sup> However, many of us are too distracted with what Willard calls the 'vessel' mode of ministry (how we do church) rather than the 'treasure' mode of ministry (what the church should be about).<sup>9</sup> In the Great Commission, Jesus showed us where our focus should be. This is basically the 'principles and absolutes' of the New Testament church.<sup>10</sup>

It is all about spiritual formation—becoming like Christ! 'The call of Christ today is the same as it was when he left us here. That call is to be his apprentices, alive in the power of God, learning to do all he said to do, leading others into apprenticeship to him, and teaching them how to do everything he said.'<sup>11</sup> He calls us to be his disciples. Ludowyk and Moore define a disciple as 'a person who follows the teaching of a leader'.<sup>12</sup> Willard says that 'if I am Jesus' disciple that means I am with him to learn from him how to be like him'.<sup>13</sup> We must spend time with him. The Bible provides us with all the teaching we need to learn to live our lives as God desires for us.<sup>14</sup> Peter says, 'His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him' and he goes on to encourage us to 'make every effort' to cultivate godly characteristics in our lives so that we do not become 'ineffective and unproductive' (2 Pet. 1:3-8). He says, 'if you do these things, you will never fall' (2 Pet. 1:10).

The best way to become like Jesus is to live as he lived, and be as he was. Willard calls this 'the secret of the easy yoke'.<sup>15</sup> It involves following Jesus in

6 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 204.

7 Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (London: Penguin, 1952), 27.

8 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, xi.

9 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 26-27.

10 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 28.

11 D. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 202.

12 F. Ludowyk and B. Moore, *The Australian Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, 2nd edition, (South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press, 1996), 224

13 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 303.

14 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 311.

15 Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 6.



the entirety of his life and not just trying to behave as he would on the spur of the moment. That means practising the disciplines he engaged in and even more, because we are not God as he is, but human, and therefore prone to many weaknesses and character flaws.

## II Transformed by the Spiritual Disciplines:

Willard describes spiritual disciplines as tried and true activities undertaken in order to give our spirits more control over our bodies, by moulding and shaping our embodied selves.<sup>16</sup> Willard states that 'we grow in spiritual life and in ministry by well directed effort'<sup>17</sup> and nothing else will substitute for this. However, no effort of sheer will power on its own can transform our sinful desires, attitudes and behaviours.<sup>18</sup> Our normal response to deal with ingrained sin is to rely on will power and determination.<sup>19</sup> Heini Arnold states that 'as long as we think that we can save ourselves by our own will power, we will only make the evil in us stronger than ever'.<sup>20</sup>

We need God's grace acting in our lives to accomplish what we cannot do on our own. This is what grace is all about. As Willard says, 'if we had never sinned we would still need grace'.<sup>21</sup> Foster explains that 'the disciplines al-

low us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us'.<sup>22</sup> They put us in a position where we can receive his grace more readily. Henri Nouwen suggests that we must 'create a space in which God can act'.<sup>23</sup>

Many Christians act and speak as if effort on our part is pointless and even offensive to God. They respond with statements such as, 'God's grace is a free gift which covers our sins' and 'there is nothing you can do to earn God's favour'. It is true that righteousness cannot be earned by human effort or will power—all of the New Testament attests to this, but the distinction must be made between 'earning' and 'effort'. As Willard states, 'grace is not opposed to *effort*, but to *earning*'<sup>24</sup> (emphasis added). Paul tells Timothy to 'train yourself to be godly' (1 Tim. 4:7).

In 1 Corinthians 9:25-27, he speaks about going into strict training, and even beating one's body to make it one's slave. As any great athlete knows, training certainly involves a substantial amount of effort! Paul calls us to follow his example as he follows Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). By themselves spiritual disciplines will achieve very little; they only put us in a place where God's grace can change us.<sup>25</sup> While we are self-reliant and other-reliant for our personal and spiritual formation, we are totally God-reliant for our spiritual transformation.

We need to be transformed spiritu-

16 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 86, 92.

17 Willard, *Spirituality and Ministry*, 20.

18 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 121; Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 4.

19 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 4.

20 Cited in Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 4.

21 Willard, *Spirituality and Ministry*, 14.

22 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 6.

23 Cited in P. Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006), 278.

24 Willard, *Spirituality and Ministry*, 20.

25 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 6.



ally if we wish to minister to people effectively. Without it, in our sinfulness and brokenness we will only do more harm than good. Ortberg says that the primary goal of our life as Christians is to become transformed spiritually.<sup>26</sup> This means our ministry should have little to do with simply assuring people of where they will go when they die, or just getting to heaven. People's spiritual transformation in this life should be our goal. Most of us want to change, but very few of us actually see transformation into Christ-likeness happening at any observable pace.<sup>27</sup> Willard says we must be intentional about spiritual transformation otherwise it will not happen as a regular feature of our ministries.<sup>28</sup> It may happen accidentally, and once it does happen, we will not know how to make it happen again.

He says to become spiritually formed in Christ we must have: (1) a vision of what that means; (2) an intention to carry it out; and (3) intentionally apply means for achieving those ends.<sup>29</sup> When we are spiritually awakened into a state of transformation, God's commands are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:3). It is then that we become good trees that cannot bear bad fruit (Lu. 6:43). Willard says that 'ordinary people in common surroundings can live from the abundance of God's kingdom, letting the spirit and actions of Jesus be the natural outflow from their lives'.<sup>30</sup>

He insists elsewhere, that 'we can become like Christ in character and in power and thus realize our highest ideals of well-being and well-doing'.<sup>31</sup> C. S. Lewis suggests that we do not desire the things promised to us enough because we are 'half-hearted creatures'.<sup>32</sup> 'Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.'<sup>33</sup> We should take up the promises offered to us through a life guided by spiritual disciplines.

Disciplines of prayer, meditation and study of scripture have often been thought of as indispensable to the journey of faith. Referring to such disciplines, Bonhoeffer says, 'for the pastor it (prayer) is an indispensable duty and his [sic] whole ministry will depend on it'.<sup>34</sup> The spiritual disciplines help us to identify the duplicity and malice buried in our character and will, so that God's word and Spirit can work in us to rid us of these destructive feelings that arise.<sup>35</sup> Such feelings and sins are often hidden by our habits of self-deception and rationalisation.<sup>36</sup>

Many of the spiritual disciplines help us to deal with these sins head on, as the purpose of spiritual disciplines is the transformation of one's entire

26 J. Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1997), 21.

27 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 29.

28 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 62.

29 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 59-61.

30 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 24.

31 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, ix.

32 C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters: With Screwtape Proposes a Toast* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1942), 46

33 Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 26.

34 D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1949), 66.

35 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 121.

36 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 121.

person.<sup>37</sup> According to Ortberg, following Jesus means learning from Jesus how to organise our lives around practices which enable one to 'live in the fruit of the Spirit'.<sup>38</sup> Ortberg describes a spiritual discipline as 'any activity that can help me gain power to live as Jesus taught and modelled it'. For this reason there is no exhaustive list of spiritual disciplines.<sup>39</sup>

### III Listing the Disciplines:

The following is an exploration of common spiritual disciplines and their role in the spiritual growth and ministry of disciples of Jesus Christ. Numerous times in scripture we hear of Jesus practising solitude and prayer, going off early in the mornings to pray by himself (e.g. Mark 1:35). Willard describes the discipline of prayer simply as 'talking to God about what we are doing together'.<sup>40</sup> Ortberg suggests that prayer is the discipline that people feel most guilty about not practising enough, because they believe that prayer should be effortless if we are truly devoted to God.<sup>41</sup> However, this was not the case even with Jesus' disciples, for they asked Jesus to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1).

#### 1 Prayer

Prayer is something we learn by praying. Thomas Merton says of prayer,

'we do not want to be beginners. But let us be convinced of the fact that we will never be anything else but beginners all our life!'<sup>42</sup> Foster believes that prayer is the primary way that God chooses to change us into his likeness.<sup>43</sup> In prayer, God reveals to us the hiding places we have from him, and he graciously frees us from them.<sup>44</sup> Prayer causes our love for others to increase.<sup>45</sup> Jesus himself teaches us that prayer is useful for avoiding temptation when he says; 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation' (Mt. 26:41).

Willard states that prayer has a 'spiritually strengthening effect'<sup>46</sup> on every aspect of our personality. It builds our faith and confidence in God.<sup>47</sup> To be done well, prayer will almost certainly be linked with other disciplines such as study, worship, meditation, as well as solitude and fasting.<sup>48</sup> John Wesley said, 'God does nothing but in answer to prayer'.<sup>49</sup> We should 'precede, unfold and follow' everything we do with prayer'.<sup>50</sup> Imagine the potential of our ministries if we did this. However, so often we forget to pray—or is it more than this? Willard makes a profound statement regarding prayer. He says;

The idea that everything would hap-

37 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 54.

38 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 44.

39 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 48.

40 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 267.

41 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 95.

42 Cited in Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 96.

43 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 30.

44 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 30.

45 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 106.

46 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 191.

47 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 192.

48 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 191.

49 Cited in Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 31.

50 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 40.

pen exactly as it does regardless of whether we pray or not is a spectre that haunts the minds of many who sincerely profess belief in God. It makes prayer psychologically impossible, replacing it with dead ritual at best. And of course God does not respond to this. You wouldn't either.<sup>51</sup>

We must deal with these psychological barriers to prayer, otherwise our prayers are sure to be ineffective. Brother Lawrence says of prayer that there is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of continual conversation with God'.<sup>52</sup> What a wonderful way to live one's life and carry out one's ministry, in constant communion with God. Isn't that what every true Christian longs for?

## 2 Solitude

Solitude is spending long periods of time alone with God,<sup>53</sup> and purposefully avoiding interaction with others.<sup>54</sup> Foster describes solitude as a state of one's mind and heart.<sup>55</sup> The gospels show us that Jesus regularly sought solitude, particularly before and after important events.

He began his ministry in the desert, and ended his ministry in Gethsemane with times of solitude.<sup>56</sup> Nouwen says that it is in 'solitude that we discover

that being is more important than having, and that we are worth more than the result of our efforts'.<sup>57</sup> Here we can escape from the forces in society that attempt to mould us.<sup>58</sup> Willard explains that 'in solitude we find the psychic distance, the perspective from which we can see, in light of eternity, the created things that trap, worry and oppress us'.<sup>59</sup>

Solitude can help us to see that our extreme busyness is caused by our inability to trust God or unwillingness to let others contribute.<sup>60</sup> Willard explains that hurry is the enemy of kindness and love, and also involves worry, fear and anger.<sup>61</sup> He says that solitude can help us to remember that the world keeps going without us, and that there is more damage done by our unkindness and lack of love, as a result of our hurry, than the benefits to haste (if there are any at all!).<sup>62</sup> A life without lonely places of solitude can easily become destructive without a 'quiet centre'.<sup>63</sup>

Bonhoeffer<sup>64</sup> and Foster<sup>65</sup> both make the point that for one to have meaningful fellowship with others, one must be comfortable being alone, and we must

51 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 268-9.

52 Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God with Spiritual Maxims* (Grand Rapids: Spire Books, 1958), 44.

53 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 121.

54 Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*, 164.

55 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 84.

56 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 84.

57 H. J. M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*, (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, Indiana, 1976), 22.

58 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 84.

59 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 165.

60 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 121.

61 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 29.

62 D. Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2006), 29.

63 Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, 21.

64 Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* 58.

65 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 85.

have the fellowship and accountability of others in order to be alone safely. 'In solitude, our heart can slowly take off its many protective devices, and can grow so wide and deep that nothing human is strange to it.'<sup>66</sup> Willard believes that solitude is one of the most fundamental disciplines to the beginning of spiritual life, and must continue to be practised.<sup>67</sup> In aloneness it is possible to be silent and still and know that the Lord is indeed God.<sup>68</sup>

### 3 Silence

Intricately connected to solitude is silence. In fact Foster believes that silence and solitude are inseparable.<sup>69</sup> To just refrain from speaking without a heart ready to hear from God, is not silence.<sup>70</sup> We must 'close off our souls from "sounds"',<sup>71</sup> Noises can be a comfort to us, while complete silence often gives the impression that nothing is happening, and this can be quite shocking to us in our busy lifestyles.<sup>72</sup> Willard claims that only silence can provide us with the opportunity for 'life-transforming concentration upon God'.<sup>73</sup> Silence can also give us the 'quiet, inner confidence' that many of us desire, and are lacking in our daily life and ministry.<sup>74</sup> Silence teaches us when to speak and when we need to

close our lips. This can be an important realisation in Christian ministry.

The discipline of silence can help us to see that our vocalness in offering opinions can stem from a contempt of other people's words and thoughts, or a wish to keep them quiet. According to à Kempis, 'It is easier to keep silence altogether than not to talk more than we should'.<sup>75</sup> This is so true for many of us as restraint is something we so often lack. Foster says that the discipline of silence will often bring the freedom to let God be the one to justify our actions, rather than being defensive of them, and increased compassion and sensitivity to others.<sup>76</sup>

Practising silence helps us to have an 'inner distance' that allows us time to ponder our words and have the self control to respond graciously, and to also learn to really listen to others.<sup>77</sup> A person who has mastered the discipline of silence is someone who can say what needs to be said, and also hold their tongue appropriately. What a benefit this would be to any one of us! Willard says that the ability to be silent and truly listen to others may be the greatest witness and testimony to our faith.<sup>78</sup> How valuable the discipline of silence could be to life and ministry for Jesus Christ.

### 4 Meditation

Meditation is not a foreign concept in the Bible, though for many Christians these days it is primarily associ-

66 Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, 45.

67 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 166.

68 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 166.

69 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 86.

70 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 86.

71 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 167.

72 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 167.

73 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 168.

74 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 170.

75 à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 50.

76 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 95.

77 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 169.

78 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 169.

ated with eastern religions.<sup>79</sup> However, meditation is mentioned over 50 times in the Old Testament.<sup>80</sup> Meditation is all about *sustained* attention.<sup>81</sup> The aim of Christian meditation is not simply to empty one's mind, but also to fill it with thoughts of God and his word. Meditation on scripture should be used to internalise and personalise scripture.<sup>82</sup> Jesus studied God's word as a boy and was well versed in scripture (Lu. 2:49; Jn. 7:15). If Jesus took the time to memorise and internalise scripture, that gives us even more reason to do so. Study, as opposed to meditation, is careful observation of objective structures which results in a change to one's thought processes.<sup>83</sup>

### 5 Study

In the spiritual discipline of study we engage our minds with the word of God or material about God's word.<sup>84</sup> The aim of study is to replace old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits.<sup>85</sup> It is distinguished from meditation by the fact that study is analytical and meditation is devotional, though the two do overlap.<sup>86</sup> Study requires repetition, concentration, reflection and humility in order to be effective in changing the way

we think.<sup>87</sup> Romans 12:2 says that we should 'be transformed by the renewing of our minds'. Ortberg says that 'the goal is not for us to get through the scriptures. The goal is to get the scriptures through us'.<sup>88</sup>

Memorisation of scripture is one of the best ways to transform our minds and ingrain scripture in our character.<sup>89</sup> Psalm 119 speaks of hiding God's word in our hearts so that we will not sin against him. One of the greatest benefits of studying God's word is that it increases our faith, as it penetrates our heart, mind and soul.<sup>90</sup>

### 6 Simplicity

Our culture is 'plagued by the passion to possess'.<sup>91</sup> Hamilton and Denniss write that although Australia is one of the world's richest countries, two thirds of Australians still believe they cannot afford to buy everything they really need.<sup>92</sup> They state that 'as a rule, no matter how much money people have, they feel they need more'.<sup>93</sup> Tozer says, 'things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended'.<sup>94</sup> God's gifts now take

79 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 13.

80 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 189.

81 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 189.

82 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 26.

83 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 55.

84 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 182.

85 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 54.

86 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 56

87 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 56-7.

88 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 188.

89 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 190.

90 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 182-3.

91 R. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 3.

92 C. Hamilton, and R. Denniss, *Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2005), 4.

93 Hamilton, and Denniss, *Affluenza*, 5.

94 A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, (Carlisle, United Kingdom: OM Publishing, 1982), 26.

the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution.'

In our desire for affluence we tend to buy so much more than we really need, and waste so much of what we do not use. Australians today buy far more food and luxury items than they can even use because of an 'insatiable appetite for more things' and this inevitably leads to a tremendous amount of waste.<sup>95</sup> It is a gross understatement to say that our contemporary culture lacks the reality of simplicity; we have so much, do so much, and want so much out of life. It is interesting then that authors such as Tabb claim that 'the only way to get more out of life is to choose less'.<sup>96</sup>

The Bible is clear about God's displeasure towards the accumulation of wealth and exploitation of the poor. The Old and New Testaments abound with examples of God's wrath on those who ignore injustice and commands to care for the poor, the ostracised, the fatherless, and on those who put their trust in material things. Even our Christian culture is affected by the insanity of affluence. Foster states that we buy things we don't need or even want, to impress people we don't even like, and which we ultimately don't end up using.<sup>97</sup> What is the point? He says that western culture falsely says covetousness = ambition, hoarding = prudence, and greed = industriousness.<sup>98</sup>

The discipline of simplicity offers a direct challenge to our sinful desires and affluent lifestyles, resulting in 'a life of joyful unconcern for possessions'.<sup>99</sup> Our society needs the corrective example of godly people who are not enslaved to the rat race of accumulating wealth and prestige. The discipline of simplicity would go a long way in developing such characteristics in our lives. Jesus Christ is the perfect example of what it meant to live simply.<sup>100</sup> He did not accumulate wealth or become deceived by the things of this world, and he avoided competitive popularity and prestige.

Simplicity as a discipline is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.<sup>101</sup> However, simplicity is not easy to achieve, neither is it fundamentally simple. In fact, it is actually complex because it goes against accepted values and expectations.<sup>102</sup> Both the greedy and the miserly do not know simplicity, as it has nothing to do with an abundance or lack of possessions.<sup>103</sup> Simplicity relies on receiving all we have as a gift, entrusting what we do have to God, and being willing to give it to others.<sup>104</sup> But it also requires an outward expression, as simplicity must affect the way that we live. However, there are no legalistic rules as to what simplicity should look like.<sup>105</sup>

Foster suggests ten principles for developing simplicity in one's life, in-

95 Hamilton and Denniss, 100-5.

96 M. Tabb, *Living With Less: The Upside to Downsizing your life* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006) xv.

97 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 70.

98 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 71.

99 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 75, 77.

100 Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 3.

101 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 69.

102 Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*, 5.

103 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 77.

104 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 77.

105 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 8.



cluding buying things for their usefulness and not their status, rejecting anything that causes addictions, habitually giving things away, appreciating creation more, enjoying things without owning them and not buying things that may continue the cycle of oppression for others. One example would be choosing to buy fair trade coffee beans rather than brands which exploit unfairly paid African people. Through simplicity, followers of Christ can exert a remarkable influence on those around them, and through them, the entire culture.

### 7 Fasting

As depicted in the Bible, fasting is about abstaining from food for spiritual purposes.<sup>106</sup> Willard says its purpose as a spiritual discipline is about learning to be free from the desire for food, and experiencing how God directly nourishes us.<sup>107</sup> There are many examples throughout scripture of God's people fasting including David, Esther, Daniel, Elijah and Paul to name a few. Jesus fasted for forty days on one occasion recorded in scripture (Lu. 4:2). There are just as many examples of great Christians throughout history who also practised fasting, such as Martin Luther, John Wesley, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, John Knox and Charles Finney.<sup>108</sup>

Jesus taught about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount, while teaching about giving and prayer (Mt. 6). Referring to this passage Foster states that 'it is as if there is almost an uncon-

scious assumption that giving, praying and fasting are all part of Christian devotion'.<sup>109</sup> Although Jesus didn't make any specific commands about fasting it could be assumed that he expected his followers to fast.

Willard claims that fasting will surely prove humiliating for us, as so much of our peace is dependent on the joy of eating.<sup>110</sup> It can reveal to us how we use food to distract us from our own unwise behaviour and sinful attitudes, feelings of self-worth or meaninglessness.<sup>111</sup> It affirms our dependence on God, and the fact that in him we can find 'a source of sustenance beyond food'.<sup>112</sup> Through fasting we can truly learn that it is not just food that gives us life but 'every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Mt. 4:4).

Fasting is an important way that we can practise self denial, which Jesus requires of us as his followers (Mt. 16:24). Willard says that someone who is well practised in fasting will easily be able to endure many forms of deprivation with joy.<sup>113</sup> Fasting also teaches us self-control and temperance, with reference to all our desires, and so it can have a great effect in transforming our whole personality.<sup>114</sup>

### 8 Worship

To worship is to ascribe great worth to God and to see him as *worthy*.<sup>115</sup> Worship is a response of our heart to the

<sup>106</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 42.

<sup>107</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 121.

<sup>108</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 42.

<sup>109</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 46.

<sup>110</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 171.

<sup>111</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 171.

<sup>112</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 171.

<sup>113</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 172.

<sup>114</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 172.

<sup>115</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 184.



love of God<sup>116</sup> which encompasses our whole lives.<sup>117</sup> We can worship both in community and alone.<sup>118</sup> Worship includes but is far more than just singing, praising, and praying.<sup>119</sup> When we worship we contemplate and express the glorious radiance, goodness and greatness of God through various expressions including words, symbols and rituals.<sup>120</sup> We read in John 4:23 that God is actively seeking those who will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. In worship we praise God for who he is, and we express gratitude for all he has done for us.<sup>121</sup>

Foster says worship is a spiritual discipline because 'it is an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so that He can transform us'.<sup>122</sup> Worship is not true worship unless it changes us. It propels us towards greater obedience, deeper compassion for others, and compels us to release our resentments.<sup>123</sup> Foster states that 'to worship is to change'.<sup>124</sup> When God meets us in worship and reveals himself to us 'our thoughts and words turn to perception and experience of God'.<sup>125</sup> Worship is faith-building and strengthening for the believer and is therefore an important spiritual discipline for effective ministry.

The discipline of celebration usually involves gathering together with others to eat, drink, sing, dance and share stories of God's goodness<sup>126</sup> and so reflect on how wonderful he is.<sup>127</sup> Willard claims that it is the completion of worship.<sup>128</sup> Foster suggests that it should involve lots of noise.<sup>129</sup> As there is a time for silence, so there is a time for making noise! The Bible is full of examples of celebration. In the Old Testament the Israelites were commanded to gather three times a year for periods of celebration.<sup>130</sup> Jesus practised fellowship and celebration as evidenced by his presence with people and reputation as a glutton and a drunkard.

## 9 Celebration

Celebration fills us with joy, and joy gives us strength as Nehemiah 8:10 reminds us: 'the joy of the Lord is your strength'. Without the joyful festivity that celebration brings, the spiritual disciplines can become dull and draining, but celebration provides us with energy.<sup>131</sup> Paul commands us in Philippians 4:4 to 'rejoice in the Lord always'. One reason for this command may well be that no one will be attracted to a life of following Jesus if it proves to be as dull as our faces often suggest. Ortberg explains that joylessness is a sin that religious people are prone to enjoy.<sup>132</sup>

116 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 138.

117 D. Zschech, *Worship: Hillsongs Australia Leadership Series* (Hillsong Australia: Castle Hill, NSW, 1996), 21.

118 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 184.

119 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 139.

120 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 183.

121 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 140.

122 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 144.

123 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 148.

124 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 148.

125 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 184.

126 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 185.

127 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 67.

128 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 185.

129 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 168.

130 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 164.

131 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 164.

132 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 63-4.

Celebration helps us not to take ourselves too seriously, it prevents us from becoming weary in our quest for godliness, and it gives us perspective, and helps us to laugh at ourselves.<sup>133</sup> Many Christians are cautious about celebration and to this Willard responds:

The suffering and terror of life will not be removed no matter how 'spiritual' we become. It is because of this that a healthy faith before God cannot be built and maintained, without heartfelt celebration of his greatness and goodness to us in the midst of our suffering and terror.<sup>134</sup>

He says that God is dishonoured just as much if we fear and avoid pleasure, as when we depend upon it and live for it.<sup>135</sup> Uncle Screwtape informs his protégé Wormwood that fun is closely related to joy and,

It can sometimes be used, of course, to divert humans from something else which the Enemy would like them to be feeling or doing; but in itself it has wholly undesirable tendencies; it promotes charity, courage, contentment, and many other evils.<sup>136</sup>

Celebration done well makes all our problems and sorrows seem small, and it accentuates the goodness of God towards us, so that we have greater strength to do his work. Ortberg claims that it is a learned skill to be joyful. It is a skill well worth practising in the life of every minister of the gospel.<sup>137</sup>

The discipline of service is about doing good things for others, without thinking of ourselves.<sup>138</sup> In service we give of ourselves and our resources to promote the good of others.<sup>139</sup> Although service can be used as a discipline, it does not have to be a discipline. It can simply be a means of showing love to others, without any thought to how it will enable one to follow Jesus better.<sup>140</sup> However, service strengthens us in refusing to conform to the world's standards of authority and promotion, while resisting the temptation to conform to the 'pecking order'.<sup>141</sup>

## 10 Service

Service can train us to rid ourselves of arrogance, envy, coveting, being possessive or resentful, particularly if we are in 'low' positions in society.<sup>142</sup> Willard believes, however, that service is of more benefit to those in higher social positions, because it is a greater challenge to serve from such a place.<sup>143</sup> In Matthew 20:26, 28 Jesus says, 'whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve'. Willard says that this is more of an instruction for those who are 'great', rather than training on how to become 'great'.<sup>144</sup> Jesus gave us an excellent example of service by washing his disciples' feet (Jn. 13:1-17). He loved them by performing this menial

133 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 168.

134 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 187.

135 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 187.

136 Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, 54.

137 Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 66.

138 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 121.

139 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 188.

140 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 188.

141 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 111.

142 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 188.

143 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 189.

144 Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 190.

and humiliating act which was normally assigned to the lowest of servants in the household.<sup>145</sup>

Jesus' reason for calling us to serve others was not simply because they need help, but because of the benefits to the individual who serves others.<sup>146</sup> Pride always lurks in the background for people who aim for spiritual transformation<sup>147</sup> and although humility is a virtue that we can't gain by trying to be humble, service is the spiritual discipline most conducive to producing humility.<sup>148</sup> Humility is about having a 'submitted willingness' and 'involves a healthy self-forgetfulness'.<sup>149</sup> In serving, we think of others and give no thought to our own needs and desires.

Service that results from obligation or duty cannot compare to the life, joy and peace that flow's from service motivated by our 'inward person'.<sup>150</sup> True service builds community and a sense of intimacy,<sup>151</sup> it requires no service in return, and it 'draws, binds, heals and builds'.<sup>152</sup> What a benefit the discipline of service could be to our Christian communities and ministry.

## 11 Confession

The discipline of confession can be practised only within fellowship as it requires trusting others enough to know our deepest failures and weaknesses.<sup>153</sup> James 5:16 says, 'confess your sins to each other and pray for each other'. Bonhoeffer claims that 'he who is alone with his sin is utterly alone' and 'the more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it'.<sup>154</sup> Our sins need to be confessed so that we can begin to heal and to change.<sup>155</sup>

Confession helps us to abandon self-justification, and when sin is expressed to another person, it loses its power over us.<sup>156</sup> Bonhoeffer states that 'in confession we affirm and accept our cross. In the deep mental and physical pain of humiliation before a brother—which means before God—we experience the cross of Jesus as our rescue and salvation'.<sup>157</sup> Confession builds our faith that God can provide for our needs through his people, it allows us to experience love, and to be humbled before others.<sup>158</sup> Foster says;

Without the cross the discipline of confession would be only psychologically therapeutic. But it is so much more. It involves an objective change in our relationship with God and a subjective change in us. It is a means of healing and transforming

---

**145** M. Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2006), 25.

**146** Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 117.

**147** Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 112.

**148** Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 113.

**149** Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 112

**150** Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 122.

**151** Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 119.

**152** Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 113.

---

**153** Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 195.

**154** Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 86-7.

**155** Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 129.

**156** Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 88.

**157** Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 89-90.

**158** Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 195.

the inner spirit.<sup>159</sup>

Confession is not just about telling the truth, it also involves acknowledging the pain of the people we have hurt, as well as God's pain over our sin.<sup>160</sup> It addition, it also involves an intention to change.<sup>161</sup> It is a grace and a discipline, as it is a 'consciously chosen course of action that brings us under the shadow of the Almighty'.<sup>162</sup> As Christians, we so often forget that we are all sinners under grace, and we hide our sinfulness behind hypocrisy.

Often, although we pray and even beg for forgiveness, we do not feel it ourselves until we have confessed it to another person. For this reason, God has provided other Christians to 'make God's presence and forgiveness real to us'.<sup>163</sup> We have been given the authority to receive confessions of sins and forgive them in Jesus' name. As John 20:23 says, 'if you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven'. What a great ministry we have been given! Confession also assists us in avoiding sin. As Willard says, 'nothing is more supportive of right behaviours than open truth'.<sup>164</sup> It builds community, enables deep fellowship, and encourages restitution among believers.

#### IV Practising the Disciplines

Our relationship with God allows much room for creative individuality and

experimentation with spiritual disciplines.<sup>165</sup> We are limited only by the number of sins such disciplines can address! When we commit to engaging in the above mentioned disciplines faithfully, we are sure to be changed from glory to glory. Willard suggests that 'the duplicities, entanglements and evil intentions that infect our will can be eliminated as "we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith"' (Hebrews 12:2), through the practising of spiritual disciplines.<sup>166</sup>

Jesus said in John 14:12 that 'anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these.' Willard says that such great acts of power, which Jesus promises we would do, require great character and great character is something we can grow only slowly towards.<sup>167</sup> Through spiritual disciplines one builds great character, and therefore, the disciplines go hand in hand with the power of God demonstrated in one's life.

If one has great power without great character, pride in one's ability is an inevitable consequence. It was said of Satan that he fell into pride when he observed how well he performed his religious acts. Willard goes on to say that in God's kingdom he intends us to have as much power as our character can bear.<sup>168</sup> Eventually we will even have enough power to do whatever we want; because we will have 'the mind of Christ' and will therefore do what God wants. What an awesome picture that is!

<sup>159</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 126.

<sup>160</sup> Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 135.

<sup>161</sup> Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 138.

<sup>162</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 127.

<sup>163</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 129.

<sup>164</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 196.

<sup>165</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 198.

<sup>166</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 121.

<sup>167</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 403.

<sup>168</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 404.

The spiritual disciplines deserve a place of prime importance in training for Christian ministry, and practice in daily life. To make the sort of impact that many claim they want to make in reaching our cities, states, and our world for Christ, we need people to become more like Christ. The tried and true way to do this is to practise spiritual disciplines. We will minister most

effectively when we learn to be like Christ. What power and what amazing transformative effects our ministry could have if we learned what it means to pray effectively, and see God answer us as we spend time each day communing with him. It is plain to see that the spiritual disciplines are essential in our growth and development as disciples of Christ, and in the ministry of disciple making.

## **1, 2, 3 John Word Biblical Commentary (Revised Edition) (WBC)**

Stephen S. Smalley

The letters of John, although simple in style, affirm such profound truths that interpreters throughout history have laboured to explain them. In this extensively revised edition of his commentary on the Johannine epistles Smalley updates his work by interacting with recent scholarship on the letters over the last twenty years. This revision is seamlessly woven into the commentary.

**Stephen S. Smalley** has retired from his position as Dean of Chester Cathedral. He is author of *John: Evangelist and Interpreter and Hope For Ever*.

978-1-41851-424-2 / 216 x 140mm / £29.99

## **Judges Word Biblical Commentary**

Trent C. Butler

This commentary will feature the most extensive text critical notes available in any modern commentary on Judges. It will present a theological reading of the present text of the book and seek to show that current literary and source theories attributing various parts and even minute pieces of the book to a long series of editors over almost a millennium of time are not needed to explain the origin and purposes of the book. This volume of the WBC will argue for a much earlier date of the book in the reigns of Rehoboam and Jeroboam and will show how Judges is designed as a reversal of the structure and achievements of the Book of Joshua, preparing the way for the Davidic line of kings. The commentary will underline Judges' ironic presentation of its major characters as heroes and failures. The commentary will wrestle with the nature and expectations of leadership in Judges.

**Trent C. Butler** is Vice President of Editorial Services, Christian Board of Publication. He is a former Associate Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüscklikon, Switzerland.

978-0-8499-0207-9 / 229 x 152mm / £24.99

**Paternoster, Authenticmedia Limited, 52 Presley Way,  
Crownhill, Milton Keynes, MK8 0ES**

# Practising Ministry in the Presence of God and in Partnership with God

## The Ontology of Ministry and Pastoral Identity: a Trinitarian-Ecclesial Model

John Jefferson Davis

**KEYWORDS:** *Self, Trinity, Union with Christ, Body of Christ, pastoral theology, bridging acts*

THE PURPOSE OF THIS article is to argue the following thesis regarding the nature of Christian ministry: *Christian ministry is activity by baptized Christians done in the presence of God and in partnership with God, for the purpose of bringing the people of God into deepening communion with God and with one another, and into right relationship with God's creation.* The article will present a model of ministry that incorporates fundamental categories of biblical theology such as divine presence,<sup>1</sup> divine-

human partnership, communion (*koinonia*), and Body of Christ, together with fundamental categories from systematic theology, particularly the Trinity and union with Christ.<sup>2</sup> It will argue for an *ontological* understanding of the nature of ministry and pastoral identity, in contrast to prevailing *functional* views.

### I Historical Perspectives

In his widely influential critique of theological education in America, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, Edward Farley pointed to the thirteenth century as

1 See my book *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), where I argue that the Triune God is *really present* among his people, by Word, Spirit, and sacrament as they gather in his Name.

2 In his groundbreaking work, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology: A Christological Foundation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), Andrew Purves has argued for a reorientation for the discipline of pastoral theology in which the categories of Christology, union with Christ; the doctrine of God are at the core of the discipline, rather than categories drawn from the social sciences.

---

**Dr. John Jefferson Davis** (PhD, Duke), an ordained Presbyterian minister, is professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, USA. He is a frequent public speaker and press columnist and is the author of several well-known books, including *Evangelical Ethics* (2004), *The Frontiers of Science and Faith* (2002), *Worship and the Reality of God* (2010) and numerous articles in scholarly journals.



a watershed in the way in which ministers were trained for service in the church. With the rediscovery of lost writings of Aristotle and their dissemination in the universities, theology was transformed into a university-based 'science' rather than the 'holy wisdom' of the church fathers and the monasteries.<sup>3</sup>

This introduction of Aristotelean logic and dialectics into the medieval universities as the basis for the study of theology by Aquinas and the schoolmen had the unintended effect of widening the gap between the church and the 'academy'—a gap which is very much in evidence in the modern period. Jaroslav Pelikan has noted that from AD 100 to 600, most theologians were bishops; from AD 600 to 1500 they were monks; and from AD 1500 to the present they have tended to be university professors!<sup>4</sup>

The model of a university-based, rather than church-based context for the teaching of theology was given further impetus in the Enlightenment period, and especially by the German university system exemplified by the University of Berlin. It was in this context that Friedrich Schleiermacher's celebrated four-fold division of the theological curriculum was launched: ministerial training came to be defined as a course of study progressing through the exegetical, historical,

systematic/philosophical and practical disciplines.<sup>5</sup> 'Practical theology' or 'pastoral theology' were understood primarily in functional terms, in relation to the tasks of parish ministry.

This understandable focus on the *practices* of ministry, however, was to increase the distance between the student's study of theology ('theory'; doctrine; specialized knowledge) and pastoral ministry ('practice'; professional skills), especially with the subsequent growth and specialization of university-based knowledge in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The older patristic idea of theology as a *habitus* or way of spiritually forming the soul tended to be lost in the modern university setting.

Another obstacle to the integration of pastoral and systematic theology can be found in the internal history of theology as a discipline, namely, the fact that ecclesiology—the doctrine of the church—did not become a separate *loci* or topic of focused discussion for theologians until the fifteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Ecclesiology—the natural location for discussions of the nature of ministry—became more prominent as a theme in systematic theology as a result of

3 Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 38.

4 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 5; cited in Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, xxix, n.27.

5 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline On The Study of Theology*, tr. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966; orig. 1830). Schleiermacher's own schematization explicitly mentions three divisions, but these emerged as a four-fold division of the curriculum in subsequent theological education in America.

6 This history is reviewed by Wolfhart Panzenberg, 'Excursus: The Place of Ecclesiology in the Structure of Dogmatics', *Systematic Theology*, v.3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 21-27.



the sixteenth century Reformation controversies between Catholics and Protestants, but even here, the focus of attention was on such matters as the doctrine of the sacraments and the identity of the true church, and so forth, and not on the nature of ministry as such.

Modern systematic theology textbooks tend to follow in well-worn tracks laid down at that time—the nature and government of the church; discussions of baptism and the Lord's supper—but tend not to address a biblical and systematic understanding of the nature of ministry as such.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, modern books written for pastors in the area of pastoral ministry tend to be 'how-to' treatments that are usually not grounded in the fundamental categories of systematic theology.<sup>8</sup>

## II Pastoral Theology

Since any project such as the present

one that seeks fresh integration of the disciplines of pastoral and systematic theology needs to be informed by an awareness of the historical development of both disciplines, a very brief overview of the history of pastoral theology will be noted here.<sup>9</sup> During the patristic period works such as that of Gregory of Nazianzus, *In Defense of His Flight to Pontus*; John Chrysostom, *Six Books on the Priesthood*, and the widely read *Pastoral Care* by Gregory the Great, set pastoral care and theology in a priestly, church-based, and confessional context.<sup>10</sup>

During the Reformation period, both Luther and Calvin addressed pastoral as well as theological questions, but the outstanding work of pastoral theology from this period is Martin Bucer's treatise, *Concerning the True Care of Souls* (1538), in which Bucer sought to place the ministerial tasks of the 'care of souls' within a biblical context of the doctrine of the church as the fellowship and body of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

In the post-Reformation period the work of the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter of Kidderminster, England, *The Reformed Pastor* (1659) is justly considered a classic in the field of pastoral theology and practice, and has been

7 See, for example the table of contents of widely used textbooks such as Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); and from an earlier generation, Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941).

8 Commenting on this 'gap' between systematic and practical theology, Ray Anderson observed that for typical seminary graduates, much theology is set on one side, and they are 'under pressure to be successful leaders of the organized church' and 'are easily attracted to pragmatic strategies for church growth, conflict management, and pastoral counseling'. (Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 318).

9 Helpful resources in this area are G.R. Evans, ed., *A History of Pastoral Care* (London: Cassell, 2000), and Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982), 'Introduction: What Is Pastoral Theology?', x-xii.

10 For discussion of these patristic authors, see Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

11 Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*, tr. Peter Beale (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009; orig. 1538).

widely read down to the present day.<sup>12</sup> Baxter was noted for his program of home visitation and catechizing of the families in his parish, reflecting his conviction that preaching alone was not sufficient to ensure Christian growth and discipleship.

The nineteenth century witnessed a flowering of substantial works in pastoral theology. Among the many works that could be mentioned, the following are perhaps among the most significant: A. Vinet, *Pastoral Theology: The Theory of the Evangelical Ministry* (1854); James M. Hoppin, *Pastoral Theology* (1884); Patrick Fairbairn, *Pastoral Theology: A Treatise on the Offices and Duties of the Christian Pastor* (1875); William G.T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (1873); and Washington Gladden, *The Christian Pastor and the Working Church* (1898).<sup>13</sup> An examination of the tables of contents of these works reveals that the presentations tend to be structured around the functions of parish ministry, rather than an overall theological framework as such.

This focus on the functional aspects of ministry has continued in the

twentieth century works in pastoral theology.<sup>14</sup> In 1958 Seward Hiltner of Princeton University published *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, a landmark work that proved to be widely influential in the subsequent development of the fields of pastoral theology and pastoral counselling in the English speaking world.<sup>15</sup> Hiltner defined pastoral theology as a branch of theological inquiry '... that brings the shepherding perspective to bear on all the operations and functions of the church and minister, and then draws conclusions of a theological order from reflection on these observations'.<sup>16</sup> This definition, according to Hiltner, implied that pastoral theology was an 'operation-centered' or 'function-centered' branch of theology rather than a 'logic-centered' one.<sup>17</sup>

In a somewhat Tillichian vein, Hiltner could view pastoral theology as a 'method of correlation' in which reflection on the resources of the Christian tradition and reflection on the 'shepherding' situations of ministry were held in mutual relation, with theory and practice informing one another. While retaining the historic Christian

**12** Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974; orig.1659).

**13** A. Vinet, *Pastoral Theology: The Theory of the Pastoral Ministry*, tr. Thomas Skinner (New York: Ivison and Phinney, 1854); William G.T. Shedd, *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1873); Patrick Fairbairn, *Pastoral Theology: A Treatise on the Offices and Duties of the Christian Pastor* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1875); James M. Hoppin, *Pastoral Theology*, 5th ed. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901; orig. 1884); Washington Gladden, *The Christian Pastor and the Working Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898).

**14** Such a functional emphasis, with varying degrees of theological grounding and reflection can be seen in Martin Thornton, *Pastoral Theology: A Reorientation* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958); Lawrence O. Richards and Gib Martin, *A Theology of Personal Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); Thomas F. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983); David Hansen, *The Art of Pastoring: Ministry without All the Answers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

**15** Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958).

**16** Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, 20.

**17** Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*.

and biblical metaphor of 'shepherding' as an organizing principle, Hiltner wished to integrate into pastoral practice the new knowledge coming from psychology, psychiatry, anthropology and other sources; these '... riches are such that no thoughtful person can set them aside.'<sup>18</sup>

Hiltner's paradigm for pastoral theology has been predominant in much Protestant pastoral theology and pastoral counselling for the last sixty years in the United States, but it has not been without its critics. Thomas Oden, for example, argued that approaches such as Hiltner's that borrow heavily from the social sciences are in danger of losing their biblical and theological foundations. An area of pastoral practice such as church administration, for example, that borrows heavily from pragmatic management procedures can become '... an orphan discipline wondering about its true parentage',<sup>19</sup> blurring the lines that distinguish a business enterprise from the church.

Andrew Purves has argued that the modern pastoral theology and pastoral counselling movement promoted

by Hiltner has been, in practice, more influenced by psychological and social-science concerns than theological and doctrinal ones, with the result that secular goals and techniques of care have come to predominate in pastoral practice.<sup>20</sup> With the loss of Christology, soteriology, and the Christian doctrine of God, pastoral theology and practice have tended, according to Purves, to focus on 'acceptable functioning rather than discipleship', and on 'self-actualization and self-realization rather than salvation'.<sup>21</sup>

The churchly context of historic pastoral care and the ongoing ministries of Word, sacrament, fellowship, and discipline were in danger of being displaced by the *clinical* settings<sup>22</sup> of the secular disciplines of counselling and psychology. Purves has challenged the pastoral theology and counselling movement not to ignore the social sciences, but to re-orient these disciplines in such a way that the biblical and Christian confessional heritage and the doctrines of God and union with Christ are the integrative core of theory and practice.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 4. The plausibility of Oden's concerns could be supported by an examination of the table of contents of some current works in the area of church administration such as James D. Berkley, ed., *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Managing the Congregation: Building Effective Systems to Serve People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Gary L. McIntosh, *Church That Works: Your One-Stop Resource for Effective Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, xiv.

<sup>21</sup> Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, xiv, xix, xx.

<sup>22</sup> Awareness of the tensions and ambiguities that obtain in modern pastoral counseling movement, as it attempts to straddle the worlds of clinical practice and the church are reflected, for example, in the work of Wayne E. Oates, *Pastoral Counseling* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 7.

<sup>23</sup> This is likewise the perspective of this essay: not to ignore or reject valid insights from the social science, but to re-integrate them around a Christian doctrinal core.

### III Individualism and Pastoral Theology

One of the motives for proposing a Trinitarian-ecclesial model for church ministry and pastoral identity is to provide a model for ministry that can address the *individualism* of American culture<sup>24</sup> at a fundamental level. The pervasiveness of individualism in American culture is widely recognized, and can be seen to have both its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, individualism can support concerns for human rights, rule of law, personal achievement, and the virtues of innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship. On the other hand, it is generally recognized that individualism in its more exaggerated forms has contributed to the weakening of social bonds in marriage and other personal relationships, and has also contributed to the erosion of loyalty and commitment to churches, denominations, and other social institutions.

A significant element in the broader historical context of this discussion of pastoral theology and the nature of ministry is the growing separation between the clergy and the laity that began to develop from the third

century onward, and which was only partially corrected in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras of church history. The development of the idea of the priest as one who was uniquely empowered and ordained by God to offer *sacrifices* for the people, on the analogy of the Old Testament priesthood, increasingly tended to marginalize the role of the laity in Christian worship and ministry.

These tendencies were strengthened by the development of the doctrine of substantiation, beginning in the ninth century, and culminating in its official promulgation at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.<sup>25</sup> The role of the laity in the late medieval period was reduced largely to that of being passive spectators, watching the priest consecrate and elevate the elements, in the words of a liturgy in a language (Latin) not understood by the people. The Protestant reformers made the liturgy available in the languages of the people, and restored the Bible and the preaching of the gospel to a more central place in the life of the church, but Protestant church life and ministry still tended to be dominated and controlled by the clergy.

In the modern period a variety of developments have emerged that have tended to recover a more vital role for the laity in Christian ministry and worship. The Second Vatican Council (1963-65) introduced sweeping changes into the life of the Roman Catholic Church. Conciliar documents

<sup>24</sup> As used here, 'individualism' is taken to imply 'a focus on... personal autonomy and self-fulfillment... basing one's identity on one's personal accomplishments', and a view of the self that sees the self as more independent than interdependent in the context of the group or larger collective: Ronald Inglehart and Daphna Oyserman, 'Individualism, Autonomy, Self-Expression', in Hek Vinken, Joseph Soeters, and Peter Ester, eds., *Comparing Cultures: Dimensions of Culture in a Comparative Perspective* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2004), 74-96 at 11, 77.

<sup>25</sup> On the history of this development, see James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 248-259, 'Understanding the Eucharist'.

such as the 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church' (*Lumen Gentium*) and the 'Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity' (*Apostolicum Actuositatem*) emphasized an understanding of the church as the whole people of God, rather than the more juridical understanding of a hierarchical institution controlled by priests and bishops.<sup>26</sup>

The post-World War II period also witnessed the emergence of a 'theology of the laity' and 'workplace theology' that understood ministry as involving all the people of God, and not limited to the confines and activities of the institutional church.<sup>27</sup> The charismatic renewal movements that have impacted both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches since the 1960s have heightened the awareness of the gifting of all the people of God for ministry, and promoted more participatory forms of ministry understood in terms of 'Body Life' (cf. 1 Cor.12, 14; Eph.4).

This modern recognition of the calling of all the people of God to be actively involved in the work of the ministry—both inside and outside the church—is to be welcomed and encouraged. The present essay is calling, in effect, for a further 'third moment' in

the historical trends in Christian ministry, one in which the more active role of the laity will be preserved, but that in addition, the *divine agency* and divine presence in every act of ministry will be recognized: all the people of God, with their various charisms for ministry, are recognized to be acting both in the presence of God and in partnership with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The God who is actively and really present in the midst of his people is recognized as the primary agent in all ministry.<sup>28</sup>

This 'third moment' is seen as a corrective to the 'turn to the (human) subject' that has characterized modern theology since Schleiermacher and much of modern evangelicalism since Finney. We now turn to the biblical and theological basis for this 'Trinitarian-ecclesial' model for ministry.

#### IV Divine Presence and Human-Divine Partnership<sup>29</sup>

The themes of the divine presence and

<sup>26</sup> Walter M. Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Corpus Books, 1966), 14-101, 489-521. Vatican II made famous a phrase calling for the 'full, conscious and active participation' of the people in worship.

<sup>27</sup> For historical perspective on these developments, see Robert Banks, 'Appendix A: Lay Theology and Education since 1945', in Robert Banks, *Redeeming the Routines: Bringing Theology to Life* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993), 153-174, and also Stephen C. Neill and Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Layman in Christian History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963).

<sup>28</sup> Jerald C. Brauer, in his seminal essay, 'Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism', *Journal of Religion* 58:3 (1978): 227-243 has argued that in the historical trajectory from Puritanism to Finney and modern revivalism, with its focus on conversion, there was an (unintended) shift of focus away from God as objectively present and acting toward the human subject and private religious experience.

<sup>29</sup> The current essay echoes and recalls, of course, the seventeenth-century devotional classic of Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), who saw all Christian life and service as being done with an awareness of the presence of God. This essay is an attempt to generalize Brother Lawrence's insight for church ministry and to give it a more comprehensive biblical and systematic basis.

divine-human partnership in ministry are significant themes in both the Old and New Testaments, and can be illustrated in the lives of Moses, Joshua, Jesus, and the apostle Paul.

## 1 Old Testament

Moses is called by God to ministry at the burning bush ('I am sending you', Ex. 3:10), and at the same time, is promised that God will be with him as he fulfils his calling ('I will be with you', Ex. 3:12). God will make the Egyptians favourably disposed (Ex. 3:21), and will help Moses to speak (Ex. 4:12). Aaron will be Moses' partner in speaking, and God promises to help both Moses and Aaron to speak and to teach them what to do (Ex. 4:15).

Moses will see what God himself will do to the Egyptians in the plagues and confrontation with Pharaoh (Ex. 6:1); it is God, not Moses who is the primary agent in the deliverance of the Israelites. God will pass through Egypt (Ex. 12:12), will lead them toward the Red Sea (Ex. 13:18), going ahead of them and guiding them (Ex. 13:21), and it will be God himself, not merely Moses as the human servant, who will be actively fighting for them (Ex. 14:14). The Lord himself is present in the pillar of cloud as the 'commander-in-chief' of the people of God, and looks down as witness to the mighty deliverance at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:24).

After the crossing of the Red Sea and during the wilderness sojourning the Israelites engage in battle with the Amalekites, with Joshua leading the battle, and Moses directing the battle from the top of a hill with the staff of God and Aaron and Hur hold-

ing up his hands (Ex. 17:8-16). The incident provides a memorable image of 'ministry in the presence of God and in partnership with God', since Joshua fights in the presence of God and with the empowerment of God, and Aaron and Hur partner with Moses as Moses intercedes for Joshua in the posture of prayer. Joshua, Moses, Aaron, and Hur are all 'partners with God' in the victory over the Amalekites.

In Exodus 18 Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, gives Moses the wise counsel that his ministry of leading the people and judging all their disputes will inevitably lead to 'ministerial burnout', and that he needs to delegate and practise ministry in partnership with other gifted people in the community (Ex. 18:21-24).

As the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle, and the consecration of the priests are being prepared, the promise of God's continuing presence as the central reality in the life of the community is again emphasized: 'I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of Egypt *so that I might dwell among them*' (Ex. 29:45,46; emphasis added). As Moses and the people anticipate the continuing journey and the entrance into the promised land, God again promises, 'My presence will go with you' (Ex. 33:14).

It is in fact the divine Presence that distinguishes the people of Israel from all the other peoples on the face of the earth (Ex. 33:16). Moses' ministry to the people is energized by the forty days and nights that he spends in the presence of God on top of Mount



Sinai (Ex.34:28); he descends from the mountain with his face shining with the glory of God, a glory that foreshadows the transformative glory that is to be shared by all the future ministers of the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:18). The narrative suggests that all truly transformative ministry, done to the glory of God, first begins with a minister who spends time contemplatively in the presence of God and himself is being transformed by the divine glory.

The themes of the divine presence and partnership in ministry that are central in the Moses narrative are continued in the life of Joshua, Moses' successor. Joshua, who must have had a great sense of personal inadequacy to fill the shoes of his enormously gifted predecessor is promised by God, 'As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you' (Josh. 1:5). The promise and the reality of the continuing 'real presence' of the Almighty is far more weighty than the human presence of Moses. God says to Joshua, 'Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go' (Josh. 1:9).

As the people are led across the Jordan River—recalling the action of God at the crossing of the Red Sea—the people are to recognize that 'the living God is among you' (Josh. 3:10), for it is God, the commander of the Israelite armies, enthroned on the ark of the covenant, who is causing the water to cease from flowing (Josh. 3:15). In the conquest of Jericho, with the priests carrying the ark of God around the walls, it was in fact God himself present with the people (Josh. 6:27) who caused the

walls to tumble down and give Joshua and the people victory. The fallen walls of Jericho were a vivid image of a divine-human partnership in achieving victory, with God as the primary agent, and the people as the secondary agents in partnership with the Lord.

## 2 New Testament

In the New Testament Jesus can be seen as a 'second Moses' and 'second Joshua' who also exemplifies ministry in the presence of God and in partnership with God. Jesus never acts independently; he constantly and consistently acts in partnership with God his heavenly Father. 'The Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does' (Jn. 5:19). Jesus does not seek to be 'original' or 'creative', but rather takes his cues from the Father's actions and presence in the world. 'By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear... I seek not to please myself but him who sent me' (Jn. 5:30).

Jesus tells his disciples that apart from him they can do nothing (Jn. 15:5b) that will produce lasting fruit in the ministry; he himself practises what he preaches by listening to the Father before speaking to others. Jesus is consciously aware of the Father's presence in his own ministry and seeks to follow the Father's initiative: 'I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me *is with me and has not left me alone*' (Jn. 8:28,29; emphasis added).

The gospel narratives, especially those of Luke and John, also make it clear that Jesus' ministry is done with an awareness of the presence and em-



powerment of the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup> As he is praying during the baptismal scene in the Jordan River (Lk. 3:21)—prayer as an act of communion with the Father—the Spirit descends upon him, signifying the reality of the Father's love and the peace that characterizes the relationship between the Father and the Son. Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 4:1), is led by the Spirit to be tested in the desert, and then returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (Lk. 4:14) to begin his ministry.

As he reads from the scroll of Isaiah (Is. 61:1,2) in the synagogue at Nazareth, his reading of scripture is anointed by the Holy Spirit (Lk. 4:18). When his disciples return from a preaching and healing mission, Jesus exults in praise to the Father, full of joy in the Holy Spirit (Lk. 10:21). All of Jesus' ministry, in fact, flows from the reality that the Father has anointed the Son with power and the Holy Spirit (Acts. 10:38).

Jesus goes to the cross in obedience to the Father, offering himself by the strength of the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14), and is raised from the dead through the Holy Spirit, to 'the glory of the Father' (Rom. 6:4). Exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus receives

a fresh effusion of the Holy Spirit from the Father, and then shares this anointing with his disciples on earth, that they might be empowered to continue the ministry that Jesus began on earth (Acts 2:33).

The implication of these texts is clear: the ministry of Jesus is Trinitarian in nature, in that he, as the eternal Son of God, does ministry in partnership with and in the presence of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The ministry of Jesus is the action of the Triune God in human history, and provides the paradigm for all ministry in the New Covenant.

Jesus, in commissioning his disciples for ministry, commands them to continue ministry in his own way of communion with God and in partnership with God. They are to abide in communion with him (Jn. 15:5), for apart from this communion with him, mediated by the Holy Spirit, their ministry cannot bear lasting fruit. As the Father sent Jesus into ministry by anointing him with the Spirit (Lk. 3:21; 4:1,14), so Jesus imparts the Holy Spirit to the disciples (Jn. 20:21,22; Acts 2:4: 'they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit') before sending them out into the world to be his witnesses and to proclaim the message of forgiveness of sins. As the Father was present with Jesus his Son in ministry (Jn. 8:28,29), Jesus promises that he will be with them as they seek to make disciples and to fulfil the Great Commission (Mt. 28:20: 'Surely I am *with you* always, to the very end of the age').

The ministry of the apostle Paul, as it is reflected in his epistles and the book of Acts, gives clear evidence of a style of ministry that could be characterized as 'ministry in the presence of

**30** An insightful study of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts is found in Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), especially chap. 3, 'The Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Luke: The Charismatic Christ', 33-48. See also James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975).

God and in partnership with God'—and in partnership with other members of the Body of Christ. Paul's sense of self-identity and his life and ministry are grounded foundationally in his union with Christ: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me' (Gal.2:20). The old self, the old Saul of Tarsus is dead; the new Paul the apostle lives and ministers in union with and in partnership with Christ, who supplies the new life and energy and direction for ministry.

Paul's sense of apostolic authority, his awareness that Christ is speaking through him (2 Cor. 13:3), is grounded in this awareness of union with Christ. The word of the gospel that the Thessalonians received was not just Paul's human word, but indeed the word of God spoken by God himself through Paul (1 Thess. 2:13). He is conscious that the words that he is writing to the Corinthians are not merely his words; these words are the instruments of the risen Christ who gives his commands to the church through Paul (1 Cor. 14:37, 'what I am writing to you is the Lord's command').

The gifts of the Holy Spirit that are being manifested in the Corinthian congregation are in fact the actions of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—that are acting through the various members of the body for the good of the whole: 'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service [*diakonia*, 'ministries'], but the same Lord [Christ] There are different kinds of working [*energeimatoon*, 'operations'], but the same God [Father] works all of

them in all men' (1 Cor. 12:4-6).<sup>31</sup> The individual Christian in Corinth who is exercising a particular charism should be aware of the fact that he or she is actually acting *in partnership* with the Holy Spirit and is *participating* in the action and ministry of the three persons of the Trinity as *they* act in partnership for the purpose of building up the whole Body.<sup>32</sup>

The reality of Paul's ministry as one done in the presence of God and in partnership with God is attested in the book of Acts. Paul and Barnabas are in the presence of God, worshipping with the community in Antioch, when the Holy Spirit, present to the assembly, says, 'Set apart for *me* Barnabas and Saul for the work to which *I* have called them' (Acts 13:2). The Holy Spirit, a co-equal person of the Trinity, is the primary agent in the calling and commissioning of those who are to be the agents of the Spirit in the mission to the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas are 'sent on their way by the Holy Spirit' (Act 13:4), as Jesus had been sent by the Spirit into the desert (Lk. 4:1) and empowered by the Spirit for ministry in Galilee (Lk.4:14). When they return to Jerusalem, the church meeting in council is aware that its deliberations are done in

31 According to Thiselton, the 'Trinitarian ground plan constitutes an outstanding feature of 12:4-6': Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 934.

32 To state the same point in a slightly different way, the one who is exercising a particular charism should see the Triune God as the primary active agent in the manifestation and exercise of the gift, and himself or herself as the secondary agent or instrument.

the presence of the Spirit ('it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,' Acts 15:28).

In the second missionary journey, the Holy Spirit deflects Paul and Silas from preaching in the provinces of Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6,7), calling them, through a vision, to preach the gospel in Macedonia (Acts 16:8-10). Upon arriving in Philippi, the risen Christ, and the Holy Spirit who is accompanying Paul and his companions, open Lydia's heart to respond to the message ('The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message', Acts 16:14).

Lydia's conversion is a result of the divine agency of Christ and the Spirit working through the human agency of Paul. When Paul arrives in Corinth, the risen Christ speaks to Paul in a vision, and encourages him to continue speaking, because '*I am with you and I have many people in this city*', Acts 18:9,10). Christ is present with Paul as he preaches and teaches in Corinth.

After his arrest and during his defence before King Agrippa (Acts 26) Paul, in recounting his conversion experience and the essentials of the gospel kerygma, states that in fulfilment of the scriptures the Messiah would suffer, and '... as the first to rise from the dead, *would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles* [emphasis added]' (Acts 26:23). Paul is saying here that the risen Christ continues to act in redemptive history as the gospel is proclaimed; Christ's priestly work of atonement is finished, but his kerygmatic ministry continues as he continues to preach through his chosen apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Paul is a 'junior partner' in the Gentile mission; the Risen Christ and the Holy

Spirit are the 'senior partners', so to speak.

Not only is it the case that the apostle Paul works in partnership with Christ and the Spirit; his ministry is notably one of partnership with various members of the Body of Christ. A striking example is provided by the term *synergos*, 'fellow-worker', characteristic of Paul.<sup>33</sup> This appellation is applied to Priscilla and Aquila, Urbanus, Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, Clement, Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus Justus, Demas, Luke and others not explicitly named.

Terms such as 'fellow-partner' (Phil. 1:7, of the Philippians), 'fellow-slaves' (Col. 1:7; 4:7, of Epaphroditus and Tychicus), 'fellow-soldier' (Phil. 2:25; Philemon 2, of Epaphroditus and Archippus), and 'fellow-prisoner' (Col. 4:10, Aristarchus, and Philemon 23, Epaphras) also express Paul's sense of solidarity with his fellow Christians in the ministry of the gospel. Paul's sense of working in partnership with Christ and the Spirit and with his fellow believers arises naturally out of his sense of the reality of his union with Christ and solidarity with the Body of Christ; his actions in ministry were a manifestation of his deepest dogmatic and doctrinal convictions.

## V Systematic Foundations for Ministry in Partnership

Having in the previous section surveyed the biblical themes of divine presence and divine-human partnership in ministry, we will now turn to

---

<sup>33</sup> Of the 13 instances of *synergos* in the New Testament, 12 are found in Paul.

reflection on three fundamental topics in systematic theology—the doctrine of the Trinity, union with Christ (Christology), and the Body of Christ (ecclesiology)—with a view toward showing how they are foundational for the theology and practices of ministry. Here it is being proposed that the doctrines of the Trinity, union with Christ, and the ecclesiological notion of the church as the Body of Christ should be at the core of a biblical theology of ministry.

At the outset we can notice the fundamental nature of the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christology (of which union with Christ is an implication) in the fabric of the Christian faith. The doctrine of the Trinity is the basis of the distinctively Christian answer to the question, ‘Who is God?’, and the doctrines of Christology give the distinctively *Christian* answer to the questions, ‘Who is Jesus Christ?’ and ‘How does God save?’ A foundationally *Christian* understanding of the nature and practices of church ministry would, consequently, be explicitly and self-consciously formulated with these foundational truths in view.

## 1 Trinity

In the last several generations there has been a remarkable renaissance of interest in Trinitarian theology, reflecting the influence of Karl Barth in Protestant theological circles and of Karl Rahner in the Roman Catholic world.<sup>34</sup> This growing recognition of

the centrality of Trinitarian theology for all Christian faith and life has yet to be adequately integrated into pastoral theologies and practices of ministry.

The proposition being argued in this section of the essay in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity is as follows:

*Christian ministry is done in the presence of the Triune God and in partnership with the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—with the Triune God being recognized as the Primary, Active Agent in every ministerial act.*

This proposition further implies that the doctrine of the Trinity provides the irreducible and essential foundation for a proper New Testament understanding of ministry at three basic levels of theory and practice: the ontological, the methodological, and the teleological (purposive). That is to say, the doctrine of the Trinity is recognized as the ultimate Christian reality (divine persons in communion) and hence, the ultimate grounding of the Christian faith, the Christian church, and Christian ministry. Methodologically, the Trinitarian pattern of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit acting in concert and collaboration provides the methodological paradigm and model for all Christian ministry. Teleologically, bringing persons into ever-deepening communion with God the Father, through Jesus Christ the Son, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, is recognized as the ultimate purpose and goal of all church ministry (worship, discipleship, mission).

In the previous section we saw that the disciples were sent out by Jesus the risen Son to disciple the nations and were to do so with a consciousness of the accompanying presence of Christ (Matt. 28:20); Christ is truly present

<sup>34</sup> For a review of recent scholarship in Trinitarian theology, see Fred Sanders, ‘The Trinity’, 35–53, in John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Ian Torrance, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

wherever two or three of his disciples gather in conscious intent to invoke his name (Matt. 18:20). Repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus is to be proclaimed in the power and in the presence of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:21,22). Since Jesus is in the Father and the Father in Jesus (Jn.17:21; cf. Jn.14:9, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father'),<sup>35</sup> where Jesus is, by virtue of the Spirit, his name, and his word, so there the Father is also. All three persons of the Trinity—the Spirit (Jn. 14:16) and the Father and the Son abide with the church forever (Jn. 14:23) and are present with the church in its worship and ministry.

New Testament ministry is performed in partnership with God as the Father's will is done on earth (Matt. 6:10). The apostle Paul is conscious of the fact that he 'partners' with the risen Christ in ministry who proclaims light to the Gentiles through his missionary preaching (Acts 26:23), and that the life he now lives he lives in union with the Christ who lives in him (Gal. 2:20). The Pauline Gentile mission is characterized by partnership with the Holy Spirit who calls (Acts 13:2), sends (Acts 13:4), counsels (Acts 15:28), directs (Acts 16:6,7), and illuminates the gospel message to effect conversion (Acts 16:14).

This human partnership *with* the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a reflection of the partnership in ministry *of* the Triune God and a participation in it. We have previously noted a text such as 1 Cor. 12:4-6, where the

cooperative, co-active ministry of Father, Son, and Spirit ('different gifts, but the same Spirit... different service, but the same Lord... different operations, but the same God) is seen. Likewise, we have noted texts such as John 5:19 and John 8:28,29 that witness to Jesus' cooperation and partnership with the Father in ministry.

These texts and others like them are examples of the Trinitarian principles articulated in various ways by the church fathers: *Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*: that is, 'The works of the Trinity in the world are indivisible'. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work not independently of one another, but always work in partnership and collaboration. As St. Athanasius stated, 'The Father does all things through the Word in the Holy Spirit; and thus the unity of the Holy Trinity is preserved.'<sup>36</sup> This model of the partnership and collaboration of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in ministry provides the foundational model for effective ministry in and by the church.

## 2 Union with Christ

The category of *union with Christ* is another central concept for the Trinitarian-ecclesial model of ministry, and is a fundamental basis for the pastor's self-identity. Union with Christ, referring to the intimate, personal bond between the believer and the risen Christ,<sup>37</sup> me-

<sup>35</sup> The mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is known as *perichoresis* in the theological tradition.

<sup>36</sup> Athanasius, *Ad Serapion*, I, 28.

<sup>37</sup> The Christian concept of union with Christ or mystical union does not involve the destruction of human individuality, but its transformation and renewal in the context of a new relationship lived in interdependence with Christ; union with Christ is not the end of *individuality* per se, but rather the end of an atomistic and autonomous individuality.

diated by the Holy Spirit, is prominent in New Testament theology, especially in the Pauline and Johannine writings. Jesus tells his disciples that he is the vine and they are the branches, drawing their life fruitfulness from him (Jn. 15:5). As Jesus is in the Father, so is Jesus in the disciples and they in him (Jn. 14:20); the Father and the Son will come to the believers and make their home with them (Jn. 14:23). Jesus will continue to make the Father's love known to the disciples in order that the Father's love might be deepened in them and that Jesus himself may dwell more deeply within them (Jn. 17:26).

Union with Christ is a central category in Pauline theology, frequently signified by the terminology of 'with' or 'in' Christ. For Paul, Christian baptism is baptism into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3); the old self or identity was crucified with him (Rom. 6:6). We died with Christ and were buried with him (Rom. 6:4,8). Paul has been crucified with Christ, and the life he now lives he lives by faith in the Son of God and in living union with him (Gal. 2:20). Anyone who is in Christ is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). We were all baptized by the Spirit into one body of which the risen Christ is the living head (1 Cor. 12:13). Christian marriage is a spiritual image of the intimate union between Christ and his bride, the church (Eph. 5:25-32). God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:6).

Just as a man who unites himself to a prostitute is one with her in body (*hen soma estin*), so the one who unites himself with Christ the Lord is one with him in spirit (*hen pneuma estin*) (1 Cor. 6:17).<sup>38</sup> Just as union with a prostitute involves body-to-body contact between

a man and the prostitute, so union with Christ involves a real spirit-to-spirit contact between Christ and the believer. As the New Testament scholar Alfred Wikenhauser has rightly insisted, this Pauline and Johannine language of union with Christ is not to be taken as only 'metaphorical' or as only a figure of speech, but with its real ontological force, as a 'real, objective state' that is 'true of all [Christians] without exception'.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the prominence of union with Christ in the New Testament and in the histories of both Catholic and Protestant theology, this key concept has, for the most part, not been sufficiently integrated into modern theologies of ministry.<sup>40</sup> Part of the problem may be that modern New Testament scholars and theologians, influenced by the materialistic and naturalistic categories of the Enlightenment and modern science, find it difficult to relate the 'mystical' dimensions of union with Christ to the categories of modern life. A case in point is provided by E.P. Sanders, who recognizes the centrality of union with Christ in Paul, yet has difficulty in conceptualizing it:

<sup>38</sup> George T. Montague, commenting on this text (1 Cor. 6:17), has observed that 'Christian life is a union with the Lord so real that Paul can use the very same verb (*kollomenos*) for union with the prostitute and union with the Lord': Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 45.

<sup>39</sup> Alfred Wikenhauser, *Pauline Mysticism: Christ in the Mystical Teaching of St. Paul* (Edinburgh-London: Nelson, 1960), 93.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology*, is a notable exception in this regard.



It seems to me best to understand Paul as saying what he meant and meaning what he said: Christians really are one body and Spirit with Christ, the form of the present really is passing away, Christians really are being changed from one stage of glory to another, the end really will come and those who are in Christ will really be transformed.

But then Sanders goes on to ask:

But what does this mean? How are we to understand it? We seem to lack a concept of 'reality'—a real participation in Christ, real possession of the Spirit—which lies between naïve cosmological speculation and belief in magical transference on the one hand [e.g., Gnosticism or Hellenistic mystery religions: JD] and a revised self-understanding [e.g., Bultmann: JD] on the other. *I confess that I do not have a new category of perception to propose here.*<sup>41</sup>

In order to meet this difficulty in relating the biblical concept of union with Christ to the categories of post-Enlightenment modern thought, we introduce at this point the concepts of the *extended Self* and of a *coupled system*, adapting these concepts from ideas articulated in an article by Clark and Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind'.<sup>42</sup>

The notion of an 'extended Self' is based on the observation that a per-

sonal agent can extend himself or herself into the surrounding environment, beyond the bounds of the agent's physical body (the 'empirical Self') through the use of an instrument or tool under the agent's control. The instrument in question can be either physical or electronic in nature. For example, a blind person can extend his sense of touch into the environment through the use of a cane held in his hand; the cane becomes an extension of his body. The blind person and the cane under his control form a 'coupled system'.

A coupled system and an extended Self may be formed also through an electronic instrument such as Skype software and an internet connection. If I am communicating with my daughter in California with a Skype connection, my daughter and her Skype icon that appears on my laptop screen form a coupled system; her empirical/molecular self is extended into my physical location, and my physical presence is extended electronically into her physical space by the Skype software and internet connection. Our Skype icons are instruments of our extended Selves. My icon is 'in' her laptop screen and her icon is 'in' mine. The connection is a real one because the internet connection is real and the Skype icon and software are real.<sup>43</sup>

The 'mutual indwelling' ('perichoresis') of Skype icons in a coupled internet system reminds us that a *molecular* form of presence can be distinguished from a *digital* or *informational* form of

41 Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 520, 522-23, cited by John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 150.

42 Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind', *Analysis* 58 (1998):10-23, accessed at <http://consc.net/papers/extended.html>

43 Material objects are only one form of the 'real'; reality also includes entities that are virtual/electronic/digital in nature, and ones that are *spiritual* in nature as well (e.g., God, angels, demons).

presence. Two molecular objects—such as two bowling balls—cannot be ‘in’ the same space, but various forms of digital information can be ‘in’ the same computer hard drive, or in the same wireless internet broadcast space at the same time: a Google home page, the data available in Facebook or YouTube or Twitter or Wikipedia can all be in the ‘cloud’ in the room around me, simultaneously, available to me if I have the proper receiving device.

To complete this implied analogy between the digital and the spiritual worlds, we can say that in union with Christ, Christ and the believer are a ‘coupled system’; the Holy Spirit is the real, continuous, ‘high-speed, broadband “internet” connection’ between heaven and earth, between Christ and the believer. ‘If anyone is joined to the Lord, he is one spirit with him’ (1 Cor. 6:17). We are more deeply and really connected to Christ by the Holy Spirit than we are connected electronically on Facebook to our Facebook ‘friends’. Indeed, what a ‘Friend’ we really have in Jesus!

The Holy Spirit extends my empirical/molecular self into the presence of the risen Christ; we are seated with him (by extension) in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). The Spirit extends the presence of the risen Christ into my space/soul: we are truly connected in a ‘digital’/spiritual connection and embrace. The risen Christ uses a variety of instruments—his Word in the scriptures, his name (cf. 1 Cor. 5:4: ‘when you come together in the name of Jesus and the power of the Lord is present’), the sacraments, and his called and gifted disciples to extend himself from heaven to earth; by these instruments, and by the energizing connectivity of

the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ is both in us (Jn. 14:20) and among us (Matt. 18:20) and with us (Matt. 28:20). Because I am in union with Christ the Son, I am also in living communion with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, for the three persons of the Trinity indwell one another, and indwell us.

### 3 Body of Christ

Union with Christ is also the basis of the category of the *Body of Christ* that is so significant for biblical ecclesiology. Because we are really united to Christ as the head, we are also really united to one another as the living members of his body. ‘By one Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body’ (1 Cor. 12:13). Union with Christ, then, is the core of our new Trinitarian-ecclesial identity as Christians and pastors: I *really am* in communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and I *really am* in communion with my brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ: this is who I *really am*, and I need to constantly recognize this ‘new creation’ identity, and act accordingly.

The old autonomous, independent Self is gone; the new *interdependent*, Trinitarian-ecclesial Self has arrived. Our ministry is to flow from the presence of God and to be done in partnership with God and the people of God, because this is the true account of the ways things really are and of who we really are. My self-concept and actions need to be in alignment with the fundamental being of God, Christ, the Spirit, the church, and my deep, continuing bonds with these interconnected and interdependent persons, human and divine.

## VI Practical Suggestions

This essay began by stating the following general proposition: *Christian ministry is activity by baptized Christians done in the presence of God and in partnership with God, for the purpose of bringing the people of God into deepening communion with God and with one another, and into right relationship with God's creation.* It was argued that this awareness of doing ministry in the presence of God and in partnership with God had its fundamental grounding in the doctrines of the Trinity and of union with Christ.

To conclude this essay, I will offer a number of practical observations and suggestions as to how these theological insights could be translated into the specific tasks of ministry

### 1 Reframing the Great Commission

The first suggestion regards a 'reframing' of the way in which the 'Great Commission' (Matt. 28:18-20) is generally read in the evangelical community. Since the publication in 1792 of William Carey's seminal essay, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, the 'Great Commission' has generally been read through the lens of *foreign missions*. The command in v.19 to 'go and make disciples of all nations' has been understood in terms of crossing national boundaries for the purpose of evangelizing and planting new churches. This is indeed a proper implication from the text, but as various commentators have pointed out, the main verb in the text is *make disciples* (*matheteu-sate*), and 'going... baptizing... teach-

ing' are all dependent participles.<sup>44</sup>

The proposal here is to read the 'Great Commission' in a new way: while not ignoring the missiological and 'boundary-crossing' implications of the text, the Great Commission should be seen as a mandate for how *ministry*—especially discipleship, viewed as a life-long task—should be done in the context of the *local church*. The focus should be on *making disciples*—not on making 'converts' or on 'going'—and the *risen Christ present in the church* ('I am with you always to the end of the age,' v.20) should be recognized as the primary, active Agent in the ministry of discipleship, in partnership with whom pastors and laity in the local church are working as a team in partnership with Christ and with one another.

The primary agency of Christ is emphatically asserted in the declarative statement, 'All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me' (v.18)—not to human agents; the authority and efficacy of the ministry of human agents is derived from the risen Christ who is the Primary Agent and who is really present with and partnering with the church in its ministries, both locally and globally. The paradigm shift that is needed is a shift from a primary focus on 'going' and *foreign* mission to a re-cognition of the real presence of Christ the Almighty Lord in the midst of the community as it ministers to

---

<sup>44</sup> For an excellent exegetical study of the Great Commission, and the command to 'make disciples,' see David Bosch, 'The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16-20', in Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 218-248, especially 230-233, 'Making Disciples'.

make disciples.<sup>45</sup> Every particular act of ministry—whether preaching a sermon, leading worship, teaching a Bible or membership class, leading a youth group, doing pastoral counseling, or leading a church committee meeting<sup>46</sup>—should be done with the consciousness that *Christ is present with us*—as the Primary Agent of ministry, and that he is the One who really ‘makes it happen’.

## 2 Spurgeon and Calvin

Second, by way of illustration of the principles of ministry done in the presence of God and in partnership with God, I mention two examples from church history, one from the ministry of Calvin, and the other from the ministry of Spurgeon.

When Charles Haddon Spurgeon ascended the stairs of the pulpit to preach in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, he would say to himself, repeatedly, ‘I believe in the Holy Spirit... I believe in the Holy Spirit... I believe in the Holy Spirit’.<sup>47</sup> Spurgeon was

not doing this to allay any doubts in his mind concerning the doctrines of the Holy Spirit or the Trinity; he was rather, in his personal confession and prayer prior to preaching recognizing that the Holy Spirit was indeed the Primary Agent in making the sermon fruitful and effective in the lives of his hearers, and that he, Spurgeon, was merely the secondary human agent and messenger. Spurgeon was partnering with the Holy Spirit and invoking the presence of the Spirit for his preaching.

John Calvin urged the ministers in Geneva to work in partnership, meeting weekly to study and discuss the scriptures. In his *Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1551 he stated, ‘First it will be expedient that all ministers, for conserving purity and concord of doctrine among themselves, meet together one certain day each week, for discussion of the scriptures; and none are to be exempt from this without legitimate excuse.’<sup>48</sup> Calvin did not want his fellow-pastors in Geneva to operate as ‘Lone Rangers’. Today, in a multiple-staff church setting, the pastoral staff would do well to discuss the weekly sermon text and topic among themselves, sharing exegetical insights and points of practical application.

## 3 Bridging Acts to Ministry

Third, I mention three ‘bridging concepts’ from the first chapter of the book of Acts that can help to link the

<sup>45</sup> This ‘reframing’ of the Great Commission is consistent with the modern recognition in missiological circles that the foundation of the church’s mission is the *missio Dei*, the ‘mission of God’; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 389-392.

<sup>46</sup> My article, ‘How To Get More Out of Committee Meetings in Your Church’, that applies some of the principles of practising ministry in the presence of God and in partnership with God and God’s people can be accessed at <http://bit.ly/kpvc2M>.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Douglas Wilson, ‘The Sacred Script in the Theater of God’, 2009 Desiring God National Conference, accessed at <http://www.passionforpreaching.net/tag-spurgeon>.

<sup>48</sup> In J.K.S. Reid, ed., *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 60. See also Joseph D. Small, ‘A Company of Pastors’, in David Foxgrover, ed., *Calvin and the Company of Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2004), 9-15.

principles of divine presence and divine-human partnership to the specific functions of ministry.

Luke states that during the forty day period between the resurrection and the ascension, Jesus spoke to the disciples about the Kingdom of God (1:3) and gave instructions ‘through the Holy Spirit’ (1:2). Jesus’ teaching ministry was ‘through the Holy Spirit’: even before Pentecost, the Spirit that had anointed him and empowered him throughout his ministry (Acts 10:38, ‘God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power’) continued to be present with him.

The presence of the Spirit in this teaching by Jesus (Acts 1:2) was not accompanied by any extraordinary manifestations (e.g., tongues, prophecies, miracles), but the Holy Spirit made the teaching effective and fruitful. Ministry involves both the ‘natural’ (e.g., turning on the lights when entering the pastor’s study), and at times, can involve the ‘extraordinary supernatural’ (e.g., praying for the healing of end-stage cancer—and the person being dramatically healed), but most ministry is done in the ‘natural’ and in the ‘ordinary supernatural’<sup>49</sup>—and it is this latter category that is likely to

be missed. The point is that the Holy Spirit is present even when there are no visible signs (tongues of fire; a heavenly dove; miracles) or dramatic manifestations; the ‘ordinary supernatural’ ministry can always be done with a consciousness of the presence and partnership of the Holy Spirit.

Luke’s account of the period leading up to Pentecost also embodies the principle of ‘doing church in the second-person plural’. Jesus gave *them* this command: Do not leave (2p.pl) Jerusalem, but (you, 2p.pl) wait for the gift.. you (2p.pl) will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you (2p.pl) will receive power... you (2p.pl)... you (2p.pl) will be my witnesses’ (Acts 1:4,5,8). All too often, the words of Acts 1 are read as promises and commands to *me*, as though Jesus was primarily concerned about giving me gifts as an individual; the point is that the text is directed to ‘all of you’; it is about ‘we’, not ‘me’, because the purpose of Jesus is to build a church, a Body, and a team. ‘Doing church in the second-person plural’ is consistent with the theme of doing ministry in partnership with God and with the people of God.

In Acts 1:14 we find the crucial ministry principle of *spiritual alignment*: ‘They all joined together constantly in prayer.’ Luke uses the relatively rare word *homothumadon* (see also Acts 2:46 and 4:24), ‘of one mind’ to describe the mind set of the disciples, achieved through persistent, united prayer, that prepared these disciples to receive the Spirit and be empowered for ministry—in a way that *united* the community rather than dividing it.

The term *homothumadon*, ‘of one mind’, signifies a ‘togetherness’ that means not merely being in the same

<sup>49</sup> In regard to what is here termed the ‘ordinary supernatural’ ministry of the Holy Spirit, Morgan-Wynne notes that in both Luke and Paul, the action of the Holy Spirit is seen not only in the more dramatic manifestations such as tongues, prophecy, miracles, and exorcism, but also in the ‘non-ecstatic’ manifestations of ethical growth, maturity of character, administration, and practical service: John Eifion Morgan-Wynne, *Holy Spirit and Religious Experience in Christian Literature ca. AD 90-200* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 14,15.

place physically or geographically, but, as we would say, 'being on the same page', having a common focus of attention and shared purpose. The connection between Acts 1:14 ('they were all together... praying') and Acts 2:4 ('they *all* were filled') and Acts 2:41 ('about 3000 were added') is not accidental. The sequence for effective ministry indicated in these seminal texts is clear: first, *alignment* (listening for God's voice in united prayer; aligning our wills to God's will; agreeing together to obey God's will); second, receiving *empowerment* for ministry through the presence of the Holy Spirit to the community (Acts 2:4); third, *active ministry* and witness in partnership with God and the church (Acts 2:14, Peter stood up *with the Eleven*... 3000 were added; 2:41).

The principle of spiritual alignment is so powerful because it is, in effect, an answer to Jesus' high priestly prayer (Jn.17) that his disciples manifest unity, a unity that in itself gives credibility to the claim that Jesus was indeed sent by the Father and that the Father indeed loves the church as he has loved his Son (Jn. 17:23). Jesus himself practised the principle of spiritual alignment, aligning his will with that of the Father before he spoke or acted (Jn. 5:19; 8:26,28,29; 14:10,31). Because Jesus' will as the Son is in alignment with the will of the Father, the Spirit can flow freely through him and from him in ministry to the world. A church 'in alignment' (Acts 1:14) is effective in ministry, because this alignment is a reflection of the life of the Triune God, acting in unity and partnership.

#### 4 Four benefits

Fourthly, and finally, I will mention four benefits that can result from a practice of ministry reflecting a consciousness of the presence of God and partnership with God, grounded in the doctrines of the Trinity, union with Christ, and the Body of Christ. The first benefit is that such a practice of ministry can lessen the danger of ministerial *burnout* that seems endemic to so much ministry in the modern church. The Trinitarian-ecclesial model of ministry being proposed here encourages a slower, more contemplative approach to ministry, one that recognizes that before the outward act, the pastor should be grounded internally, prayerfully and contemplatively, in the experience of the love of God known through union with Christ, and then empowered to execute that ministry outwardly in partnership with other gifted members of the Body of Christ.<sup>50</sup>

Avoiding ministerial 'burnout' is also, in effect, a matter of rooting out three 'heresies' of ministry: 'Deism'; 'Pelagianism'; and 'Individualism'.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> The excellent book by Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), skillfully blending biblical theology and insights from psychology, calls for just such a more contemplative approach to ministry.

<sup>51</sup> The notion of these three in-practice 'heresies' of ministry is drawn from James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & The Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), especially 19-41, 'Worship—Unitarian or Trinitarian?' 'What is needed today is a better understanding of the person not just as an individual but as someone who finds his or her true being in communion with God and others, the counterpart of a Trinitarian doctrine of God': 39, 38.



'Deism' signifies the working assumption that 'God is really far away' when I am preaching and ministering. 'Pelagianism' is the working assumption that 'I can do this ministry in my own human power and ability'. 'Individualism' is the 'heresy' that 'I can do this ministry myself'. All three heresies are a sure recipe for ministerial burnout, and all three heresies can be rooted out by a theory and practice of ministry done consciously in the presence of God and in partnership with God and

God's gifted people.

This essay has been an attempt to continue, from the vantage point of a systematic theologian, a conversation on the nature of ministry initiated from the perspective of pastoral theology by Andrew Purves. It is my hope that some of my fellow systematic theologians might join this attempt to build more bridges between pastoral and systematic theology by critiquing my analysis and by extending it in various ways.

## **Holy Spirit and Religious Experience in Christian Writings, c.AD 90–200**

John Eifion Morgan-Wynne

This study examines how far Christians in the third to fifth generations (c.AD 90–200) attributed their sense of encounter with the divine presence, their sense of illumination in the truth or guidance in decision-making, and their sense of ethical empowerment to the activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

**John Eifion Morgan-Wynne** is a former Tutor in New Testament and Dean of Regent's Park College, Oxford, Principal of Bristol Baptist College, and minister of Ilkley Baptist Church, West Yorkshire, UK.

978-1-84227-319-7 / 229 x 152 mm / 390pp (app.) / £24.99

**Paternoster, Authenticmedia Limited, 52 Presley Way,  
Crownhill, Milton Keynes, MK8 0ES**

# The Problem of Evil from a Gospel Perspective

James P. Danaher

**KEYWORDS:** *Divine attributes, forgiveness, justice, mercy, atonement, righteousness*

## I Solutions

What theologians refer to as ‘the problem of evil’ results from the fact that if God is all-good, all-knowing, all-powerful, and the sole creator of the universe, how do we explain the existence of evil? This creates what logicians call inconsistency. We can resolve the inconsistency by removing any one of the above-mentioned attributes of God. If God were not all-good there would obviously be evil in the world because of the evil in the creator. Likewise, if God were not all-knowing he could have created a world, which he thought would be free of evil without knowing that evil would result from his creation. Equally, we could understand God to be less than all-powerful.

In Plato’s *Timaeus*, the character Timaeus claims that the Demiurge who created the world tried to eliminate all of the preexisting evil but was not powerful enough to do so. Another alterna-

tive is to imagine that God was not the sole creator of the universe. According to the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism, there were two creators: one evil and one good, and hence the existence of evil.

Christian orthodoxy has always dealt with this problem by trying to explain evil and suffering in a way that resolves the inconsistency without eliminating any of the divine attributes. Some have argued that evil is only apparent and not ultimately real. Things may appear evil to us but that is to perceive things from our limited perspective; it is to view things in light of what we like or do not like. If we could see things from God’s eternal perspective, we would see them very differently.

Unfortunately, the result of such a position is that it tends to make us less than compassionate. When people are suffering, if we believe that the evil they suffer is only apparent and not ultimately real, we will tend to lack the very important virtue of compassion. Jesus extended true compassion to people suffering the evil of this world, and he calls us to do the same. A diminished capacity for compassion is a

---

*James P. Danaher, Ph.D., M. Phil. (City University of New York) is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department of Philosophy, Nyack College, NY. He has published articles in many philosophical and theological journals, including ‘The Problem with Fundamentalism’ (New Blackfriars, March, 2008). He is the author of Eyes That See, Ears That Hear: Perceiving Jesus in a Postmodern Context (Liguori Publications, 2006).*

high price to pay for exonerating God as the cause of evil.

Over the centuries, philosophers and theologians have proposed a host of other possible ways to explain or justify the existence of evil, but the one I find most compelling is the idea of evil as instrumental. The philosopher, John Hick, has written extensively on the idea of evil as a necessary ingredient in God's purpose of making us into his likeness.<sup>1</sup> Hick claims that God has made us in his image and likeness,<sup>2</sup> but although we bear the image of God from birth, the likeness of God takes a lifetime to develop. In that process, God uses what we call evil as an instrument to that purpose. Just as a medical operation might be painful and undesirable in itself, it can have the consequence of restoring us to health. Likewise, God uses what we consider evil to make us into his likeness.

Hick, like most people, thinks that God's perfecting of us and making us into his likeness is largely a matter of perfecting our moral behaviour. The perfection that Jesus calls us to, however, is not about becoming like him in terms of being sinless but in terms of becoming his agents of forgiveness and mercy. Interestingly, if we find our perfection in our becoming forgiving rather than sinless, the existence of evil is very consistent with an all good, all-knowing, and all-powerful sole creator. If what it means to follow Jesus is much more a matter of becoming agents of God's forgiveness and mercy, it makes sense that God would create a world that would give us the greatest

possible opportunity to develop those divine attributes. If we are to become loving, as God is loving, and extend our love to sinners and even our enemies<sup>3</sup> through forgiveness and mercy, it makes sense that God would create a world full of sinners and enemies in order to give us the greatest possible opportunity to develop into his forgiving likeness.

Of course, we do not want a God whose purpose for our lives is to transform us into people who can love sinners and enemies. We want God to be a moral policeman, who enforces divine justice, which we imagine is a matter of rewarding good behaviour and punishing bad behaviour. We want God to be the enforcer of the kind of order we would want if we were God. If we were God, we would base our sovereignty upon power and reward those who obey us and punish those who dare to disobey.

## II Jesus, Forgiveness and Love

The God that Jesus reveals, however, bases his sovereignty upon forgiveness and love. The Jesus revelation is that of a loving God who desires to produce love within his creation. His great purpose behind creation is to create people who, like himself, are able to change others, not through the threat of force, but through forgiveness and love. In order to accomplish that purpose, we must participate by becoming evermore aware of the forgiveness he constantly extends to us.

<sup>1</sup> John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (revised edition) (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Gen 1:26.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus washes the feet of Judas (John 13:2-5), and prays from the cross for his torturers would be forgiven in order that they might spend eternity with him (Luke 23:34).

Jesus tells us that, 'The one to whom little is forgiven, loves little'.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, to love much, we must experience much forgiveness. We usually understand this to mean that the one with the greater sin and therefore greater forgiveness will love more, but that is a wrong way to understand the idea of receiving much forgiveness. We are forgetful creatures and no matter how great our offence might be, in no time, we forget its gravity and the grandness of the forgiveness we received.

Jesus tells a story to illustrate this fact. He tells us of an unforgiving servant who, after his master has forgiven him a great deal, did not forgive another who owed him a very small amount.<sup>5</sup> As in all of Jesus' parables, he is not telling us about a particular unappreciative individual. He is instead relating a universal truth that applies to almost all of us. We are all forgetful of others having forgiven us, and acutely aware of the offences we have suffered.

The only way to reverse this process is to experience forgiveness on an almost constant basis. By constantly being aware of receiving forgiveness, we do, in time, become more forgiving ourselves and respond to others with forgiveness rather than a demand for justice. Thus, the one who habitually receives forgiveness is more likely to become forgiving than the one who experiences a single, great act of forgiveness that easily slips from memory.

This is the great problem with imagining that God forgives us in one act of atonement for all time, and never again suffers the offence of our sin. If Jesus suffered the offence of our sin, once

and for all, then we have no continual need of repentance, and likewise no continual source from which to experience God's forgiveness. The truth is that God continues to suffer our rejection of him, and we continually need to repent and experience his forgiveness for our failure to love God the way Jesus calls us to love him with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

In order to understand this, we must see that our sin is much deeper than we imagine, and we grieve the heart of God long before any evil behaviour appears. Likewise, God's desire is that we would repent long before any evil or destructive behaviour appears; that is, that we would repent or turn back to an awareness of God's presence every time we find ourselves distracted from an awareness of his presence. God's desire is that we would all live the way Jesus lived; that is, in a constant awareness of the Father's presence. Whenever we leave such a state of prayer we need to turn back or repent.

Our culture may imagine that the sins that separate us from God are things like murder or adultery, but Jesus was sinless not because he avoided such behaviours, but because he was never distracted from an awareness of his Father's presence. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus offers many teachings in order to reveal sins that our culture finds difficult to see as sinful. In the story of the Great Banquet,<sup>6</sup> the reason that people chose not to come to the feast was not that they choose instead to be at a crack house or bordello, but because they are doing business or getting married.

We assume there is nothing wrong

---

4 Luke 7:47.

5 Mt. 18:23-35.

---

6 Luke 14:16-24.

with doing business or getting married, but Jesus tells us that anything that keeps us from the great banquet God has for us is cause for repentance. Indeed, we are almost all kept from the fullness of life that God has for us by innocuous activities that occupy us in ways that keep us from an awareness of God's presence.

Jesus is constantly pointing out that the standard to which God is calling us is much greater than we would like to imagine, and that there is a judgment. The judgment is that we have all failed to live the fullness of life that God intends for us. The intention of the judgment, however, is to bring us to repentance in order that we might experience God's forgiveness. We have all gone our own way, and sought to find life and meaning apart from God. Our hearts are prone to wander, but it is the recognition of that sin that causes us to return to an awareness of God's presence through repentance, and the experience of God's forgiveness.

At this point, we should better understand why an all-good and all-powerful creator would fashion a world where human beings would constantly be tempted to go off on their own to seek life and meaning apart from God. It is only in a world where the opportunity for sin and all the evil that follows from it is abundant, that there is equally the opportunity to come to know the greatness of God's forgiveness and mercy. Such a world provides countless opportunities to both receive forgiveness from God and to practise our divine likeness by extending it to others.

We may find it strange that God would create a world so ripe with evil, but that is because we equate evil with pain and suffering, the absence of

which we consider happiness. Jesus, however, points to a deeper, richer, and more divine happiness. The happiness he has for us draws us into the pain and suffering that is so much a part of forgiveness and love. We find this hard to understand.

We want God to be who we would be if we were God. If we were God, we would destroy those portions of creation that did not immediately conform to our idea of what is good. We would punish the prodigal son and reward the good son.<sup>7</sup> We, like Jonah, would have God punish evil and eliminate those people who are unlike us in their morality or theology. We understand neither God's love, nor his ultimate purpose behind creation, and therefore we do not understand his tolerance of evil. True, there are places in Scripture where God does seem to sanction violence in order to eliminate evil, but his desire is always to transform evil through forgiveness. Henri Nouwen puts it best.

If evil is seen only as an irreversible, clearly visible, and sharply outlined tumor, then there is only one possibility: cut it out. And then violence is necessary. But when evil is reversible and can be turned into good through forgiveness, then non-violence become possible.<sup>8</sup>

God's desire is always for transformation through forgiveness, and it is for that reason that God is so tolerant of evil. Indeed, God tolerates evil and is 'kind to the ungrateful and the wick-

---

<sup>7</sup> Luke 15:11-32.

<sup>8</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Encounters with Merton* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 102.

ed',<sup>9</sup> not simply because they are his creation—his beloved sons and daughters—but because God knows that the ungrateful and the wicked might be the very ones with the greatest potential to realize God's ultimate purpose. That is, they may have the greatest potential to become the forgiving and merciful likeness of Jesus. God knows that often the greatest sinner makes the greatest saint, and that we ultimately come to know who God is not by doing it right but by doing it wrong.

We see many examples of this throughout Scripture: Moses, David, and Paul are murders or accomplices to murder, and yet God uses them because they come to know God in a way that most of us never do. Likewise, in the genealogy of Jesus, of the five women mentioned, one is an adulteress, one a prostitute, and another pretends to be a prostitute in order to get pregnant from her own father-in-law. There is something about doing it wrong that makes us understand God's heart in a way that we never understand by doing it right. The father in the story of the prodigal loves the good, older son as much as the prodigal, but the prodigal comes to understand the father's love in a way that the good, older son never does.

In that same fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel where Jesus tells the story of The Prodigal Son, he tells another parable about The Lost Sheep. At the end of that parable Jesus says, 'I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not

need to repent.'<sup>10</sup> If the gospel were about doing it right, why would there be more rejoicing over someone that did it wrong rather than those that do it right and have no need of repentance? What is so wonderful about repentance that there is rejoicing in heaven? There are probably many reasons for the rejoicing in heaven over the repentant sinner, but one is that only the repentant sinner knows who God is. We discover the truth of God's divine, forgiving nature only through repentance, and the experience of his forgiveness.

Of course, this does not mean that we should indulge in sinful behaviour in order to experience God's forgiveness. That is not necessary since our sin occurs, and we grieve the heart of God, long before any evil behaviour appears, and we are ripe with opportunities for repentance and the experience of God's forgiveness.

Likewise, we should not take all this talk to mean that we are not to oppose evil. Evil is to be opposed, but our opposition to evil should always be with compassion. Evil should always be opposed with the kind of compassion that will lead to repentance and the experience of God forgiveness. The hope and purpose of our confrontation of evil, whether in others or ourselves, should always be intent upon bringing about the experience of God's forgiveness in order that we might be changed into his likeness.

In order to do that, we must oppose evil and the suffering it produces in a very different way from that to which human beings have become accustomed. Jesus does not come into the

9 Luke 6:35.

10 Luke 15:7.



world to destroy evil and suffering, but to show us how we can transform evil and suffering and therein be made evermore into God's forgiving and loving likeness.

### III Incarnational Mysticism

The real key to understanding the problem of evil is to understand the incarnation. God not only created a world that abounds in evil and suffering, but he entered into that world in order to show us how to become like him in terms of forgiveness and love. This is the great mystery of incarnation. Some atonement theories have tried to end that mystery, and explain atonement as a matter of God punishing Jesus for our sin, but the revelation of Jesus on the cross is the revelation of a God who transforms evil by suffering it and releasing it through forgiveness. This is the divine revelation of the cross; and those that have taken it seriously, and have followed Jesus to their own crosses by suffering evil and releasing it through forgiveness, have found themselves become a little more like God.

There is something so divinely beautiful about God entering into the suffering of the world that it confounds our understanding. However, although our understanding may not comprehend it, we can experience it ourselves by entering into the suffering of others. Think of the person you love most in this world and recall the times when you felt closest to them—when you felt that closeness that goes beyond what we normally feel as human beings. It is almost always a time of suffering. Nothing brings us together like suffering. Great suffering and great love are

the things that transform us, and they are often experienced together.

Sadly, this is not the message we all too often hear from religious people. Instead we are told that religious righteousness is about confronting evil with violence and eliminating it rather than transforming it and letting it transform us. What we hear from most religious people is that God hates evil and the suffering it causes, and obedient followers of God should do everything in their power to eliminate it.

What is behind such thinking is the idea of holiness as sinlessness. That was certainly the Pharisees' notion of holiness, but Jesus tells us that holiness is very different from what the Pharisees imagined. Jesus' notion of being holy, as God is holy, is not a matter of being sinless, but a matter of being merciful and forgiving as God is merciful and forgiving. That kind of holiness comes only through an ever-greater experience of God's mercy and forgiveness. Such experience is not the result of increased sin in our lives but an increased awareness of the depth of our sin.

There have always been these two very different notions of holiness. Unfortunately, the pharisaic notion of holiness as sinlessness is the more common among religious people, while the kind of holiness of which Jesus speaks is more rare. Rare as it may be, however, we can still see that kind of holiness in those individuals who are conscious of the depth of their sin, and consequently live in an almost constant state of repentance and the experience of God's mercy and forgiveness. These are God's agents of the mercy and forgiveness by which the world continues to be transformed.

# Law and Gospel: The Hermeneutical/Homiletical Key to Reformation Theology and Ethics

Thomas K. Johnson

**KEY WORDS:** *Reformation, Martin Luther, John Calvin, hermeneutics, homiletics, ethics, natural moral law*

ciety, balanced and authentic pastoral care, and relating the Christian faith to questions of culture and politics.

EVANGELICALS SHOULD actively appropriate one of the most important central themes from the Protestant Reformation to provide a unified structure for faith, life, and proclamation: the nuanced relation between law and gospel. A largely unified (but not woodenly identical) perspective can be learned from a comparison of Martin Luther with John Calvin. Their significant similarity on these questions established patterns for quality teaching and preaching in the Protestant tradition. The relationship between law and gospel is a hermeneutical/homiletical key to Reformation theology and ethics, both *historically* to understand the Reformation itself and *normatively*, setting a pattern to appropriate today. This complementarity offers evangelicals a proven tool for understanding the Bible, proclamation in church and so-

## I Luther and Calvin Compared

There were theological differences between Luther and Calvin, but differences of literary style and personality seem larger. Calvin laboured for elegance of expression and an orderly arrangement. The Table of Contents of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* offers an overview of how he connected the various themes in Christian proclamation. Calvin found repetition inelegant; in his commentaries he refers the reader to a previous book if he has already given a satisfactory exposition of a text or theme. He also distinguished theology from biblical exegesis, representing the Renaissance care for precision in dealing with historical texts. To get Calvin's total perspective on a topic, one must read his *Institutes*, not only his commentaries.

---

**Prof. Thomas K. Johnson**, PhD, is Vice President for Research of Martin Bucer Seminary, Director of the Comenius Institute (Prague); Professor of Theology, Philosophy, and Public Policy (International Institute for Christian Studies), and Doctoral Professor of Theology and Interdisciplinary Studies (Olivet University). He has taught theology and philosophy in several universities and theological schools in various countries and has served as a pastor and church planter. Email: [Johnson.thomas.k@gmail.com](mailto:Johnson.thomas.k@gmail.com).

Luther did not clearly distinguish exegesis from theology. In his *Lectures on Galatians* he often digressed from the text of Galatians to other texts and generally told his students all they should know relative to the themes before him. His *Lectures on Galatians* describe faith and life in light of Galatians, not merely exegeting the Pauline book. Luther had a tremendously systematic mind, but his love of the gospel constantly breaks his orderly presentation. This makes Luther repetitive though never monotonous.

Behind the difference in literary style between Luther and Calvin lay a difference in personality so great that one can mistake it for a difference in core theology. Lewis Spitz commented:

Calvin and Luther were temperamentally quite different. The younger man was shy to the point of diffidence, precise and restrained, except for sudden flashes of anger. He was severe, but scrupulously just and truthful, self-contained and somewhat aloof. He had many acquaintances but few intimate friends. The older man was sociable to the point of volubility, free and open, warm and cordial with people of all stations of life. But in spite of their differences in personality, Calvin and Luther retained a mutual respect for each other that was rooted in their confessional agreement.<sup>1</sup>

A 'confessional agreement' deeper than their disagreements is what we find on law and gospel, though it is

disguised by differences in terminology. Luther and Calvin had remarkably similar convictions, especially that the relationship between law and gospel is central. Luther's key text is his 1535 *Lectures on Galatians*. Calvin's 1548 *Galatians Commentary* is convenient for comparison; it must be supplemented by his *Institutes* because of his literary method.

## II The Centrality of the Law/ Gospel Relationship

For Luther the relationship between law and gospel is the centre of true Christianity; the ability to distinguish properly between law and gospel qualifies a theologian. 'Therefore, whoever knows well how to distinguish the gospel from the law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian'.<sup>2</sup>

The real problem in theology through Luther's time was the failure to articulate this distinction:

You will not find anything about this distinction between the law and the gospel in the books of the monks, the canonists, and the recent and ancient theologians. Augustine taught and expressed it to some extent. Jerome and others like him knew nothing at all about it. In other words, for many centuries there has been a remarkable silence about this in all the schools and churches. This situation has produced a very dangerous condition for consciences.<sup>3</sup>

1 Lewis W. Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements*, 2 volumes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), vol. 2, *The Reformation*, 412.

2 Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, assoc. ed. Walter A. Hansen, vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 115.

3 Luther, *Galatians*, 313.

This distinction was no mere theoretical abstraction: it was an existential reality of the highest import; it was the heart of the Christian faith; it was the key to keeping the gospel pure and distinguishing authentic Christianity from distorted faiths and religions. 'Let every Christian learn diligently to distinguish between the law and the gospel.'<sup>4</sup> Without this distinction people either fall into despair, finding they cannot earn God's favour by law keeping, or they fall into false confidence, presuming they can earn God's favour.

However, the proper distinction is not a matter of memorizing proper terms or using certain words; it is more an art than a science. It must be made in the midst of life experience. 'I admit that in the time of temptation I myself do not know how to do this as I should.'<sup>5</sup>

Calvin appropriated a clear distinction between law and gospel from Luther, but he understood it to come really from the Bible: '[Paul] is continually employed in contrasting the righteousness of the law with the free acceptance which God is pleased to bestow.'<sup>6</sup> Because Calvin avoided repetition, one such statement suffices to show that Calvin saw this contrast as central to the faith. But he thought it prominent in the entire Bible.

When discussing Abraham he noted, 'For faith,—so far as it embraces the

undeserved goodness of God, Christ with all his benefits, the testimony of our adoption which is contained in the gospel,—is universally contrasted with the law, with the merit of works, and with human excellence.'<sup>7</sup> He echoes Luther: 'We see then that the smallest part of justification cannot be attributed to the law without renouncing Christ and his grace.'<sup>8</sup>

### III What is The Gospel?

For Luther, justification by faith alone (not faith plus anything else) is the centre of the gospel. By faith a person is united with Christ and received by Christ so that Christ's righteousness becomes one's own and the believer is declared righteous by God. While the legal status of being justified is an enduring condition in relation to God, a person's faith remains dynamic; one may be aware of the status of justification only to the extent one trusts the gospel.

If it is true faith, it is a sure trust and firm acceptance in the heart. It takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object of faith but, so to speak, the one who is present in the faith itself.<sup>9</sup>

But the work of Christ, properly speaking, is this: to embrace the one whom the law has made a sinner and pronounced guilty, and to absolve him from his sins if he believes the gospel. 'For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who

---

4 Luther, *Galatians*, 120.

5 Luther, *Galatians*, 115.

6 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1854. Reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 67. Modernized spelling and punctuation.

---

7 Calvin, *Galatians*, 85.

8 Luther, *Galatians*, 151.

9 Luther, *Galatians*, 129.

has faith may be justified' (Rom. 10:4).<sup>10</sup>

Calvin's used slightly different language. Salvation was accomplished solely by the work of Christ; salvation is received solely by faith. About Galatians 2:15-16, Calvin observed:

Since the Jews themselves, with all their advantages, were forced to betake themselves to the faith of Christ, how much more necessary was it that the Gentiles should look for salvation through faith? Paul's meaning therefore is: 'We... have found no method of obtaining salvation, but by believing in Christ: why, then, should we prescribe another method to the Gentiles?... We must seek justification by the faith of Christ, because we cannot be justified by works.'<sup>11</sup>

The reformers understood the gospel in contrast to the law. Believing the gospel is the opposite of seeking to achieve a proper relationship with God by following the law or performing 'works'.

#### IV Faith and Works

From the start of the Reformation, Luther was misunderstood to say that if people do not need to earn their eternal salvation by doing good works, then people are free from all moral restraint and free to sin. This antinomian misunderstanding threatened to contribute to the widespread social chaos of the time, an outcome Luther feared. In his 1520 treatise, *The Freedom of the*

*Christian*, Luther rejected antinomianism with his ear-catching irony that, in addition to being a perfectly free lord of all, each Christian is also a perfectly dutiful servant of all.

Luther claimed true faith in Christ moves people to love and serve within the everyday social structures without any rejection of the moral law. Faith leads to good works, and if real faith is present, good works can be expected.

Therefore we, too, say that faith without works is worthless and useless. The papists and the fanatics take this to mean that faith without works does not justify, or that if faith does not have works, it is of no avail, no matter how true it is. That is false. But faith without works—that is, a fantastic idea and mere vanity and a dream of the heart—is a false faith and does not justify.<sup>12</sup>

Luther interpreted the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church to say that works were necessary in order to be justified; this was the central problem of 'the papists'. Luther also thought that the 'fanatics', his term for some Anabaptists, followed the papists at this crucial point—a claim not always noticed. Luther taught good works would always follow any justification that is authentic, but such good works do not contribute to justification.

In addition to holding a different view of the relation between faith and works, Luther also claimed to teach a different view of an appropriate 'good work'. As a papist he had done works that were explicitly *religious* in nature;

10 Luther, *Galatians*, 143.

11 Calvin, *Galatians*, 66, 67.

12 Luther, *Galatians*, 155.

he had entered a monastery, fasted, taken pilgrimages, and spent long hours confessing sins.<sup>13</sup> After coming to the Reformation faith, he taught that good works are primarily in the everyday world:

For such great blindness used to prevail in the world that we supposed that the works which men had invented not only without but against the commandment of God were much better than those which a magistrate, the head of a household, a teacher, a child, a servant, etc., did in accordance with God's command.<sup>14</sup>

The good works resulting from justification by faith are those commanded by God in the Word within the everyday created orders:

Surely we should have learned from the Word of God that the religious orders of the papists, which alone they call holy, are wicked, since there exists no commandment of God or testimony in Sacred Scripture about them; and, on the other hand, that other ways of life, which do have the word and commandment of God, are holy and divinely instituted..., on the basis of the Word of God we pronounce the sure conviction that the way of life of a servant, which is extremely vile in the sight of the world, is far more acceptable to God than all the orders of monks. For God approves, commends, and adorns the status of

servants with his Word, but not that of the monks.<sup>15</sup>

For Luther, works do not contribute to justification before God. One is justified by faith alone, meaning nothing one does contributes to justification. But real justifying faith necessarily leads to obedience to God's command in the Word.

Calvin's doctrine of faith and works resembles Luther's. Though some have misperceived Calvin to be a stern legalist, in his time the French speaking Reformation was perceived to be antinomian in a manner that contributed to social chaos and wanton vice. This was similar to Luther's problem, a result of saying that good works and the moral law do not contribute to our salvation. From the 'Prefatory Address to King Francis' in the *Institutes*, it is clear that Calvin clarified his doctrine of the relation of faith to good works partly to teach his people but partly as an apologetic response to this continuing allegation against the Reformation.

Using Galatians 5:6, Calvin defined matters:

It is not our doctrine that the faith which justifies is alone; we maintain that it is invariably accompanied by good works; only we contend that faith alone is sufficient for justification.<sup>16</sup>

From Luther to Calvin there is a small development in the terminology of good works. Whereas Luther talked about loving service within the created orders of everyday life in obedience to

<sup>13</sup> This is what later scholars often call 'extra-mundane asceticism' in contrast with the 'intra-mundane asceticism' taught by Luther and Calvin.

<sup>14</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 212.

<sup>15</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 213. For Luther, the fact of these biblical commands indicates that being a servant is a proper way of serving God.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Galatians*, 152.



the command of God, Calvin usually talks about obedience to the law of God as the standard for good works. This is a tiny change in terminology, not a substantial development in content. Like Luther, Calvin describes good works as love for others within the framework of everyday life.

But we must inquire into the reason why all the precepts of the law are included under love. The law consists of two tables, the first of which instructs us concerning the worship of God and the duties of piety, and the second instructs us concerning the love of neighbour;... Piety to God, I acknowledge, ranks higher than love of the brethren; and therefore the observance of the first table is more valuable in the sight of God than the observance of the second. But as God himself is invisible, so piety is a thing hidden from the eyes of man....God therefore chooses to make trial of our love to himself by that love of our brother, which he enjoins us to cultivate.<sup>17</sup>

Calvin used the term 'law' to describe the function of Holy Scripture in guiding the life of gratitude and good works, whereas Luther used the term 'commandment'. This difference in terms is based on a deep agreement—real faith leads to good works that are practised in everyday life according to the commands or law of God in Scripture.

## V The Gospel and the Old Testament

Throughout Christian history, a recur-

ring issue is the relationship between the two testaments. Some, such as the group that disturbed the churches in Galatia, minimize any transition from the Old to the New Testament. Others, such as Marcion in the second century, minimize any continuity between the testaments, thinking the Old Testament contains only law while the New Testament preaches only the gospel. Against such extremes, with small differences, Luther and Calvin fundamentally agreed on seeing both law and gospel in both the Old and the New Testament. Neither obliterates all distinctions between the two testaments; both saw substantial continuity.

Luther loved to describe Moses as the preacher of righteousness by law:

Moses does not reveal the Son of God; he discloses the law, sin, the conscience, death, the wrath and judgment of God, and hell.... Therefore only the gospel reveals the Son of God. Oh, if only one could distinguish carefully here and not look for the law in the gospel but keep it as separate from the law as heaven is distant from earth.<sup>18</sup>

Representing the apostle Paul, Luther writes, 'You have not heard me teach the righteousness of the law or of works; for this belongs to Moses, not to me.'<sup>19</sup>

If this were all Luther said, one might imagine an absolute antithesis between the two testaments. However, with no sense of self-contradiction, Luther said, 'the patriarchs and all the Old Testament saints were free in their conscience and were justified by

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Galatians*, 159, 160.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 72.

<sup>19</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 73.

faith, not by circumcision or the law'.<sup>20</sup> It is true that 'Moses, the minister of the law, has the ministry of law, which he [the apostle Paul] calls a ministry of sin, wrath, death, and damnation',<sup>21</sup> yet Moses preached justification by faith alone.

The gospel in the Old Testament, Luther claims, is also about Jesus Christ. The faith of the patriarchs was a faith that looked to the future acts of God for their salvation. 'The sound of the promise to Abraham brings Christ; and when he has been grasped by faith, then the Holy Spirit is granted on Christ's behalf.'<sup>22</sup>

Though the promises related to the gospel were especially given to Abraham, these promises were also available to whoever believed. In discussing how the Roman centurion (Acts 9) was righteous *before* he heard the gospel from Peter, Luther claimed:

Cornelius was a righteous and holy man in accordance with the Old Testament on account of his faith in the coming Christ, just as all the patriarchs, prophets, and devout kings were righteous, having received the Holy Spirit secretly on account of their faith in the coming Christ.<sup>23</sup>

The main contrast between the gospel in the Old Testament and in the New Testament is that 'the faith of the patriarchs was attached to the Christ who was to come, just as ours is attached to the One who has already

come'.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the book of Genesis was primarily a book of gospel:

In Jewish fashion Paul usually calls the first book of Moses 'law.' Even though it has no law except that which deals with circumcision, but chiefly teaches faith and testifies that the patriarchs were pleasing to God on account of their faith, still the Jews called Genesis together with the other books of Moses 'law' because of that one law of circumcision.<sup>25</sup>

Just as Luther claims the Old Testament is full of gospel, so he finds law in the New Testament, though the New Testament is pre-eminently gospel:

The gospel, however, is a proclamation about Christ: that he forgives sins, grants grace, justifies, and saves sinners. Although there are commandments in the gospel, they are not the gospel; they are expositions of the law and appendices to the gospel.<sup>26</sup>

Calvin's distinction between the testaments was similar to Luther. At the beginning of his Galatians commentary he complains that the false apostles disturbing the churches removed the distinction between the two testaments, which is the distinction between law and gospel. 'It is no small evil to quench the light of the gospel, to lay a snare for consciences, and to remove the distinction between the Old and the New Testament.'<sup>27</sup>

Like Luther, Calvin regarded the

<sup>20</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 85. With the term 'free in their conscience' Luther means awareness of a status of full acceptance before God.

<sup>21</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 147.

<sup>22</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 255.

<sup>23</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 210.

<sup>24</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 239.

<sup>25</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 433.

<sup>26</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 150.

<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Galatians*, 14, 15.

Old Testament as largely law, whereas the New Testament is largely gospel:

That office which was peculiar to Moses consisted in laying down a rule of life and ceremonies to be observed in the worship of God, and in afterwards adding promises and threatenings. Many promises, no doubt, relating to the free mercy of God and of Christ, are to be found in his writings; and these promises belong to faith. But this is to be viewed as accidental.<sup>28</sup>

Though Calvin agrees with Luther that Moses is primarily a writer of law, yet Calvin's statements about Moses are more positive than Luther's statements about Moses. Calvin genuinely loved the Law of Moses and wrote a multi-volume study on the last four books of the Pentateuch. Luther chose to write more on the book of Genesis than the other Mosaic books, probably because he saw Genesis as containing more gospel.

For Calvin, the way of salvation was the same under the old covenant as under the new, justification by faith alone:

Abraham was justified by believing, because, when he received from God a promise of fatherly kindness, he embraced it as certain. Faith, therefore, has a relation and a respect to such a divine promise as may enable men to place their trust and confidence in God.<sup>29</sup>

Calvin explained why Moses added the law so many years later if the gospel was already given to Abraham. His comment would have pleased

Luther—to show people their sin and need for the gospel. 'He means that the law was published in order to make known transgressions, and in this way to compel men to acknowledge their guilt.... This is the true preparation for Christ.'<sup>30</sup>

Like Luther, Calvin heard the gospel throughout the Old Testament, making the difference between the two testaments one of degree and place in the history of redemption:

The doctrine of faith, in short, is attested by Moses and all the prophets: but, as faith was not then clearly manifested, so the time of faith [Galatians 3:23] is an appellation here given, not in an absolute, but in a comparative sense, to the time of the New Testament.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the Old Testament ceremonies spoke of Christ and served as a schoolmaster to lead to the coming Christ:

Beyond all doubt, ceremonies accomplished their object, not merely by alarming and humbling the conscience, but by exciting them to the faith of the coming Redeemer.... The law... was nothing else than an immense variety of exercises, in which the worshippers were led by the hand to Christ.<sup>32</sup>

The reformers agree in seeing continuity with development from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Old Testament believers looked forward to the redemption in Christ, whereas New Testament believers look back to

<sup>28</sup> Calvin, *Galatians*, 99.

<sup>29</sup> Calvin, *Galatians*, 84.

<sup>30</sup> Calvin, *Galatians*, 100.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *Galatians*, 107.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Galatians*, 109.

Christ, but all believers are justified by faith alone in the promise of the gospel. While the New Testament is preeminently a book of gospel, that gospel is properly understood only in relation to the moral law contained in both testaments.

Whether in the time of the Old Testament or of the New Testament, Luther and Calvin saw the biblical message as always having two distinct but inseparable dimensions: command and promise, law and gospel. This is the continuous structure of the biblical divine-human encounter.

## VI Reason and Law

'Reason cannot think correctly about God; only faith can do so.'<sup>33</sup> Such statements gave Luther the reputation for being opposed to reason. Some view him as irrational. Calvin is sometimes presented as an unfeeling rationalist. Neither interpretation is accurate because they assume no differentiation in terms of the object to which reason must be applied. Both Reformers saw reason as properly pertaining to the law; when reason is used within this realm, it is a tremendous gift of God. But when reason exceeds its proper bounds, going into the realm of gospel, then reason becomes an enemy of faith.

For Luther, the primary problem with reason is that it continuously claims people can be justified by works of the law, rejecting the gospel:

Human reason and wisdom do not understand this doctrine [the gospel]. Therefore they always teach the opposite: 'If you want to live to

God, you must observe the law; for it is written (Matthew 19:17) 'If you would enter life, keep the commandments'.<sup>34</sup>

Let reason be far away, that enemy of faith, which, in the temptations of sin and death, relies not on the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness, of which it is completely ignorant, but on its own righteousness or, at most, on the righteousness of the law. As soon as reason and the law are joined, faith immediately loses its virginity. For nothing is more hostile to faith than the law and reason.<sup>35</sup>

For Luther, faith is not merely affirming religious propositions, though Luther accepted such classical Christian creedal statements as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Faith is personal reliance on the gospel. But during assaults on the soul (German: *Anfechtungen*), temptations to doubt God's grace, believers are prone to move from trusting in the gospel to trusting in obedience to the law, and *sinful reason supports this tendency*. During spiritual assaults, fallen reason confuses law and gospel, so believers either fall into despair of pleasing God or else fall into false confidence, assuming they please God without the gospel:

When it comes to experience, you will find the gospel a rare guest but the law a constant guest in your conscience, which is habituated to the law and the sense of sin; reason too supports this sense.<sup>36</sup>

---

33 Luther, *Galatians*, 238.

---

34 Luther, *Galatians*, 156.

35 Luther, *Galatians*, 113.

36 Luther, *Galatians*, 117.

Reason rarely overcomes the tendency to forget the gospel and rely on the law. Luther did not think people should become irrational. The solution is to employ reason to its fullest in its proper realm: everyday, practical affairs. Reason is properly applied in the realm of the 'orders'—the realm of the civil use of the law. Discussing a popular proverb, 'God does not require of any man that he do more than he really can', Luther's tightly connects reason to everyday affairs:

This is actually a good statement, but in its proper place, that is, in political, domestic, and natural affairs. For example, if I, who exist *in the realm of reason*, rule a family, build a house, or carry on a government office, and I do as much as I can or what lies within me, I am excused.<sup>37</sup>

With this understanding of the proper realm of reason, Luther could praise Greek political philosophy and Roman law, though he also describes reason and philosophy very negatively. Of itself reason knows nothing about the gospel and tends to confuse law and gospel; nevertheless, reason can know much about the moral law and its application in everyday life. In this realm reason must be treasured. The knowledge of the moral law possessed by reason is the result of God's revelation through creation. Because of sin and unbelief, this reasonable knowledge of the moral law will need to be corrected by the command of God in the Scriptures; nevertheless, reason can know the law. Therefore, by reason, civil righteousness is possible for

many who do not know the gospel:

The sophists, as well as anyone else who does not grasp the doctrine of justification, do not know of any other righteousness than civil righteousness or the righteousness of the law, which are known in some measure even to the heathen.<sup>38</sup>

Calvin's doctrine of reason is similar to Luther's with a subtle shift. After celebrating the ability of human reason in the natural realm, the result of God's general grace and general revelation, Calvin asked what reason knows of God:

We must now analyze what human reason can discern with regard to God's Kingdom and to spiritual insight. This spiritual insight consists chiefly in three things: (1) knowing God; (2) knowing his fatherly favour in our behalf, in which our salvation consists; (3) knowing how to frame our life according to the rule of his law. In the two first points—and especially in the second—the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles!<sup>39</sup>

Calvin distinguishes knowing what God is like (No. 1) from knowing how God relates to man in the gospel (No. 2). Though reason is not always completely wrong about God's Being, statements on this topic by philosophers 'always show a certain giddy imagination'.<sup>40</sup> But unaided reason is 'blinder than a mole' in regard to understand-

<sup>38</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 261.

<sup>39</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), II, ii, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* II, ii, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 173, 174. Emphasis added.

ing God's fatherly care and the gospel. To trust properly in God's fatherly care, the gospel, scripture, and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit are needed.

Though reason is worthless in the realm of the gospel, Calvin emphasized reason in area No. 3, 'how to frame our life according to the rule of his law'. This is the realm of the civil use of God's moral law, the natural moral law, and civil righteousness.

There remains the third aspect of spiritual insight, that of knowing the rule for the right conduct of life. This we correctly call the 'knowledge of the works of righteousness.' The human mind sometimes seems more acute in this than in higher things. For the apostle testifies: 'When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do the works of the law, they are a law to themselves... and show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their thoughts accuse them among themselves or excuse them before God's judgment' [Rom. 2:14-15]. If Gentiles by nature have law righteousness engraved upon their minds, we surely cannot say they are utterly blind as to the conduct of life. There is nothing more common than for a man to be sufficiently instructed in a right standard of conduct by natural law.<sup>41</sup>

Reason often knows right and wrong based on the natural (God-given) moral law, and this knowledge can provide 'a right standard of conduct'. Calvin never suggests that this knowledge equips people to earn God's favour. Even

though people often know the good and are able to attain civil righteousness, they are still sinful; the natural knowledge of right and wrong received by reason renders people blameworthy before God.

Calvin carefully qualifies what reason knows about the moral law. Sin darkens our knowing process. We do not always in fact know what we should in principle know by reason. The written moral law is extremely important:

Now that inward law [the natural law], which we have above described as written, even engraved, upon the hearts of all, in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the two Tables [the Ten Commandments]. For our conscience does not allow us to sleep a perpetual insensible sleep without being an inner witness and monitor of what we owe to God, without holding before us the difference between good and evil and thus accusing us when we fail in our duty. But man is so shrouded in the darkness of errors that he hardly begins to grasp through this natural law what worship is acceptable to God.... Accordingly (because it is necessary both for our dullness and for our arrogance), the Lord has provided us with a written law to give us clearer witness of what was too obscure in the natural law, shake off our listlessness, and strike more vigorously our mind and memory.<sup>42</sup>

There is a difference between how Luther and Calvin understand the influence of sin on our perception of the

41 Calvin, *Inst.* II, ii, 22.

42 Calvin, *Inst.* II, viii, 1.



natural moral law. Calvin emphasizes the way in which the content of our knowledge is darkened, while Luther emphasizes the way in which people misuse this knowledge to earn God's favour. They agree there is knowledge of God's natural moral law available to reason that allows people to know right and wrong, but unaided reason cannot know how to relate properly to God. And the Bible is needed to know more fully what kinds of good works should follow faith.

## VII The Uses of the Law

Some see a large difference between Luther and Calvin regarding the proper uses of the law. The evidence shows a difference in terminology, literary style, and personality driven reactions to the moral law within a substantially similar perspective. Calvin may have taken Luther's doctrine and refined the terminology, though Luther might have been dissatisfied with some aspects of this development.

If the moral law is not to be used to earn God's favour, what are its proper uses or functions? Luther spoke of two proper uses of the law, the civic and the theological, with the theological use being primary. While discussing Galatians 3:19 Luther claimed:

One must know that there is a double use of the law. One is the civic use. God has ordained civic laws, indeed all laws, to restrain transgressions. Therefore, every law was given to hinder sins. Does this mean that when the law restrains sins, it justifies? Not at all. When I refrain from killing or from committing adultery or from stealing, or when I abstain from other sins, I do not do

this voluntarily or from the love of virtue but because I am afraid of the sword and of the executioner. This prevents me, as the ropes or chains prevent a lion or a bear from ravaging something that comes along.... The first understanding and use of the law is to restrain the wicked.... This is why God has ordained magistrates, parents, teachers, laws, shackles, and all civic ordinances.<sup>43</sup>

Though the civic use of the law is important to make civic righteousness possible, it is not the most important use of the law. The ultimate use of the law is to show us our sin and need for the gospel:

The other use of the law is the theological or spiritual one, which serves to increase transgressions.... Therefore the true function and the chief and proper use of the law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate, and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well deserved wrath of God.<sup>44</sup>

At this point Luther waxes eloquent about the value of God's law, but his point is clear—there are two uses of the law that must be distinguished from each other. In the civic use, the law restrains sin to make civilization possible, whether the law comes directly from God or indirectly through human laws, civic authorities, or other humane influences. The theological use leads a person to despair and prepares one for hearing the gospel. Because of its close relation to the gospel, the theological use of the law is primary.

---

<sup>43</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 308, 309.

<sup>44</sup> Luther, *Galatians*, 309.

Calvin spoke about three uses of the law, but he did not discuss all three uses in relation to Galatians because he did not think Paul discussed all three uses there. In discussing Galatians 3:19, Calvin offered a rare criticism of Luther:

For many, I find, have fallen into the mistake of acknowledging no other advantage belonging to the law, but what is expressed here. Paul himself elsewhere speaks of the precepts of the law as profitable for doctrine and exhortations (2 Tim. 3:16). The definition here given of the use of the law is not complete, and those who refuse to make any other acknowledgment in favour of the law do wrong.<sup>45</sup>

Calvin agrees that Galatians teaches Luther's two proper uses of the law. Calvin insists the rest of the Bible teaches a third use.

Calvin's first use of the law he calls the 'primitive' function of the law, similar to Luther's theological use:

Let us survey briefly the function and use of what is called the 'moral law.' Now, so far as I understand it, it consists of three parts.

The first part is this: while it shows God's righteousness, that is the righteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness. For man, blinded and drunk with self-love, must be compelled to know and to confess his own feebleness and impurity.<sup>46</sup>

Calvin compares the law with a mirror; as it shows the spots on one's face, so the law shows sin, though with different results among believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers are terrified; believers flee to God's mercy in Christ. Calvin and Luther used different language to describe this use, reflecting differences in personality.

Luther seems to have gone through a two-step process, dropping into despair before turning away from the law and toward the gospel. With continuing assaults on his soul, the law repeatedly drove Luther to despair, which is echoed in his language about the law. Calvin seems to have gone through a one-step process, of immediately turning from the law to the gospel without intermediate despair; his language about the law does not usually contain echoes of terror.

Calvin's second use of the law is Luther's first use—the civic or political use:

The second function of the law is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats in the law. But they are restrained not because their inner mind is stirred or affected, but because, being bridled, so to speak, they keep their hands from outward activity, and hold inside the depravity that otherwise they would wantonly have indulged.<sup>47</sup>

The differences between Luther and Calvin are small but noteworthy. Luther understood the moral law in its

<sup>45</sup> Calvin, *Galatians*, 99, 100.

<sup>46</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* II, vii, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* II, vii, 10.

civic use as largely mediated through societal orders, whether the state, the family, the school, or the church. Calvin conceives of the civil use of the law as being largely unmediated, in the direct encounter of an individual with God. Of course, Calvin thought the civil magistrate had to prevent societal chaos, which he regarded as the worst of evils. But when he turned his mind to his second use of the law, he first considers each person's direct encounter with God.

Calvin said the third use of the law is primary:

The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper use of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. For even though they have the law written and engraved upon their hearts by the finger of God (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 10:16), that is, have been so moved and quickened through the directing of the Spirit that they long to obey God, they still profit by the law in two ways.<sup>48</sup>

Calvin's two ways in which the law helps believers are teaching the will of God, which believers desire to follow, and exhorting believers to continued obedience. Though Calvin does not use this terminology, they could be called 'Use 3A' and 'Use 3B'. Concerning Use 3A Calvin claims the law 'is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it'.<sup>49</sup> He uses vivid language about Use

3B: 'by frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression'.<sup>50</sup>

Lest one think the desires of believers are all negative, he explains:

For the law is not now acting toward us as a rigorous enforcement officer who is not satisfied unless the requirements are met. But in this perfection to which it exhorts us, the law points out the goal toward which throughout life we are to strive.<sup>51</sup>

For Calvin, the law is a friend in a way Luther did not imagine. Calvin knew, like Luther, that the law always accuses believers, but for Calvin this accusation is in light of a deep, continuing assurance of God's fatherly care, so the threats and harshness can be removed from the believer's experience of the law. Like Luther, Calvin fully affirmed the principle of *simul justus et peccator*, that the believer is simultaneously justified and sinful; therefore, the believer needs the law of God as a guide to life. But the new obedience to the law is an expression of gratitude for the gospel without any hint of using the moral law as a tool for self-justification.

Was Calvin's gentle criticism of Luther correct, assuming the validity of Calvin's three-fold use? The answer is 'probably not', because Luther's view of the uses of the law is closer to Calvin's than Calvin may have recognized, even though Luther did not use the word 'third use'. The reason for this claim is that the content

48 Calvin, *Inst.* II, vi, 12.

49 Calvin, *Inst.* II, vi, 12.

50 Calvin, *Inst.* II, vi, 12.

51 Calvin, *Inst.* II, vi, 13.

of Calvin's Use 3B, that believers 'be drawn back from the slippery path of transgression', is included in Luther's civic use of the law, restraining sin. Luther and Calvin both thought the sin of believers needs to be restrained. The difference in terminology is only where this theme appears in the outline.

Then the question of knowing the will of God, to which believers should aspire: Calvin called this third use of the law 'primary', which Luther did not. However, for Calvin this use of the moral law was 'primary' in an ideal sense if God's people were all walking by faith and merely questioning what they should do. In practice Calvin makes the theological, condemning use of the law very important.

In his *Institutes*, the insightful discussion of the Decalogue is included in the section analyzing the human predicament, prior to his discussion of the gospel. Calvin is using the law in its theological function to show sin. If Calvin had only emphasized the 'third' use of the law, then he would have discussed the law only after his discussion of Christology and justification. In practice Calvin's use of the law is close to Luther's recommendations about which use is primary.

At the same time, Luther's notion of the 'Command of God' found in scripture as the norm for the Christian life resembles Calvin's Use 3A, showing how Christians should live in gratitude for the gospel. The first problem with the works Luther had done as a monk was that they were intended to deserve or earn God's favour; the second problem was that his works were the wrong works. True good works had to be done in obedience to God's word in the Scriptures and flow from faith in the gospel,

not substitute for faith in the gospel. This teaching of Luther approximates to Calvin's Use 3A.

Luther made negative statements about the law. In the 'Preface' to his study on Galatians, he claimed:

The highest act and wisdom of Christians is not to know the law, to ignore works and all active righteousness, just as outside the people of God the highest wisdom is to know and study the law, works and active righteousness.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, Luther also said, 'the works of the law must be performed either before justification or after justification'.<sup>53</sup>

When outward duties must be performed, then, whether you are a preacher, a magistrate, a husband, a teacher, a pupil, etc., this is not time to listen to the gospel. You must listen to the law and follow your vocation.<sup>54</sup>

Luther taught that the works of obedience to the moral law not only follow justification in a chronological manner; obedience to the law is a fruit of faith:

Anyone who wants to exert himself toward righteousness must first expert himself in listening to the gospel. Now when he has heard and accepted this, let him joyfully give thanks to God, and then let him exert himself in good works that are commanded in the law; thus the law and works will follow hearing with faith. Then he will be able to walk safely in the light that is Christ; to

---

52 Luther, *Galatians*, 6.

53 Luther, *Galatians*, 123.

54 Luther, *Galatians*, 117.

be certain about choosing and doing works that are not hypocritical but truly good, pleasing to God, and commanded by him; and to reject all the mummery of self-chosen works.<sup>55</sup>

After contrasting the righteousness of the law with the righteousness of faith, Luther declares:

When he [Christ] has been grasped by faith, then the Holy Spirit is granted on Christ's account. Then God and neighbour are loved, good works are performed, and the cross is borne. This is really keeping the law;... Hence it is impossible for us to keep the law without the promise.<sup>56</sup>

Luther elaborates:

Moses, together with Paul, necessarily drives us to Christ, through whom we become doers of the law and are accounted guilty of no transgression. How? First, through the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness, on account of faith in Christ; secondly, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, who creates a new life and new impulses in us, so that we may keep the law.<sup>57</sup>

Luther taught that law-keeping by believers had three important purposes:

What is the purpose of keeping it [the law] if it does not justify? The final cause of the obedience of the law by the righteous is not righteousness in the sight of God, which is received by faith alone, but the peace of the world, gratitude toward

God, and a good example by which others are invited to believe the gospel.<sup>58</sup>

Like Calvin, Luther taught that keeping the moral law of God was the proper expression of gratitude for the gospel. There were differences in terminology regarding the proper uses of the law, with differences of personality behind those differences in terminology, but the massive agreement between Luther and Calvin set a standard for discussions of the use of God's law.

## VIII Implications

Luther and Calvin thought the relationship between law and gospel was central for several reasons. They saw this relation as central *in* the Bible, in *both* the Old and New Testaments; in other words, the biblical interpreter has not properly examined the Scriptures if this relation between law and gospel has not been perceived. This consideration must not be forgotten. Following directly from this, the ability to clearly distinguish and relate law and gospel was regarded as central to recognizing a person as an evangelical theologian. This ability enables a person to apply the biblical message to human experience in a balanced manner that flows from a central structure of the biblical proclamation.

Closely related is the apprehension that the biblical relationship between law and gospel addresses one of the deepest existential dynamics within

55 Luther, *Galatians*, 214, 215.

56 Luther, *Galatians*, 255.

57 Luther, *Galatians*, 260.

58 Luther, *Galatians*, 273. The term 'final cause' was a way of talking about purpose that was inspired by the terminology of Aristotle.

human beings. People will always do something with the moral law, whether despair because of inability to keep the law, false confidence because of supposed earned righteousness, or turning to the gospel. Others may turn to a deficient gospel because believing a gospel is hard to avoid. This existential relation to law and gospel is constant and dynamic, throughout a lifetime. For this reason, it is wise to address these issues continually in preaching and pastoral care. We should see law (in its multiple uses) and gospel as truly central to the application of the biblical message and central to the divine-human encounter.<sup>59</sup>

Some weaknesses in evangelicalism can be strengthened by Reformation teaching on law and gospel. One has been forgetting the connection between the moral law and God's general revelation.<sup>60</sup> Forgetting this connection can cause us to miss the way in which people without the gospel already encounter God's law in both its theological and civic uses, weakening our approach to social ethics, culture, and missions.

In social ethics, we should assume that all people already encounter God's moral law through creation and conscience; therefore, moral claims rooted in the Bible clarify and strengthen moral knowledge that people already have, though this knowledge is darkened or misused.

In missions, we can expect that people will normally have questions and anxieties arising from their encounter with the moral law in its theological use, proclaimed by God's general revelation; there is a correlation or question/answer relation between the gospel and human experience.<sup>61</sup>

In relation to culture, each of the uses of the moral law, as well as the gospel, implies a distinct relationship of the biblical message to culture. In this light we can think of Christianity as having four distinct relationships to culture.<sup>62</sup>

Another weakness has been a failure to distinguish the way the moral law relates to reason from the way the gospel relates to reason. The claim that 'we are justified in Christ' is purely a statement of faith in the gospel, whereas the claim that 'murder is wrong' is based on reason as well as on faith. This leads to more differentiation in our discussions of faith and reason. This differentiation can strengthen how we discuss integrating evangelical theology and ethics with learning in the various academic fields.

A further weakness has been forgetting the civil use of the moral law. This makes it more difficult for evangelicals to develop social ethics that do not either sound like an attempt to flee the world (ethics of holy community) or else sound like an attempt to take over the world (ethics of theocratic domina-

<sup>59</sup> The second question and answer of *The Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) clearly used this framework for preaching the Reformation faith. See question and answer no. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, Karl Barth did much to promote this problem by his rejection of general revelation.

<sup>61</sup> It is proper to use the term 'correlation' in Reformation based theology without intending everything that Paul Tillich meant by that term.

<sup>62</sup> I have explained this further in 'Christ and Culture', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 35:1, January, 2011.



tion). There is a distinct and proper relation of the moral law, given by God, to human experience, reason, and society, which we must learn to use in our civic ethics. This will enable us to talk and act as responsible citizens contributing to the public good, being open about our Christian faith, without following a fight or flight relation to society.<sup>63</sup>

**63** I have addressed these topics in *Natural Law Ethics: An Evangelical Proposal* (Bonn: VKW, 2005) and in 'Biblical Principles in the Public Square', MBS Text 108, available at [www.bucer.eu](http://www.bucer.eu). This forms the background for my *Human Rights: A Christian Primer*, World Evangelical Alliance, 2008.

Therefore, it is wise to see the relation between law and gospel as a hermeneutical/homiletical key in a two-fold sense. Historically, this is the key to the Reformers' hermeneutics and homiletics, needed to understand the Reformation. Normatively, we should see the relation between law and gospel as a hermeneutical/homiletical key to interpret, apply, and proclaim the biblical message in a balanced and full manner in late modernity. This distinction gives a substantial and unified structure to our hermeneutics, theology, social ethics, practical theology, and homiletics.

## Luther as a Spiritual Adviser

### The Interface of Theology and Piety in Luther's Devotional Writings

Dennis Ngien

The aim of this book is to unfold the pastoral side of Luther, drawing on the spiritual insights he offers to people of high and low estate. His pastoral writings are devotional and catechetical in shape and intent, yet not devoid of rich theological substance. They are the exercises of Luther's basic calling as a theologian-pastor, and are the concrete illustrations of the interface of theology and piety, the former being the abiding presupposition of the latter. Ngien's work reveals Luther as a theologian of the cross at work in the pastoral context.

*'This timely book will help to recover the pastoral theological importance of Luther for a new generation.'*

Carl R. Trueman

**Dennis Ngien** is Research Professor of Theology at Tyndale University College and Seminary, and founder of the Centre for Mentorship and Theological Reflection, Toronto, Canada.

978-1-84227-461-3 / 229 x 152mm / 208pp / £19.99

**Paternoster, Authenticmedia Limited, 52 Presley Way,  
Crownhill, Milton Keynes, MK8 0ES**

# Rethinking Postliberal Theology: Comparing and Contrasting Lindbeck and Vanhoozer

Richard A. Pruitt

**KEYWORDS:** *Cultural-Linguistic, Rule Theory, Intratextual Methodology, Canonical-Linguistic, Hermeneutics*

POSTLIBERALISM ENCOMPASSES a developing theological outlook that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and is generally associated with a community of scholars from Yale University. Consequently, it is often referred to as 'the Yale school'. The late Hans Frei and George Lindbeck are arguably the most noted in the field of postliberal theology. However, other prominent scholars include Ronald Thiemann, Garrett Green, Paul Holmer, William Werpehowski, William Placher, Kathryn Tanner, George Hunsinger, Bruce Marshall, Stanley Hauerwas, David Kelsey, and the list is growing.<sup>1</sup> This

theological perspective has also been referred to as narrative theology. In general, the postliberal's position is in opposition to that of Rudolf Bultmann (which dominated NT scholarship in the 1970s) and leans considerably in the direction of Karl Barth. Gary Dorrien observes,

Though postliberals' connections to neo-orthodoxy are not widely touted in postliberal writings, the connections are significant. The postliberal movement is essentially a Barthian project—one that, in certain respects, is more deeply influenced by Barth than American neo-orthodoxy was in its glory days.<sup>2</sup>

William Placher generally agreed with this statement when he said, '[Hans] Frei also got a lot of us excited about reading Barth.'<sup>3</sup>

At the heart of postliberal theology is the premise that biblical understand-

1 A younger group of Yale-trained postliberals now contributing to the development of postliberalism includes Kathryn Greene-McCreight, Serene Jones, David Kamitsuka, Ian McFarlan, Paul McGlasson, Joe Mangina, R. R. Reno, and Gene Rogers. See Gary Dorrien, 'A Third Way in Theology?' in *ChrCent*, (July 4, 2001): 16-21.

2 Gary Dorrien, 'A Third Way in Theology?' in *ChrCent*, (July 4, 2001): 16.

3 William Placher, 'Being Postliberal: A response to James Gustafson', in *ChrCent*, 116:11 (April 7, 1999): 390.

ing must be shaped by the narrative of Scripture rather than by attention to historical context or reliance on propositional truth claims. Postliberals recognize a shift in the thinking process of those living in the after-effects of the Enlightenment, or modern era, to a postmodern thinking process generally shaped by language, culture, and practice.<sup>4</sup> One may conclude that postmodernism is best understood as a philosophical framework in which postliberal theology exists. In other words, postliberal theology is a postmodern approach to a theological understanding of biblical authority, faith, and the credibility of Christian practice based upon the culture and language of Christian tradition and Scripture.

The notion that theological understanding must be understood from within culture and language, rather than being imposed on culture or language, has global significance. This is, after all, the very foundation of the contextualization process prominent in ecumenical discussions.<sup>5</sup> A postmodernist might argue that a postmodern philosophy frees the western mind from the constraints imposed through modernity and, so to say, drives it in

the direction of a more global ecumenically-congenial disposition. Postliberal theology—specifically through a cultural-linguistic approach—may be capable of not only bridging the gap between various religious cultures but also helping to communicate the Christian faith to the postmodern mind in a western context.

## I Common Threads among Postliberal Theologians

### 1. Christology

The person of Jesus is the central figure in the biblical narrative. His coming is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, revealed in the Gospels, and featured in the writings of the Acts and the Apostles. To speak of the biblical Jesus is to speak of the One who is a 'present reality'. Hans Frei states,

Throughout the narrative, and most particularly at the crucial climax of the resurrection,...to know who he is in connection with what took place is to know that he is. This is the climax of the story and its claim. What the [Gospel] accounts are saying, in effect, is that the being and identity of Jesus in the resurrection are such that his nonresurrection becomes inconceivable...however impossible it may be to grasp the nature of the resurrection, it remains inconceivable that it should not have taken place.<sup>6</sup>

For Frei, the Synoptic writers ar-

4 Cf., Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Evangelical theology in a Post-modern World,' in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 22:1, (January 1998): 5-27, esp. 9.

5 For example, African theologians (e.g., J. Mbiti, E. Oduwu, etc.) maintain that Christianity must find form within an African cosmology while many Asian theologians (e.g., Wonsuk Ma, Hwa Yung, etc.) indicate that the message of Christ in Asia is different from western conceptions and enters a thinking process that is generally antithetical to Enlightenment predispositions.

6 Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 145.

gued that to grasp the identity of Jesus is to 'believe that he has been, in fact, raised from the dead' and, in John's Gospel, 'to think of him as dead is the equivalent of not thinking of him at all'.<sup>7</sup> When Placher was directly challenged to answer if the postliberals were genuinely ready to 'make a stronger historical claim...that God chose to reveal Godself in a unique and exclusive way in a single historical event, [namely] Jesus Christ', he responded with only one word: 'Yes!'<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Scripture

In recent years, postliberal theology has focused attention on how Scripture functions within the Christian community. Since the Bible is a book for the Christian community, to say that a biblical text is Scripture is to say that the function of the text is to shape, nurture, and reform the continuing self-identity of the church.<sup>9</sup> The Christian believer 'looks' into the biblical narrative and seeks a pattern for normative behaviour—in effect, the reader seeks a standard sense. Kathryn Tanner refers to this standard sense as the 'plain sense' of the text. She states: 'The plain sense of scripture works in a Christian context to form a tradition that is self-critical, pluralistic, and viable across a wide range of geographical differences and historical changes

of circumstance.'<sup>10</sup> This 'sense' will not always be the literal sense but will generally be a sense consistent within the story itself as well as consistent within or reasonable to the community of believers reading it. For this reason, postliberal theologians promote the reading of Scripture in community.

## 3. Less Methodology, More Practical

In general, postliberal theologians have focused less on methodology and more on positive Christian practice. Webster remarks, 'Indeed, one of the chief characteristics of postliberal theology has been its lack of heavy investment in prolegomenal or foundation discourse.'<sup>11</sup> Apparent in many postliberal theological writings is the view that theology is the functional tool for Christian practice rather than a soapbox for critical inquiry. Webster sums up this aspect by stating,

For postliberal theology, issues of the methods of theology are generally subsumed under discussions of the norms and sources of theology. In their turn, moreover, those norms and sources are located in the practices and traditions of Christianity as a positive religion, and external norms (such as content-independent standards of rationality) or external sources (such as common

<sup>7</sup> Frei, *The Identity*, 145, 8.

<sup>8</sup> See James Gustafson, 'Just what is "postliberal" theology?' in *ChrCent*, 116:10 (March 24, 1999): 354, and Placher, 'Being Postliberal', 390.

<sup>9</sup> David Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999), 89-96.

<sup>10</sup> Kathryn E. Tanner, 'Theology and the Plain Sense', in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, Garrett Green, ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 60.

<sup>11</sup> John Webster, 'Theology after Liberalism?' in *Theology after Liberalism*, John Webster and George P. Schnier, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 57.

human experience) do not feature very large in its account of the theological enterprise. One important consequence here is that a richer range of intra-Christian sources is brought into play. For example, the spiritual and liturgical traditions of Christian faith have come to enjoy renewed attention in postliberal theology, which has not considered them merely ornamental but rather as an ingredient within Christian self-definition, and thus as offering significant clues to the nature of theological rationality. Like methods and norms, that is, the sources of theology are for postliberal theology more Christianly [sic] specific than humanly generic.<sup>12</sup>

With these issues in mind, attention will now turn to one specific postliberal theologian, George Lindbeck.

## II George Lindbeck

George Lindbeck, the Pitkin Professor of Historical Theology (emeritus) at Yale Divinity School, officially retired in 1993. He was born in China in 1923 and his parents were Swedish-American Lutheran missionaries. His main interests have been in historical and ecumenical theology from a Lutheran perspective. However, growing up in a non-western environment and his subsequent selection by the Lutheran World Federation to be a delegate observer to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) had a profound impact on his theological direction. Since the mid-1960s, he has focused most of his research and writing in the 'context of

participation in national and international ecumenical dialogue, primarily with Roman Catholics'.<sup>13</sup>

Lindbeck believed that all standard theological approaches were incapable of dealing with 'intra-Christian theological and ecumenical issues'.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, he set out to formalize an alternative approach to understanding religion and doctrine in his 1984 book, *The Nature of Doctrine*, and in so doing, 'christened a nascent theological movement "postliberal"',<sup>15</sup> and launched the 'cultural-linguistic' methodology into the forefront of theological discussion.<sup>16</sup> The late Hans Frei (1922-1988, a former colleague of Lindbeck's at Yale) described his hermeneutical approach as being like that of Schleiermacher but his dogmatics more like Barth.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> George Lindbeck, 'Confession and Community: An Israel-like view of the Church', in *ChrCent*, 107:16 (May 1990): 493.

<sup>14</sup> George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1984), 7. (Hereafter referred to as N/D.)

<sup>15</sup> Placher, 'Being Postliberal', 390.

<sup>16</sup> However, most observers recognize that he could not have developed the distinctive account in *The Nature of Doctrine* without the work of Hans Frei. Kendall remarks that of the two, Frei 'emerged first as having something important and interesting to say with his book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, published ten years before N/D'. See Stuart Kendall, 'Intra-textual Theology in a Postmodern World', in *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity*, Terrence W. Tilley, ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 93.

<sup>17</sup> Hans Frei, 'Epilogue: George Lindbeck and *The Nature of Doctrine*', in *Theological Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, Bruce D. Marshall, ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 279-80.

<sup>12</sup> Webster, 'Theology after Liberalism', 59.

## 1. The Cultural-Linguistic Approach

Lindbeck's theological approach to religion 'in a postliberal age' does not focus on either the facts (truth claims) or the experiences<sup>18</sup> of a particular religion. Rather its focus is on 'the aspects in which religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures'.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, Lindbeck subscribes to a 'cultural-linguistic' approach to religious study and theological process. As Mike Higton notes, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory

...seems to Lindbeck to fit well the data of religion, world-wide, and so be a good theory for religious studies. He further argues that it is appropriate for theological use because it enables us to deal with various ecumenical topics [having] to do with the convergence of doctrines without fundamental change on the part of the churches converging, as well as enabling us to do justice to a selection of standard theological claims about doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

Within this framework, church doctrines must be viewed as 'rules'. By equating doctrines with rules, focus is placed on the manner in which doctrines are used, 'not as expressive symbols or as truth claims [like the liberals and the fundamentalists respectively], but as communally authoritative rules

of discourse, attitude, and action'.<sup>21</sup> In other words, particular religious expression must be viewed within the culture and language utilized for expression with its doctrines functioning as rules in the same way in which language utilizes grammatical rules to govern its use and give it meaning in a particular context. Higton explains Lindbeck's methodology by stating,

A church is a community where the Christian idiom is learned through practice. Behaviour within this idiom is rule-governed, although learning to follow the rules is more like learning a skill by internalizing the idiom in a process of apprenticeship and socialization than it is like learning to parrot a set of regulations. The system therefore consists of a 'first-order' (actual performances of particular 'sentences') and a 'second-order' (the grammar by which those sentences are regulated), and Lindbeck keeps a fairly rigid boundary between the two.<sup>22</sup>

By positing postliberal theology within a social science framework, Lindbeck places his theological concern (the validity of Christianity and the need for ecumenical dialogue) into the arena of the secular historians, anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, and the university religious studies departments.<sup>23</sup> In doing so, he readily acknowledges the tremendous difficulties this poses for theologians because the language of the social science approach to religious experience

<sup>18</sup> Lindbeck refers to these as cognitive and experiential-expressive aspects of religion.

<sup>19</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Mike Higton, 'Frei's Christology and Lindbeck's Cultural-linguistic Theory', in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 50 (1997): 85.

<sup>21</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Higton, 'Frei's Christology', 83-4.

<sup>23</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 25.



was developed within an environment generally antithetical to theological uses.

The secular world-view of religion is uninterested in (if not hostile to) theological or doctrinal application, focusing rather on the observation of religious behaviour (e.g., Tylor, Evans-Pritchard, Eliade, and Geertz) or the underlying motivation for religious behaviour (e.g., Durkheim, Freud, Marx). Lindbeck, however, sees within the language of the secular arena's observation and fascination with religion the most promising method of bridging the ever-widening gap between the (fundamentalist and evangelical) proposition-ists and the (liberal) experiential-expressivists. As Lindbeck states, he is attempting to 'untie intellectual knots by intellectual means'.<sup>24</sup>

It should be also noted that the social science approach is largely a construct of anthropological, sociological, and philosophical studies.<sup>25</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer notes that Lindbeck is particularly indebted to Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and to Clifford Geertz's cultural anthropology.<sup>26</sup> I would argue that what he has suggested is essentially a religious

theory rather than a doctrinal position. It would not be surprising to see a new addition of Daniel Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*,<sup>27</sup> revised and renamed *Eight Theories of Religion*, with the inclusion of a survey of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory.

Nevertheless, working through *The Nature of Doctrine* is a tedious and arduous task. Frei held the opinion that unless the reader rigidly kept in mind the ecumenical hopes of Lindbeck, the theory as a whole lacked value. He stated,

Without the absolute priority of that Christian-ecumenical reality, without its reality, forget the 'rule' or regulative approach, forget the cultural-linguistic theory—forget the book.<sup>28</sup>

Commenting on Frei's response, Vanhoozer remarks that Lindbeck's writing approaches the point of being 'unintelligible' as he winds his way through the social maze of proof for a cultural-linguistic approach to theology.<sup>29</sup> Vanhoozer's comment may not necessarily suggest that Lindbeck's theory is unfounded or ill-logical, but only to say that it requires a Herculean effort to unravel its mysteries. Notwithstanding, Lindbeck deserves credit for writing something that has sparked so many responses and has gained a measure of recognition and critique not only in theological journals, but even among the more secular academy of religious studies.

Many works have been published

<sup>24</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Vanhoozer notes that Lindbeck is particularly indebted to Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and to Clifford Geertz's cultural anthropology. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 10. Cf., Stuart Kendall, 'Intratextual Theology in a Postmodern Word', in *Post Modern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. by Terrence W. Tilley (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 92-93.

<sup>26</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 10 n. 30.

<sup>27</sup> David Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Frei, 'Epilogue', 278.

<sup>29</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 28.

in an effort to decipher *The Nature of Doctrine*, of which several will be cited in this analysis. However, a careful reading of Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, which was written ten years before *The Nature of Doctrine*, may demonstrate that Lindbeck built upon theological notions more clearly published by Frei. In fact, I would argue that the essence of what Frei wrote to the theological community Lindbeck has repackaged—in a sense—for the university religious studies community along with some of his own particular additions. What follows is a brief summation of his theory.

## 2. Intratextual Methodology

According to Lindbeck, intratextual hermeneutics interprets extratextual realities through the lens of the biblical text, rather than translating the biblical messages into extrabiblical languages. From this premise, Lindbeck states, 'It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.'<sup>30</sup> In other words, understanding the story within the biblical text enables understanding about the world outside the biblical text. Consequently, the Bible serves as a lens through which to see and understand the outside world. In the process of reading the biblical story and understanding what it means within the story, the reader, so to say, reads his/her own biography into the story.

From this perspective, the contemporary world is explained by the biblical text (the lens) rather than the other way around. The call of the bibli-

cal narrative is, so to say, *to come into my world and gain understanding about yours; and not to take me into your world in order to understand mine*. As Kendal states, 'The relationship of the text to the world is the key for postliberal, intratextual theology.'<sup>31</sup> One might say that postliberal theology seeks to understand the grammatical rules of 'the language game' found in the central and distinctive characteristic of the Christian forms of life.<sup>32</sup> However, Kendall adds a cautionary note by stating,

Lest it be thought that such an approach is necessarily conservative, it must be noted that rules are not always simply given in a preexisting framework. They may emerge as the language game is played and lived out in a form of life. As Wittgenstein put it, 'And is there not also the case where we play and make up the rules as we go along? And there is even one where we alter them as we go along' (Wittgenstein 1958:83).<sup>33</sup>

## 3. Rule Theory and Doctrine

As noted earlier, Lindbeck recognizes doctrinal statements to function as 'communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action'.<sup>34</sup> He illustrates this supposition by focusing on beliefs and practices that are considered essential (ontological) to the religious identity of the group under consideration.<sup>35</sup> Specifically looking at

<sup>30</sup> Lindbeck, *N/D*, 118.

<sup>31</sup> Kendall, 'Intratextual Theology', 91.

<sup>32</sup> Kendall, 'Intratextual Theology', 92.

<sup>33</sup> Kendall, 'Intratextual Theology', 92.

<sup>34</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 94.

<sup>35</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 74.

the Christian faith, Lindbeck identifies three regulations, or rules, that must be followed for its proper understanding and expression.

First, there is the monotheistic principle: there is only one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. Second, there is the principle of historical specificity: the stories of Jesus refer to a genuine human being who was born, lived, and died in a particular time and place. Third, there is the principle of what may be [inappropriately] called Christological maximalism: every possible importance is to be ascribed to Jesus that is not inconsistent with the first [two] rules. This last rule, it may be noted, follows from the central Christian conviction that Jesus Christ is the highest possible clue (though an often dim and ambiguous one to creaturely and sinful eyes) within the space-time world of human experience to God, i.e., to what is of maximal importance.<sup>36</sup>

These rules were not only formula-tive in the early church, but all three were 'clearly at work even in the New Testament period'.<sup>37</sup>

The development of the Trinitarian and Christological beliefs over the first four centuries of the church that encapsulated the orthodox position is a direct result of what Lindbeck called 'the joint logical pressure' of the 'rules' noted above. These (and other rules) were recognized from reading both the Scriptures (OT) and the writings of the Apostles (NT) and the manner in which these guiding rules were practically

experienced in the early church. In other words, the rules inherent in the text and the community's understanding established the 'form of life'. The text and its common sense understanding constrained Christians, according to Lindbeck,

... to use available conceptual and symbolic materials to relate Jesus Christ to God in certain ways and not in others. Docetism, Gnosticism, Adoptionism, Sabellianism, Arianism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism were each rejected because they were felt in the concrete life and worship of the Christian community to violate the limits of what was acceptable as defined by the interaction of these three criteria.<sup>38</sup>

Alternatively, recognizing doctrines as rules within divergent Christian circles or religious faiths may also function as a means to promote ecumenical dialogue, although, as Lindbeck rightly admits, 'the proof is far from rigorous'.<sup>39</sup> Assuming that doctrines can be compared to rules, it then becomes necessary to distinguish whether a practical doctrine is unconditionally necessary or conditionally necessary.

Within a Christian context, Lindbeck suggests that some practical doctrines, such as loving God with all one's heart and loving one's neighbour as one's self ('law of love') are unconditionally

---

38 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 95.

39 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 73. Later, Lindbeck reiterates this difficulty again by saying, 'Admittedly the practical difficulties of verifying the existence of such a consensus may be insuperable' (101).

---

36 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 94.

37 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 94.

necessary. Other doctrines, such as Christian participation in war may be regarded as conditionally necessary. It is not possible to envision Christian community that is not required to fulfil the 'law of love' but there have been instances in which the community interpreted its involvement in war (or a war effort) differently from what it has in times past.

From this example, it is possible to accept that unconditionally essential doctrines are always permanent while conditional doctrines may be permanent or temporary, and as such, may be reversible (to a new position without necessarily abandoning the validity of the former position) or irreversible (with no return to the former position). An instance of this reversible/irreversible aspect may be seen in the Christian view of slavery, which at one time was accepted as normative but now, in light of historic changes, is deemed irreversible. In contrast, historic church views of war have been conditional and reversible depending on the specific occasion and time.

One final classification of doctrines proposed by Lindbeck is to view them as neither conditional nor unconditional, 'but simply accidentally necessary'.<sup>40</sup> A Christian community may look at some doctrinal practice with an objective eye and come to the conclusion that its particular approach or methodology may just as easily follow that of another group as to follow its own tradition (such as driving on the left in Great Britain or driving on the right in the U.S.). However, since the community is already deeply established in a particular tradition, practi-

cal change is considered pointless or even impossible. Lindbeck suggests that post-biblical liturgical developments, such as Sunday worship services and Christmas celebrations, might serve as examples.

### III Vanhoozer's Evangelical Alternative

Kevin Vanhoozer is the Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. His return to the faculty at TEDS in 2012 marks his second return to the campus since his original stint from 1986-90. Theologically, Vanhoozer identifies himself as a Presbyterian and Calvinist in persuasion who was troubled by the apparent lack of doctrinal understanding pervading today's evangelical churches across North America. For him, doctrine is an essential aspect to 'understanding and truthful living'.<sup>41</sup> The emergence of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theology of doctrine served as the impetus for the development of his own canonical-linguistic approach.

Although he remains committed to his theological roots, his research challenged him to rethink his self-avowed stance position 'on the matter of Scripture's sufficiency' and led him to 'assign a more positive role to the notions of "tradition" and "improvising"'. As a result, he feels that his contribution to the theological conversation at hand roots the theological task 'more firmly in Scripture while preserving Lindbeck's emphasis on practice'.<sup>42</sup> The

<sup>40</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 86.

<sup>41</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, xii.

<sup>42</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, xiii.

culmination of his work in *The Drama of Doctrine*, his fourth monograph, earned the *Christianity Today* 2006 Book Award for the best book in theology. Since his work is so keenly tied to Lindbeck's, it appropriately serves as a foil for deliberation in this paper.

In *The Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer recognizes that the cultural-linguistic and canonical-linguistic approaches are 'cousins' in that both agree that meaning and truth are critically related to language use.<sup>43</sup> However, the latter approach maintains that the normative use is ultimately not that of the church's culture (whether in a clerical or popular sense) but of the biblical canon. He goes on to say,

The supreme *norm* for church practice is Scripture itself: not Scripture as used by the church but Scripture as used by God, even, or perhaps especially, when such use is *over against* the church....Canonical-linguistic theology attends both to the drama *in* the text—what God is doing in the world through Christ—and to the drama that continues in the church as God uses Scripture to address, edify, and confront its readers.<sup>44</sup>

His concern is essentially two-fold. First, if church culture and language are not constrained by the biblical text, then they will inevitably drift. Without a pre-determined self-submission to the biblical narrative, a cultural-linguistic methodology will collapse in the same manner in which modernity's 'truth is found within' notion has collapsed.

The centre of the believing community cannot be the community itself; otherwise, it possesses no objective standard and cannot provide 'the missing link between right belief (orthodoxy) and wise practice (orthopraxis): *right judgment* (orthokrisis)'.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, Vanhoozer's contribution may not solve the weakness of Lindbeck's methodology in practical terms. Even he admits, 'Authoritative Scripture still has to be interpreted'.<sup>46</sup> As Vanhoozer develops his methodology, he inevitably recognizes problems associated with moving biblical interpretation to some idealized fixed point outside the church's community and tradition. For example, the notion that biblical interpretation is a public event and, as he states, 'open to all', is often a most unfortunate consequence of the Protestant Reformation. Without a consensus of interpretive meaning, the culture and language of the believing community ceases to be a unified community—being transformed instead into a field of individuals with no culture and language linking them together.

Vanhoozer concedes, 'Critics of *sola scriptura* typically make much the same point. To locate divine authority in a list of books does not resolve but exacerbates the problem inasmuch as the canon itself cannot stave off the conflict of interpretations about its meaning'.<sup>47</sup> It goes without saying that although the canon is fixed, interpretation of that canon is not. Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic methodology does

43 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 16.

44 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 16.

45 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 30.

46 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 122.

47 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 123.

not seem capable of resolving this dilemma.

His second concern is that Lindbeck does not offer a clear process as to how the church overcomes the apparent weakness of correcting the identity of the Christian community in its culture and language (if and when needed) without specifying an objective guide to stand over that culture and language. In fact, Lindbeck argues that church doctrines (teachings from the Scripture implemented into practice) shape Christian culture and language in a manner similar to the way grammatical rules affect language. Learning the language enables the believer to participate in the form of life.

Vanhoozer clarifies this notion by stating, 'For Lindbeck, language and culture function as *the socially mediated web or mosaic of belief* that serves as the means and measure of doctrinal knowledge' (*italics original*).<sup>48</sup> From this perspective, a person's beliefs and their interpretive framework are dependent on the community in which a person is situated.

Vanhoozer believes this approach places the biblical text at the wrong end of the process when he states that 'the authority of Scripture—God's communicative action—is relegated (demoted!) to the role of one voice among many'.<sup>49</sup> For Vanhoozer the interpretive framework for the church must be canonical before being communal.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Vanhoozer wonders whether Lindbeck's position may be a form of 'ecclesial expressivism' similar

in perspective to the experiential-expressivist position Lindbeck attributes to modern liberals.

#### IV Evaluating the Cultural-Linguistic Approach

A definitive strength of the cultural-linguistic approach is the emphasis it places on the biblical narrative and the community's reading of Scripture. For Lindbeck, the culture and language of the Christian faith is expressed or revealed through Scripture. The 'hinge pin' of the cultural-linguistic methodology is the unique manner in which the church—past and present—utilizes the biblical text. For example, the church discovers its identity, so to say, in reading the story of the Bible and, from that reading discerns, learns, and teaches how Christian believers are to behave and act. This fundamental element promotes the church's reading the Scriptural narrative in community and is the guiding principle of narrative theology.

Narrative theology has developed quite significantly since the 1970s. There are divergent streams of thought within narrative theology making it impossible to say that all narrative theologians subscribe to the same notions or have the same particular interests. The most notable division within the narrative theological stream took place during the 1970s and 1980s between theologians at Yale University (e.g., Frei, Lindbeck, Hauerwas, Kelsey) and the University of Chicago (e.g., Ricoeur, Tracy, Hartt, and McFague).<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 294.

<sup>49</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 294.

<sup>50</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 294.

<sup>51</sup> Gary L. Comstock, 'Two Types of Narrative Theology', *JAAR* 55:4 (1987): 688.



Since that time, others have contributed to the narrative 'dialogue', many of whom were students at either institution or who were influenced by such.<sup>52</sup>

At that time, as Gary Comstock remarks, those from Yale were generally 'antifoundational, cultural-linguistic, Wittgensteinian-inspired descriptivists' while those from Chicago were 'revisionist, hermeneutical, Gadamerian-inspired correlationists'.<sup>53</sup> In other words, narrative theology typically generated from the Yale school insisted that the biblical narrative must set the boundaries for what can be said and done in theology. A focus on 'truth claims' was not of primary importance since that was a matter of faith and a practical outcome within the Christian community. Comstock's describes their approach in this manner:

Theology ought to be a descriptive and regulative enterprise. It ought to tell us what Christians historically have done and believed, help us to think about what Christians today should do and believe, and then stop before it oversteps the limits of the confessing community. It should not aspire to be a public, 'rational' enterprise; we should not expect from it apologetic arguments.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast, theology from the Chicago school viewed the biblical narrative as *a* starting point, but not *the only* starting point for theological reflection. Other narratives (even from other faiths) along with historical evi-

dence and philosophical writings must be considered in assessing the 'truth claims' of the Bible. Within this stream of narrative theology, extratextual material is critical in justifying the claims of the Bible.

In spite of the difference between these two streams, one issue unites both camps: the biblical story provides the language necessary to shape the culture of the Christian community. It is within this understanding that Lindbeck applies his notion of intratextuality and rule-theory. An adequate understanding of the story contained within the narrative of Scripture begins with the reader entering the biblical world and allowing the language of the narrative to provide not only the meaning of the text but also meaning for the life of the reader.

The community of believers is deeply impacted when the emphasis of biblical study and the theological process is centred on the biblical narrative. In this sense, 'It is the text...which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text'.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, the theological process begins and ends with the Christian community's reading and use of the biblical story. Its story is the community's story.

The advantage of an intratextual hermeneutic is that it allows the meaning to be immanent or inherent in the text. Lindbeck argues that 'Meaning is constituted by the uses of a specific language rather than being distinguishable from it'.<sup>56</sup> For example, the proper way to determine what the term 'God' signifies is to understand how the word

52 Consider Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), esp. 85-7.

53 Comstock, 'Two Types', 688.

54 Comstock, 'Two Types', 695-6.

55 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 118.

56 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 114.

or concept is used within the story and how it consequently shapes reality and experience. According to Lindbeck, typical conservative and liberal approaches alike sought to establish its propositional or experiential meaning *first* and then moved to 'reinterpreting or reformulating its uses accordingly'.<sup>57</sup> Beginning with an already developed definition of any word, concept, or theological position—that is a presupposition—employs an 'extratextual' methodology and may alter the intratextual meaning intended within the story.

For Lindbeck, an intratextual approach enables meaning to flow from one generation or culture to the next. The manner in which the church uses Scripture to shape its form of life makes this possible. The church community not only possesses the text—the story—but it also has a history with the story. As the story is read and internalized, it shapes the community's culture. In this way, the story of the Bible, though static, does not remain static but becomes the story of the community.

The story of the community shares commonalities with previous generations in many ways while at the same time developing in new cultural ways consistent with the narrative. Even Vanhoozer recognizes this benefit when he states: 'The cultural-linguistic turn characteristic of postliberal and other types of postmodern theology is a salient reminder that theology exists to serve the life of the church.'<sup>58</sup>

The intratextual method described

by Lindbeck does not fix meaning only to the original time and circumstance, but by bringing the community of believers into the biblical world, allows the 'story of old' to be a contemporary story over and over with amazing continuity. This observation only exemplifies the necessity of the Christian community's commitment to reading the biblical story. If a community of believers fails to read the story of the bible—the narrative given—choosing rather to reduce it to a series of propositional truth statements or to transform it into a series of symbols representing something other than what is inherent in the story, the result will be the loss of the community's identity as the people of God.

Although I would argue that the benefits of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach are positive, especially in light of the manner in which a narrative or intratextual approach brings a fresh impetus to the believing community reading the Scripture, there is a potential hazard for the cultural-linguistic approach. Lindbeck's theory hinges on the culture and language of the Christian community's use of Scripture. The authority of Scripture finds its place only as the church appropriates or utilizes its teachings. Emphasis is placed on the manner in which the believing community, the church, uses Scripture.

In this schema, authority is centred in church tradition and interpretation rather than within the canon of Scripture itself. Vanhoozer considers this particular aspect the Achilles' Heel of Lindbeck's postliberal approach to theology and offers an alternative through his canonical-linguistic method.

57 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 114.

58 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 16.

## V Summary and Analysis

At the heart of postliberal theology is the premise that biblical understanding must be shaped by the narrative of Scripture rather than by attention to historical context or reliance on propositional truth claims. Lindbeck maintains that all standard theological approaches were incapable of dealing with intra-Christian theological and ecumenical issues. His twin concerns of ecumenical discussion and the communal importance of the Christian community led him to formalize an alternative approach to understanding religion and doctrine and, in the process, coined the phrase 'postliberal' and introduced the cultural-linguistic methodology. His theological approach did not focus on either truth claims or on the experiences of the Christian faith. Rather he focused on the manner in which religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures.

Within this framework, church doctrines function as rules. By equating doctrines with rules, focus is placed on the manner in which doctrines are used, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims but as community rules guiding daily behaviour. In this sense, Lindbeck subscribes to a cultural-linguistic approach to religious study and theological process. Within this context, intratextual hermeneutics interprets extratextual realities through the lens of the biblical text, rather than translating the biblical messages into extrabiblical languages. For Lindbeck, understanding the story within the biblical text enables understanding about the world outside the biblical text.

A definitive strength of the cultural-linguistic approach is the emphasis it

places on the biblical narrative and the community's reading of Scripture. The advantage of an intratextual hermeneutic is that it allows the meaning to be inherent within the story as well as enables meaning to flow from one generation or culture to the next. Whereas Frei's emphasis was on the biblical narrative specifically, Lindbeck focuses the manner in which the believing community, the church, uses Scripture thus allowing the original story to be a contemporary story over and over with amazing continuity. Consequently, authority is placed in church tradition and interpretation rather than within the canon of Scripture, allowing the theological process to begin and end with the Christian community's reading and use of the biblical story.

Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach is, in many ways, synonymous with Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic view. Both require the believing community to read and develop meaning from the text. The main point of difference concerns the nature and status of interpretative frameworks and their relationship to interpretative communities.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, he maintains that his canonical-linguistic methodology does provide the philosophical or theological safeguard necessary to ensure that the biblical canon remains the guiding principle for church culture and language. He summarizes his argument by stating,

To think of the church as the context within which Scripture becomes canon appears plausible in terms of history and sociology, but it is theologically inadequate. It is

---

59 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 294.

not the church's use but the triune God's use of Scripture that makes it canon. That the church recognizes the canon authenticates the church rather than the canon, which needs no ecclesial approval to be what it is: the Word of God. Canonicity is the criterion of catholicity, not vice versa. This insight also marks the definitive break between the canonical-linguistic approach and its cultural-linguistic counterpart.<sup>60</sup>

The obvious difficulty with his claim is that it is hard to prove and, as such, is necessarily a claim of faith. In practical terms, God does not use Scripture, at least, not in the same manner as the believing community. The community

uses Scripture to understand itself. Ultimately, it is the community that must determine what God is saying through Scripture and how God might be using Scripture to guide the community. Vanhoozer's methodology could benefit from Lindbeck's by recognizing that theology is ultimately a local event, deriving meaning from within the community's experience and not from the canon itself.

Both methods bring something of worth to the hermeneutical table, but not without their respective difficulties. Perhaps what is required is for each method to function in cooperation or even dialectically. Constructing a method that emerges from the conflation of Lindbeck and Vanhoozer is beyond the scope of this paper but certainly bears continued contemplation.

---

60 Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 149-50.

## Postliberal Theological Method A Critical Study

Adonis Vidu

The postliberal theology of Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Ronald Thiemann, John Milbank and others is one of the more influential contemporary options. This book focuses on several aspects pertaining to its theological method, specifically its understanding of background, hermeneutics, epistemic justification, ontology, the nature of doctrine and, finally, Christological method.

**Adonis Vidu** is Lecturer in Theology at Emmanuel University, Oradea, Romania.

978-1-84227-395-1 / 229 x 152 mm / 284pp / £19.99

**Paternoster, Authenticmedia Limited, 52 Presley Way,  
Crownhill, Milton Keynes, MK8 0ES**

# Justifying Advocacy

## A Biblical and Theological Rationale for Speaking the Truth to Power on behalf of the Vulnerable

Andrew Sloane

**KEYWORDS:** *Social justice, gospel, wealth, poverty, power, authority, renunciation, prayer, praise*

### I On justifying advocacy

Giving the John Saunders lecture is something of a daunting privilege—particularly given that I want to speak about advocacy, something for which he is justly renowned. Indeed, many early advocates for the humane treatment of indigenous Australians and of their rights came from the ranks of evangelical Christians such as John Saunders (1806-1859) and Lance- lot Edward Threlkeld (1788-1859), a tradition maintained in Peter Adams' 2009 Saunders lecture.<sup>1</sup> This tradi-

tion of evangelical Christian action in advocacy on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged is one to which I am committed, largely through the Micah Challenge campaign which has given a voice to many of us who have been committed to engaging with the 'powers that be' on behalf of the poor.<sup>2</sup>

Given this tradition, my commitment to it and my interest in thinking theologically, it seemed only reasonable to sketch a theological rationale for *advocacy*: especially given that most of the rationales for advocacy have not been *theological*, but focused on the practical value of advocacy for bringing about sustainable transformation for poor and oppressed communities;<sup>3</sup> and

---

<sup>1</sup> See John Saunders, "Claims of the Aborigines": a sermon preached by the Rev John Saunders, Bathurst Street Baptist Church, Sydney, 14 October 1838', *The Colonist*, 17, 20, 24 October 1838; Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998): esp. Chs.2-3.

---

<sup>2</sup> For more on the campaign, see <http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/> (accessed 10/10/2011) and associated links.

<sup>3</sup> So, for instance, Jayakumar Christian, 'The Nature of Poverty and Development' in *Another Way to Love*, ed. T. Costello and R. Yule (Brunswick East: Acorn, 2009): 23-34; Gary A. Haugen, 'Integral Mission and Advocacy' in

---

*Rev Dr Andrew Sloane* has been Lecturer in Old Testament and Christian Thought at Morling College, Sydney since 2002, prior to which he taught at Ridley College, Melbourne. Trained as a medical doctor, Dr Sloane was ordained as a Baptist pastor in 1991. His academic interests include Old Testament and Biblical interpretation, philosophical theology, bioethics and epistemology. He is the author of *On Being a Christian* in the Academy (2003) and *At Home in a Strange Land* (2008). This article was delivered on 19 October 2011 as the annual John Saunders Lecture sponsored by the Social Issues Committee of the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT (<http://baptistsocialissues.com>) and is reproduced by permission of the author.

most of the *theological* rationales have been broadly focused on social engagement (assuming the legitimacy of advocacy as one *strategy* amongst many) rather than looking at advocacy *per se*.<sup>4</sup> Hence my desire to present a *theological* account of *advocacy*. But there are challenges that must be addressed especially for those, like me, who are committed to the task for broadly theological reasons.

## II Critics to the left of me, critics to the right

There are those who question the theological legitimacy of the whole enterprise—something of a problem for *theologically* justifying advocacy. From the theological right, the claim is made that our mission is the gospel—especially the verbal proclamation of the gospel—and that justice and advocacy are other people's business. These were, in fact, almost the very words used to me by a Christian worker on

university campuses. All sorts of people, they said, are concerned about justice; only Christians care about the gospel, and so while being kind to the poor is a valuable mark of Christian discipleship, the proclamation of the gospel so as to call people to faith in Jesus should be our (sole) priority in mission.<sup>5</sup>

From the left, perhaps surprisingly, there are also those who question the theological legitimacy of the whole enterprise. Their concerns are, of course, quite different. For them the issue is power—the illegitimacy of Christians using power in God's name. These were, in fact, almost the very words used to me at a conference I attended by a Christian worker in an urban slum. Christians are called in imitation of Christ, they said, to incarnational identification with the poor in their weakness and vulnerability. Such a gospel commitment eschews the top-down exercise of power for the bottom-up service of weakness so as to bring about transformation by and through and for the poor and their communities.

And so with critics to the left of me and critics to the right, I seem to be stuck in the middle. And that, theologically, can be a fairly barren place to be stuck. Most of the biblical justifications I have seen have been thin and fragmentary. A matter of scooping up a few textual gems without regard to their context—such as Micah 6:8, or

---

*Justice, Mercy and Humility: The papers of the Micah Network International Consultation on Integral Mission and the Poor* (2001), ed. T. Chester (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002): 187-200; Robert Davis, 'What about justice? Toward an Evangelical perspective on advocacy in development', *Transformation* 26 (2009): 89-103.

4 Tim Chester, *Good News to the Poor: Sharing the gospel through social involvement* (Leicester: IVP, 2004); Tim Costello and Rod Yule, ed., *Another Way to Love* (Brunswick East: Acorn, 2009); Jamie A. Grant and Dewi A. Hughes, ed., *Transforming the World? The gospel and social responsibility* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009); Dewi A. Hughes and Matthew Bennet, *God of the Poor: A Biblical Vision of God's Present Rule* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1998); Dewi A. Hughes, *Power and Poverty: Divine and human rule in a world of need* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008).

---

5 So also Jim Harries, "'Material Provision' or Preaching the Gospel: Reconsidering "Holistic" (Integral) Mission', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32 (2008): 257-70; David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005): 117-39.



Proverbs 31, or Matthew 23—or grabbing a few textual threads from the books of Esther or James and tossing them together as a biblical justification.<sup>6</sup>

Some, indeed, have been misguided. I am not, for instance, convinced that Esther is a good place to go to justify advocacy. Apart from issues relating to the violence of both the threat and Esther's response, Esther does not address the kind of advocacy I am seeking to justify. Esther speaks as a Jew—admittedly one with a position of power and privilege—on behalf of her own people—admittedly in a context of marginalisation and powerlessness. Nonetheless, she advocates on behalf of *her own people*, those who share ethnic and religious and even geographical ties with her as an exiled Jew. And there is, of course, a place for that—say, expatriate Tibetans speaking about the plight of their country under Chinese rule, or expatriate Karens or Chins (or Congolese, or Somalis, or...) speaking about the plight of their country under domestic rule, or the Voice of the Martyrs speaking on behalf of persecuted Christians across the world. There is a place for that kind of lobbying,<sup>7</sup> but that is not what I want to examine in this address.

What I want to examine is the role of the church as representatives of God and God's mission in the world 'speaking the truth to power' on behalf of

the poor. And I want to do a bit better than a bit of piecemeal proof-texting or exegetical special pleading, and I believe there are biblical and theological resources for doing so. After all, a mission focused on the kingdom of God, one reflecting God's own mission in the world and agenda for it, necessitates the gospel—a gospel in all its fullness which means, of course, it being good news for the poor.

Further, while costly identification with the marginalised (what is often called 'incarnational' ministry)<sup>8</sup> is a legitimate form of mission there are others; for the gospel of both the Old and New Testaments, I will claim, calls for the just and responsible use of power. This may, indeed, mean its renunciation, but not always. So let me attempt to move beyond fragments and threads to develop a coherent biblical framework that justifies advocacy.<sup>9</sup>

### III Framework not fragments

My plan is to outline a biblical-theological framework which aims to justify ad-

<sup>8</sup> Despite its currency in much contemporary missiology [e.g., Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011): esp. 121-40]), I believe that 'incarnational' is an unhelpful label for some useful emphases and commitments. See Tim Chester, 'Why I don't believe in incarnational mission', <http://timchester.wordpress.com/2008/07/19/why-i-dont-believe-in-incarnational-mission/>; accessed 17/10/2011.

<sup>9</sup> For a helpful articulation of the 'political hermeneutics' at work in my discussion, see Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to read the Bible politically* (London: SPCK, 1989); also my earlier work on ethics, Andrew Sloane, *At Home in a Strange Land: Using the Old Testament in Christian Ethics* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Leslie Nathaniel, 'Church and Advocacy' in *Gospel and Globalisation*, ed. A. Watkins and L. Nathaniel (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006): 69-74.

<sup>7</sup> For the distinction between lobbying and advocacy, see Con Apokis, *Christians: Catalysts for Change*, (Brunswick East: Acorn, nd), 1-3.

vocacy as calling on power to be used justly for the poor, one in which many of the threads and fragments of the usual piecemeal approaches find their setting. This will involve, in the first instance, reminding ourselves of God's passion for the poor and God's passion to see justice done. As such, I will aim to show that God is both the chief advocate for the poor and the chief one we address when we advocate on their behalf: praise (Pss. 97, 146) and prayer (Luke 18:1–8) are key elements in this framework.

Second, I will seek to (briefly) articulate a theology of (political) power and authority, in which power is seen as a gift given to a community *through* a person of power *for* those without it. As such I will aim to show that power, while it can be abused, can also be used on behalf of the poor, and that we therefore have a responsibility to hold the wielders of power accountable to those for whose sake they have been given it (Psalm 72). Third, I aim to show that our voice is a God-given gift and responsibility—an expression of power, really—which we must use for God's glory and in service of the poor (James 5:1–6).

#### IV God and advocacy

Let me begin where any Christian theology ought to begin: the God whom we know and worship through Jesus Christ. It is clear from the opening chapters of Scripture that God is committed to a world of justice and delight and that this is reflected in God's design for creation, God's work in judging human sin and seeking to redeem a broken world and broken humanity, in God's design for a renewed hu-

manity, first in Israel, then in Jesus and through him and his Spirit in the church as a (broken but real) sign of the coming kingdom in which God's design will be fully realised. But that is a tale well told elsewhere; and here my focus is on the question of *advocacy*. And so my concern is for us to think about how the practices of praise and prayer as exemplified, say, in Psalm 146 and Luke 18 contribute to our understanding of advocacy.

I would like to look at two texts that illustrate this—not as fragments arbitrarily grabbed for a rhetorical purpose, but as indicators of God's role in the story as the one who addresses us and is addressed by us in advocacy for the poor in the context of praise and petition. For central to the *praise* of God is God's commitment to speak and act for the victims of injustice, as is seen in one of the oldest known songs in Scripture the 'Song of the Sea' in Exodus 15, Hannah's famous song in 1 Samuel 2 (and its even more famous echo in Mary's Magnificat in Luke 2), through to some of the last songs sung in Scripture in Revelation 7:15–17 and Revelation 19:1–2.

Of course, as we think about God, justice and praise, the logical place to turn is the book of Psalms, specifically, Psalm 146.<sup>10</sup> As is clear from the open-

<sup>10</sup> For more on the Psalter and Psalm 146 in particular, see Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984); Craig G. Broyles, *Psalms* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999); John Goldingay, *Psalms 90–150* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); James C. McCann, 'Psalms' in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 4, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996): 639–1280; James Mays, L, *Psalms* (Louisville: WJKP, 1994).

ing and closing verses of this Psalm, this is a Psalm of praise, a hymn that identifies key qualities of God that show that God is worthy of our praise. More than that, it is strategically located towards the end of the book of Psalms, helping to shape the climax of the book's journey from obedience to praise. It is the first of five great 'hal-lel' Psalms which end with the exultant cry, 'let everything that has breath praise Yahweh'—and helps us to see why we should join in this praise. For in the face of the frailties and failures of human power (Ps. 146:3–4), Yahweh is the one whose power is limitless and indefatigable, whose kingdom will rule forever and in whom we can safely trust (5–6, 10).

However, Yahweh is more than the wielder of superior and trustworthy power; Yahweh is the wielder of a superior *kind* of power, a power to which we should willingly and joyfully submit, a power we can freely and fully trust. For the God we praise—the (only) God worthy of praise, is the God who works justice forever; the one who cares for the weak and the vulnerable (v.7). *This* God, contrary to all our expectations of the exercise of earthly power, uses God's uncontainable power for those who stand to benefit from it, those in greatest need of aid. This God releases exiled Israel and cares for the socially, geographically, economically displaced and vulnerable (aliens, widows and orphans). This is the God who acts for the poor and whose word—even the word of praise—speaks on their behalf.<sup>11</sup> This vision of God shapes our

praise, brings us to the climax of the journey of faith and shapes our wanderings on the way.

It also, of course, shapes our prayer. God's concern for justice is equally central to the way Scripture shapes *petition* to God. This is clear in one of the oldest recorded prayers in Scripture, that of Abraham in Genesis 19 (shall not the judge of all the earth do what is right/just?); it is reflected in the cries of Israel that prompt God to act in the Exodus; the same cries of the poor that prompt God's judgement in Israel's history and which shape so many of the (lament) Psalms (7, 10 and 12, to take three early examples). It is echoed in one of the last petitions recorded in Scripture, the cry of the martyrs under the throne in Revelation 6 (and even in the very last, Maranatha, which is, I would suggest, a longing cry for the judge of all the earth to finally do what is right). Our advocacy for the poor is first addressed *to God* before it is ad-

---

Praise is, in the first instance, human words addressed to God—as is true also of prayer and other Scriptural words by which the people of God address God. The praises (and prayers, etc) we find in the Psalms, however, are part of the canon of Scripture, and so are included in the words God gives to us. They are, I would suggest, now divinely endorsed and appropriated as ways God addresses us as people of faith, instructing us in how we can appropriately relate to (and so speak with) God. In this sense they are both human words addressing God and divine words addressing us. For a useful discussion of this which, however, fails to understand Psalms as words given by God to us as authorised forms of address directed to God see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995).

---

<sup>11</sup> A word here on the way in which praise is both God's word and ours is in order here.

dressed on God's behalf to those in power.<sup>12</sup>

There are many texts about prayer that I could look at in this regard. Psalm 82 would be a fascinating example, consisting as it does of an accusation brought by God against the 'powers' (be they understood as pseudo-divine rivals in the heavenly assembly or powerful humans in the earthly one) and their unjust abuses (vv.1–7), followed by a petition that God so act *now* (v.8). My focus, however, will be on Jesus' teaching his disciples to always pray and not give up in Luke 18:1–8. Luke's gospel, as is well known, has a sustained interest in the poor and Jesus' words and actions on their behalf—it is Luke's gospel that presents Jesus' kingdom program, after all, as proclaiming good news to the poor and in which Jesus pronounces a blessing on the poor. What is often missed is that this interest is sustained in Jesus' teaching on perseverance in prayer here in chapter 18.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> For fascinating reflections on suffering, injustice, prayer and liturgy, see 'Liturgy, justice, and tears', *Worship* 62 (1988): 386–403; and for specific reflections on Psalms 10 and 126, see Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*: 53–72.

<sup>13</sup> The concern for justice is missed by a number of commentators, for which see, Darrell L Bock, *Luke* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); C. A. Evans, *Luke* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990). Others, however, recognise it and the role it plays in Jesus' eschatological concerns, for which see, Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (Dallas: Word, 1993).

It is worth noting the way that this is surrounded by passages that reflect Luke's emphasis on Jesus' ministry to seek and save (the least and) the lost (the parables in Luke 15; the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in 16; the parable of Pharisee and the tax collector, the blessing of children, the confrontation with the rich ruler in 18 and, of course, the saving of Zacchaeus in 19). But the immediate context is Jesus' warning in 17:20–37 of the inevitability of final judgement and the need for the disciples to be found alert and faithful when it comes. His teaching on prayer, then, aims to encourage that faithfulness as they wait for the end—a faithful trust in God that, in Jesus' view, is seen most clearly in our continuing to cry out for God to fulfil God's kingly purposes, rather than giving in to a cynical despair that says, 'as was, so is now and ever shall be'.

However, in the midst of all the humour and obscurity of elements of this parable, please note the *content* of both the widow's petition to the unjust judge and ours to the just Judge of all the earth: these are pleas for *justice*. Jesus tells us that what ought to sustain our prayer is a confident trust that the divine judge will work justice for those who trust the judge's justice. The sting at the end of his parable is, of course, the question of whether we will be found exercising faith in God's justice, or whether we have given up in a flabby acquiescence to the ways of the world.

For Jesus, exercising such faith involves pleading for justice on our own behalf as well as for others—it is a faith that recognises that the world is not as God would have it and which calls on God to act to bring it in line with the coming kingdom of God. The

picture that emerges, then, from the praise and prayer of Scripture is of a God of inexhaustible power who is the initiator of the cause of justice and the one who responds to us in it. Which takes us, of course, to a theology of power.

### V A theology of power

Power—the ability to effect change in the (political and communal) world—and its correlate authority—the right to do so, however and from wherever it is derived—are fundamental and inescapable features of human life together.<sup>14</sup> No human communal life is imaginable without some forms of social power and authority and the institutions and practices that support and are governed by it. They may be more-or-less egalitarian or authoritarian in nature, but such patterns of decision making and implementation must exist for there to be any common life. From a biblical point of view, it does not seem to matter much what *forms* they take. From clan to kingdom to Persian or Roman province to the new (largely urban) communities of faith of the early church, the common life and social context of the believing community varies greatly.

What matters, it seems, is not the form (which seems to range from patriarchal familial patterns, through complex centralised monarchy to various forms of ‘diaspora’ community, none of which conforms to our late modern democratic ideals), but the reasons for

which power and authority are given, and the ends to which they are used. And to that, for all the variety of *form* of institutional power, the Scriptures seem to give clear and unequivocal witness.

Theologically, (political) power and authority are seen as gifts given to a community *through* a person of power *for* those without it. The primary reason (political) power is given is in order to establish ordered patterns of life together, in which those who gain advantages in the system are responsible to use their wealth and power (the advantages they accrue) for the benefit of those who become disadvantaged as a result of the operation of those patterns of common life.

Such an understanding of power is seen in the *Torah*’s call to wealthy land-owners to leave gleanings for the poor and its call to administer justice fairly; it is seen in the prophetic indictment of abuses of power from Elijah (1 Kings 21) through Amos to Zechariah; it is seen in Job’s self-defence in chapter 31 and Ecclesiastes’ despairing vision of a broken world; it is seen in Jesus’ condemnation of abusive power (e.g., Mt. 23:23) and even Paul’s much misunderstood call to submit to the political structures of his day (Rom. 13); it is evident in Revelation’s stinging rebuke of the ‘Babylon’ of John’s day. But perhaps the clearest articulation of this vision of power is seen in the ‘charter of kingship’ found in Psalm 72, to which I would like us now to turn, aiming to show that power, while it can be abused, can also be used on behalf of the poor, and we have a responsibility to hold the wielders of power accountable to those for whose sake they have been given it.

<sup>14</sup> For this and much of the following argument, see Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics*: 41–52; Hughes and Bennet, *God of the Poor*: Ch.8.

This is the last of a series of 'David's prayers', one which closes Book Two of the Psalter focusing on David as man and king.<sup>15</sup> It sets up for us the ideal of human kingship which, as Psalm 2 notes, is meant to be an expression in earthly power of the rule of God. It is no surprise, then, that this 'job description for the king' is couched as a *prayer* to God, and one in which the king's exercise of justice is emphasised as one of the key blessings God can bestow on God's people (and the earth) through the human king. Clearly, the Psalm petitions (or at least expresses a wish for) the blessings of God: prosperity (lit: *shalom*, v.3 and also v.7); abundance (v.6, 15–16). But these blessings are tightly connected to the king's reflecting God's own passion for justice, for using his earthly power for the weak and the vulnerable (v.2, v.7, 12–14), including dismantling the unjust powers and systems that oppress and exploit them (v.4b, 14).

Such an exercise of power, interestingly, will culminate in God fulfilling those promises originally given to Abraham and tied to God's purposes for Israel: the establishing of a great name, the gift of offspring and the abundance which characterises *shalom*, and the blessing of the nations through the blessing of God's chosen one. This is what power is for in God's economy: the bringing of blessing to the community for whom it is to be exercised through the establishing of justice, through the use of power to establish, restore and maintain right relationships in the community. This is

how we are to use our power; this is the pattern by which all users of earthly power are held accountable by God.

But, you might say, when we come to the NT we do not see a call to responsible exercise of power, but its renunciation in costly, suffering service. Does that not undercut all this OT material? Let me be clear: Jesus' understanding of his identity and mission is driven by the OT, including its picture of power and its use. Indeed, that is one thing that shapes his characteristic emphasis on power and position as opportunities for service (for, as we have seen, power in the OT is given to the community *through* those in authority; Jesus reinforces that). In my view this means that, while at times the NT overturns a basic pattern of OT faith (e.g., the way that purity or Temple and sacrifice work) we need to be very careful before we jettison the OT and its concerns and should do so only for very good reason.<sup>16</sup>

There is, in fact, very good reason to see the NT as endorsing the basic understanding of power I have outlined. John the Baptist, for instance, calls on those with economic and military power to use it well, not to renounce it (Luke 3:10–14); the leaders of the early church exercised their power, or authority if you will, for the benefit of the community both socially (Acts 6) and theologically (Acts 15). Indeed, while there is a clear call in the NT to renounce power for suffering service, I would suggest such renunciation is because some ends for the poor can be achieved only through *powerlessness*; but that is not a universal phenomenon.

<sup>15</sup> For more on Psalm 72, see references cited earlier, as well as Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100* (Dallas: Word, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> I discuss this at length elsewhere, for which see Sloane, *At Home in a Strange Land*



Indeed, a failure to embrace the responsibilities of power can be an act of infidelity both to the God who gave it and the poor for whose benefit it was given.

Perhaps here *The Lord of the Rings* might give us useful parallels. The power of the Ring must be surrendered, as Boromir tragically failed to see; but the power of the king must be embraced in costly service, as Aragorn recognises. Indeed, Jesus' call for those in power to love in service is a call to the proper *Christomorphic* use of power: not for one's one benefit, but for that of the weakest and the least—the very reason power was given in the first place.<sup>17</sup> The renunciation of power, then, is *one* pattern we find in the NT; it is not the only one—witness James' advocacy for poor labourers to which we now turn.

## VI The power of a voice

So finally we turn to what may have seemed like an obvious starting point (well, to anyone but an [OT] theologian!): the concern we find in Scripture that we use our voice in line with God's purposes—especially God's commitment to justice. This theme, too, runs

right through Scripture, if we know where (and how) to look. It is, perhaps, most obvious in the great prophets of the Eighth Century BC, who were commissioned by God to voice God's revulsion at and rejection of Israel's and Judah's sin and injustice. They, clearly, were authorised advocates of God's concern for the poor.

It is also a concern that reaches back long before the corruption of the divided kingdom, and stretches out long after it: the *torah's* passion for justice entails speaking the truth on behalf of the poor; prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Zechariah advocate (on God's behalf) for the poor, as does Nehemiah. Micah 6:6–8 is not, it would seem, a text chosen at random, a scattered gem grabbed out of the wreckage to justify our concern for advocacy, but a crystallisation of this great OT witness to the power and responsibility of the people of God using their voice on behalf of the poor.

However, it is to the NT I would like us to turn—a portion of the Bible often seen to have a muted witness at best to the cause of advocacy, a perception that is frequently used to suggest that advocacy is no longer a legitimate *Christian* concern, even if it had been one for (some in) Israel. James 5:1–6, I would suggest, gives the lie to that claim.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In this regard it is important to remember that we are not to play God in the lives of poor communities, paternalistically determining the ways our power should be used on their behalf, but listen to the poor, giving them the power to determine how that power entrusted to us for their good ought to be used. On this see particularly, Jayakumar Christian, *God of the Empty-Handed: Poverty, Power and the Kingdom of God* (Monrovia, CAL: MARC, 1999): esp. chaps. 10–11; Christian, 'The Nature of Poverty and Development': 24–26. I should note, however, that (as I have made clear) I think he is mistaken to see Jesus as exercising a different kind of power from that of the OT.

<sup>18</sup> For more on James, including explicit rejections of Luther's (in)famous rejection of it as an 'epistle of straw', see Craig Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Daniel M. Doriani, *James* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007); Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); Jim Reiher, *James: Peace activist and advocate for the poor* (Dandenong: UNOH, 2009).

The context of the letter shows us James' concern with faith and its out-working in the concrete life of the community and with true wisdom which is grounded in a proper fear of Yahweh. All of this is addressed to a community facing the reality of struggle and persecution, calling them to persevere in light of the coming Day of Yahweh (see 5:7ff).

The passage directly addresses the rich. It is probable that, in light of James 2:1ff (and our knowledge of early Christian sociology) the rich are those outside the community of faith, in which case the struggling community rather than their rich oppressors would be the primary hearers of this text. The main 'rhetorical aim', then, would be to comfort suffering Christians and call them to faithful perseverance; but that, in turn, must be rooted in the actuality of the condemnation of the unjustly wealthy.

James pulls no punches. He fiercely denounces careless, selfish, unjust luxury, both in light of the coming final judgement (vv.4-6) and the folly of such useless hoarding (v.2): the rotting of their riches probably speaks, not of the final judgement in which such wealth counts for nought; rather it speaks of the way unjust hoarding of wealth rather than just using it for the benefit of others and the community leads to its decay, being useful for nothing (dare one speak of the hoarding of shares and property and our intermittent financial crises?). This wealth, hoarded rather than distributed to those whose labour earned it, 'cries out' in language reminiscent of the cries of Israel in Egypt and comes to the ears of the Lord of Hosts, the God of battle who acts in history in

judgement and salvation.

This is a denunciation, not a call to repent (either because such a call is implicit or because it is seen as pointless in light of the obvious gross wickedness of these people). The picture is of the fires of the last judgement licking through the cracks of reality, a warning of coming wrath. And it is a horrible fate: James speaks of 'miseries' (v.1), a rot which will 'eat your flesh like fire' (v.3), being fattened for a 'day of slaughter' (v.5—which is a clever, if brutal, use of irony, being both a description of rich self-indulgence and its reversal in eschatological judgement).

James is clear: Yahweh still acts in judgement against injustice—and will do so on the last day. And please note that there is nothing in the text to indicate that either the oppressed poor or the rich oppressors are *Christian*. James here seems to speak (on behalf of God) about a general pattern of injustice and abuse, not one confined to the 'people of God'. Furthermore, while the main rhetorical function of this stinging condemnation is the consolation of those within the community who are suffering and oppressed, chapter 2 suggests that such rich people may at times be present in the congregation, and so they are also directly addressed by this word of advocacy.

Nonetheless, I do need to acknowledge that, in the main, the hearers of the NT did not have the kind of political power we take for granted in late modern democracies. It is all the more remarkable that we find as much there as we do; and it is clear that words such as James 5 tell us what we as Christians *would or should* say were we to have the kind of influence over policy and policy makers that we have today.

Our voice, then, is a God-given gift and responsibility—an expression of power, really—which we must use for God's glory and in service of the poor. But I should note, in passing, that there are other modes of speech that we can address to those in power. There are fiery words of judgement such as in James; but there is also Philemon, a gentle word to a fellow believer with power over another that anticipates compliance and so evokes it. The fiery, combative words may also be addressed to unbelievers (as in James) or believers (as in Isaiah); and the invitation may be spoken to believers (as in Philemon) or unbelievers (as in Nehemiah 2); and in between there is a combination of rebuke and encouragement (as in Luke 3 and John's shaping of repentance).

There are also different horizons we may have in view in both judgement and salvation, the ultimate and the more immediate (as we see combined, for instance, in James). There is a variety of tactics we can adopt that have theological legitimacy. We can seek to persuade those in power, projecting a moral vision they ought to adopt; we can warn them about consequences and warnings, speaking of the electoral consequences or regional security implications should they fail to act. In all of that we must remember that God is still the one who speaks, through the people of God, to those in power, calling them to account and to use their power for the purposes for which it was given.

## VII A gospel-driven pattern for advocacy

So we see, then, that advocacy is jus-

tified: it arises out of our praise and prayer to God; it reflects God's purpose for power; it echoes the advocacy of God and God's people which resounds through Scripture. Now I would be the first to admit that this is framework is anything but comprehensive. Indeed, if what I have outlined is true, then *everything* that demonstrates God's concern for the poor and marginalised and our responsibility to act on their behalf feeds into justifying advocacy: the character of God; the shape of the story of God and the world; the nature of our creation in God's image and our growing into the image of the Son which the Spirit shapes in us as we struggle for justice and the gospel; the shape of community formed by God's saving and transforming grace; the new future towards which we head and which God seeks to form in us and through us by the power of the Spirit; the instructions that shape our view of the world and our living in it.<sup>19</sup>

This is advocacy grounded in the gospel—both in its form and content; this is advocacy which is justified theologically and which works by identification with the poor, carefully listening to their concerns and seeking to articulate them to the 'powers'. Such a use of our voice can be both a legitimate expression of the gospel, and a costly embodiment of it.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For more on this, see Micah Challenge 'Is Poverty a Problem for God?', <http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/poverty-a-problem-for-God>; accessed 17/10/2011.

<sup>20</sup> I would like to thank my colleagues David Starling, Phill Marshall and Rod Benson for comments on this paper—and the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT Social Issues Committee for the invitation to give this address.

## Books Reviewed

Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird

J. Andrew Kirk

*Civilisations in Conflict? Islam, the West and Christian Faith*

Reviewed by George W. Harper

Ted Rivera

*Jonathan Edwards on Worship: Public and Private Devotion to God*

Reviewed by George W. Harper

John A. Grigg

*The Lives of David Brainerd: The Making of an American Evangelical Icon*

Reviewed by David Parker

Brian R. Talbot

*A Man Sent from God The life and ministry of John T. Hamilton 1916-1999*

## Books Reviewed

ERT (2012) 36:2, 187-188

**Civilisations in Conflict? Islam, the West and Christian Faith**

**J. Andrew Kirk**

Oxford UK: Regnum Books

International 2011

ISBN 978-1-870345-87-3

Pb pp 205 Bibliog. Index

*Reviewed by Raymond J. Laird, Centre for Early Christian Studies, Brisbane, Australia*

This study addresses probably the most pertinent issue of our times: how may the secularised 'Christian' West live peacefully with the rising tide of Muslim populations not only on its doorstep, but also increasingly so in its midst? It is a question raised by Kirk's reading of Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order* (London: Simon and Schuster 1998). Kirk's work builds upon, and attempts answers to questions raised by it.

Kirk, in answer to the central question, provides some principles for the achievement of peaceful coexistence based upon an insightful analysis of the origins and early histories of the two faiths which

are foundational to these civilisations. From those sources he detects the divergence of paths and policies of the two; the acute problem of the inner diversity of Islam; the emergence of the Christianity's uneasy amalgam with the State, and its falling away from its prophetic heritage. Added to these is the rise of a critical divergence within Christianity, a secularism both within and without the church, a long development starting centuries ago but blooming in recent times.

Kirk's attention to foundational principles is to be applauded. If those principles contain the essence of authentic Christianity and authentic Islam, then, as Kirk argues in the end, peaceful coexistence appears, in essence, possible. Christianity, he observes, began as an alternative community to Rome, the wielder of political power of the day. So also was Islam, when it remained in its birthplace in Mecca. Christianity kept distinct from the State until the fourth century; Islam made that transition within twelve years, with its move to Medina. From that point, the will to power, expressed in political dominion, became the *raison d'être* of the new religion. Kirk would have both faiths return

to their original mandates.

Kirk, astutely, stresses that the will to power is the root of the problem. Due to the long period of exclusion of Christianity from access to political power, it had the chance to build its founder's principles into the warp and woof of its life. Though later history would distort that stance, it did not totally lose it. It remained as a strong beckoning sign to future generations to remain true to their founding principles, especially this critical refusal of the will to power.

This was not the case with Islam, for the early transition made the new situation in Medina the norm, a phenomenon which is evident through Islam's history right up until the present day. Perhaps the one saving grace is the emergence of divisions within Islam. This has resulted in many setting out to look for the essence of their faith, with scholars searching again the significance of the original revelations, and interpretations, and Muslim history. Kirk delineates the essential differences, a useful key to understanding the present state of Islam as being multiform and not monolithic.

Kirk calls the proponents of both faiths to consider their relationship to political power. While he argues that the close alliance of a doctrinaire religious faith with a political power is disastrous, in that it ends up in corruption for both, he is aware of the circumstances that prevent absolute detachment, especially in Muslim nations. He is insistent that as both faiths began with a prophetic heritage they should rediscover that heritage as a way forward to not only to discover their own destiny but to make possible peaceful coexistence.

This is of particular importance for those followers of Islam who find themselves dwelling in western countries. Both the possibility and the opportunity are great-

er for them. It is of no less significance for Christians in their own democratic States. As mentioned above, one common problem is that both communities are at ideological war internally. Kirk, within the limitations of available space, gives a clear picture of those ideological divides within each. Here is where the main issues will be decided.

This is thoughtful and balanced study, that is empathetic but frank in its criticisms. Kirk is looking for genuine answers to an enormously difficult question. On the surface, his suggestions look to be a voice crying in the wilderness. It is doubtful that the crowds will follow there to hear him speak his wisdom. However true his analysis and wisdom might be, there does not appear to be enough on either side of the divide to effectively implement the vision. He thinks there are such. Please God, may that be the case.

ERT (2012) 36:2, 188-190

### Jonathan Edwards on Worship: Public and Private Devotion to God

Ted Rivera

Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications,  
2010.

ISBN: 978-1-60899-256-0.

Pb, xi + 175 pp.

Bibliography, illustration.

*Reviewed by George W. Harper, Asia  
Graduate School of Theology, Manila,  
Philippines.*

The vast array of treatises on Edwards includes a number of biographies, some of them serious and scholarly, others intended for the mass market but one thing we have lacked is a study of Edwards and worship. However, the defi-

ciency is made up, at least provisionally, by Ted Rivera, who is Assistant Professor of Religion at Liberty University. In this book he works hard at setting the context for Edwards's words and deeds. He rightly views Edwards as a typical New England Congregationalist 'largely conforming to Puritan formulations of public and private devotion' (p. 8). In other words, as in dogmatics, Edwards's innovations were largely formal rather than material; he deployed arguments that could be strikingly novel in defence of thoroughly traditional beliefs and practices. He did so in response to the unique challenges of his time, aiming to set the Reformed faith as he had received it, including the Reformed approach to worship, within the most robust theoretical framework he could construct.

Rivera's book is in five chapters, its introduction and conclusion bracketing detailed discussions of Edwards's perspective on public worship, self-examination, and private devotion. The chapter on public worship is aptly dominated by an exposition of his approach to preaching.

Like his Puritan forebears, he invariably made use of the traditional tripartite sermonic template: first the scriptural text was set forth; then the doctrine it taught was drawn from it; and finally that doctrine's use or application was driven home to the listeners. He saw the latter as especially important because he viewed the Bible above all as 'a book of instructions' (p. 35), intended to guide Christians in the path of obedience to God's will. Rivera develops all this via a close reading of Edwards's sermon, 'Christian Knowledge', on Hebrews 5:12. Rounding out the chapter are brief but useful considerations of Edwards's approach to the sacraments, public prayer, fast days, church discipline, collections

for the poor, and special days of prayer and thanksgiving.

There is much that is helpful in Rivera's discussion of Edwards's stance regarding self-examination and private devotion. Again Rivera positions Edwards against a Puritan backdrop, demonstrating that he derived from his spiritual forebears his anxiety for assurance of salvation, his zeal to root out sin, and his concomitant concern for careful soul-searching. When it came to the harrowing of souls, including his own, he took a back seat to no one. Rivera's comments concerning Edwards's Sabbatarianism, again very much in the Puritan mould, may surprise some readers.

Unfortunately, Rivera's critique of Edwards's practice in regard to family devotions strains to make its points, leaning too heavily on letters from Edwards to his wife and children that express sincere but commonplace sentiments with respect to their spiritual welfare and have little or nothing to say about specific devotional practices. This illustrates my first major concern with Rivera's work. In moving from the public and corporate to the private and personal, the book loses focus, lapsing into a consideration of Edwards's view of the Christian life itself. Rather than spreading the discussion so thin, Rivera ought to have given us a deeper examination of Edwards's approach to, say, preaching and the sacraments.

My second major concern is that Rivera does his best to enlist Edwards as a co-belligerent in present-day 'worship wars'. Is it really fair that he lumps Bill Hybels together with 'the likes of Jacques Derrida [and] Hans[-]Georg Gadamer', then ponders 'what invective Edwards might levy against' (p. 45) the lot of them? Rivera observes that the Puritans followed the so-called



'regulative principle', which 'stipulate[s] that all elements included in corporate worship must be explicitly taught in Scripture' (pp. 6-7). But he seems to think that only this approach is biblical, failing even to mention the alternative 'normative principle', which permits in worship all elements that are not actually prohibited by Scripture, thus leaving broad latitude for the Spirit's guidance in regard to liturgy, music and other elements of worship.

After all, Christ himself evidently followed the normative principle, accepting without question the synagogue worship of his day even though its pattern of corporate Sabbath prayers and Torah reading is never even mentioned, let alone mandated, in the Tanakh. In fact, Edwards broke with the regulative principle, albeit cautiously, embracing Isaac Watts's hymnody for its 'efficacy to soften the heart [and] harmonize the affections' (p. 163). However, Rivera is forced to minimize the significance of this move.

Who are Edwards's true heirs today? Certainly Rivera, John MacArthur, and others of their camp lay claim to his mantle—but so do Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Wimber, and others who take a very different perspective on these things. Perhaps it would be best to acknowledge that, as with other great men and women, there are a number of legitimate perspectives on Edwards, each of which contributes to our understanding of his thought, none of which has exclusive title to his heritage. Certainly one ought not to make the anachronistic mistake of trying, as does Rivera, to squeeze Edwards into a present-day mould, lopping off or ignoring the parts that do not fit. Rivera's book is hobbled as well by awkward writing (pp. 28, 48, 78, etc.), bad proofreading (pp. 31, 60, 160, etc.), and the lack of an index. There are foot-

notes and a select bibliography, but the former often (p. 45 n. 91, p. 76 n.4, p. 84 n. 28, etc.) give short-form citations of works not in the latter. Again, the book fills a genuine need, but it does so only provisionally.

ERT (2012) 36:2, 190-191

**The Lives of David Brainerd: The Making of an American Evangelical Icon**

**John A. Grigg**

New York: Oxford University Press, 2009

ISBN: 978-0-19-537237-3

Hb, xi + 276 pp

Bibliography, index, illustrations.

*Reviewed by George W. Harper, Asia Graduate School of Theology, Manila, Philippines.*

Just as no one owns Jonathan Edwards, no one has ever owned his young protégé, David Brainerd. That message comes through loud and clear in *The Lives of David Brainerd: The Making of an American Evangelical Icon*, by John A. Grigg, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Grigg combines his own sketch of Brainerd's life with short studies of the work of previous biographers. Those who know this storied missionary to the Native Americans mainly via Edwards's *Account of the Life of the Late Rev. David Brainerd*, first published in 1749, will find quite a few surprises in Grigg's narrative. The most significant is that evidently Brainerd always retained a deep sympathy for the evangelical radicalism stirring the waters of New England Congregationalism during his time at Yale College in the early 1740s.

Grigg describes Brainerd as 'a child of

two worlds', a member of a respected family ensconced in Connecticut's colonial establishment, yet also 'part of a small coterie of men who believed they were in the vanguard of ushering in a new and greater work of God' (p. 7). In Edwards's version of events, after Brainerd was converted in 1739 and two years later expelled from Yale for his zealotry, he came to realize the folly of such extremism and retreated to a more moderate stance, becoming an exemplar of the piety Edwards praised in his *Treatise on Religious Affections*.

However, as Grigg tells the story, rather than maturing from mystical enthusiasm into spiritual self-restraint, Brainerd always held the two mindsets in tension, even retaining his admiration for the radical stalwart James Davenport. Brainerd was 'seeking a way in which he could reconcile the stability of his establishment background with the spontaneity and experiential nature of the religion which had first come alive to him in the months before his entry to Yale and which had been fanned by the revivals' (p. 44; cf. p. 127).

Grigg's discussion of Brainerd's missionary work among the Delaware Indians makes it clear that his interaction with them was very much two-way, that '[j]ust as Brainerd's words brought change to the Indians, so the response of the Indians brought change to Brainerd'. Though he remained a man of his times, he experienced a kind of second conversion that 'enable[d] him to transcend, to some degree, concepts of race and culture then inherent in the European colonial world' (p. 87).

Brainerd, bonding with his Indian congregants, embracing them as 'my people' (p. 118), did his best to defend their settlements from the depredations of land-hungry Euro-Americans. Moreo-

ver, he developed a healthy respect for Native American religion, showing himself 'willing to allow...space for esoteric experiences' (p. 111) such as dreams and visions in their conversion narratives. Grigg's helpful discussion of this point is marred by his unsubstantiated speculation that Brainerd may even have come to see Indian spirituality as 'a different pathway that would eventually reach the same destination' (p. 84) as the Christianity he himself preached.

As Grigg demonstrates, each successive generation seems to discover the Brainerd, or even the Brainerds, it thinks it most needs. John Wesley's short biography, adapted from that of Edwards, offered him as an example for Methodist leaders more than the masses: 'Let every preacher read carefully over the Life of Mr. Brainerd. Let us be followers of him as he was of Christ' (p. 154). In the nineteenth century, the golden age of Protestant missions, promoters of the cause championed his ministry as 'peculiarly useful to the Missionary' in that it offered 'an example of self-denial, of patience under privations and suffering' (p. 172). More recently, he has been hailed as an early campaigner for human rights, as a campus radical anticipating the activism of the 1960s, and even as the first of the Jesus People.

We may well fault dubious interpretive plays like Wesley's depiction of an Arminian Brainerd as well as the naïve presentism on display in much of this. However, we can only applaud the basic impulse. The perception seems to be widespread that, as Lloyd-Jones said of Edwards, 'No man is more relevant to the present conditions of Christianity'.

ERT (2012) 36:2, 192

**A Man Sent from God: The life and ministry of John T. Hamilton 1916-1999**

**Brian R. Talbot**

Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2011

ISBN 978-1-907600-06-7

Pb pp236 biblio., illus., index

*Reviewed by David Parker, Executive Editor, Evangelical Review of Theology*

Brian Talbot's biography of Baptist minister Rev. J T Hamilton is a personal tribute to a successful pastor in his service as RAF chaplain and in a variety of churches in UK in the critical period of 1951 to 1994. The author, currently a pastor in a Scottish church, witnessed the subject's pastoral ministry in his last two charges and in his retirement and gives a moving description of their final contact only hours before Hamilton's death. The appendix contains notes for the sermons Hamilton had prepared for the services he had been scheduled to conduct two days following his death.

This personal link between author and subject accounts in part for the decision to write the biography of a man who was not known widely as a public speaker or denominational leader. What marks out the subject as worthy of full length biography is that he saw his calling as serving local churches, particularly those needing special help.

Hamilton was also a man with a mixed denominational background, and one who sensed the call to ministry at the very early age of sixteen when he began his training at the South Wales Bible Training Institute, Porth. He was the last student to be accepted by the founding principal of that institution, Rev R B Jones, who was notable because of his connection with the Welsh revival. After some pastoral work, Hamilton's training

took him to Spurgeon's college London where he was part of a distinguished group of students.

Valuable experiences were gained during seven years as a RAF padre during and after World War II which helped in large measure to make his deep piety and careful pastoral training accessible to a wide range of types of people. These attributes were well used during his pastoral ministry at five different churches until his retirement in 1994 at the age of 78 years. In all this Hamilton was well supported by his wife, but by her request, the author mainly focuses on the husband's life.

This is an instructive book first for the valuable record of a pastor's life coping with run down churches and difficult people in changing social conditions. As such, it could well be used as a case study in ministerial courses. It also provides detailed information about the various movements and contexts in which its subject was involved including Bible colleges, military chaplaincy, the histories of the various churches and locations of his service and the cultural shifts of the late 20th century in north west England and their impact on the church and its mission.

All of this information is presented in helpful detail with full documentation revealing the extent of research needed to accomplish the task. It requires careful reading, but to absorb the wealth of information provided is a worthwhile task. While this book refers to a particular life and the specific circumstances he faced, it reveals its subject as a gifted and inspiring figure and its author as a meticulous scholar who has given us a worthy record of good pastor and his times.

It is published by Regent's Park College's Centre for Baptist History and Heritage of which the author is a Fellow.

## ABSTRACTS/INDEXING

This journal is abstracted in Religious and Theological Abstracts, 121 South College Street (P.O. Box 215), Myerstown, PA 17067, USA, and in the Christian Periodical Index, P.O. Box 4, Cedarville, OH 45314, USA.

It is also indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606 USA, E-mail: atla@atla.com, Web: www.atla.com/

## MICROFORM

This journal is available on Microform from UMI, 300 North Zeeb Road, P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346, USA. Phone: (313)761-4700

## Subscriptions 2012

\*Sterling rates do not apply to USA and Canada subscriptions. Please see below for further information.

Period	Institutions and Libraries		Individuals	
	UK	Elsewhere Overseas*	UK	Elsewhere Overseas*
One Year:				
hard copy	£61.00	£67.00	£41.00	£45.00
electronic version	£61.00	£67.00	£41.00	£45.00
joint subscription	£74.00	£80.00	£49.00	£53.00
Two/Three Years, per year				
hard copy	£56.00	£60.00	£37.00	£40.00
electronic version	£56.00	£60.00	£37.00	£40.00
joint subscription	£67.00	£72.00	£45.00	£49.00

### All USA and Canada subscriptions to:

EBSCO Subscription Services, P.O. Box 1493, Birmingham, AL 35201-1943, USA

### All UK and International subscriptions to:

Paternoster Periodicals, c/o AlphaGraphics, 6 Angel Row, Nottingham NG1 6HL UK

Tel: UK 0800 597 5980; Fax: 0115 852 3601

Tel Overseas: +44 (0)115 852 3614; Fax +44 (0)115 852 3601

Email periodicals@alphagraphics.co.uk

### Subscriptions can be ordered online at:

www.paternosterperiodicals.co.uk (Non USA and Canada subscriptions only)

### Special Offer

All orders placed via our websites will receive a 5% discount off the total price.  
Rates displayed on the websites will reflect this discount

## Important Note to all Postal Subscribers

When contacting our Subscription Office in Nottingham for any reason  
**always quote your Subscription Reference Number.**

## Photocopying Licensing

No part of the material in this journal may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of Paternoster Periodicals, except where a licence is held to make photocopies.

Applications for such licences should be made to the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.

It is illegal to take multiple copies of copyright material.

## Micah's Challenge

### The Church's Responsibility to the Global Poor

Edited by Marijke Hoek and Justin Thacker

'He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'  
(Micah 6:8)

This is Micah's challenge to Israel in his day and to the Church in our day. God called them and us to act with justice, mercy and humility in dealing with the poor. This book pulls together prophetic voices from Jim Wallis to Tony Campolo and from Ronald Sider to René Padilla and Joel Edwards to explore the theological, ethical and practical dimensions of Micah's challenge. The heart of the book is an exploration of 'acting justly', 'walking humbly', and 'loving mercy'. That call is set within a broader biblical and theological framework and followed by reflections on how we might live it out today. *Micah's Challenge* offers a passionate, biblical, and challenging call to think afresh and to act redemptively as individuals and as Christian communities.

The Micah Network is a group of 300 Christian relief, development and justice organisations from 75 countries. This book aims to lay bare the Christian foundations of their diverse missions.

*'Micah Challenge is harnessing faith to unite Christians globally ... to deepen ... commitment to people living in poverty through prayer, service and advocacy ... I warmly welcome this book'*

Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

978-1-84227-606-8 / 216 x 140mm / 224 pp / £9.99

## Grace and Global Justice

### The Socio-Political Mission of the Church in an Age of Globalization

Richard Gibb

What does it mean for the twenty-first-century church to conceive of itself as a community defined by the covenant of grace? *Grace and Global Justice* explores the ramifications of this central Christian doctrine for the holistic mission of the church in the context of a globalized world. Gibb shows how the church can be a voice for justice on behalf of the global poor by affirming its mission as a community of grace.

*'Extremely insightful.'*

Richard Mouw

*'An insightful and pertinent analysis.'*

Alan Torrance

Richard Gibb is Assistant Minister of Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh, UK.

978-1-84227-459-0 / 229 x 152mm / 266pp / £19.99

Paternoster, Authenticmedia Limited, 52 Presley Way, Crownhill,  
Milton Keynes, MK8 0ES