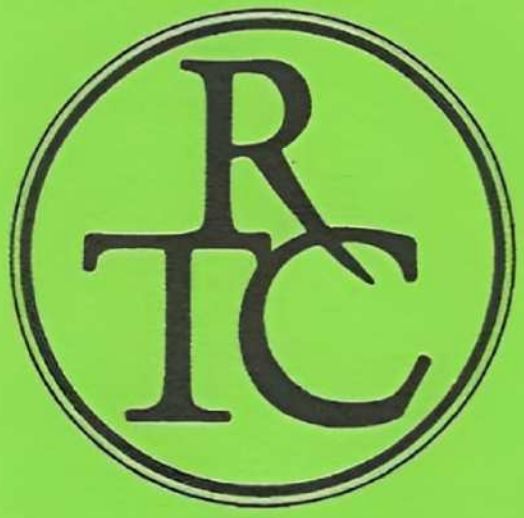

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OLIVER CROMWELL

When the godly are in government

Knox Hyndman

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There are many different ways of evaluating the life of Oliver Cromwell. That is borne out in the titles chosen by those who have ventured to write an account of his life. Antonia Fraser chose words of John Milton for her biography, *Cromwell, our chief of men*. The Irish writer, Tom Reilly, dealing essentially with Cromwell in Ireland, described him as *An Honourable Enemy,* while Christopher Hill wrote of him as *God's Englishman*. More specifically Michael Haykin gave his edited collection of Cromwell's letters and speeches the descriptive title *To Honour God. The spirituality of Oliver Cromwell.* Scottish Presbyterians were less enthusiastic and one of their number, Robert Blair, dismissed Cromwell as "an egregious dissembler, a great liar and a greeting [weeping] devil".

Cromwell was of course to hold the highest office in England. That period was known variously as, the Commonwealth, the Protectorate or the Inter regnum. It was certainly a time when the opportunity existed to implement a Christian programme of government, and the vision to do so was there among the leaders, to build England as the Lord's habitation.

First we must trace the events which propelled Cromwell to those lofty political heights. He was born on 25th April, 1599, in Huntingdon in East Anglia. His parents, Robert and Elizabeth, had ten children, though Oliver was the only boy to survive. The family itself had some tentative connection with minor nobility, "the middling sort" as they were known. Oliver's uncle was Sir Oliver Cromwell and at one point James I stayed in his home. It is intriguing to think that quite possibly young Charles and young Oliver met each other there. Oliver once wrote about the status of his family, "I was by birth a gentleman, living neither in any considerable height nor yet in obscurity".

His educational path led him, for a time, to Sidney Sussex College at Cambridge, which at the time was essentially a seminary for Puritan ministers. However when his father died in 1617 Oliver had to return home and so his college career was cut short.

In 1620 he married Elizabeth Bouchier, the daughter of a successful London fur dealer. It was a stable, loving marriage which lasted thirty years.

Judging from Oliver's letters to his wife, they were a deeply devoted couple.

It is difficult with any precision to trace Oliver's spiritual journey. He does not highlight any preachers or sermons which particularly affected him. We do, however, get some insight into his spiritual life from his letters. His writing displays a man with a warm spiritual heart and a grasp of biblical doctrine. This prompts the comment from Merle D'Aubigné, "I am at a loss to understand how those who doubt Cromwell's Christianity can explain his letters to his children". In one of those letters he counselled his son-in-law how he might help his wife, who was prone to a legalistic spirit.

> Bid her beware of a bondage spirit. Love will deliver her. Love argues in this wise, What a Christ we have; what a Father in and through Him; what a Name hath my Father, merciful, gracious, long suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. What a covenant between Him and Christ for all the seed, for every one wherein He undertakes all and the poor soul nothing.

Cromwell's public service began with a brief spell as a Member of Parliament from 1628 to 1629. He then served a longer period from 1640. One Royalist Member of the House commented on Cromwell's appearance and manner when he first arrived as a Member.

> I came into the house well clad," he said, "and perceived a gentleman speaking whom I knew not, very ordinary apparelled, for it was a plain cloth suit which seemed to have been made by a poor country tailor. His stature was of good size, his sword stuck close to his side; his countenance swollen and reddish; his voice sharp and untunable and his eloquence full of fervour. He was very much hearkened unto.

When the Civil War broke out Oliver Cromwell was forty-three years old. He had no previous military experience, but it soon became clear that he was an instinctive soldier. There was no standing army at the time and both King and Parliament had difficulty raising an army and paying those who served. The war itself in its early stages was indecisive and neither side displayed the determination necessary to achieve an outright victory.

Cromwell began to see that, since the issues were serious, therefore the war should be waged in a serious way. It was his conviction that, "Religion was not the thing first contended for, but God brought it to the issue at last." In recruiting his own regiment Cromwell saw the value of cavalry and the importance of disciplined troops. His leadership was both skilful and strict. During the siege of Drogheda his men were forbidden to take food from locals by force. Two of his men violated this code and stole a couple of hens, for which crime Cromwell had the men hanged.

Cromwell chose for his regiment men who believed, as he did, that

Parliament was acting in defence of evangelical religion. He had two basic questions which he applied to those he recruited: "Can he fight and is he godly?" His approach was clear. "I had rather have a plain russet coated captain that knows what he fights for and loves what he knows, than that which you call a gentleman and nothing else." It was his victory at Marston Moor in 1644 that made his reputation and earned for him the familiar title of "Old Ironsides". Parliament subsequently agreed that every other regiment should be modelled on Cromwell's. Hence the Parliamentary forces became known as the New Model Army.

The motivation of a godly leader

What motivation could a man have to seek political office, especially the highest office in the land? It is an intriguing question and ultimately impossible to answer. The office brings with it so many problems and pressures, exposes the holder to constant scrutiny and possibly, in certain societies, actual physical danger. It was like that for Oliver Cromwell. Even when he was established as Protector, Charles offered a bounty for "anyone who would assassinate this base mechanic fellow called Oliver Cromwell". And there were those, like the Fifth Monarchists and the Levellers, who would not have been averse to try.

So what motivated Cromwell to accept this high office? It was certainly not "ambition or any other carnal motive". He also knew that the praises of men can evaporate very quickly. When he returned to London after the final battle of his military career at Worcester, he was hailed as if he was the king, but he himself was not carried away by the sounds of jubilation which greeted his arrival in the capital. "There would have been a bigger crowd to see me hanged" was his comment.

Indeed when circumstances led him into the position of leadership as Protector, his humble reluctance in accepting it was apparent. "I would have been glad to have lived under my wood side, to have kept a flock of sheep rather than to have undertaken this government." He constantly resisted all the pressure which came on him to accept the crown and rejected all arguments which were forcibly expressed in favour of accepting it.

This refusal is even more telling since in many ways he was sympathetic to the monarchy. Cromwell became a republican out of necessity rather than out of long held conviction. He did believe that the authority which the monarch carries was essential for the stability of nation. "Unless there be some authority and power so full and so high as to restrain and keep things in order, it will be impossible in human reason to prevent our ruin."

So what were his motives in accepting high office? One certainly was his sense of personal responsibility and awareness of God's providence directing his life. God, he believed, had brought him to this place and he was under

obligation to obey his Lord. Closely related to this was his deep concern for the well-being of the nation. It was his belief that Charles was bringing ruin on the three nations which persuaded him in the first place to take up arms. Cromwell agreed with the statement of the army leaders when considering what to do with the king once he had been defeated in battle:

> After seriously seeking the Lord's face we come to the clear and joint resolution that it was our duty to call Charles Stuart , that man of blood, to an account for that blood he had shed and the mischief he had done to his utmost against the Lord's cause and people in these poor nations.

He was enraged when he saw men whoever they were, acting against the best interests of the nation. The Rump Parliament had become a body of men which he regarded as being interested only in lining their own pockets, voting themselves extravagant salaries and being more interested in their own comforts than in the public welfare. He rebuked the members in the strongest terms.

His desire was consistently for a constitution which "might secure the election only of such as are pious and faithful to the interests of the Commonwealth." He had a high view of the nation and accordingly a compelling desire for the welfare of all its citizens. "I hope to make the home of the Englishman as great as ever that of a Roman has been," he said.

The agenda of a Puritan government

During this period of the Commonwealth there was a wonderful opportunity to implement a Puritan agenda in legislation. At the time Cromwell's own goals seemed very limited. "Truly I have as before God, often thought that I could not tell what my business was, nor what place I stand in, save comparing myself to a good constable set to keep the peace in the parish."

But keeping the peace was a challenging task. Some of the actions he carried out to implement this peace were harsh. As one critic wrote, "No nation could be at ease when an old Devon squire of seventy six could be transported to the plantations without a trial." At the same time the legal system was refined and did become more humane. The number of offences for which capital punishment was the penalty was greatly reduced. A scale of charges for lawyers was set at a level which no longer prevented the poor from having access to law.

Other measures were introduced which touched everyday life in society. Education was encouraged and morality promoted. It was Parliament's goal to bring in laws which were truly Christian in character. King Charles' *Book of Sports* was banned in an attempt to deal with excessive indulgence in useless leisure. For this Puritan government, the idea that there could be such a thing

as a leisure industry or that men would be paid for playing games would have been dismissed as truly outlandish!

Parliament attempted to enforce strict Christian conduct throughout the nation. This was not just an arbitrary thing. Oliver Cromwell believed that the greatness of a nation depended on its morality. So adultery and swearing and "walking abroad on the Sabbath", except for going to church, all became punishable offences.

Cromwell's agenda went further than the internal affairs of England. He looked beyond its shores to Europe, and even further, to the far corners of the world. Cromwell was no isolationist. "God hath brought us hither but we are to consider the work we may do in the world as well as at home." To advance the Protestant cause he sought to set up an alliance of truly Protestant states. In 1657 he approved a scheme for sending Protestant missionaries all over the world.

His concern for the Reformed church in the world led him to intervene in the plight of the Waldensians, a body of Reformed Christians which was suffering severe persecution in the south of France and in Italy. Cromwell threatened severe consequences for the persecutors and for France if it did not take action. As a result of this intervention the wholesale slaughter ended.

The imperfections of an ordinary saint

Oliver Cromwell was not a man to try and deny his imperfections. He is famously reputed to have warned the artist painting his portrait, "I desire you would use all your skill to paint my picture truly and flatter me not at all. But remark all these roughnesses, pimples, warts and everything you see in me. Otherwise I will never pay a farthing for it."

There were, however other imperfections which were not so obvious to Cromwell himself but have been noted by others. He had a tendency at times, when attempting to discern God's will, to be mystical rather than biblical. "His great religious error," says one biographer, "was his assuming for the mainspring of his actions those inward impulses which he ascribed to God in preference to the explicit commands of Scripture. If while praying he felt a lively conviction in his mind he thought that this impression proceeded directly from heaven and that he ought to follow it as the very voice of God."

Antonia Fraser suggests another effect of this subjective approach to decision making. "His religious views," she says, "showed signs of being extremely subjective and he had presumably chosen independency for the very fact that the looser bonds gave fuller play to his temperamental rejection of Anglicanism and Presbyterianism."

Cromwell also, like all men, did not always exercise the grace of self-control and at times allowed himself to be provoked into outbursts of anger. Even his own steward, John Marsden, had to make reference to that: "His

temper was exceeding fiery, as I have known, but the flame of it was kept down for the most part or soon allayed, with those other moral endowments he had." There is a documented example of one of those outbursts during the period of the Rump Parliament. One contemporary reported how Cromwell stamped about the floor of the chamber, waving his arms and shouting at members "in a furious manner with so much passion and discomposure of mind as if he had been distracted."

However serious these imperfections were, there can be no doubt that Cromwell's heartfelt desire was to live a life pleasing to God. He relied entirely on the grace of God in Christ and in many ways displayed the fruit of that grace in his character.

The liberty of a Christian conscience

Within the Commonwealth there was no uniformity of religious views. Many diverse groups had emerged within the army and there was no shortage of self-appointed preachers to disseminate their various views. Ranters, Seekers, Quakers, Fifth Monarchy Men and Muggletonians existed alongside more mainstream bodies such as Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists, whilst hovering in the background were the remaining Episcopalians. How were these diverse groups to be treated and how were they to be accommodated within the church?

Cromwell himself was in favour of a national church. He saw that if the nation's life was to be morally reformed and stable then the church must be at the heart of it, and it was one of the responsibilities of the state to ensure that the church was properly organized. But what kind of organization was this to be? Initially it looked as though the national church would be Presbyterian, but that expectation soon disappeared with the rise in influence of the army where Independents were in the majority.

For Cromwell all Reformed churches were part of the Catholic Church and the national church should be able to embrace all who had "the root of the matter" in them. For him what was necessary was a simple profession of "faith in God by Jesus Christ" and "whoever hath this faith let its form be what it will; he walking peaceably, without the prejudice of others under another form" was to be accepted. Within this simple boundary, liberty of worship should be granted to all.

It seems likely that Cromwell's experiences in the army contributed to his view of church membership. Writing about the army, he spoke warmly of his observation that "Presbyterians, Independents, all had the same spirit of faith and prayer, the same presence and answer; they agree here, know no differences. Pity it is it would be otherwise anywhere." At a very simple level Cromwell's concern for the church was that it would not destroy itself. His goal was "to preserve the churches from destroying one another, to keep the godly

of several judgements in peace, because like men falling out in the street they would run their heads against one another."

Though his statement of faith and his goal for the church might have been very basic, Cromwell was committed to faithful preaching of the gospel and sought to ensure that the gospel was preached throughout England. Two commissions, Triers and Ejectors, were set up to oversee the appointment of ministers. The Triers examined men for ministry and accepted "a person with the grace of God in him, holy and unblameable in conversation, able and fit to present the Gospel". In that case a man was at liberty to adopt any ecclesiology he liked. The Ejectors were given the task of removing men who were deemed unfit for the ministry of the gospel.

While the motives of those in parliament might have been good, Merle D'Aubigne is right when he says, "We would have preferred his leaving to the church the power of self-government."

It is also important to keep in mind the assertion of another biographer that, "What gives Oliver Cromwell his importance in the history of dissent is not his views on church government but his hatred of religious intolerance." He had a particular antipathy towards those who made a statement of faith so precise that it might exclude others who were true believers. "Nothing will satisfy them unless they can put their finger on their brethren's conscience and pinch them there." Martin Lloyd Jones sums up Cromwell's view of liberty of conscience by saying that, "His idea was to use the power of the state to guarantee tolerance and variety and liberty, not to enforce particular points of view."

Interestingly, it was Cromwell's view of liberty of conscience which in part encouraged the return of Jews to England during the period of the Commonwealth. He was pleased to see Jews returning for another reason: "Since there was a promise of their conversion, means must be used to that end such as, preaching the Gospel and that could not be done unless they were permitted to dwell where the Gospel was preached."

Cromwell certainly had a love for the church. Addressing the Barebones Parliament, he urged the members,

> I beseech you, have a care for the whole flock! Love the sheep, love the lambs, love all, cherish and countenance all, in all things that are good. And if the poorest Christian, the most mistaken Christian, shall desire to live peaceably and quietly under you, if any desire but to lead a life in godliness and honesty, let him be protected.

A legacy of limited success

Expectations that the morality of the nation's life would improve during the Commonwealth were high. One preacher, affectionately known as Praise God Barebones gave expression to this hope,

Why should we be afraid to say or think that this may be the door to usher in the things that God hath promised, which have been prophesied of, which He has set the hearts of His people to wait for and expect?

Yet these hopes were not realized. Within a few years of those stirring words, Charles II was on the throne and the general populace was, by one assessment, "Weary of Puritan zeal, sick of their religion and eager for the easy times which the King and his High Church friends would surely bring." And that is what happened. Following the Restoration, godly laws were abandoned and the morality of the nation reverted to what it had been before. "The cavaliers, to celebrate their triumph, abandoned themselves to debauchery."

Richard Baxter lamented the lack of success of the period of the Commonwealth. But the question remains as to why the influence of the godly, when in government, so limited? Was it that Oliver Cromwell was too old when he came to power? He was about fifty two when he became Protector, which was old for the time. He felt old, and described himself as an old man, and was frequently subject to various illnesses. Did this put a limitation on the promotion of godliness?

Or was the lack of success due to the fact that the dilemmas facing the Commonwealth were just too great? The Scots had, on the basis of his acceptance of the Covenants, received Charles and recognized his legitimate right to the throne. This of course presented a real threat to the stability of the Commonwealth and forced Cromwell to march against the Scots and engage them in battle.

Cromwell did try to avert war with the Scots and pleaded with the ministers, "I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken." He expressed his own attitude to the possibility of conflict,

> Since we came to Scotland it has been our desire and longing to have avoided blood in this business by reason that God hath a people here, fearing His Name, though they are mistaken.

Following the defeat of the Scottish army, Cromwell dismissed the suggestion, made by some, that a medal be struck to mark the victory. "Victories over brothers, even misguided brothers, were not things to glory in." Yet his conflict with the Scottish forces did put a severe strain on the Commonwealth and diverted the energies of those in leadership from other issues.

Perhaps again, the fact that the Commonwealth did not last long enough to implement the vision of those in power explains the lack of enduring success. That was the view of Richard Baxter. He believed that if the godly had continued in government for twenty-five years England would have become a land of saints.

There may be some truth in all of these suggestions. But there is surely another, simpler, reason why the success of the Parliament was so short-lived. It is that a nation cannot be made godly by legislation. More is needed than having godly men in government if a nation is to embrace Christian morality.

Protestantism had become the law of the country by vote in the legislature and was imposed on the population "from above". But as Martin Lloyd Jones has observed, "Enforcing morals by Acts of Parliament instead of by moral and spiritual persuasion is bound to produce a reaction against itself."

That reaction was not long in coming. In the view of one writer,

> Puritan conviction not only appeared to have failed the nation, but their underlying premises were now up for attack by the intellectual forces of moderatism which characterized the Enlightenment.

This is not to say that the attempt to introduce legislation which reflected the morality of Scripture was a hopeless endeavour. To have legislation which is in keeping with the Law of God is the desire of the true Church of Christ. Christ's Kingship is to be acknowledged in the nation's life and laws, but even when the godly are in power, too much should not be expected from government. Perhaps it is enough if the government acts like Cromwell's good constable and keeps the peace of the parish. Scripture does exhort us to "Pray for kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." The reality is that the Kingdom of God does not advance through parliamentary legislation, but that the weapons Christ's Church has been given do have divine power to destroy strongholds.

Nothing should obscure the vision of God's people living in the world, that there is another King, one called Jesus. This King has no weaknesses, his rule is perfectly righteous and his Kingdom will never end.

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NAAMAN THE SYRIAN'S "TWO MULES' BURDEN OF EARTH", HIS "BOWING DOWN IN THE HOUSE OF RIMMON" AND ELISHA'S REPLY (2 Kings 5: 17 – 19)

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D.R. Davis has demonstrated that a literary analysis of the structure of 2 Kings 2:1 – 8:6 shows that chapter 5 (the Naaman story) is central in the whole pericope, suggesting that, "the writer thought that it carried particular weight"[1].. The redemptive-historical significance of Naaman is underscored by Christ in Luke 4: 27. An enemy Gentile experiences one of the signs of the coming of the Kingdom and is brought to faith, whilst hostile, syncretistic Israel is by-passed – a message that Christ's Jewish hearers that day reacted to with murderous fury!

That indeed there is a deep-rooted change in Naaman is clear from 2 Kings 5: 13 – 19. His attitude shows a humbled spirit (five times the once proud Syrian refers to himself as "Elisha's servant"). He makes a clear public confession of faith that shows an enlightened mind ("Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel"). His resolute commitment shows a renewed will ("Your servant will no longer make burnt-offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD"). His returning to the prophet to give glory to God and acknowledge his indebtedness betokens a changed and thankful heart. Such evidences of transformation are well brought out by Reformed expositors. A.W. Pink says, "a work of grace is wrought...[a] radical and blessed transformation had been produced in Naaman's heart"[2].. Rev. Alexander Stewart says, "He renounced the false gods which he had formerly served. He cast away his idols and made formal and definite choice of the living and true God"[3].. Davis says, "Yahweh's grace...made him a faithful, fearful worshipper. We have here an Old Testament version of 1 Thess.1: 9 – 10. Naaman...that day...lost his paganism"[4].. So far so good! Then we come to verses 17 – 19a! There are three apparent problems.

First Naaman's request, "Please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD". C.F. Keil comments,

> It is very evident from Naaman's explanation...that...he was still a slave to the polytheistic superstition that no god could be worshipped in a proper and acceptable manner except in his own land, or upon an altar built of the earth of his own land [5]

Likewise Stewart says of Naaman, "he attaches a superstitious value to material symbols...As if an offering must be more acceptable to God because the altar stood on what he regarded as 'consecrated' ground"[6].. Matthew Henry says Naaman "over-did it...he overvalues the earth of Israel, supposing that an altar of that earth would be more acceptable to (God)"[7].. Is this being fair to Naaman?

Second Naaman's request, "But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow down there also – when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this". As Pink says, this presents a real difficulty...and seems utterly foreign to all that precedes...His desire to erect an altar unto Jehovah would appear to preclude the idea that he should in the next breath suggest that he play the part of a compromiser and then presumptuously count on the Lord's forgiveness. One who is fully surrendered to the Lord makes no such reservation. He cannot, for His requirement is, "Thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and him only shalt thou serve"; and again, "Touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you [8].

Keil says,

> And because Naaman's knowledge of God was still adulterated with superstition, he was not yet prepared to make an unreserved confession before men of his faith in Jehovah as the only true God, but hoped that Jehovah would forgive him if he still continued to join outwardly in the worship of idols, so far as his official duty required [9].

J.J.S. Perowne goes further.

> Here we find Naaman making an excuse, it is said, for dissembling his religious convictions and Elisha accepting the plea. He is convinced that Jehovah is the true God, but is not prepared to make any sacrifice for his faith. What is this but to open a wide door for every species of dissimulation, and to make expediency, not truth, the rule of conduct [10].

J.D. Douglas says,

> [Naaman] shows the contemporary pagan idea of religious syncretism as permissible (perhaps even desirable) by raising with Elisha the interesting problem of his future ostensible conformity to idol-worship in Syria. [11].

Likewise Stewart says,

> Naaman tried to make a kind of compromise between the altar of God and the house of Rimmon...For the first time he realizes that the whole course of a lifetime has been sinful, and must no longer be maintained. But he is not quite ready to face the full consequences of his change of religion. The problem with which he was confronted was how a believer in the true God could engage with a clear conscience in the service of an idolatrous king. He was no longer going into the heathen temple to engage in its worship...but the duties of his calling required that he should...perform certain acts which appeared to involve participation in idolatry. And Naaman wished to receive from the prophet a kind of indulgence for this mediating course. [12].

All of this is compounded when we are informed by D.J. Wiseman, "that Rimmon, the god of thunder and raincloud, was in fact the Damascus representative of Baal" 13., thus bringing to bear on the context the campaign of Elisha's predecessor Elijah to rid Israel of Baal worship? Is Naaman guilty of "halting between two opinions"?

The third apparent problem then is Elisha's somewhat enigmatic reply, "Go in peace". Pink says,

> And still more difficult it is to understand Elishia's "Go in peace", if he had just been asked to grant dispensation for what Naaman himself evidently felt to be wrong. [14].

Davis, on the other hand, sees Elisha's reply as dismissive, stating, "Elisha...did'nt seem overly concerned about the matter." [15]. Others see the reply as evasive or non-committal. Keil says, "Elisha answered, 'Go in peace'...without thereby either approving or disapproving the religious conviction which he had expressed."[16]. Likewise J.R. Vannoy says, "Elisha did not directly address Naaman's problem of conscience, but commended him to the leading and grace of God."[17]. Stewart sees this as a wise course, stating,

> Elisha wisely refused to settle the question for Naaman...instead of burdening his conscience with hard and fast rules...he sent him away in peace, confident that He who had begun the good work in him would carry it on unto clearer light and sounder judgment. [18].

John Bimson, on the other hand, states, "Elisha's blessing assures (Naaman) of the forgiveness he asks for."[19]. Similarly Pink concludes,

> we must suppose that Elisha perceived that Naaman was convinced that the thing he anticipated was not right. So, instead of rebuking him, Elisha left that conviction to produce its proper effect, assured that in due course when Naaman's faith and judgment matured, he would take a more decided stand against idolatry.[20].

Which view is correct?

How then do we address these three apparent problems?

In relation to the first question regarding the soil Naaman requested, the context of 1 Kings 20 is important. There the same Ben-Hadad [21]., who features in 2 Kings 5, had learned the hard way that the God of Israel was not confined to any patch of earth. Having been defeated in the first battle against Israel his officials advised him, "Their gods are gods of the hills. That is why they were too strong for us. But if we fight them on the plains, surely we will be stronger than they" (1 Kings 20: 23). God's response was to send a prophet who told the King of Israel, "This is what the LORD says: 'Because the Syrians think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands and you will know that I am the LORD' " (1 Kings 20: 28).

Their subsequent defeat brought Ben-Hadad and his officials in sackcloth to the King of Israel pleading for mercy. (Who is to say that Naaman, Ben-Hadad's commander (2 Kings 5), was not one of them?) This incident would argue strongly that Naaman did not take the earth for the superstitious reason that he believed Israel's God was confined to Israelite earth. As H. L. Ellison says, "The request for...earth did not imply that he thought Jehovah's power was limited to Israelite soil."[22]. Rather the key point is that Naaman wants the earth to make an altar "for burnt-offerings and sacrifices...only to the Lord" (verse 17) and furthermore Naaman's request fulfils the LORD's requirement regarding sacrifices set down in Exodus 20: 24, "Then the LORD said to Moses... 'Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings...In every place where I cause my name to be honoured I will come to you and I will bless you'".

God's name would now be honoured in Damascus and who is to condemn Naaman just because he wishes to use soil for his altar from "the holy land"? As Ellison says,

> If the vast majority of Israelites were indulging in a debased worship of Yahweh in which room for other deities and altars could be found, no blame could be laid on a Syrian who did not rise to the heights of monotheism in a moment.[23]

As Davis says, "It is too easy for Christians with a superficial knowledge of John 4 to patronise Naaman."[24]. Stewart drives the point home,

> When we think of how many in our own land, after centuries of gospel teaching, exceed Naaman in their attachment to the external and the sensuous, we can scarcely find it in our hearts to pronounce any very severe judgement upon this recent convert from Syria.[25]

Moreover there is the possibility raised by T.E. Fretheim that the soil may not have had a particular religious significance but had merely an individualistic symbolic meaning for Naaman. Fretheim comments,

> Naaman desires that such worship take place on an altar built on the soil that he takes back with him. A *material* tie is thus provided to the community of faith, which Elisha represents. A solely spiritual relationship across the miles with the community is seen to be insufficient; there is need for those ties which are tangible, for the life of faith is not lived out in spiritual terms alone.[26]

Be this as it may the thing to note is how far Naaman has come spiritually and that God's representative spokesman on earth (Elisha) does not condemn him for his request. After all, Naaman's confession that "there is no God in all the world except in Israel" put those Israelites to shame who continued to waver in their opinion on whether Baal and Yahweh were both gods, or whether Yahweh alone was God (1 Kings 18: 21). As Stewart says,

> Naaman had yet to learn that they alone worship God who worship Him in spirit and in truth. But would it not be too much to expect in a man so lately delivered from the darkness of heathendom, and in an age when symbolism had a recognized place even in the worship of the true God, so clear an anticipation of the spirituality of New Testament worship? When we think of how many in our own land, after centuries of gospel teaching, exceed Naaman in their attachment to the external and the sensuous, we can scarcely find it in our hearts to pronounce any very severe judgment upon this recent convert from Syria.[27]

Secondly the problem of Naaman's "bowing, in the house of Rimmon". Clearly important issues are at stake here, especially when we consider the Reformed consensus that the Books of Kings were written by an author living in the Babylonian exile when issues of non-conformity to pagan worship were very real (for example Daniel). It is clear that Naaman's request in 2 Kings 5: 18 did not mean that he wished to continue worshipping Rimmon, for that would contradict his forthright declarations in verses 15 and 17. His problem was that he had to perform certain acts where it would *appear* that he was worshipping Rimmon. Thus we feel that Keil overstates things when he says that because Naaman's knowledge of God is

> still adulterated with superstition, he was not yet prepared to make an unreserved confession of faith in Jehovah as the only true God and hoped for forgiveness if he still continued to join outwardly in the worship of idols.[28]

To state before all his attendants, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" and that he would "never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD" is certainly an "unreserved confession of faith" that is no longer "adulterated with superstition"! Naaman's problem was that he had to perform certain acts where it would *appear* that he

was worshipping Rimmon.

As Keil [29] and W.Sanford La Sor [30] both note, many earlier scholars believed that Elisha here was apparently permitting Naaman to participate in idolatry and sought to evade this conclusion in two ways. First, some drew a distinction between real worship of the false god that was not permissible and prostration from civil connivance without worship that was permissible. For Keil, this is "unsatisfactory"[31] and La Sor calls it, "an artificial difference".[32] After all what was an onlooker to think?

Second, some tried to translate the Hebrew of verse 18 to refer to the past and not the future. They did this by taking the *Waw* with the Hithpael Perfect 1 c.s. as a *Waw* Conjunction and not a *Waw* Consecutive (which is the majority consensus) and so referring to the past, "when I bowed myself". Thus they hold that Naaman is referring to what he did in the past and seeking forgiveness for his past sin of idolatry. Pink is one attracted to this view, though he admits that though "many learned men" hold to it, he "does not possess sufficient scholarship to be able to pass judgment...but from what little (he) does know...it strikes him as likely."[33] Unfortunately for Pink none of the versions agree with him, Keil rightly calling the translation "ungrammatical"[34] What we have here is a series of Infinitive Constructs that suggest a future scenario – "when my master goes to the house of Rimmon to bow down there (worship), leaning himself on my hand, and I bow myself [W.C. (following the Qal Imperfect, "May the LORD pardon") and Hithpael Perfect 1 c. s. ie future sense] in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant".

Not only is grammar against this view however. We can ask, "If Naaman is asking for forgiveness for past idolatry, why does he not ask forgiveness for *all* past idolatry when he worshipped as an individual in the house of Rimmon, rather than for those occasions when he was leaned on?"

H.J. Austel and R.D. Patterson attempt to solve the problem by running difficulties one and two together.

> Naaman asks for two mule loads of Israelite soil...so that whenever circumstances forced him to bow ceremonially to the Aramean gods with his king, he might in reality be placing his knees in the soil of the true God of Israel. Thus he might be a true, though secret, believer.[35]

There are at least two flaws in this theory. First it is inconceivable that the clay altar to the LORD would be set up in Baal's temple. Secondly, as we have seen, Naaman is no secret disciple!

Keil sees the way out of the apparent problem by driving a wedge

> between the times of the Old covenant and those of the New. Under the Old covenant the time had not yet come in which the heathen, who came to the knowledge of the true deity of the God of Israel, could be required to break off from all their heathen ways...[36]

This is altogether a much too sweeping statement. Was the covenant promise not blessing for all nations? Was the covenant Law not a "charter for all mankind"? Did Isaiah not call on foreigners to "bind themselves to the LORD"? Did the Servant not suffer for outsiders? Did Daniel not plead with Nebuchadnezzar to break off his sinful ways and repent?

Is there a way out of the apparent difficulty of a prophet of the LORD (and a forerunner of Christ) apparently condoning an action which can be misinterpreted as idol worship? The answer ties in with the third apparent problem outlined above, Elisha's answer, "Go in peace". For some Naaman is wrong to put his question. As Stewart says, "he realizes that the whole course of a lifetime has been sinful and must no longer be maintained." He must, "face the full consequences of his change of religion"[37] (doubtless facing up to the first and second commandments for a start!). Others go further and say Elisha was equally wrong to accept Naaman's plea. Perowne states, "Even if Elisha did accept Naaman's plea, it would not follow that he was right. An inspired prophet wasn't equally inspired at all times."[38] Likewise Matthew Henry applies Naaman's "wrong" desire to us,

> If, in covenanting with God, we make a reservation for any known sin, which we will continue to indulge ourselves in, that reservation is a defeasance of [making null and void] his covenant. We must cast away all our transgressions and not accept any house of Rimmon. If we ask for a dispensation to go on in any sin for the future, we mock God and deceive ourselves.[39]

Likewise Perowne states,

> We may fairly ask how far Naaman is to be excused in urging (his) plea. Superstition mingled with his faith. He was a heathen, only just converted, only newly enlightened. We may excuse Naaman, but we cannot pretend as Christians to make his plea ours, or to justify our conduct by his. The Christian missionary preaches a religion whose very essence is the spirit of self-discipline, daily taking up of the Cross and following Christ. It is plain therefore that he could not answer the man who came in the spirit of Naaman, 'Go in peace'.[40]

Others (like Keil, as we have seen) argue that Elisha and Naaman were not wrong, but merely victims of the time in which they lived. J.R. Lumby states,

> We must judge both Naaman and the prophet according to the times in which they lived. It was impossible for the former at once to cast away all his old idols...a new creature is not to be made in a moment out of men like Naaman. Elisha on the other hand had no light such as we have concerning God's message to the heathen; the Jew has not, either in ancient or modern times, been a missionary, and we need not judge Elisha harshly, because he felt no call to rebuke the half-converted heathen for his imperfect service. The Lord had not yet given His message to any of the chosen people 'Go ye out into the world'.[41]

The answer to this is that Israel, whether in the old or new administrations of the covenant promise of Genesis 12, was to be the channel of God's blessing to all nations. Also it needs to be said that Naaman *had* obviously, "cast away all his old idols", and that regeneration is a momentary act of God. As we said, Naaman is not asking to worship in Baal's temple, but wondering if he can be forgiven for appearing to do so as part of his civic duty. So what we have here is another mark of the spiritual change in Naaman and that is his sensitive conscience. This is well stated by Davis,

> Note, positively, what verse 18 shows. It shows a sensitive conscience. Here is a man who feels the rub between his exclusive allegiance to Yahweh and the expectations of his workplace. And it *bothers* him. Would that Bethel-visiting or Baal-kissing Israelites were bothered like this! Would that they could have had the uneasy conscience of this Gentile! Would that apparent inconsistencies drove them to seek pardon...Where in Israel can you find a conscience that intuits the 'either-or' of Yahweh's demand for exclusive worship?...Naaman's faith far outstrips anything one can find in syncretistic Israel. This Aramean implicitly condemns Israel; he receives the blessing of Israel's God while Israel is passed by. That's what Jesus said – and it almost got him killed (Luke 4: 27)![42]

So, in answer to Naaman's question, Elisha says, "Go in peace" (or literally, "Go into peace"). We must remember that he speaks God's word as God's prophet. This is more than "the common form of Oriental leave-taking...a courteous dismissal"43. as Perowne says. It has all the same significance as used by Christ in the New Testament (i.e. spiritual wholeness). Wiseman states, "'Go in peace' is not simply 'farewell', but an acknowledgement that the recipient is in covenant relation with the speaker and his God."44. It assures Naaman that he is in a right relationship with the One who does forgive and guide his people. As to Naaman's request, it is not that Elisha evades the issue, "neither approving nor disapproving...Elisha could do nothing more without a special command from God"45. as Keil states. Rather is it not as Pink states,

We must suppose that Elisha perceived that Naaman was convinced that the thing he anticipated was not right. So, instead of rebuking him, Elisha left that conviction to produce its proper effect, assured that in due course when Naaman's faith and judgment matured, he would take a more decided stand against idolatry.46.

Wisely, under the Holy Spirit's direction, Elisha leaves Naaman's renewed conscience to do its work. As Stewart says,

> He recognized the work of God in Naaman's soul and felt sure that as he advanced in spiritual attainment the path of duty with reference to such cases would become clearer to him. So, instead of burdening his conscience with hard and fast rules at the outset, he sent him away in peace, confident that He who had begun the good work in him would carry it on into light and sounder judgment.[47]

As Wiseman says, in taking the stand he did, Naaman was putting himself under the covenant Law of the LORD.48. This would from now on inform his conscience. He has the sign of the LORD's power in his own body as a witness to his power and the One who had given him military victory before he even came to know him (2 Kings 5:1) would give him the spiritual victory.

Bimson concludes, "Elisha's blessing assures Naaman of the forgiveness he asked for. The whole passage should make us sensitive to the difficulties of those who try to serve God among people of another faith."[49]. Things for the first readers of Kings in Babylon, for example, may not always be as clear cut as they were for Daniel and his friends.

Hundreds of years later the New Testament church came to the same conclusion that was latent in Elisha's words. At the Council of Jerusalem it was stated, "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved, just as our forefathers were...God from the first showed His concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for Himself and the words of the prophets are in agreement with this". Then James stated, "Therefore I conclude that we should not make it difficult for those among the Gentiles who are turning to God...for Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times" (Acts 15:11-21).

Notes

1. D.R. Davis, *2 Kings. The power and the fury*, (Christian Focus), p.95.
2. A.W. Pink, *Gleanings From Elisha. His life and miracles*, (Moody Press), p.151.
3. Alexander Stewart, *Elisha. A prophet of grace*, (Knox Press), p.172.
4. D.R. Davis, op. cit., p.94.
5. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, Vol.3, *I and II Kings*, by C.F.Keil, (Wm. B. Eerdmans), p.130.
6. Op. cit. p.173.
7. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible in One Volume*, (Marshall, Morgan and Scott), p.406.
8. Op. cit., p. 155.
9. Op. cit., p. 320.
10. J.J.S. Perowne, *The Sermon Bible: I Kings to Psalm LXXVI*, (Hodder and Stoughton), p.80.
11. Op. cit., p.174.
12. *The New Bible Dictionary*, Ed. J. D. Douglas, (I.V.P.), p.858.
13. *The New Bible Dictionary*, p.1097; cf. Donald J. Wiseman, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: 1 and 2 Kings*, (I.V.P.), p.156. See also M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings. Anchor Bible*, p.65.
14. Op. cit., p.155.
15. Op. cit., p.93.
16. Op. cit., p.321.
17. J. Robert Vannoy, *1 and 2 Kings, N.I.V. Study Bible*, p.521.
18. Op. cit., p.174.
19. John J. Bimson, *1 and 2 Kings, New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, (I.V.P.), p.366.
1. Op. cit., pp.155-6.

21. See *NIV Study Bible*, pp.504 and 520.
22. H.L. Ellison, *1 and 2 Kings, New Bible Commentary First Edition*, (I.V.P.), p.320.
23. Op. cit., p.320.
24. Op. cit., Footnote, p.93.
25. Op. cit., p.173.
26. T.E. Fretheim, *The Deuteronomic History*, (Abingdon), p.155.
27. Op. cit., p.173.
28. Op. cit., p.320.
29. Op. cit., p.321.
30. W. Sanford La Sor, *1 and 2 Kings, New Bible Commentary, Second Edition*, (I.V.P.), p.352.
31. Op. cit., p.321
32. Op. cit., p.352.
33. Op. cit., p.155.
34. Op. cit., p.321.
35. H.J.Austel and R.D. Patterson, *N.I.V. Bible Commentary, Vol. 1: Old Testament*, (Hodder and Stoughton), 1 and 2 Kings, p.543.
36. Op. cit., p.321.
37. Op. cit., p.274.
38. Op. cit., p.80.
39. Op. cit., p.406.
40. Op. cit., p.81.
41. J.R. Lumby, *The Second Book of the Kings: The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, (Cambridge University Press), p.55.
42. Op. cit., pp.93-94.
43. Op. cit., p.81.
44. Op. cit., p.208.
45. Op. cit., p.321.
46. Op. cit., pp.155-156.
47. Op. cit., p.174.
48. Op. cit., p.208.
49. Op. cit., p.366.

URGENCY IN PREACHING AND ITS INSTRUCTION

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The Quality of Urgency in Preaching

Preaching, by definition, should be urgent in nature. By urgency we mean preaching that has, in the words of Merriam-Webster, a "force or impulse that impels or constrains." Preaching with urgency is done when the preacher not only hopes for but calls for and expects response to the Word of God from those who are hearing him. Robert Dabney in *Evangelical Eloquence* (formerly known as *Sacred Rhetoric*) defines preaching with this sense when he describes it as the "the soul's virtuous energy exerted through speech" which "applies to the will, the authority of God, the only Lord of the conscience," with the aim being to produce "a definite, practical volition in the soul of the hearer."[1] As Lloyd-Jones states to the preacher, "You are not simply imparting information, you are dealing with souls, you are dealing with pilgrims on the way to eternity, you are dealing with matters not only of life and death in this world, but eternal destiny. Nothing can be so terribly urgent."[2] Like Dabney, Lloyd-Jones believed urgency was a necessity in preaching. "If we do not know something about this sense of urgency we do not know true preaching."[3]

With over half of its content sermonic, the biblical record contained in the Acts of the Apostles would support the thesis that true preaching is urgent preaching. Using Peter's message at Pentecost as a paradigm, urgent preaching would appear to possess these seven qualities:

1) a yearning to glorify God for his salvation (Acts 2:17, 22, 36);
2) an aim in the message to touch hearts as well as minds (Acts 2:14, 22-23, 29, 36-37);
3) an eschatological sense that the gospel is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, thus adding authority to its call (eleven of the twenty-three verses of Peter's sermon are Old Testament quotations);
4) a clear, congregationally-directed call to repent and escape the evil of this world (Acts 2:38, 40);
5) a desire to see active faith in the hearers (Acts 2:39);
6) repeated urgings for the hearers to respond to the declaration of the kingdom of God (Acts 2:40);

7) great joy expressed when the hearers respond (Acts 2:47). Horatius Bonar describes apostolic preaching in this manner:

In the words of Horatius Bonar,

> Their object in preaching (the gospel) was not to induce men to commence a course of preparation for receiving Christ, but to receive Him at once and on the spot; not to lead them through the long avenue of a gradually amended life to the cross of the Sin-bearer, but to bring them at once into contact with the cross, that sin in them might be slain, the old man crucified, and a life of true morality begun. As the strongest motive to a holy life, they preached the cross.[4]

Truly Biblical preaching is intense, urgent preaching, and homiletical students must be taught this. As Lloyd-Jones says so clearly,

> We are to preach the Gospel, not to preach about the Gospel....There are men who think they are preaching the Gospel when actually in fact they are simply saying things about the Gospel...We are not to simply say things about it, we are actually to convey it. We are the channels through which this Word is to pass to the people.[5]

The Need for This Sense of Urgency in the Minister's Heart

In order to be this channel, the minister of the Word of God should be first intensely affected by his own salvation. Baxter's maxim of "preaching as a dying man to dying men" has to be felt by the preacher through the experience of salvation in all its components in order to result in urgent preaching. The minister will find his preaching becoming more passionate as the doctrines of grace influence his own soul. Those given the sacred duty of instructing students in homiletics should be particularly aware of the need to help them develop a heartfelt desire to see gospel fruit in their own lives.

This is highlighted in the Westminster Larger Catechism, which asks in Question 159, "How is the Word of God to be preached by those that are called thereunto?" Authoritative preaching by duly ordained preachers is described as needing to be done "diligently," "faithfully," and "plainly," but then we hear it is also to be performed "zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their *conversion, edification, and salvation.*"[6] Only those whose hearts are experiencing the zeal, love, fervency, and sincerity the Spirit of God brings through the gospel can preach in this manner and call with conviction their hearers to respond likewise. That hearers are to respond actively to urgent preaching in these areas is seen in the next question which asks, "What is required of those that hear the Word preached?" The answer:

> It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine: What they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, *and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.*[7]

With these high and lofty goals in mind for preaching, the gospel minister should clearly have as his aim evangelistic and consecrated responses each time he opens and proclaims the Word of God. Yet sadly this is not the experience of many.

The Scarcity of Urgency in Modern Reformed Preaching

Though there are certainly notable exceptions, across the Reformed landscape it would be the testimony of many church goers that their experience of preaching in local congregations lacks this urgency. In his indicting book *Why Johnny Can't Preach,* David Gordon points out how many ministers in this generation talk about subjects, but do not bring out from the text what amounts to a "convincing, compelling weight on the soul of the hearer."[8] According to Dabney, this would be a failure of true preaching:

> The power of the orator over his hearers is far more than intellectual, it is more than sentimental, it projects the force of his volition...upon the will of the hearer...The preacher relies alone upon evangelical inducements, and refers every conviction of the reason ultimately to God's testimony...the end of every oration is to make men do...(if it) does not end by bringing their will under the direct grasp of a 'thus saith the Lord,' it is not a sermon; it has degenerated into a speech.[9]

John Stott also warned against the type of preaching Gordon decries when he said,

> A preacher can be faithful to Scripture, lucid in explanation, felicitous in language, and contemporary in application, yet somehow appear cold and aloof. No note of urgency is ever heard in his voice, and no suspicion of a tear is ever seen in his eyes. He would never dream of leaning over the pulpit to beg sinners in the name of Christ to repent, come to Him, and be reconciled with God.[10]

Jay Adams would concur that this is the general state of modern preaching.

> I have heard conference speakers, seminary professors, pastors, and just about every sort of preacher there is, from every sort of background and denomination. Yet the story is the same: poor preaching predominates. Everywhere I go I hear the same complaint from laymen: 'Why don't the seminaries teach men to preach?' The question is not just part of the typical griping that goes on all the time; it has a solid basis in fact. And it is asked most frequently by those who are most sincere in their faith, not as an excuse to cover irresponsible behavior, but as a genuine, heartfelt cry. Men and women (and especially young people) are being turned away from Christ and his church by dull, unarresting, unedifying, and aimless preaching.[11]

As Lloyd-Jones states, preaching is not just to be a talk, or a lecture, or a running commentary on a biblical text. It is declarative in nature, seeking to elicit a response from the hearers. The urgent preacher yearns for unbelievers to respond in saving faith and for believers to take definitive steps in holiness. Before addressing how urgency can be encouraged through instruction, confession is needed to promote preaching that carries this tone.

A Confession Regarding Preaching Urgency

Perhaps what is needed most in this area is public confession. In a larger chapter of his book *Words to Winners of Souls,* entitled "Ministerial Confessions," Horatius Bonar repeats liberally a 1651 confession of sin by Church of Scotland ministers where they make prayers to God over their preaching failures. We find that lack of urgency in preaching has long been a problem. "Preaching of Christ, not that people may know Him, but that they may think we know much of Him...Not preaching with bowels of compassion to them that are hazard to perish."[12]

After listing confessions such as these, Bonar then encourages his readers to make like declarations. Praying and confessing sentiments like these would be cleansing for the church, be it in session meetings, presbytery courts, or homiletics classes.

> The whole soul is not poured into the duty, and hence it wears too often the repulsive air of routine and form. We do not speak and act like men in earnest. Our words are feeble, even when sound and true...and our tones betray the apathy which both words and looks disguise.[13]

Then further still:

> Fear has often lead us to smooth down or generalize truths which if broadly stated must have brought hatred and reproach to us...We have feared to alienate friends, or to awaken the wrath of enemies. Hence our preaching of the law has been feebled and straitened; and hence our preaching of a free gospel has been yet more vague, uncertain, and timorous.[14]

Many men in pulpit ministry feel ashamed over timorous preaching. Barrenness both in a desire for and in seeing conversions, or a lack of boldness in calling people to holiness, are often endured in a shameful silence. Yet perhaps we should remember Hannah. She was barren, prayed her desires unashamedly in public, and was blessed greatly with a son who brought prophetic preaching back to Israel. If we desire preaching urgency, we must confess our lack of hunger for it and earnestly seek it from the Spirit, whom Christ promised the Father gladly gives to us (Luke 11:13).

Having begun with confession, Spirit-filled actions need to follow.

Proverbs 11:30 says in part that "whoever captures souls is wise." What wisdom can be given and practised in homiletical instruction to help encourage preaching that calls for conversions and also sounds a note of authority as saints are exhorted onward in their godliness? Though my career as a professor is in its early stages, I am finding that the following five exercises in the homiletics classroom have already begun to help develop in men a greater preaching urgency.

Unceasing Prayer Development in the Life of the Student Preacher

If men are truly called to "prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4), then in seminary they must be encouraged to recognize not only how to prepare the word to be preached, but how to prepare themselves and their people for when the word is preached. This is accomplished through prayer. The Apostle Paul knew how reliant he was on the prayer support of the saints, saying to the Colossian church, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak" (Colossians 4:2-4). Paul wanted God-opened doors to people's hearts, the ability to reveal the gospel to them, and clarity in his ministry of the word. In short, he wanted to preach with urgency, and knew it was only through prayer that his preaching would have this quality of effectiveness.

Likewise, one of the first, simple assignments homiletic students should be given is to assemble a team of prayer partners. Recruiting from their congregation, family members, mentors, and fellow students, the students are required to assemble a number of at least eight to ten people for their prayer team in the first week of the class. He has them express a solemn commitment to pray throughout the course period for his development as a preacher, and make a special promise to pray for him on the days he is scheduled to preach. The student is encouraged to give regular updates to his prayer team, and invite them to attend the occasions he preaches. Again, it seems that Paul sought such prayer support. "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel" (Ephesians 6:18-19).

In speaking on revival, which in part is characterized by a deeper and wider spread preaching urgency, J.I. Packer reminds us of the important place that prayer has in such movements by the Spirit.

> Pray, because God has told us that we need not expect to receive unless we ask, and in the words of Jonathan Edwards, the classic theologian of revival: 'When

> God has something very great to accomplish for his church, it is his will that there should precede it, the extraordinary prayers of his people; as is manifest by Ezekiel 36:37...And it is revealed that, when God is about to accomplish great things for this church, he will begin by remarkably pouring out the Spirit of grace and supplication (Zech. 12:10).[15]

Continual Concentration on Sermonic Proclamation as Well as Preparation

A perusal of many homiletical textbooks designed for classroom use will show the material is heavily weighted toward sermon ***preparation***. The teaching on sermon ***proclamation*** in these homiletical textbooks follows a predictable pattern: in the introduction or opening chapter of the book preaching is defined and proclamation is highlighted in an energetic, motivational treatise; then it is not addressed again until the end of the book in a chapter or two on delivery and tips regarding pulpit presence. Thus, the large majority of the material in the heart of homiletics textbooks is on preparing the message. While sermon preparation is highly important and certainly needs to be a major focus in homiletics, when one considers that almost all the other courses offered at a seminary - theology, hermeneutics, languages, Old and New Testament, etc. – have as their intent biblical interpretation that should lead toward sermonic development, not giving due attention to proclamation in a class on preaching helps explain at least in part the woeful lack of urgency documented above. The subliminal message communicated through most homiletic textbooks, and the classes that are structured around them, is that preparation is far more important than proclamation.

Yet here is where Lloyd-Jones again helps us make an important distinction.

> Here I believe that we have to draw a distinction between two elements in preaching. There is first of all the sermon or the message – the content of that which is being delivered. But secondly, there is the act of preaching, the delivery, if you like, or what is commonly called 'preaching.' *It is a great pity that this word 'preaching' is not confined to this second aspect which we may describe as the art of delivering the message.*[16]

Just as spiritual formation in such areas of church life as membership, discipleship, service, evangelism, etc., requires not only teaching God's people on the subject but also providing practical ways to implement it, so the student preacher should be helped not only in his sermon preparation but in his sermon proclamation. To regain balance in preaching instruction, the teacher should use every classroom period not only to work on helping students with sermon development, but also on sermon declaration. This can be done through such means as the instructor demonstrating urgency in his own preaching in classroom devotions, seminary chapel, or pulpit ministry; taking deliberate

steps to address both preparation and proclamation in lectures; using inspiring quotes from Spirit-filled preachers about sermon proclamation in his instruction; giving sufficient weight to delivery and the sense of urgency in the form of evaluation used for student preaching; emphasizing the need for, and listening to the presence of, the second person as the student preachers are encouraged to address the congregation directly with an exhortative voice rather than abstractly with a lecture manner in the third person; and discussing with students in the classroom or private times of evaluation the strength of the sermon in this area.

George Whitefield wrote to another minister at one point, "The doctrines of our election and free justification in Christ Jesus...fill my soul with a holy fire and afford me great confidence in God my Saviour. I hope we shall catch fire from each other ...and that there shall be a holy emulation amongst us who shall most debase man and exalt the Lord Jesus."[17] If "preaching is theology on fire" as Lloyd-Jones said, then the flames of urgency must be spread through the instructor seeking to ignite sparks often and frequently in the classroom. For if a common characteristic of reformation in the church comes from "the persistent reappearance of small intentional communities in the history of church renewal and the thematic commitment to the larger ecumenical community characteristic of revival leaders," then creating an intentional atmosphere of expected, urgent gospel proclamation in a homiletics classroom, where future leaders of multiple denominations are present, would seem to be an important and vital strategy for the seminary in encouraging revival.[18]

Regular Practice in Developing Preaching Urgency

Paul told the younger minister Timothy to "train yourself for godliness," and then instructed him to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching" (I Timothy 4:7, 13). He then commanded him to "*practise* these things, *devote* yourself to them, so that all may see your *progress*," again in the context of urging him on as a preacher of the gospel (I Timothy 4:15; emphasis added). Thus, student preachers must be given the opportunities to practise their craft in a devoted way so they can show that they are making progress in their preaching.

Thus, the homiletic class should give ample time for practising. Regrettably, many students speak of having the experience of taking a homiletics class, going week after week to hear the professor lecture, then coming to one or two times in the course semester where they make their first public presentation(s) by giving a sermon in a chapel or laboratory setting. This is similar to asking a piano student to spend ten to fifteen weeks listening to his teacher talk about piano, give the history of music, and discuss the mechanics of the instrument, then expecting the student suddenly to perform at

a recital. Students go to music instructors to practise their craft under the teacher's tutelage, and so must the homiletics student.

To that end should not homiletics classes have more of a "workshop" format? At the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary (RPTS), each homiletics class has devotional and instructional content, but significant time is also set apart for student presentations. Week-by-week the students prepare parts of their messages and have two to three minute classroom presentations, with immediate feedback given on written forms that have categories for objective scoring and room for the instructor's comments. For instance, the first week students must read their passage, with instruction and evaluation given on areas such as voice projection, enunciation, eye contact, etc. In the following weeks they present other components, such as the homiletical point, the outline, the introduction, an illustration they will use, and an evangelistic urging complete with a gospel call that they will make in their message. Again, instruction and evaluation covers further categories such as commanding attention, the pleading heard in their voice, and aiming for the hearers' hearts. By the time they actually preach their full message, they have already publicly given several components of it and had time to make adjustments. Because of the more intensive teacher-student interactions this method requires in the classroom, actual class size is limited to ten students or less. This has required dividing some courses into sections. Though this means spending more time as the instructor with the students, the deeper relationships of trust that develop between professor and student; the atmosphere of mutual encouragement that has developed; the sense of "coaching" or "mentoring" which allows speaking more directly and honestly into the students' lives; and the testimonies of the students in the sense of development and progress they are making more than offset the additional investment of time.

Yet further practice, with more frequency and a more "lively" congregation than just fellow students and professors, is needed. Consequently, students are taught the importance of practising at home, and encouraged to work hard on their presentations before giving them. They are also required to take their homiletical outline and give a devotional message with five people or more outside the seminary, in order to work the text and its message further into their hearts and to share its contents with others. When preaching in chapel, they are required to invite at least five people outside the seminary community to come and hear them. In one practicum, in addition to preaching their message in the seminary, students had to arrange to preach their evangelistic sermons in a setting where at least five unbelievers could hear, be it open air preaching, a special evangelistic meeting at a church, inviting non-Christian friends to their home, going door-to-door and asking to share, etc. Sharing updates and praying for the planning of these evangelistic opportunities have made homiletic classes livelier and led to the students

offering greater mutual encouragement to one another. Students are testifying that these further exercises are helping them to be more intentional, intense, and direct in their preaching.

Frequent Exhortations to View Preaching as Speaking on God's Behalf

God has granted to the Church the gift of preaching through men divinely set aside to proclaim the word of the Lord. The risen and ascended Christ has granted gifts to his body, as it says in Ephesians 4:7-8, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.'" One special gift the Lord has given the Church is that some among God's people are "pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:12). In instructing students, they need to be regularly reminded of this truth.

Again, Paul asks, "How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?" We must hear this question very carefully. Some versions, such as the English Standard Version, actually add a word here by rendering this verse "How are they to believe in him *of* whom they have never heard?" Yet the word "of" is not in there, and seeing this helps emphasize a subtle yet wondrous truth about this verse. If people are to believe in God's Word, they must not just hear about Christ. They must hear Christ. So then when Paul asks next "How will they hear without a preacher?" we are led to understand that people hear Christ's voice through those proclaiming his Word. As James Boice says:

> When Jesus sent seventy-two disciples ahead of him to preach in his name and prepare the people for his coming, he encouraged them, saying 'He who listens to you listens to me, and 'he who rejects you rejects me.' (Luke 10:16)... When I (or any other minister) stands up to teach the Bible, if I do it rightly, it is not my word you are hearing. It is the Word of God, and the voice you hear in your heart is the voice of Christ.[19]

In my experience in 1988-1991 as a student at RPTS, Dr. Renwick Wright, God's gift from Ireland to the American churches, would often turn the lectern into a pulpit, especially as he pressed upon us the sacredness of our calling and the nearness of Christ to us in it. Those instructing students in homiletics would do well to do likewise. Impressing students with regular exhortations through opening devotions, lecture reminders, and personal interactions that they are the Lord's mouthpiece, and that as such they will be judged accordingly (II Timothy 4:1-2; James 3:1), has a profound impact on them. Through this they can be encouraged not only to study the text of their sermons, but to examine the motivation of their own hearts in preaching. As Baxter reminds the ministers of his day, "If it not be your daily business to study your own hearts, and to subdue corruption, and to walk with God – if you

make not this a work to which you constantly attend, all will go wrong, and you will starve your hearers."[20] Indeed, Dabney points out that a clear demarcation between secular and sacred rhetoric is the character of the messenger. Secular rhetoric does not care so much about the virtues of the speaker, but rather about his performance, looks, and charisma. Yet sacred rhetoric is all about character – the character of God, the minister, and the congregation. The student needs to be constantly reminded that if he lacks virtue, churches will ultimately not listen to him.

> If (the speaker) is evidently intelligent and shrewd, but of doubtful integrity, the plausibility of what he advances will be felt; but the more ability he shows, the more will the people fear to commit themselves to his opinions; for they have no guarantee of moral principle that he is not employing these forces of his genius, manifestly so powerful, to entrap and injure them instead of to benefit them.[21]

Dabney goes on to say, "His advice, moreover, will probably be corrupt, unworthy of a virtuous people, and, because immoral, foolish in the end, even if it be kindly meant."[22]

The close proximity of their Saviour that students should experience in sermon preparation and proclamation should be used to encourage their spiritual growth, which is preparation for heaven itself. Regularly reminding them of the great privilege of being able to study the heavenly Scriptures as a lifelong occupation, of how the Lord will use their words as his words, and of being chosen as vessels by God to bring his grace to lost sinners is to remind them that Christ is near to them in a unique way as ministers of the gospel. This should greatly humble both instructor and student alike, bringing further urgency in the process.

An Ongoing Emphasis to "Exegete" the Congregation as Well as the Text

One final place where preaching urgency can be cultivated is by constantly reminding the class to be students of human nature as well as the Bible. One personal preaching mentor regularly said to me, "When you are done studying the Bible, you are only halfway done. You must now study the congregation."[23] Stott captured this sentiment in the title of his book on preaching, *Between Two Worlds*, as he encouraged the preacher to engage both the world of the biblical text and also the world of his hearers. Contemplating the spiritual state of the hearers helps the preacher strive for more direct applications that give messages urgency. This is vital in evangelistic preaching as well as in holiness preaching.

George Whitefield often wept as he urged people to repent in his preaching that awakened thousands from their sins. When questioned, he explained the reason why he did this.

> You blame me for weeping, but how can I help it when you will not weep for yourselves. Your immortal souls are upon the verge of destruction, and, for ought you know, you are hearing your last sermon, and may never more have an opportunity to have Christ offered to you.[24]

These words remind us of how Jesus wept over Jerusalem, crying out to them that he longed to gather her people to himself like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. The godly man who sees the true spiritual state of the lost begins to care for them more greatly than they even do for themselves.

Students can be encouraged to keep the congregation well in mind, and thus strive for urgency, in a variety of ways. One is to encourage the use of not only theological doctrines but anthropological ones in sermon preparation to help the student preacher keep before him the spiritual condition of the flock. Similarly, having weekly exercises in sermon preparation where together in the classroom they identify in sample passages what Brian Chapell terms the "Fallen Condition Focus", meaning "the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage," assists the student in thinking about the congregation's gospel need.[25] Making the distinction between hermeneutics and homiletics can also be helpful, especially with the use of analogies in teaching. For instance, reminding them that hermeneutics is like sharpening the arrow and tightening the bow, while homiletics is drawing the bow back and letting the arrow fly straight and true visualizes the distinction while at the same time encouraging urgency. Studying and discussing together such things as biblical passages on the condition of the lost or admonitions regarding holiness, descriptions of diversified types of personalities present in congregations such as the ones Gregory the Great gives in Book 3 of his *Pastoral Rule,* or situations men may be facing in their own congregations, bring a great deal of lively practicality to men preparing to preach.

In certain assignments, having the students choose and deliberately address within a section of their sermon a unique group within the congregation, for example children, mothers, the rich, teenagers, or the aged, will tune them in on how to apply God's Word more directly on given occasions. Explaining to them that, like families, each congregation has its own unique history, personality, traditions, house rules, and favourite memories provides assistance to them in seeing how to be more specific in addressing congregations. Reviewing with them the messages that Jesus preached to the seven churches of Asia in the Book of Revelation as examples of congregational diversity is a helpful exercise in this area. Asking the class or an individual student during their evaluation how particular texts or even messages that have already been preached would have been approached differently with unique assemblies such as a college group, a women's retreat, a mission chapel, a junior high devotion, or in a jail ministry encourage the

student to be aware of and more prayerful over the people to whom he is preaching. Informally, when hearing of preaching engagements over the weekend, simply asking a student the question, "What is unique about the congregation you will be preaching to on Sunday?" can stimulate them to talk to the pastors and elders of the congregation to know more about the people they will be addressing and be more reflective as they consider preaching to different churches.

A Final Consideration Regarding Urgency

Urgent preaching may be criticized as unnecessary emotionalism. At those times, we would do well to remember the words of Jonathan Edwards. When evangelistic preachers during the Great Awakening were accused of this by ministers in established churches, he countered,

> I think an exceeding affectionate way of preaching about great things of religion, has in itself no tendency to beget false apprehensions of them; but on the contrary, a much greater tendency to beget true apprehensions of them, than a moderate, dull, indifferent way of speaking of them...Our people do not so much need to have their heads stored, but to have their hearts touched; and they stand in that greatest need of that sort of preaching, which has the greatest tendency to do this.[26]

Notes

1. Robert Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence: A Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), p.33-34.
2. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), p.91.
3. Lloyd-Jones, p.91.
4. Horatius Bonar, *God's Way of Holiness* (Ross-shire, Scotland (UK): Christian Focus Publishers, 1999), p.52.
5. Lloyd-Jones, p.67.
6. *Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America: Westminster Larger Catechism* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant, 1989), B-34 (emphasis added). Hereafter WLC.
7. *WLC*, B-35 (emphasis added).
8. T.D. Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), p.26.
9. Dabney, p.32-34.
10. John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).
11. Jay Adams, *Preaching with Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), xi.
12. Horatius Bonar, *Words to Winners of Souls* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995), p.31-32.
13. Bonar, p.40.
14. Bonar, p.41.
15. J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2005), 204.
16. Lloyd-Jones, p.56 (emphasis added).

17. Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: God's Anointed Servant in the Great Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), p.69-70.
18. Richard. F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p.78.
19. James Boice, *Romans: God and History,* Volume 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), p.1241.
20. Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p.62.
21. Dabney, p.261.
22. Dabney, p.262.
23. Private conversations with Edward Donnelly, former pastor of Trinity Reformed Presbyterian Church of Belfast, N. Ireland, and professor emeritus of the Reformed Theological College, Belfast.
24. Alex Montoya, *Preaching With Passion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), p.61.
25. Brian Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), p.42.
26. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards,* Volume I, ed. by Edward Hickman (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p.391.

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EVANGELISM BEFORE CONSTANTINE

Principles of Gospel Work in the Roman Empire to c.300AD

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The growth of the church in the Roman Empire is very often attributed to the (supposed) conversion to Christianity of the Emperor Constantine in 312AD and to his consequent pro-Christian policies which gave the Church liberty and prestige. As a result, it is argued, Christianity, which had previously been persecuted and had therefore struggled to survive, began to flourish until it virtually took over the Empire. There is no doubt that Constantine's policies had significant implications for the Church, both good and bad. However, even before Constantine, the Church had experienced significant numerical and geographical growth. During New Testament times, it is clear that Christianity spread throughout much of the Roman Empire - from Jerusalem and Samaria north to Antioch, then west through Asia Minor, across into Greece and finally reaching Rome itself. During the next hundred years, the faith seems to have spread even further in most directions. To the east, for example, there was an important church in Edessa (200 miles north-east of Antioch) by 200 AD, by which time it seems that some form of the Christian faith had reached several hundred miles further east still, into Parthia (north-eastern Iran) and possibly to India (taken there, according to tradition, by the apostle Thomas). During this early period, the faith also reached down to Egypt and began to spread across northern Africa. Gaul (France) was reached early on and, by 300 AD at the latest, even Britain.

The growth in this early period of the church's history was not only geographical but also numerical. Evidence indicates that the overall number of Christians in the Roman Empire grew very significantly in the first half of the third century. The historian Eusebius (writing about that period from his viewpoint in the early fourth century) wrote of the 'enormous' congregations that met and the spacious new church buildings which had arisen in the cities[1] Tertullian, writing in around 200AD, claimed, "We are but yesterday and we have filled everything you have - cities, tenements, forts, towns, exchanges, yes! and camps, tribes, palace, senate, forum" [2] Also it would seem that the

social make-up of the church was altering. Whereas previously believers had come mainly from the poorer classes, by the early third century more intellectuals and members of social elites were joining. Persecution in the middle of the third century no doubt stunted growth at the time, but the second half of that century provides evidence too of further quite spectacular advance.

All this is of considerable interest, as this significant geographic and numerical growth came about without the formal, official backing of the State and before the conversion of Constantine. It is worth, therefore, examining the strategies employed by the Church for the spreading of the gospel in those early centuries. It may be that, in our increasingly post-Constantinian world, where State support for Christianity is much reduced and often non-existent, there are lessons that we should learn for evangelism in our day.

This article will therefore examine the approaches taken by the early Church in seeking to bring the gospel to the Roman Empire in which they lived, looking first at the evidence from the New Testament itself and then at the evidence from the subsequent history of the Church to about 300 AD, before seeking to bring some application to our own time.

1. The New Testament period

The church in the Roman Empire

The Roman Empire into which the New Testament Church was born was a potentially daunting prospect for a nascent religious movement. The rule of Rome extended across the whole of the geographic area covered by the events narrated in the New Testament, and more. Eastwards, Roman authority reached Judaea, Samaria and, to the north and east, Syria; it included the whole of Asia Minor and Greece, as well, of course, as Italy and, to the west, Spain. The regions of Gaul, parts of Germany, the Balkans, Egypt and much of the north African coast also formed part of the Empire and Rome was beginning to consolidate its hold on Britain.

What was life in the Empire like, in general? The might of Rome ensured that, compared with much of the ancient world, life in the Empire in the middle of the first century AD was relatively stable. Travel and communications were good, enabling Paul and others to move around, sometimes covering significant distances, without insuperable difficulties. The extent to which this enabled the new churches founded by Paul (and others) to keep in touch with each other is strikingly illustrated by the end of the apostle's letter to Titus. Paul there tells Titus that he is sending him Artemas or Tychicus and asks the young pastor whom he had left in Crete to join him in Nicopolis (probably the one in Asia Minor, though possibly the town of the same name in Greece). Zenas and Apollos are to be sped on their way with ample provision. All this coming and

going indicates that the early churches made the best use of the quite reliable communications systems provided by Rome.

All this was aided immensely, of course, by a common language. Many throughout the Empire spoke and understood, and some read, Greek. Again, this helped Paul and others in their efforts to spread the gospel. It meant that inspired writings could be written in one language, circulated amongst the churches and understood sufficiently by all.

Roman law upheld marriage, provided for family life and recognised the enforceability of contracts. The rule of law was a vital pillar of Roman society. However, the darker side of this was the prevalence (and general acceptance) of adultery and, within certain limits, homosexual activity, the neglect of the poor and those on the fringes of society, the brutality which lay not far below the surface of many aspects of life and which found expression in the treatment of prisoners and in the violence of the public games, and the all-pervading nature of the institution of slavery.

Religiously, the Empire was dominated by polytheism and paganism, though the details of activities of the gods described in the myths seem not to have been taken entirely seriously by everyone. Many ordinary aspects of life were affected: serving in army or membership of the trade guilds without which it could be impossible to practise one's trade or profession might well require public acknowledgement of pagan gods or emperor worship, or both. The Romans recognised that the monotheism so tenaciously maintained by the Jews was impossible to challenge with any success and therefore special provision was made for them. Other religions or cults, especially new ones, however, would be treated with a great deal more suspicion and would be unlikely to acquire similar exemptions.

This was the empire in which Christian churches began to be established in the first century AD. The Church, as an entirely new phenomenon to the Romans, posed particular problems for the authorities. As is clear from the New Testament and from the literature of the first two centuries or so following, the Empire found it difficult to know what to make of this new movement. Who precisely were they - simply a sect of Judaism or something entirely new? Were they a threat, possibly seditious, or were they harmless? How should they be treated? In a well-known exchange of letters with the Emperor Trajan in the early years of the second century, the Roman governor of Pontus and Bithynia in Asia Minor, Pliny the Younger, asked the emperor for guidance on how to deal with men and women brought before him accused of being Christians. Pliny had tested whether they were truly Christians or not by requiring them to call upon the gods and to make offerings to the image of the emperor. Those that obeyed him were released; those who refused were punished. Trajan approved of this approach. Pliny lamented the numbers of people being brought before him in this way, complaining that the Christian "superstition" had reached

multitudes, in rural districts as well as the towns and cities. Thus these early Christians could find themselves under suspicion, the object of accusations and ultimately punishment and death at the hands of the authorities.

This, then, in brief, was the world into which the New Testament Church sought to bring the message of the good news of Jesus Christ. The Christians were initially very small in number, of no significance in their communities and the object of suspicion, mistrust and sometimes outright persecution. They enjoyed none of the usual means of influencing their society. How did they go about the task of evangelism? This article will explore, first, the data in the New Testament itself and, secondly, the evidence afforded by Christian literature of the two centuries or so following the closure of the canon.

Apostolic evangelistic preaching

The evangelistic preaching recorded in the Acts of the Apostles demonstrates how the apostles went about the task of preaching the gospel with the aim of conversions. Two quite different, but complementary, approaches can be discerned.

Firstly, the Book of Acts records the preaching of Peter and of Paul to Jews and Gentile "God-fearers", those likely to be familiar with the history and teachings of the Old Testament. Their approach with this audience was simply to demonstrate that the man Jesus of Nazareth, whose ministry of teaching and miracles they knew or had heard of and who had so recently been crucified in Jerusalem, was the very Messiah of whom the prophets spoke. Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, recorded by Luke in the second chapter of Acts, speaks first of Jesus of Nazareth (v.22), the man they had all heard of, and ends with the great statement that "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified" (v.36). Peter's argument rests on the fulfilment of prophecy, particularly of Psalm 16, in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Peter argues that David's statements in that psalm about not seeing corruption and not being abandoned in Hades could not apply to David, who was dead and buried. They knew where his tomb was. So this must be a prophecy of another who was yet to come. The climax of Peter's argument, then, is that the prophecy is clearly fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, as he rose from the dead and having ascended to his Father in heaven has now poured out his Holy Spirit, the evidence of which Peter's audience had heard and seen.

The apostle Paul's sermon in Antioch of Pisidia, recorded in chapter 13 of Acts, runs along similar lines. After a rather more extensive overview of Old Testament history (v.16-22), Paul demonstrates to his Jewish and God-fearing Gentile audience that Jesus of Nazareth, who has been born of David's line and who was preceded by John the Baptist, has been put to death but has been raised again. Once again, Paul shows that this is all in fulfilment of prophecy

(quoting Psalm 2; Isaiah 55 and Psalm 16) and so reaches his concluding exhortation to his audience not to make the mistake of rejecting the one whom God had sent to them for the forgiveness of sins and the redemption that the law of Moses was unable to bring (vv.38-41). Thus Old Testament prophecy is the key to the apostles' evangelistic preaching to Jews and to God-fearing Gentiles. Their task was simply to show that Jesus of Nazareth and the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament were one and the same.

Paul's approach to evangelising pagans was rather different. His aim when preaching to non-Jewish audiences was to demonstrate that the God whom Christians proclaim is the true God of all the world, on whom all humanity depends and to whom everyone is accountable and that God has demonstrated this to be the case in the person of the man Jesus, in particular by raising him from the dead. Thus in preaching to the pagan worshippers of Zeus in Lystra or to the pagan philosophers in Athens, Paul sought to put across a worldview, a big picture, which clearly conflicted directly with the worldview of his audience. To achieve this, he used arguments from general revelation and from nature (Acts 14:15-17), he quoted pagan poetry and philosophy (Acts 17:28), he alluded to the image of God in man and the remnants of revealed truth which humanity retains (Acts 17:29). He sought very deliberately to demonstrate the complete falsehood of pagan thinking and to contradict it by means of the proclamation of biblical truth. In stark contrast with his preaching to Jews, Paul did this without quoting Scripture (Acts 17:24-27), but nevertheless pointing his hearers clearly to Jesus (Acts 17:30-31).

In their evangelism to Jews and to pagans, therefore, the apostles in the New Testament period proclaimed the same message, that Jesus is the Christ whom all must worship and in whom all must trust for salvation, repenting of sin, but they emphasised different truths depending on the current beliefs and understanding of their audience: with the Jews, they argued from the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy; with the pagans, their arguments were based on creation and judgment; but in all cases, their aim was to bring their hearers from where they were to the point of conversion to Christ. In all their evangelistic preaching, as it is recorded in the Book of Acts, however, it is notable that the apostles consistently emphasised the events of the life of Jesus of Nazareth and particularly his resurrection (surprisingly, perhaps, even more than his crucifixion). In other words, they brought out with utter clarity what God had done in human history, in sending Jesus into this world and raising him from the dead, in order to save sinners: this was the central message.

Teaching the Church - the New Testament epistles

Yet it would be a mistake to think that the growth of the Church in New Testament times and beyond can be understood purely from an examination of

the apostles' evangelistic preaching. It is clear that, for the apostles, the task of instructing the Church in right doctrine and conduct was also an essential element in their strategy for reaching the world with the gospel. The work of teaching the Church was necessary not only as an end in itself but also for the spread of the gospel, as it was by that teaching that the thinking and the life of the church as a community of believers in an unbelieving world would be shaped. The apostolic teaching to which the church was to be devoted (Acts 2:42) would mould her to be the 'light of the world' and the "city set on a hill which cannot be hidden" of which Jesus had spoken in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:14).

The epistles of the New Testament therefore contain two principal kinds of material. Firstly, they tell believers what it is they are, as Christian believers, to believe. They are to believe the truth that God has revealed through his servants chosen by him for that purpose. Believers are not to believe error and they must refuse to follow those who teach error. The apostles made clear that this matters - so it is a good thing when false teachers leave a church, for they then make clear that they do not truly belong to the Church of Christ (1 John 2:26-27). It is evident that the apostles expected Christians to attain a depth of doctrinal understanding and not to be satisfied with a superficial acquaintance with basic teaching (Hebrews 6:1-2). Thus the epistles, which are mostly written to Christians generally and not only to the ministers and teachers of the Church, deal at some length and in great depth with matters such as sin and judgment, justification by faith alone, sanctification, the doctrine of the Church, the person and work of Christ and eschatology. These are not regarded as optional matters, for specialists or theologians only. They are relevant and useful for all believers and all should seek to grasp them and benefit from them. Nor was it suggested that, given the enormous size of the task of evangelism in those early days, the Church should focus its efforts on reaching the lost at the expense of deepening its understanding of theology. Doctrine was not side-lined to focus on evangelism, though evangelism was not side-lined either, rather, depth of Christian teaching and zeal in evangelism went hand in hand.

The other main kind of teaching in the epistles concerns how Christians are to live: their relations with each other, the duties of love, compassion, forgiveness and truth; instruction on sexual morality; right behaviour in home, at church and in society at large. The doctrines of the faith had clear consequences for how to live and the apostles sought in their teaching of the Church to spell these out. Again, right Christian behaviour and godly living were not side-lined in favour of evangelism, though neither did they squeeze out evangelistic activity.

The connection between teaching the Church in matters of doctrine and conduct and the task of evangelism can be seen clearly in Peter's first letter. The first part of that letter contains teaching on the privileges of being a

Christian, on the nature of Old Testament prophecy, on the kind of conduct which should characterise the Christian and on the nature of the Christian Church under the new covenant in Christ (1:1 - 2:10). Peter then embarks on an extended exposition of how Christians are to live in this world, dealing first in general terms (2:11-17) and then addressing in turn slaves (2:18-25), wives (3:1-6), husbands (3:7) and finally all believers (3:8-17). Twice in the course of this exposition, Peter makes clear the evangelistic import of his teaching on godly living, firstly to say that unbelievers should see how Christians live and so be brought to glorify God (2:12) and secondly to imply that right Christian living should give rise to questions on the part of the unbeliever who observes it, for which opportunity he urges Christians to be ready with their answer (3:15-16). It is not so much that evangelism is to be the believer's prime motive for living a godly life, but that a clear by-product of such living is to attract unbelievers to the good news of Jesus Christ. Thus preaching and teaching the truth, by word written and spoken, and living it out, individually and corporately, were the key to New Testament gospel proclamation in the Roman Empire.

2. The post-apostolic period (to c.300AD)

After the New Testament period, how did the Church continue to seek to reach the Empire with the gospel? From the evidence available, a four-fold approach can be discerned which is similar to that exemplified in the New Testament.

Firstly, as in the time of the apostles, there were attempts to bring the gospel to the Jews. Here, the evidence suggests that efforts were focused on the attempt to show that Jesus and the New Testament Church were the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. The issues debated thus tended to centre upon the Old Testament: how precisely was it to be understood, what did it teach about the Messiah, can it be rightly concluded that Jesus is that Messiah?

Thus Justin Martyr, a Christian writer and teacher of the second century based in Rome, wrote a work entitled *Dialogue with Trypho* the Jew, supposedly a report of a conversation with some Jews in which Justin seeks to demonstrate the truth of the Christian faith and that Jesus is the Christ foretold in the Old Testament. One of Justin's main arguments in this work is that the God who revealed himself in the Old Testament in theophany must be the Logos, the Son, rather than the Supreme Father of all (*Trypho* 128). Justin also sought to show that the way in which the Christians understood the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament, as fulfilled in Christ, was the correct one. He sought to justify the manner of life of Christians as being the true obedience to God's law, in distinction from that of the Jews. In his arguments with

Judaism, Justin was careful to ensure that he appealed to the Old Testament that they would recognise - he deals with them, so far as possible, in terms that would have been familiar and acceptable to them. Questions may be raised about some aspects of Justin's interpretation of the Old Testament, but it is clear that the methods that he sought to employ in bringing the gospel to Jews were based on similar principles to those used by the apostles as recorded in the New Testament.

Secondly, the early Christians sought to bring the gospel to pagans. Here, their attempts often focused on demonstrating the superiority of Christian teaching to that of the pagans, even to the extent of mocking the ridiculous and unbelievable content of much pagan myth. This is the tactic of Clement of Alexandria, who lived towards the end of the second century, in his *Exhortation to the Heathen,* in the second chapter of which he says of the pagan mysteries, "I will expose right well by the word of truth the sorcery hidden in them; and those so-called gods of yours, whose are the mystic rites, I shall display, as it were, on the stage of life, to the spectators of truth".

Christian apologists tended to attack pagan notions of gods for their immorality, unlikelihood, inconsistency and unhistorical nature. But they also argued that even pagan poets and philosophers sometimes bore testimony to the truth. Thus Clement, in the sixth chapter of his *Exhortation*, says, "though reluctantly, they confess that God is one, indestructible, unbegotten, and that somewhere above in the tracts of heaven, in his own peculiar appropriate eminence, whence he surveys all things, he has an existence true and eternal". But Clement then goes on to emphasise that truth is really to be sought in Scripture: "It is now time ... to go to the prophetic Scriptures; for the oracles present us with the appliances necessary for the attainment of piety, and so establish the truth. The divine Scriptures and institutions of wisdom form the short road to salvation"[3].

Other arguments with pagans focused on issues of antiquity. Justin Martyr, who recounted his philosophical journey from Stoic to Platonist, says he was converted to Christianity by the argument that Moses and the prophets pre-dated Plato and other Greek philosophers[4]. The Greek philosophers learned from the Old Testament prophets, he argued, and so knew about the immortality of the soul and judgment to come; Justin even suggested that Socrates and Heraclitus might legitimately be called "Christians" who lived "with the Logos"[5]. He proposed that Plato's argument that evil is the product of the free choice of rational humans, and so cannot be blamed on God, was derived from Moses[6]. Justin argued that Plato took his ideas about origins from Moses: "Plato borrowed his statement that God...made the world [from Moses] who was the first prophet, and of greater antiquity than the Greek writers"[7]. Justin even tried to make Plato understand something of the Trinity: speaking of the "soul of the universe", Plato is quoted (from his *Timaeus*) as having written,

"He placed him crosswise in the universe."[8] It is important to note that Justin was not trying to argue that the teachings of Greek philosophy were the same as those of the Old Testament, but simply that the latter pre-dated the former[9] Justin was thereby using an argument familiar to all philosophies of his day, that the older is best[10]. Again, though some of Justin's arguments seem untenable to us today, the principles underlying his approach were similar to those of the apostles: he sought to start from where his audience were and persuade them of the truth of the Christian faith in contrast with the errors of their own way of understanding the world.

The third feature of early Christian evangelism was, again like that of the New Testament, godly living, in contradistinction to the way of life prevalent in contemporary pagan society. The scarce sources available as evidence for what it was like to live as a Christian in the Roman Empire in the early centuries suggest an attractive picture. There seems to have been a strong sense of being part of the world and yet not part of it. One writer described it in this way:

> Inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners...They marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed...They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all...They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all[11].

There is evidence that Christians rejected the practices common in their day of abandoning unwanted newborn infants, of abortion, of divorce and of attendance at public entertainments[12] and participation in civic events honouring pagan gods. The *Didache* (written probably in the early second century) forbade Christians from abortion and infanticide[13].

Christians adopted a brotherly, egalitarian view of other believers based on the fact that there are no class distinctions in Christ (though male authority in marriage and the institution of slavery were not challenged). This was tangibly evidenced in the relief schemes operated by churches for the help of brethren in difficulties. Tertullian described the administration of the church fund in Carthage[14]. Eusebius claims that, in the middle of the second century, the church at Rome supported 1500 widows and other needy folk. There appears at this time to have been a remarkable unity and love among believers[15]. All of this indicates the importance that Christians in these early centuries placed upon godly living and something of the impact that this may have had on the society in which they lived and sought to testify for Christ.

Fourthly, Christian teaching was vital to the Church in these early post-apostolic years. Two kinds of such teaching survive. Some Christian teachers wrote sustained defences of Christian truth against heretical groups. Thus Irenaeus, based in Lyon and living in the latter half of the second century, wrote a very lengthy and detailed work expounding and refuting the errors of the various groups of Gnostics active in his day. Works were written also against the Montanists, who appear to have made claims to direct inspiration from God beyond what is taught in Scripture, and against Marcion, who sought to cut the Old Testament and large parts of the New Testament out of the canon of Scripture altogether. These works were necessary for the benefit of the Christian church, so that believers would know what was truth and what was error, but were also required to instruct the world more generally about what was and what was not genuine Christian teaching.

The second kind of teaching evident from the sources involved the working out Christian doctrine in greater detail and depth. Again, this work was often stimulated by the promulgation of error, but it was positive rather than negative in its form. Its aim was to spell out more clearly the implications of Scripture teaching on matters of prime importance for the Church. It was during this period, for example, that theological debates about the nature of Christ and his relationship with God began. Who precisely is Jesus - is he God, is he man, or is he some kind of mixture of the two? What does it mean to say that he is the Logos? Has he always existed? Is he to be worshipped? Is he fully God - how and in what sense, if there is to be only one God? Vital debates such as these, designed to tease out the correct way to understand the Scriptures on these issues, were often contentious and could endure for a long period of time. Again, though, they were a vital part of the work of the Church in teaching the truth, both for the benefit and edification of the Church and for the instruction of the world generally about the nature of true Christian belief. Like the apostolic Church of the New Testament, the Church of the post-apostolic period gave high importance to the task of instruction in doctrine as well as in godly living and they saw this, at least in part, as an aspect of the work of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in the society in which they lived.

3. Application for today

This examination of the evangelistic approaches adopted by the Church in New Testament and post-apostolic times, before Christianity had been endorsed or privileged in any way by the Roman authorities may be helpful to the Church today. Of course, the biblical accounts, as divine revelation, are instructive for the Church in a way that later writings are not. Nevertheless, the collective testimony to the principles underlying the evangelistic work and methods of the early church suggest the following lessons, among others, for believers today.

1. In evangelistic preaching, preachers need to learn to take an approach that is appropriate to their audience. How well does a particular audience know the Bible, if at all? In this age, when biblical knowledge amongst the population generally tends to be much lower than it was in previous generations, it may not be possible simply to quote Scripture or refer to biblical episodes without either being misunderstood or completely losing the audience. Preachers seeking to bring an evangelistic message to an audience of unbelievers therefore need to ask themselves questions such as, what beliefs do my hearers hold about the nature of this world, how it operates, who (if anyone) governs it, what God is like, how do we know right from wrong, and so on. The "big picture", a biblical worldview, needs to be presented. Preachers need to talk about origins, about who rules the universe, about who sets the rules for human life, about what happens after death. The evangelistic task is thus to seek to engage the understanding that hearers already have and demonstrate to them, in contradistinction to that understanding, the fundamental truths of the gospel.

2. It may be that preachers of the gospel today need to focus more consciously on the historical events connected with Jesus of Nazareth, that God has intervened in history in those events to redeem a sinful humanity. Many today are ignorant of these events and those that are aware of them to some degree may well not understand their significance. These matters, so basic to the Christian faith, need therefore to be spelled out to hearers today. Preachers must seek to bring into their hearers' focus what it is that God has done and then warn them about what he will do at the judgment. In that way, people must be urged to evangelical repentance and a living faith in Jesus Christ.

3. The Church must engage seriously in the defence of the faith. Sometimes, Christians need to defend themselves against the false accusations that the world makes, for example, that Christians are bigots or hypocrites, intolerant and uncaring of others, just as the early Church sometimes defended itself against the common insults of the day (for example that they were cannibals, because they spoke - in the context of the Lord's Supper - of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of a man). But perhaps more importantly, the Church must speak and write about what it believes and distinguish this from the multiple misconceptions of what true Christianity is. These misunderstandings are legion and arise from a multiplicity of causes: true Christian faith is constantly confused today with liberal Christianity or with the false teachings of Roman Catholicism, it is treated as of the same nature as fundamentalist Islam, it is blamed for the evils of the crusade and (ironically) of the persecutions practised by the papacy.

There is a need for those who, adequately trained and prepared, are able to put forward clearly the nature of true Christian belief and demonstrate its sharp difference from the phenomena with which the secular world of today so easily confuses it.

4. There is also the need for those who are able to further the theological task: to edify the Church and deepen Christians' understanding of the doctrinal teaching of Scripture. There is a great danger that, in a zeal for evangelism and perhaps out of concern at the apparent decline of the Church, at least in the West, the Church neglects the essential task of edifying and teaching Christians because she gives all her energies to evangelistic activity (which is no less necessary). As the early Church shows, both kinds of work are vital. Without a depth of theological understanding, the Church will progressively weaken, her witness in the world will become increasingly ineffective and she will have nothing substantial in the way of teaching to call the world to in any case. Error needs to be firmly and clearly refuted. Truth must be taught with a depth that will equip Christians in their minds and in their lives to bear consistent witness to Jesus Christ in the world.

5. Finally, it is an essential part of evangelism that Christians live godly lives. Well instructed in biblical standards of conduct - whether on abortion, the right upbringing of children, marriage, sexual mores, justice, or other biblical issues - God's people must learn to live as he has commanded them in his Word. A biblical distinction in lifestyle must be maintained between the Church and the world. A biblical discipline involving a right use of the sacraments must be maintained. In these ways, the Church will truly demonstrate to the world what it means to belong to Jesus Christ and what a difference he makes in the lives of those whom he has died to save. As Peter says in his first letter, the result should be the glory of God and opportunities for Christians to speak to unbelievers of "the hope that is in" them (1 Peter 3:15).

Notes

1. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 8.1.
2. Tertullian, *Ad Nationes* 1.14.
3. Clement, *Exhortation*, ch.8.
4. Justin Martyr, *Trypho* 2.6; 7.1-2; 8.1-2.
5. Justin Martyr, *I Apology* 44.8-19; 46.3.
6. Justin Martyr, *I Apology* 44.
7. Justin Martyr, *I Apology* 59.1-5.
8. Justin Martyr, *I Apology* 60.1-7.
9. See *I Apology* 2.1-2; 7.1-2; 8.1.

10. "What we say ... is alone true and older than all the writers who have ever lived", Justin, *1 Apology* 23.1; see also Tatian, *Orat.* 31.1.
11. *Epistle to Diognetus* 5.
12. See Tertullian, *Apology* 38.4; *De Spectaculis* - though it is interesting that he felt he had to write a treatise on the last-mentioned subject, indicating perhaps that not all Christians felt it necessary to abstain from attending the games.
13. 2.2; 5.5; see also *Epistle of Barnabas* 19.5, "Thou shalt not slay the child by procuring abortion, nor, again, shalt thou destroy it after it is born"; also *idem*, 20.2; *Epistle to Diognetus* 5.6; Tertullian, *Apology* 9.6-8.
14. *Apology* 39.5-6, 7; see also *Didache*. 15.4.
15. See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.1, though also 3.10.

SACRIFICE AND IMPUTATION[1]

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The meaning of both sacrifice and imputation is very much in the forefront of recent theological debate. The idea that the work of the cross has a sacrificial character is challenged by non-sacrificial and non-violent interpretations, supposedly more palatable to the modern mind[2]. Furthermore doubts are expressed as to whether the notion of imputation really articulates in a theologically satisfying way how the justice accomplished by the cross could be applied to believers. Critics consider it a cold and abstract fiction. Both notions are said to smack of legal logic and an economy of exchange which are thought to be inappropriate expressions of the inordinate love of God, who accepts sinners in all-embracing generosity[3].

Such postmodern suspicion of englobing theories provides an invitation to revisit sacrifice and imputation in the context of the theology of reconciliation and to consider some of their mutual relations. In this article we propose to consider briefly the three major models of reconciliation in relation to sacrifice and imputation and then in the context of penal substitutionary theory.

I. The language of reconciliation

Although there are any number of theological theories attempting to explain the meaning of the reconciliation of the cross, it is generally accepted that they can be grouped into three broad categories: the exemplary, the victory and the substitutionary models, the latter being considered close to Hugo Grotius' model of commercial exchange. The three models are all compatible in varying degrees with the notion of sacrifice, an offering made to God on behalf of others or oneself.

When we consider the reconciliation of the cross, it is obvious that Christ's sacrifice does provide a grand example of love and one that satisfies the deep spiritual questions of human beings. If the cross is seen as the victory of Christ over the forces and the power of evil, the sacrifice of Christ is also an appropriate vehicle of victory. By his self-giving and obedience Christ emerges victorious from temptation and triumphs over the evil that is an affront to God. His act of surrender out of love defeats the power of the devil and opposition to God. This is the victory of the new humanity. Finally, when the work of the cross is seen as a substitution – Christ taking the place of sinners to suffer and

die for them – this construal is obviously compatible with sacrificial theory. It is not logically necessary to conclude that the substitution involved is of a penal nature under criminal law because, theoretically, substitution can include various elements, of which the penal is only one possible aspect[4].

If however all these three models can be harmonised with the notion of sacrifice in some respect or other, they are not in the same way equally compatible with the concept of imputation (*logizomai*). Imputation implies that an act is adequate in the performance of obligations for another or several other persons because of representation; the action in their favour is counted as if it were theirs.

It is not difficult to see that the theory of the exemplary character of the cross does not tally with imputation. Exemplarity does not suggest that what it represents will be applied to others. Examples can be given pedagogically, they may inspire or be followed, but they remain objective with respect to others, and need not imply any effect or appropriation. In theories that emphasize reconciliation by example, the love shown on the cross is not attributed to others, which constitutes a logical and psychological impossibility. It has a limited demonstrative and hortatory character which might stimulate empathy and create a subjective response.

Theories that focus on the victory of Christ, current since the programmatic essay *Christus Victor* by Gustav Aulen (1931), and illustrated by the recent work of B. Sesboüé in France, N.T. Wright in England, or J.B. Green and M.D. Baker in the United States, bear no immediate and evident relation to the notion of imputation. A victory may stimulate hopes of similar outcomes in other situations, even if that is not its primary function. John F. Kennedy's victory in the U.S. presidential election served as a model for other campaigns. Christ's victory is hardly any closer to imputation than exemplary theories, in spite of appearances. It may encourage us to become his disciples, which undoubtedly has beneficial consequences for those who make that decision. However the principle involved is not one of imputation but identification. A victory means the reversal of a situation, but it does not itself imply anything being imputed.

This suggests why advocates of a Christology of victory often seem to adopt a soteriology with a non-forensic definition of justification. On the basis of identification with Christ, by being a member of his people and united with him, the power of his victory is infused by the Spirit. The choice of justification by the imputation of righteousness or that of a new character by infusion is a consequence of adopting a particular model of the work of the cross. Likewise, adherents of Christ's victory often speak about the defeat of sin as being its "absorption" and neutralisation by the cross[5].

The substitutionary pattern of Christ in our place, taking the penal consequences of sin to establish the righteousness of sinners clearly depends for its effectiveness not on identification or moral exhortation, but on the reality

of the imputation. We can even say that substitutionary theory depends on imputation because without it substitution has no effect. It is precisely this point that is disputed by its critics. Its opponents argue that imputation in the context of penal substitution is impossible in the legal sense, immoral in ethical terms, and logically irrational. In other words, the death of the cross does not correspond to legal requirements because it is both unjust that an innocent die for the guilty and inexplicable that the death of Christ justify the multitude.

These criticisms and the responses to them are numerous and well documented in the Western theological tradition. Suffice it to say – regarding the complementarity of the three models, each of which has an undeniable biblical reference – that they cannot claim equal validity on the hermeneutical level. When the substitutionary model is taken as the foundational theory and the starting point, it can incorporate both the other two perspectives and offer a complementary view of the various biblical and theological elements. The same applies to the relationship between the two other models (a victory can be an example and an example can be victorious) which may be harmonised with each other. However, if we take as a starting point either the exemplary or the *Christus victor* models, neither of them can logically incorporate the theory of substitution, except in very artificial fashion by saying, for example, "Christ was victorious in our favour". This inability is particularly true with regard to penal substitution. How indeed could Christ be at the same time defeated under the wrath of God because of sin and victorious? Can death be a victory? What was defeated and how it was defeated is difficult to explain without reintroducing the notion of sin and substitution.

The relationship between sacrifice and imputation is therefore of vital importance for establishing both the hermeneutic centrality of substitution in redemption accomplished and the soteriological consequences for those united to him as their representative and mediator, in redemption applied. In the discussion below, we will briefly discuss the concepts of sacrifice, substitution and penalty and imputation itself.

II. Sacrifice

It has become common in biblical studies to present the various types of sacrifice of the Old Testament in such a way that their central meaning does not immediately appear clearly[6]. Sacrifice is presented variously as a way of making a gift, as a method of purification and restoration, as a means of establishing contact between the earthly world and the realm of the sacred, or as a way to solve the problem of violence[7]. Such an approach to the problem is disjunctive and the systemic dynamic underlying the various sacrificial practices is overlooked[8]. Instead of this a more specific and less descriptive approach is called for.

If, in ancient religions, sacrifice was an act of worship with a powerful mystical content, in the Old Testament revelation it is essentially the expression of a gulf existing between sinful man and a holy God[9]. Biblical sacrifices are acts intended to change the relationship between God and man[10]. An offering for an individual or a community is set aside specifically for this purpose and presented during a ceremony in which the obstacle to communion and blessing is removed. Sacrifice differs from other religious ceremonies, such as worship or prayer, because its specific aim is to restore fellowship with the divinity[11]. The first effect of the sacrifice is to erase sin and establish the character required for communion with God. God established the sacrificial institution in Israel with this overriding end.

In a Christian context, the nature of sacrifice has rarely been better defined than it was by Augustine: "Four things must be considered in every sacrifice, to whom it is offered, by whom it is offered, what is offered, and for whom it is offered." Augustine obviously had Hebrews 5.1 in mind: "Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in service of God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins." The priestly function does not exist to demonstrate something to those who are represented, be it forgiveness or reconciliation with God. Sacrifice is primarily a God-ward act, an offering presented to God. It is made because of sin, not out of love for God, nor as a form of fellowship in the eating of a sacrificial meal. It is because of sin that sacrifices are necessary and their effect is to remove the alienation of sin.

The purpose of sacrifice is further shown in Hebrews 5:3. Augustine comments, "The only true mediator, reconciling us to God by the sacrifice of peace remains with the One to whom he offered himself as a sacrifice, became one with those for whom he has sacrificed, and was both the priest and sacrifice"[12]. The dynamics of the sacrifice become evident in these comments. The different types and models in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament find their perfect expression in Christ, the source of eternal salvation and are therefore complete, effective and unrepeatable (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1).

The link between sacrifice and imputation is not obscure. It exists in the context of the dual function of the priest who performs his office both vis-à-vis God and for the people. The sacrificial act performed is recognized by God as relevant to the needs of the people represented. There is conjunction between the function of the priest, the death of the victim and forgiveness which is the condition of reconciliation in freedom, restoration and continuation of fellowship.

III. Substitution

As a substitutionary sacrifice Christ died for us, taking the place of sinners. It is possible, without much difficulty, to accept the idea that Christ

replaces us to establish perfect humanity or even that he died in our place to open the way to life, but the notion of *penal* substitution raises representation to another level. As an interpretation of the cross the idea that the one who is just suffers punishment in the place of sinners and for them is a notion too demanding for many. The penal concept means that Christ suffered the fate of sinners in judgment and objections are raised regarding the nature of this representation.

For this reason the concept of substitution as an interpretative model for the cross engenders reticence or more marked rejection. It includes the idea of exchange, in which a comparable component replaces another, and raises the question: how can Christ be a legitimate and appropriate substitute for *sinful* man, standing in his place and fufilling his responsibilities? Despite his reluctance with regard to penal substitution, the French Catholic theologian Bernard Sesboüé recognizes that substitution has an element of truth. According to him, Christ would have taken our place as follows:

By a death he did not deserve he accomplished the redemption of which we ... were incapable ... because of the solidarity established...The "in our place" is controlled by the "in our favour" and we should never forget it was "because of us". Christ restores us to our situation as partners with God; his freedom does not replace our freedom, but renews it[13].

By emphasizing the "because of us" and the "in our favour" as concepts that exegete the meaning of "in our place" Sesboüé seems to be making a valiant effort to retain the notion of representation while avoiding an idea of the identity between Christ on the one hand and the place and the judgment of the sinner on the other. A certain distance is maintained to preserve the freedom of action of Christ that Sesboüé considers to be necessary for our salvation. An unduly rigid interpretation of the "in our place" would imply an undue imposition of humanity on divinity.

The notion of substitution, without the further penal qualification, is an insufficient model for interpreting the meaning of the sacrifice of the cross. Indeed, without the necessary explanatory precision, substitution does not imply a precise notion of imputation. For it to be so, it is necessary to add the small word *huper*, "for us", which conveys a different meaning again from the one found in Sesboüé's explanation.

IV. Sacrifice and penal substitution

For classical Reformed theology, the defining element of the theology of the cross is generally seen to be its penal character. Christ's death is a sacrifice made under the conditions stipulated by the righteousness of God in judgment.

The term "penal substitution" indicates that sin is punished by divine justice in the person of the substitute, who is the object of judgment. Christ

assumed responsibility for the guilt of sinners in the deserved condemnation and punishment. By penal substitution sin is erased, the wrath of God is propitiated and the basis is established for a new relationship beyond condemnation and death. This results in a two-way reconciliation, even though God's being reconciled is primary - the sinner is reconciled with God and God with the sinner[14]. Substitutive penal suffering, which results from the wrath of God against sinfulness and against sinners, involves the identification of Jesus with their fate. This identification is the basis on which the death of Jesus accomplished atonement for us[15].

What then is the specific function of the substitution of Christ in a penal perspective? Is it that Christ suffered the wrath of God against sin and died because of God's judgment? This is the heart of the problem. The penal substitution of Christ is the vital centre of the atonement, the keystone without which everything falls. It is surprising that almost all contemporary Roman Catholic theologians of note try to avoid penal substitution. The idea that Christ could die under the wrath and curse of God seems repugnant to them[16].

A text often referred to in the debates on penal substitution is 1 Peter 2:24, where it is said that Christ "bore our sins in his body on the tree". How is this to be understood? It is difficult to say that Christ absorbed sin by dying, like a sponge absorbs water. Sin is of spiritual not material nature and how then could it be absorbed? The only way Christ could bear the sins, its most obvious sense, is to accept that the judgment against sin was borne and the consequence was death[17]. Several salient biblical examples serve to emphasize this point.

Christ "who knew no sin, he (God) has made him to be sin for us" indicates that the judgment was upon him, with the result that God no longer holds men to account for their sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). How could God take account of sin as a just motive for accusation and condemnation other than in the legal sense?

Being "reconciled to God by the death of his Son" is set in parallel to being "saved through him from wrath" in Romans 5:9-10. This is the case because the Son assumed the wrath of God in his death, so that condemantion does not reach those for whom Christ died.

Being redeemed from "the curse of the law" is not a possibility but a reality. Christ was cursed by being hung on a tree (Galatians 3:13) and his death was the legal consequence of his standing in the place of sinners for their salvation.

Believers in Christ are saved because sins were forgiven and erased when they are nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:13-15). Christ's death is the cause of forgiveness, because through it the accusation of the law was abolished.

As substitute for sinners Christ is more than a representative. He is the mediator between God and man who offered himself as a ransom to pay the legal debt for others (1 Timothy 2:5)

In Romans 8:32, Paul states that God "spared not his own Son, but...gave him up for us all." Terms like *spare* and *gave up* have a technical meaning in Scripture. The first is sacrificial and second is legal. The phrase "did not spare" is used in the Old Testament to describe the sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:12). In Acts 2:23 we read that Christ was "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Romans 8:32 means that God sent his own Son to be an offering for sin. To see in this text the sacrificial substitution of Christ and a legal divinely-ordained act is not twisting the text. The sacrificial and legal languages come together naturally to describe the cross as a penal act of substitution[18].

In Romans 3:24-26, which is a central text, both penal and sacrificial expressions are used in a complementary manner. Christ was "destined as a means of expiation". This also demonstrates divine justice as God deals with sin through the cross, being both "just, and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus." God is just because his justice in regard to sin is satisfied by a just judgment. He is the "one who justifies" because there is no longer any condemnation for those who believe, as their sins were abolished by the death of Christ.

A consequent and impartial exegesis of these texts illustrates that the death of Christ is best understood as a penal sanction, under the terms of the law of God. It is substitutionary since Christ died "for" sinners, being condemned for them. It is a sacrificial act by which sin was removed once and for all. The language of sacrifice and the penal justice coalesce in the New Testament, and highlight what was necessary for salvation to be complete.

V. Imputation

Union with Christ, the mediator and covenant head is the fruit of redemption. The union is rooted in Christ's righteousness as the believer is bound to his justice by the sacrifice of the cross[19].

The basis of forgiveness and acceptance of sinners is only in the righteousness of the Son of God himself. Ultimately, there is only one form of justice, divine justice. It is "God-justice", cannot be claimed by anyone else and is opposed to any form of justice that man would claim by obedience to the law, good works or membership in God's people.

The Gospel reveals the righteousness of God (Romans 1:17) in the justification of sinners[20]. God's justice, or the justice of God in Christ, still belongs to God even when it is imputed to us and God becomes "the Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6).

Two texts illustrate the link between justice and imputation. In the first, Romans 3:21-26, the apostle speaks of redemption and atonement as demonstrations of God's justice: "But now the righteousness of God has been

manifested apart from the law... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... and are justified by grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith."

The justice of God demonstrated in the death of Christ has two aspects[21]. The first is reflected in the words "righteousness of God" in verses 21-22 and describes a reality that God reveals and gives to man through Christ. This righteousness is given to believers and meets their needs because it is "without the law" and independent of any human effort. The second aspect, reflected in the third mention of the word "justice" (v.25), concerns God's action against sin in appointing Christ to be a propitiation for sin. Being justified by "blood" is being "saved from the wrath of God" through Christ (Romans 5:9). God is "just" because he has dealt with sin through the death of the Lord Jesus and "justifies" the person who has faith in Christ[22].

In the second text, 2 Corinthians 5:21, the dual nature of imputation comes to light: "He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him". It is for sinners that Christ was made sin and it is on their behalf that he accomplished the justice necessary for their acquittal. Christ was "made sin" in such a way that sin cannot be considered as being his, which would contradict the fact that he is "without sin[23]. Could we take this expression to mean that Christ was made sin "in our favour", a sacrifice for sin as Sesboüé and others claim? "Made sin" implies a good deal more than that[24]. As there was no sin in Christ, his identification with sin can come in no way other than that of occupying the place of sinners to undergo judgment for their sin. "God made sin" means that the Father laid sin on the incarnate Son and made him the innocent object of wrath and judgment, with the result that, by the cross, the sin of the world is judged and removed[25]. The final judgment and death sentence was played out in advance on the cross and the result is the acquittal of sinners through the justice and obedience of Christ with the correlates of resurrection and life. The eschatological judgment is revealed in the present time. The gospel is the revelation of God's righteousness for everyone who believes[26].

Sin is judged in a way satisfactory to the demands of the righteousness of God the Father and that is acceptable to him. The sin question was settled by the justice of the Son, through his perfect holiness and obedience. When he was "made sin" and suffered in the place of sinners it was not for his own deserts but for others. Full and complete divine justice is imputed to sinners who can stand justified before God: there is "no condemnation" for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

But how is this justice communicated in union with Christ? It is not instilled in believers as a moral quality. The perfections of Christ cannot be transferred in the manner of a serum injected into a body. It is only by

imputation that sinners become beneficiaries of the work of Christ. God imputes the righteousness of Christ, the personal righteousness belonging both to his active and passive obedience[27]. This justice is very different from the works righteousenss of Judaism, which the apostle counters in Romans and Galatians. Justice is not acquired by respect for the law or by obedience to the commandments. It is manifested apart from the law and no-one is justified by the works of the law (Romans 3:21,28).

The doctrinal construct of the apostle Paul is illustrated in Romans 4, by the example of Abraham, where the word "imputation" is used a dozen times. "Abraham believed and it was counted to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3,22; Genesis 15:6)[28]. What did Abraham do? Nothing. He believed the promise of God. His justice and acceptance came from God and his promise. If a man "does a work" (4:4), the reward of his work is not a "grace" but is owed as remuneration. Abraham did no work, but had faith in the word of God: "As for him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." (4:4-5). Abraham was "fully convinced...that what God promised, he also had the power to accomplish...and it was credited to him as righteousness" (4:21-22). Justice was not from Abraham but from God. The words "counted for righteousness" also relate to believers to whom God imputes righteousness because they believe "in him who raised from the dead the Lord Jesus, delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:23-24).

The apostle emphasizes this by referring to David who in Psalm 32:1-2 says : "Blessed is he whose transgression is removed, whose sin is forgiven! Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity". This righteousness without works concerns the ungodly! This is because "Christ...died for the ungodly" when they were still sinners without power (Romans 5:6-8)[29]. Justification finds its necessary presupposition in the imputation of righteousness[30]. In other words, if a person is justified, it is made possible by the declaration of this state based on the prior imputation of the righteousness of God. Imputed righteousness is a reality based on the work of Christ, who died for the sins and was raised for justification[31].

Four conclusions

The imputation of the righteousness of God has four specific characteristics that describe its unique nature and its relation to the sacrifice of the cross.

Firstly, it is double imputation functionning simultaneously in two directions with two facets: from God in his justice and from man in his sin. What belongs to God alone comes to belong to sinners and what belongs to sinners comes to belong to Christ. Divine justice is eternal and is eternally

effective for the salvation of sinners; Christ died "once for sin" (Hebrews 9:26-28) and the sin was judged and abolished in him. This is symbolized in the act of sacrifice by the laying of hands on the head of the victim.

Secondly, the imputation is real and not a legal fiction. Sinners become the righteousness of God when the merits of Christ are imputed to them, since God accepts them and considers them as just because of Christ. Likewise, Christ was really made sin for them and was condemned to death in order that the consequence of sin be removed. This is of the essence of what is enacted in animal sacrifices that were inadequate as sacrifice is complete only in the ultimate sacrifice of the Son.

Thirdly, imputation is direct and immediate, as classic theology states. Because of the cross, when God considers sinners, he does not see them as such, but as the justice of Christ, which has become theirs. As mediator Christ acted for them in their place, and their sin died in his death, their life appeared in his resurrection. We did nothing of what is imputed to us, and Christ also did nothing of what is made over to him[32].

Finally, justice is imputed to sinners by means of faith in the efficacity of Christ's sacrifice. Sinners are justified *through* faith not *by* or *because* of faith[33]. The latter expressions attribute causality to faith in justification, and faith would then be a meritorious act contributing to justification. However the reason and foundation of the justification of sinners is ever and always the divine justice of God manifested in the death and resurrection of Christ and applied to sinners. The glorious transfer is the demonstration of the amazing grace of God in Christ. The uniqueness of the imputation corresponds to the uniqueness of the sacrifice.

Notes

1. A translation of "Sacrifice et imputation" in *Sacrifice et expiation*, P. Berthoud, P. Wells, eds., (Cléon d'Andran/Aix-en-Provence, Ed. Excelsis/Ed. Kerygma, 2008), p.143-159.
2. A. Harnack comments on the historical effects of Christ's sacrifice by saying that its finality was such that it brought an end to bloody sacrifices as it eclipsed their value. *L'essence du christianisme*, (Paris, Fischbacher, 1907), p.192f. B.B. Warfield refers to this comment in "Christ our Sacrifice" in *Works*, II, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), p.434f.
3. P. Wells, "Hospitality and Ministry in Trinitarian Perspective", in *Triniteit en Kerk*, G.C. den Hertog, H.R. Keurhorst, H.G.L. Peels, eds., (Heerenveen, Groen, 2014), p.174-184.
4. As in B. Sesboüé, *Jésus-Christ l'unique médiateur. Essai sur la rédemption et le salut*, I, (Paris, Desclée, 1988), ch.13.
5. The language of sin being absorbed and defeated at the cross seems to come from P.T. Forsyth in the line of J. McLeod Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement* (1856). It was also used more recently by Frances Young before being taken up by several of the writers of *Atonement Today*.
6. Cf., R. de Vaux, Ancient Israel, II, (London, Darton, Longman, Todd), ch.10.
7. J. Goldingay, "Old Testament Sacrifice and the Death of Christ" in Atonement Today, London, SPCK, 1995, ch.1; M. Winter, The Atonement, London, Geoffrey Chapman, p.12ff.
8. As in H. Blocher, "The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ: The Current Theological Situation", *European Journal of Theology* 8:1 (1999).

9. Cf., J. Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, (Carlisle, Paternoster, 1998 (1959)), p.29f.
10. Sacrifices (*zebach* refers to the animal sacrificed) belong to the broad category of offerings or oblations (*gorban:* that which is brought nigh) or "sacrifices of communion" (*mattenoch qodesh*). An offering can also be a gift (*minchah*).
11. G. Vos points out that all sacrifices are sacred offerings, but all offerings are not sacrifices and that if worship is present in sacrifice, it is not its motivating factor, in *Biblical Theology*, (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1975 (1948)), p.157f.
12. Augustin, *On the Trinity*, IV.14.19.
13. B. Sesboüé, *Jésus-Christ, l'unique médiateur*, p.359.
14. Cf., J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1961), p.33ff.
15. W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p.427.
16. We refer, among others, to the francophone Catholic theologians Lyonnet, Sesboüé, Benoît, Medebielle, Bigaouette, Caza, Galot and Dewerrere.
17. This is even more obvious when we take into account that the apostles often refer to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:4-5. See the study on this subject by G. Kwakkel in *Sacrifice et expiation*, note 1.
18. Cf., Blocher, art. cit, passim.
19. The mechanism of imputation is illustrated in Philemon 1:18 where Paul writes the debt of Onesimus to his own account.
20. J. Murray, "Justification" in *Collected Writings*, II, (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1977).
21. Concerning justice as belonging only to God see Isaiah 45:24-25, 54:14, 63:1-3, 64:13, 65:24-25; Romans 8:33.
22. Cf., Romans 5:17-19, Galatians 2:21.
23. Hebrews 4:15, 7:26 ; 1 Peter 2:22 ; 1 John 3:5.
24. On this see C. Hodge, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (London, Banner of Truth, 1959), p.148 and P.E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1962), p.214f.
25. Hughes, *ibid*, p.213. remarks that Christ was not made a sinner and that we are not made inherently righteous but "the righteousness of God".
26. H. Ridderbos, *Paul*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1975), p.168.
27. It is difficult to see how a valid distinction could be made between the passive and active obedience of Christ in imputation as it is the one justice of the one Christ that is imputed and not just a part of it.
28. *logizomai* in verses 6,8,11,22-24, cf. 2 Corinthians 5:19. See B.B. Warfield, "Imputation" in *Works*, (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1981), IX, p.301-309.
29. H. Ridderbos, op. cit ., p.176.
30. J. Murray, *Works*, II, p.210.
31. J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p.124.
32. J. Owen, "The Doctrine of Justification by Faith" in *Works*, V, (London, Banner of Truth, 1967 (1850)), p.169 and particularly chapters 7 and 8.
33. J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p.125.

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BOOK REVIEWS

John Newton. From Disgrace to Amazing Grace,
Jonathan Aitken, Crossway, 2013, pbk, 400 pages, $21.99.

There is a certain irony in the title Jonathan Aitken has given to this biography of John Newton, the converted slave trader. He calls it, "From Disgrace to Amazing Grace". The irony lies in the fact that this could also be a summary of Aitken's own story. He served as Chief Secretary to the Treasury in John Major's Conservative Government but then faced serious accusation of wrong doing, committed perjury and was sentenced to eighteen months in prison. It was a spectacular fall for a man with such a privileged background and the credentials which suited him for public life. But while at his lowest, Aitken, like Newton, experienced that amazing grace which reaches down and lifts a man from the fearful pit and miry clay and sets his feet on the rock. Aitken emerged from prison with a clear grasp of Scripture, a good knowledge of Greek and a desire to serve God. He brings to this biography the kind of personal insights other biographers could not bring. As Philip Yancey states in the Foreword, "Like Newton, Aitken does not defend his past but rather falls back on the amazing grace that saved a wretch like him."

The author has researched his subject carefully and one of the strengths of this biography is in the copious quotations he gives from Newton himself. The story of John Newton's life is, says Aitken, "stranger than fiction." It is certainly a story of many twists and turns and with many different themes.

It is a love story of great intensity. Newton first met his future wife, Polly Catlett, when she was a girl of thirteen. From that moment she was never out of his mind. For years, says the author, it was "only this unrequited love for Polly which restrained Newton's destructive instincts."

It is a story of shameful depravity and involvement in the worst excesses of the slave trade.

It is a story of a wonderful conversion so unexpected that the recipient of this grace was astonished to find himself, while in the middle of a terrifying storm, beginning to pray, "Lord have mercy on us." His account of this conversion entitled *An Authentic Narrative* was published in 1764 and became a best seller both at home and abroad.

It is the story of fifty years of devoted service to his Saviour as a preacher of the gospel and pastor of the flock of God.

It is also the story of remarkable influence in the corridors of power for Newton stood alongside William Wilberforce, that great reformer who pressed on relentlessly till the notorious slave trade was abolished throughout the Empire. Newton provided Wilberforce with much of the ammunition he used

to such effect in the debates on the floor of Parliament. And not only that, it was also Newton's wise counsel which persuaded Wilberforce to continue his career in politics rather than seek ordination of the Church of England.

Newton's own journey into the ministry is a compelling part of the whole story. Though his sense of call was clear and strong, he did not proceed to seek ordination without serious searching of heart. He called the record of this self-examination, written in 1758, *Miscellaneous Thoughts and Enquiries upon an important subject*. Aitken's comment is entirely pertinent, "Any candidate for ordination in modern times could well profit from studying the way Newton tested his vocation two and a half centuries ago." Certainly the blessing of God rested on Newton's ministry both in Olney and later in London. The account of the pastoral care he gave to his spiritually depressed friend, William Cowper is particularly moving.

Aitken's biography is well researched and written. Some of the accounts of the treatment of slaves are graphic and disturbing. There is also some repetition throughout the book. Neither of these however hinders the impact of the story. This is an excellent account of a life which deserves to be better and more widely known. It provides, incidentally, an interesting insight into life in England in the eighteenth century. It exposes a society which, while outwardly religious, could still regard such an abomination as the slave trade as a legitimate and indeed worthy occupation. In this regard there is the final irony that in this twenty first century the Parliament at Westminster has returned to the issue of slavery and is considering a piece of legislation known as "The Modern Slavery Bill".

The author has fulfilled his goal of describing a life which was marked by disgrace but transformed by amazing grace. To read of such grace both warms the heart and strengthens faith.

Knox Hyndman

Stirred By A Noble Theme: The book of Psalms in the life of the church, edited by Andrew G. Shead, Apollos, 2014, pbk, 301 pages, £14.99.

From an Old Testament point of view we have come generally to expect good things out of Moore College, Sydney – academically challenging things, stimulating things, things in which we may not be able to dot every 'i' and stroke every 't' as their scholars engage with the challenging world of contemporary Old Testament Studies.

This latest, somewhat weighty tome, a symposium of twelve articles edited by A.G. Shead, Head of Old Testament at Moore College, is no exception. Broadly speaking, the book arose out of a concern we share. Since no biblical book has had a richer history in the life of the church, "and has shaped the way

Christians exist in the world", it is "troubling that so many evangelical churches here set the Psalms to one side" and "with the dominance of contemporary music some of us here stopped singing them. The aim of this book is to encourage churches to take up the Psalms and to use them well". Narrowly speaking, the book arose out of the 2012 Moore College School of Theology, when some twelve "cutting edge", mainly Old Testament, scholars submitted articles on the Christian use of the Psalms, especially on how to "read the Psalms christologically, without doing violence to their initial context and meaning".

The book is laid out in two parts. In the first part we have fundamental articles on the Psalter as a book, not just a miscellaneous collection, the Christology of the Psalms, the use of the Psalms in Luke-Acts and Hebrews, how the Psalms feed into Christian doctrine and (fascinatingly) on patristic preaching of the Psalms.

In the second part of the book more specific matters are addressed: the challenge of translating the Psalms (an article especially interesting to the current reviewer having spent ten years on a new translation and version!), the use of exilic Psalms, the use of the Psalms of lament, the use of the imprecatory Psalms, the use of the "Psalms of perplexity", how the Psalms affect our political thinking and, finally, how the Psalms stimulate missionary vision.

All in all what we have here is a biblical-theological defence of the Book of Psalms which is to be welcomed as an effort "to tackle the reluctance to use the Psalms in churches enamoured with the newly written songs". As an academic work, how it may succeed with the average church member in this aim is open to question. It is certainly a book that every minister could and should read, and it should then be an influence for good from the pulpit.

As it says, the book does not always rest on the "safe" answers to hermeneutical questions and may, at times, "push us beyond our comfort zones". We do not dot every 'i' (the reviewer was, for example, a little irked by the last line of Shead's translation of Psalm 2 which forms a frontispiece to the volume – "Lucky for all who hide themselves in Him"), but we recommend it as very useful reading for ministers and theological students. It will confirm your love of the Psalms and the Christ of whom they all speak.

Norris Wilson

The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology, edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, Ashgate, 2012, hbk, 334 pages, £85.00.

John Owen (1616-83) is a towering figure in the history of Reformed theology and has exercised extensive, and sometimes controversial, influence on theological thinking over the centuries since his death. His extensive

writings have provided abundant material for scholarly argument and reflection and so, inevitably, Owen scholarship is constantly developing. The purpose of *Ashgate Research Companions* is, the publishers state, "to offer scholars and graduate students a comprehensive and authoritative state-of-the-art review of current research in a particular area". This volume on John Owen's theology succeeds admirably in fulfilling that aim.

Many of the chapters originated in a conference held in Cambridge in 2008, whilst others have been added for the published version. The contributors are drawn from a variety of confessional traditions, and represent some of the best current scholarship in Britain, Europe and North America. The diversity of authors results in a stimulating diversity of viewpoints and no attempt is made to impose an artificial unity on the material presented. This is a volume to read carefully and critically.

The book is divided into three sections: Method, Theology and Practise [sic]. The first two are each comprised of six chapters, whilst the third is made up of five chapters. The concluding bibliography of primary and secondary sources, complied by John Tweedale, a PCA pastor in Pittsburgh and Adjunct Professor of Church History at the RP Seminary, is a most valuable resource for those with a serious interest in Owen, running as it does to over thirty pages.

Among the subjects addressed in the *Companion* are 'John Owen on Faith and Reason' (Sebastian Rehnman), 'Covenant Theology as Relational Theology' (Willem van Asselt), 'The Spirit as Gift: Explorations in John Owen's Pneumatology' (Kelly Kapic), 'Christ's Priestly Oblation and Intercession' (Edwin Tay), 'John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context' (Robert Letham) and 'Justification and Mystical Union with Christ: Where Does Owen Stand?' (George Hunsinger). The essays in the third section deal with some issues often overlooked in relation to Owen's thought, including the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer, infant baptism and infant salvation, and the well-meant gospel offer.

For all their diversity of outlook and approach, each chapter offers food for thought, whether in agreement or (on occasion) disagreement. Most of the topics are of perennial interest and figure in current debates. Sebastian Rehnman in considering faith and reason in Owen, shows that for Owen philosophical argument is neither necessary nor sufficient in coming to faith in God, and that faith relies on revelation alone. Willem Van Asselt considers the views of Calvin and Owen on the 'pactum salutis', the pre-temporal covenant within the Trinity, concluding that for Owen this covenant is not a piece of abstract metaphysical speculation but a strong expression of God's actual involvement in human history. Crawford Gribben offers an interesting study of *Bibliotheca Oweniana*, Edward Millington's auction catalogue of the contents of Owen's library (1684), concluding that this document is not necessarily a reliable guide to the contents of Owen's library and so of limited value

regarding his reading and study preferences. The paper by Suzanna McDonald on 'Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ: John Owen and the "Reforming" of the Beatific Vision' examines a subject which would not usually be associated with Owen's name. Whilst the beatific vision is more often encountered in Roman Catholic theologies, McDonald shows that for Owen there will be for Christians a beatific vision, centred on Christ, both intellectually and by sight. She suggests, however, that Owen neglects the role of the Holy Spirit in formulating this doctrine.

These are but a few samples of the riches provided in this volume. Whilst it is clearly not for beginners, it will be necessary reading for those seriously engaging with Owen's theology, and indeed seventeenth century Reformed theology of any variety.

David McKay

BOOK NOTICES

Systematic Theology. Volume Two. The Beauty of Christ: A Trinitarian Vision, Douglas F. Kelly, Mentor, 2014, hbk., 567 pages, £24.99.

The second volume of Douglas Kelly's *Systematic Theology* comes garlanded with praise from a wide variety of readers. In it Kelly deals with the great subjects of the person and work of Christ. He does so with careful attention to the exegesis of the relevant biblical texts, thus avoiding the weaknesses of older works which often settled for lists of 'proof texts' which left the readers to figure out their relevance and significance. Kelly also draws on a very wide selection of resources from the history of Christian theology, giving greater prominence to the theologians of the early centuries than is sometimes the case in Reformed writing, drawing too on what is valuable in medieval theology and also mining the riches of the Reformed tradition over the centuries. His treatment too is right up to date, not only quoting contemporary authors, but evaluating current controversies such as that relating to Bible translations for use in Muslim contexts. Kelly's pastoral concern is also evident: this is not a coldly intellectual exercise but a heart-warming engagement with the truth of the God he loves and serves. The subtitle of the book indicates the particular emphasis of Kelly's Christology, namely the beauty of Christ, which he expounds in a fully Trinitarian context, in a helpful and challenging way. This is a significant addition to the selection of systematic theologies currently on offer and will prove to be a valuable resource for the Church for years to come.

Covenanted Uniformity in Religion. The Influence of the Scottish Commissioners on the Ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly, Wayne R. Spear, Reformation Heritage Books, 2013, hbk., 236 pages, $40.00.

It was well worth waiting for! Significant academic research does not always make its way into published form, and in the days before the Internet offered new ways of reaching a readership, that was especially the case. Thus the ground-breaking work of Wayne Spear on the influence of the Scottish Commissioners on the ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly, first set out in his 1976 doctoral thesis for the University of Pittsburgh, has finally been given the kind of prominence that it has long deserved. Wayne Spear, for many years Professor of Systematic Theology at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, concentrates his attention on one of the

neglected documents of the Assembly, the Form of Church Government, and by painstaking analysis seeks to determine the significance of the input of the Scottish Commissioners, such as Rutherford and Gillespie, on the final form of Presbyterianism adopted by the Assembly. Among other things Spear demonstrates that the influence of the Scots was such that the final document was accepted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, but there was a degree of dissatisfaction in that most of the elements of Presbyterian polity were declared by the Form to be permissible, or even recommended, but were not 'by divine right' as the Scots believed. This is a fascinating piece of research, not only on the Scots at Westminster but on the fundamental principles of church government. Reformation Heritage Books are to be warmly commended for publishing the book, and those of us who once had to work from photocopies of the PhD thesis are especially appreciative.

The Theology of the Westminster Standards,
J. V. Fesko, Crossway, 2014, pbk., 441 pages, $28.00.

The Westminster Standards, namely the Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, have provided the theological backbone for Presbyterian churches for over four centuries. For those who wish to understand the theology of the Bible, as well as of Presbyterianism, the study of these documents is essential. Many study guides exist, but this new volume from J.V. Fesko of Westminster Theological Seminary in California will amply repay careful use. Fesko offers 'Historical Context and Theological Insights', and the offer is made good in some 400 pages of thoughtful exposition of the Standards. Especially useful are the copious references to seventeenth century theologians, British and Continental, which serve to set the Westminster documents in their proper historical context. Different emphases and even conflicts within the Reformed family are not glossed over, but the whole range of theological topics is handled with exemplary fairness. The resultant volume is a resource that all serious students of the Reformed theological tradition will want to have close at hand.

The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis, Alister A. McGrath,
Wiley-Blackwell, 2014, pbk., 191 pages, £19.99.

Among the many works, both scholarly and popular, marking the 50th anniversary of the death of C. S Lewis, this collection of essays by Oxford theologian Alister McGrath, occupies a valuable position. McGrath is thoroughly conversant with the broad range of Lewis's work and is a (not

uncritical) admirer. In the eight chapters of this book McGrath seeks to situate Lewis in the wider intellectual world of his day, so that his particular concerns and emphases are seen in their proper context and Lewis's unique contributions to Christian thought and apologetics can be fairly assessed. Thus McGrath considers issues such as Lewis's philosophical context at Oxford in the 1920s, Lewis's concept of myth and his use of the metaphors of light, sun and sight. In relation to apologetics, McGrath examines Lewis's apologetic method and, in particular, his 'argument from desire', which still provokes considerable debate. Lewis as Anglican and Lewis as theologian also come in for careful consideration. McGrath has done significant original work on Lewis – this is not simply a summary of ideas available elsewhere – and argues clearly and persuasively for his conclusions. Readers, whether critically sympathetic to Lewis or fundamentally hostile to his views, will find much to stimulate their thinking in these pages.

Free to Say No? Free Will and Augustine's Evolving Doctrines of Grace and Election, Eric L. Jenkins, James Clark and Co., 2013, pbk., 131 pages, £15.00.

Augustine of Hippo is undoubtedly one of the most influential theologians ever produced by the Christian Church. The Reformers, such as Calvin, constantly referred to Augustine as they expounded the doctrine of God's sovereign grace. It is well known, however, that theologians of diametrically opposed views appeal to Augustine, and his doctrine of grace is in fact no exception. In his early writings he appears to speak of fallen human beings having a capacity to choose either good or evil, along with an ability to reject God's grace. In his later writings he appears to deny such 'freedom' of the human will and speaks of divine grace as irresistible. Some scholars have tried to harmonise the two positions, claiming that there is no actual contradiction, whilst others interpret the later teaching in the light of the earlier and still others see the later teaching as determinative. Eric Lane's careful study allows Augustine to speak for himself as the author traces the great theologian's views chronologically from early works such as *True Religion* and *Free Will*, through middle works such as *To Simplician* to later works such as *Enchiridion* and *City of God*. Jenkins argues that Augustine did indeed changes his position, reaching the point where he denied the ability of the fallen will to choose the good and placed all his emphasis on the sovereign grace of God as essential for faith and salvation. Jenkins attributes this development to four factors – Augustine's mature views of God's unconditional election and omnipotence, his conception of evil as a privation of good and his belief in the saving efficacy of infant baptism. This is a fascinating study of a very

important set of issues and, whether we agree with Augustine at every point or not, we have to take his arguments with great seriousness and listen to them as he actually formulated them.

The King in His Beauty. A Biblical Theology of the Old and the New Testaments, Thomas R. Schreiner, Baker Academic, 2013, hbk., 714 pages, $44.99.

New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner argues that the Old Testament and the New Testament form one book, telling one story, revealing one God. That this is the case is demonstrated in Schreiner's comprehensive yet accessible examination of the theology of the books of the two Testaments taken in canonical order. He rightly demonstrates that the theme of the reign of God, established through his covenants, runs all the way through Scripture and serves as a bond of unity for the whole Bible. Most of the biblical books are treated individually in separate chapters, but there are a few exceptions. The twelve Minor Prophets are examined together, thematically. The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are treated together, as are the Gospel and Letters of John (but not Revelation) and also the writings of Paul. Some may have preferred a separate consideration of each Pauline Letter, in order to highlight the distinctive contribution of each to Paul's overall theology, but that is perhaps a matter of personal preference. This volume serves to provide an excellent overview of the sweep of God's royal redemptive purpose and will be of great value to serious Bible readers, students and, not least, preachers.

Process and Providence. The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1845-1929, Bradley J Gundlach, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013, pbk., 388 pages, £25.99

The creation/evolution debate is often cast in very simple, black-and-white terms, with two mutually exclusive positions slugging it out, and mediating views caricatured or dismissed. For some the only possible Christian view is total rejection of evolution, and so it may come as a surprise to some that Reformed theologians of impeccable orthodoxy, such as Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield, held rather more nuanced positions which, in certain respects, accepted the possibility of evolutionary development. This comprehensive study by history professor Bradley Gundlach offers a detailed analysis of the fascinating debates regarding evolution that took place within Princeton Seminary over an 80 year period at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. There are significant differences among

the theologians studied and, whilst all strove to maintain the uniqueness of man as God's image bearer and the absolute sovereignty of God as Creator and Redeemer, they exhibit varying degrees of willingness to accept development in the biological realm. This is a valuable and thought-provoking book and deserves careful consideration, especially given the polarised nature of debates about evolution and creation.

Jonathan Edwards and the Church, Rhys S. Bezzant, Oxford University Press, 2014, hbk., 314 pages, £32.99.

It might seem that few areas of the theology of Jonathan Edwards can have been overlooked in the plethora of books and article on Edwards that have appeared in recent years. Nevertheless little attention has been paid to Edwards' doctrine of the Church, a gap which is amply filled by this comprehensive study of Edwards' ecclesiology by Australian scholar Rhys Bezzant. He adopts a chronological approach to Edwards' thought, examining a wide range of his writings at different stages of his ministry and tracing the development of his views in relation to Reformed predecessors and also the debates which raged in his own day. Although living through times of revival, Edwards' did not weaken his commitment to the Church in pursuit of religious experiences (as many evangelicals today tend to do). Instead he argued that the Church will ordinarily help us to receive the grace of God and provides an ordered community in which Christians are to pursue their callings in the world. Edwards of necessity had to integrate into the usual Reformed model of the Church the revival experiences he encountered and also new ideas such as the Concert for Prayer, but he did not downplay the role of the Church in the plan of God. Edwards' doctrine of the Church, says Bezzant, 'was itself a compass by which he was enabled to navigate the currents and reefs of the revivals' waters' (p.3). As always, Edwards is a most fruitful conversation partner, and his view of ecclesiology is no exception. Bezzant's volume offers valuable material for contemporary thinking on the Church.

Evangelical Theology. A Biblical and Systematic Introduction, Michael F. Bird, Zondervan, 2013, hbk., 912 pages, $49.99.

Australian theologian Michael Bird offers in this weighty tome 'a systematic theology written from the perspective of a biblical theologian'. He thus aims to combine two disciplines that often are treated (and sometimes behave) as rivals. He regards the centre, unity and boundary of evangelical faith as the *evangel*, the gospel, and Bird's goal is to make this the centre and

unifying thread of his presentation of theology and also the hermeneutical lens through which each area of theology is viewed. Theology. Bird argues, is the drama of what he terms *gospelizing*, performing and living out the gospel in the theatre of Christian life. As far as the structure of the book is concerned, this approach appears to make one main difference to the traditional method of presenting systematic theology, namely the moving of eschatology to a positon after the doctrine of God and before Christology. This, Bird argues, reflects the pervasive nature of references to the Kingdom of God in Scripture and its centrality in the preaching of Jesus. Bird brings together a great amount of material in what is a substantial volume, supplying both extended biblical exegesis and a wide range of theological conversation partners. The presentation is very user friendly, clearly written, with side bars, tables and charts, along with suggestions for further reading and occasional lists of 'Cool Internet Resources' which should appeal to today's tech-savvy students. There is much of value here, but some significant reservations need to be noted. Bird, for example, adopts a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20, which has a significant (we would argue deleterious) effect on his eschatology. Of even greater significance is the almost total absence of the doctrine of union with Christ, a doctrine which is of critical importance to many areas of theology, including atonement, justification and sanctification. Linked to this is a reluctance to accept the imputation of the active obedience of Christ to believers. These are serious defects which readers need to be aware of, given the wide-ranging effects they have on Bird's theology. Used with discernment, this will be a valuable resource, but not a first choice for theological study.

The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction, Roger E. Olson, IVP Academic (USA), 2013, hbk., 690 pages, $40.00.

This volume is a revision of *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* written by Roger Olson and Stanley Grenz (IVP, 1992). Grenz died in 2005 and so this revision is the work of Olson alone. The author aims to trace the development of theology from the nineteenth century right up to the present day, and to do so in a way that is accessible to students and pastors. Olson does not try to include every detail of the movements and ideas that came to the fore in these years, but describes the book thus: 'Think of it, then, as a satellite view of a city in which the major landmarks are visible (because the view has been enlarged) but not every detail is visible.' To give unity to the previous volume Grenz and Olson concentrated on the theme of the transcendence and the immanence of God: this time Olson takes as his focus modernity and theological responses to it, both positive and negative. In many respects this is a new book rather than a revision of the older study. Much more

material on nineteenth century theology is included, but all the significant figures of the twentieth century are considered, from German Liberals such as Ritschl through to postliberal and postmodern theologians of the twenty-first century. In so far as the complexity of the ideas allows, Olson's treatment of his material is clear and accessible. There will of course be debate on some of his opinions. His strong commitment to an Arminian theology is perhaps reflected in his critical comments, for example, on Charles Hodge. Nevertheless Olson offers a wealth of useful analysis in what will undoubtedly be a widely used textbook on modern (and postmodern) theology.

A Commentary on Judges and Ruth, Robert B. Chisholm Jr., Kregel Academic, 2013, hbk., 697 pages, £23.99.

Material on these books of the Old Testament is scarce and so a thorough exegetical commentary on Judges and Ruth from a firmly conservative perspective is most welcome. After an extensive introduction (105 pages) in which the usual matters of date, context, literary structure, theological content and problems with chronology are addressed, Chisholm provides a detailed commentary on the Hebrew text of Judges that is thoroughly in touch with current writing on the book, yet which keeps the biblical text firmly at the centre of consideration. Similarly, after 32 pages of introduction, Ruth is also exegeted carefully and thoroughly. A knowledge of Hebrew would be important, if not quite essential, in order to benefit fully from Chisholm's comments. He does keep preachers in mind by including advice on preaching the text and also evaluation of other commentaries and expositions (high praise for Dale Ralph Davis on Judges!). He even provides outlines for expository sermon series on both books. Preachers and serious Bible students will have cause to thank Chisholm for his labours on two important yet neglected Old Testament books.

David McKay