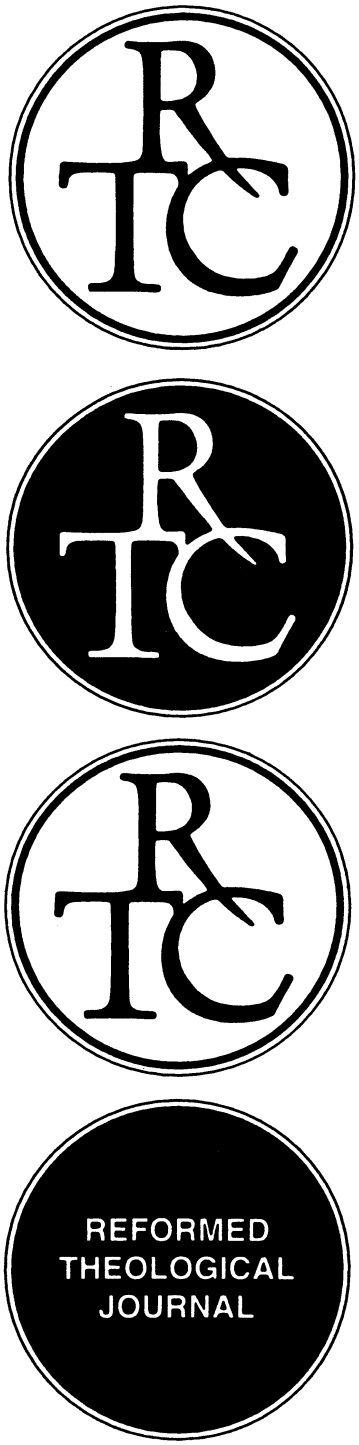

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CONTENTS

THE COVENANTAL CONTEXT IN WHICH PASTORAL MINISTRY FUNCTIONS

Robert L. W. McCollum

Robert McCollum is Principal of the Reformed Theological College, Belfast, and Professor of Pastoral Theology and Homiletics. He retired as minister of Lisburn Reformed Presbyterian Church in 2018.

Since God addressed the 'serpent' in the Garden of Eden the church has encountered many enemies. That comes as no surprise because God placed 'enmity' between the seed of the evil one and the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15). Theologian Herman Bavinck explains the purpose of this enmity: 'In his punishment on the serpent and on humanity, God's mercy triumphs over judgment as he annuls the covenant made with evil and puts enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.'[1] In other words, God came in his grace to break up the covenantal relationship between men and Satan. He placed enmity between them instead of the friendship league that they had entered into.

In the first few centuries of the Christian Church that opposition was open, direct and often violent. Many Christians were brutally put to death by the Roman authorities. In spite of this, Christianity flourished.

After Emperor Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire the world pretended to become the friend of the church. But such an alliance almost accomplished what the bloody persecutions of Nero, Trajan or Diocletian had failed to do – the extinction of the Christian Church. The Church's guard was down and the true gospel was perverted – ushering in the Dark Ages.

During the period of the Reformation in the 16th century the Church again faced violent opposition. This intense opposition was often met with faith and courage: the blood of the martyrs becoming the seed of the Church.

The liberalism and modernism that swept through many institutions training men for the ministry, in the 19th and 20th centuries, had a disastrous and devastating effect on the Christian Church. Rather than building up the Church, it undermined the Church's foundation – the person and work of Christ and the infallibility and authority of Scripture. No longer was Jesus Christ accepted as the Holy Son of God, the only Redeemer of men, who died a substitutionary death to save his people from the penalty of their sin.

The Bible, liberals taught, was only infallible in relation to matters of faith and not with reference to scientific or historical detail. Churches that embraced such philosophies soon began to crumble. Ministers who bought into the liberal agenda soon began preaching to ever dwindling congregations.

Now that we have moved into the third decade of the 21st century, what is Satan's strategy in his ongoing onslaught on the Church? I believe that for some time he has tempted the Church to think and act pragmatically rather than biblically. Sadly, many have succumbed to this temptation. The prevailing attitude, though not explicitly stated, is: if we are going to win the world then we must become like the world.

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[1] Herman Bavinck,. *Reformed Dogmatics*, Volume 3: *'Sin and Salvation in Christ'*, translated by J Bolt and J Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), p.193.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s there was an undeniable music revolution promoted by such icons as Elvis Presley, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. The Church in an attempt to ape the world has set out on its own music revolution, leading to what has been termed 'the worship wars'. Repeated warnings by John Blanchard and others have gone unheeded. Ireland may have been slower on the uptake than other regions of the UK, but she is catching up fast.

The Feminist Movement was on the march for most of the 20th century, but by the 1970s it took on a much more radical form. The evangelical church in many places was not slow to recognise which way the wind was blowing. Certain key texts of Scripture, such as 1 Timothy 2:11-15, had to be looked at afresh. These were quickly reinterpreted to accommodate the ordination of women.

With the onset of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and the recognition that the virus arose from practising homosexuals, it might have been expected that the Church would have spoken with a clear and united voice, denouncing what God calls 'an abomination' (Leviticus 18:22). Sadly, many sections of the Church caved in and many evangelicals have frantically been making attempts to re-interpret the clear and obvious meaning of God's Word.

A more subtle and insidious crusade has been at work since the late 18th century which champions the rights of the individual over and against society. This movement can be traced back to Thomas Paine and his publication in 1792 of *The Rights of Man*. It gained momentum with the setting up of the European Convention of Human Rights in 1950 and the subsequent European Court of Human Rights at Strasburg, established in January 1959. At the beginning of this millennium this movement was applied to the UK with the passing of the Human Rights Act at Westminster in 2000.

What significance has all this for the Church? It creates many problems. For one thing it has stirred up and promoted what can only be described as the 'cult of individualism'. The individual has now become 'king'. The rights of the individual are paramount.

It has impacted **the home** – where a child can sue his parents because they infringed his 'human right' to a good education – 'they sent him to the wrong school'!

It has impacted **prisons** – A prisoner recently appealed to his 'human right' to have food and cigarettes even though at the time he had mounted a roof-top protest and was resisting arrest.

It has also impacted **church life** in numerous ways because people have been programmed by society to think of self and the meeting of personal needs, rather than thinking corporately, and living for the glory of God.

The cult of individualism is out there in the world and Christians need to be aware that it is not content to stay out there – it is pushing to get into the Church. Its presence is already evident in some respects. This 'ism' must be resisted because it is contrary to God's plan and purpose for his people. It is contrary to covenant theology where the community of believers and the family unit take precedence over the individual.

In looking at the covenantal context of pastoral ministry, we have:

1. COVENANT COMMUNITY

When we refer to the covenant community we are thinking of the 'congregation' (*qahal*) in the Old Testament or the church (*ekklesia*) in the New Testament. The congregation is not any community but a distinctive community, a community in a covenant relationship with Yahweh – their covenant God. In the words of Prof. David McKay:

> The outworking of the Covenant of Grace requires the gathering of the Church, and the bringing of believers into this body should be seen as a further blessing of the covenant. Scripture never thinks of the people of God as a collection of individuals but as a community, a covenant community.[2]

The corporate nature of this community is self-evident in both the Old and New Testaments, eg Nehemiah 8:1a 'And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate."

Ephesians 4:4-6 'There is *one body* and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.'

Sadly, the Church as it presently exists, cannot be described as 'one man' or 'one body'. Nationally and internationally the church is splintered. This is something that must be lamented. This situation has arisen because of sin. Historically Covenanters have always sought the unity of the church as expressed in the Solemn League and Covenant:

> That we shall endeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, directory for worship and catechising; that we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us.[3]

Organisations such as the International Conference of Reformed Churches give an expression to the unity of faithful Christian churches. That is the covenant community globally, but what about it in the local setting?

A common metaphor to describe the church in the New Testament is the term 'body'. This is fully described for us in 1 Corinthians 12:12ff. Verse 12 reads:

> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

The following verses explain that although the human body has many members with different gifts, and thereby different functions, they all work in harmony, and all contribute to the wellbeing of the whole. The whole system is finely tuned and coordinated by the head, the human brain. This is the model for the Church. Every Christian belongs to and functions efficiently for the health and wellbeing of the covenant community, the Church of Jesus Christ. No member is off on a tangent following his own agenda. The minister working with his ruling elders will strive to see this ideal realised, but it

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[2] David McKay, *'The Bond of Love: God's Covenantal Relationship with his Church*', (Mentor 2001), p.198.
[3] *The Solemn League and Covenant*, para.1.

will never be fully realised on earth; nothing is perfect in this life. People mature in the faith at different rates. Some believers are quick to grasp a doctrine of the faith, others are comparatively slow. Some are slow to embrace their role as a member of the Church, others demonstrate a servant heart.

Iain Murray, in a short biographical account of John Newton in the 2007 commemoration issue of the *Banner of Truth Magazine*, writes:[4]

> Newton believed that regeneration – the point when a sinner is savingly and secretly renewed by the Holy Spirit – is instantaneous, and in a letter of 1753 he says of himself, 'In one day I became diametrically opposite to what I was the day before…While regeneration is instantaneous, the process of conversion is commonly gradual. A babe has life but little understanding; and so it was with Newton. 'Spiritual truths', he writes, 'the Lord was pleased to discover to me gradually. I learnt them here a little and there a little.' He tells us that it was only after his first voyage as a captain that he gained 'a fuller view of the pearl of great price', and this led him to read books that 'gave me further views of Christian doctrine and experience'.

Murray then writes,

> For Newton, God's great patience in his people's slow progress in grace and truth was a lesson that ministers must ever remember. Preachers are to teach, but they do not control the pace at which grace develops in their hearers. They cannot give the experience that prepares a Christian for fuller light. He (Newton) concluded that it is a dangerous thing to hurry young believers into an acceptance of teaching they are not ready to receive. Our Lord himself taught the people 'as they were able to hear it' (Mark 4:33).

Murray adds,

> If pastors do not observe this principle and lack wisdom and gentleness in presenting the truth they ought not to be surprised at bringing trouble into their churches.

While ministers would like to see people mature more rapidly in the faith and fulfil a more active role in the covenant community, they must be patient. Remember they serve a master of whom it was said, 'A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.' (Isaiah 42:3).

While recognising that some converts grow slowly and some members of the body live in the spiritual shallows far too long, pastors ought never to be complacent with this situation. They should always strive for a better response and more wholehearted commitment to promote the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ before a watching world.

The first sphere of responsibility is local and ministers should do all within their power to promote the unity, the harmony and the corporate nature of church life in their congregations. Satan is opposed to this concept and will do all in his power to promote the cult of the individual, but ministers and ruling elders, working together, must resist the devil and his devices.

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[4] Iain Murray, *Banner of Truth Magazine* Aug/Sept 2007.

2. COVENANT LIFE

A healthy human body is warm and vigorous, showing many signs of life. Congregations should be places that are warm and vibrant, breathing out life and energy, a life that reflects the unity of the community and which self evidently flows from Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of the Church. He is the source of all life and the one who gives life to the full. This life will find objective expression in the congregation in a number of ways.

• Public Worship

A solemn responsibility is placed on the elders of the Church. In many respects they set the tone. They are the men who should provide the spiritual sparkle. In Romans 12:8 Paul is referring to people with different gifts. In the middle of the verse it is clear that he is referring to the elders when he says, 'the one who leads, with zeal'.

If it is the elders, in general, who set the tone in the worship service, it is the minister in particular who expresses it in his pulpit ministrations. As he leads the worship, he ought to communicate spiritual life and energy.

During the previous week he should have been preparing for the moment when he stands before the people. Even the manner in which he enters the pulpit communicates. A spring in the step will indicate that he is a man on a mission, poised and ready to lead the congregation in the glorious privilege of worshipping Almighty God. Every phrase, every gesture, every facial expression should communicate to the congregation that in the pulpit is a man who is alive to God and alive to the responsibilities laid upon him by Christ.

Ministers should pray that their congregation would express that life as they engage in each aspect of the worship. Covenant life will express itself in the praise – people singing thoughtfully, expressively, tunefully and wholeheartedly. It will express itself in attentive listening to the reading and preaching of the Word and to the prayers that express the corporate mind of the congregation. Ministers should pray that every worship service will express pulsating, spiritual life and energy – a vibrant life and energy that cannot be manufactured, but comes from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

• Prayer

Some people say prayers, others pray. Prayer meetings should breathe spiritual life. Those who are spiritually alive are engaging with God, communicating with their Father in Heaven. The Pharisees said prayers, but God was not listening. The New Testament Church prayed and the effect was dramatic:

> And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them',…And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:24, 31).

When people come in from the neighbourhood, they may not understand many things initially about the worship. They should leave, however, knowing that they have observed a people meeting with God, a people who have been alive to God and sincere in their devotions.

3. COVENANT CHILDREN

Covenant theology teaches that the children of believers are *not* excluded from the covenant community but are very much *included* and a part of it. This is the theology professed in Reformed churches but it also needs to be faithfully practised in the life of the congregation. The covenant status of the children of the congregation needs to be recognised. All too often they can be treated as outsiders who need to be evangelised rather than covenant children who need to be discipled.

Covenant children of course need to be born again; they need to be saved. This should be borne in mind and taken on board as the biblical mandate to disciple them for Christ is fulfilled.

> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19, 20a).

Christian churches and Christian parents who do not embrace the covenant status of their children, often bring them up in a spiritual vacuum until the children can convince them that they are born again. But such children, young people or older people (depending on when they are converted) often have difficulty catching up on the disciplines of the Christian life and persevering in them.

It is the primary responsibility of parents to disciple their children for Christ. Ministers of the covenant community have wonderful opportunities to cooperate with parents in this glorious task. And children discipled from infancy will hit the ground running whenever regeneration takes place. Often in faithful Christian homes, with pastor and people cooperating with parents in the discipleship programme, such children will often confess that they never remember a time when they did not love the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. COVENANT BLESSING

Many ministers have lost sight of the Church as a covenant community when it comes to what is known as the 'benediction'. Elders must never lose sight of the fact that it is the Church of Jesus Christ that meets on the Sabbath to worship God. The call has gone out to the Church. The Church has responded and has met at the appointed hour to worship God - the stated times for meetings as determined by the elders. Worship is entered into by the people of God, reverently and sincerely. The final act of worship occurs when the minister pronounces the benediction.

Some confusion has arisen as to the nature of the benediction. Some regard it as a prayer and so it is stated in the form of a prayer – e.g. 'May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ', etc. But the benediction biblically and historically has never been understood to be a prayer. It is not *asking* God to bless his church. Rather the benediction is a solemn pronouncement *of blessing* upon the people of God. It is *declaring* to God's people that they *are* blessed.

An illustration of blessing being pronounced is found in the example of Isaac blessing Jacob. Afterwards Isaac said to Esau, 'Behold, I have made him (Jacob) lord over you, and all his brothers I

have given to him for servants' (Genesis 27:37). Jacob had been given the blessing. When Isaac pronounced the blessing, he was actually putting Jacob in the position to receive the blessing. Once spoken it could not be withdrawn or reversed. That is why Isaac trembled when he discovered that he had given his blessing to someone other than Esau. Then he went on to say, 'I have blessed him. Yes, and he shall be blessed'. (Genesis 27:33) John Calvin comments on this blessing and points out: 'For the benediction here spoken of was not a mere prayer'.[5]

The Old Testament example, which is more of a parallel to the New Testament benediction, is often termed the Aaronic Blessing. It was given to Aaron by the Lord shortly after the children of Israel had left Egypt and were camped in the wilderness of Sinai:

> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, "Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,
> The LORD bless you and keep you;
> the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
> the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."
> So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them' (Numbers 6:22-27)

Important details from these verses need to be identified and emphasised.

i. *The author of the blessing is the Lord*. The title used for God four times in these verses is 'Yahweh', a name which 'stresses the covenant faithfulness of God.[6]

ii. *The direction is from God to his people*.

iii. *The blessing is to be spoken by Aaron*, as God's appointed spokesman.

Peter Naylor makes the point: 'No man could dare to presume to speak such words without a divine mandate. No man can give God's blessing, not unless God has sent him to do so.'[7]

iv. *The blessing expresses God's ownership of his people* –'they shall put my name on the children of Israel' (Numbers 22:27b), who are described in Exodua 19:5 as 'God's treasured possession'.

v. *He attaches a promise that he will perform*: 'and I will bless them' (v 27).

It is as if God, through the Aaronic Blessing, was saying to his people: Israel, be assured that this is no empty platitude: it is full of substance for you; it will be a reality for you; it contains promises for you; it gives assurance of blessing for you.

The Aaronic Blessing is equivalent to and is the forerunner of the Apostolic Benediction. It is Trinitarian in structure. The term 'LORD' can apply to any member of the Trinity and Jewish converts to Christianity would immediately see the similarity between Paul's benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 and the Aaronic Blessing in Numbers 6:24-26.

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[5] John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975) p 82.
[6] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1969), p 49
[7] Peter Naylor, *'The Benediction'* (unpublished manuscript on the Benediction), p 2.

As the pronouncement of God's blessing upon his covenant people several things need to be recognised.

A. The Benediction: it gives expression to the Covenant of Grace

The benediction is at the core of the Covenant that God established with Abraham. It was the divine purpose to bring Abraham and his offspring into great blessing. **'**I will bless you' (Genesis 12:2), 'I will surely bless you' (Genesis 22:17). The same promise of blessing is extended to those Gentiles who through faith are included in the seed of Abraham. 'So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith' (Galatians 3:9).

With respect to the expression of the Covenant of Grace in the New Testament Peter Naylor writes:

> Because the benediction expresses God's covenant, we see development in the New Testament. The apostle Paul, for instance, gave it a trinitarian expression: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen' (2 Cor. 13:14)[8]

B. The Benediction: it distinguishes the Church from the world

The Aaronic Blessing was the Lord's benediction upon his people. It was specifically for them and not for the Gentile nations who were caught up in idolatry. In like manner the Apostolic Benediction is the Lord's blessing upon his own people, those who are his 'treasured possession' (Malachi 3:17). 'You are mine', the Lord proclaims in Isaiah 43:1. Psalm 133 concludes with firm assurance upon whom the blessing of Almighty God descends. 'For there (upon Zion, upon the Church), the Lord has commanded his blessing, life for evermore' (v.3). In distinction, the world lies under God's curse and will be eternally cursed (Matthew 25:41, Galatians 3:10).

Because the benediction makes a distinction between the Church and the world some are hesitant to pronounce it at the end of a worship service when unbelievers may be present. They qualify the Apostolic Blessing by making the pronouncement not upon '*you*' but upon '*God's people*' or upon '*the Church of Christ*'. This route should *not* be taken. The Aaronic Blessing and the Apostolic Blessing were never qualified. The generation in the wilderness was a mixed multitude (Numbers 11:4) and the New Testament Church had chaff among the wheat (Acts 20:30, 1 John 2:19).

It is the people of God who are called by the elders of the Church, and ultimately by Christ, to meet at appointed times for worship on the Lord's Day. Upon them the Covenant Blessing of the Triune God is to be pronounced, irrespective of who else may be present.

C. The Benediction: it should be pronounced by the minister

The minister of the congregation, after being the mouthpiece of Christ in the preaching of the Word, becomes the mouthpiece of the covenant God in pronouncing the benediction. Peter Naylor expresses this well when he writes:

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[8] Peter Naylor, op. cit., p.3.

> The benediction is God's word of blessing to His people. In it, He tells them that they belong to Him, that they are in His covenant, and are not part of the world, that He loves them and wills to do them good, to shower on them the greatest riches of His grace, and He reminds them that His blessing cannot be taken away from them. Because of this, these words are to be spoken by the Lord's spokesman. It is the task of the minister of the word, as one called to be an ambassador, to declare God's word: the role of the people is to receive it. If the minister raises his hand or hands, he is visibly reminding the people that the LORD has guaranteed His blessing with an oath.[9]

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America has the following paragraph about the benediction in the 1970 edition of its *Constitution*:

> The public worship should be concluded with a benediction, pronounced upon the people by the minister. The common form is: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.' Other forms of benediction may also be used on occasion.[10]

When a ruling elder is taking the service, instead of the teaching elder, is it appropriate for him to pronounce the benediction? There are differing views on this. It could be argued on the basis of 'parity', that the ruling elder, having also been ordained, should be permitted to conclude the service with 'the blessing'.

Concerning licentiates the RPCNA Constitution clearly states, 'He (i.e. the licentiate) is not permitted to…pronounce the formal benediction.'[11] Although their *Constitution* does not specifically forbid, it clearly implies that those who are not ordained do not possess the authority delegated by Christ to pronounce this solemn covenantal blessing in the name of the triune God. This is an obvious deduction to make.

D. The Benediction: it should be received by faith

It should never be concluded that the Divine blessing associated with the benediction is automatic. Nothing is automatic in the Christian life. Everything is by faith (Romans 1:17; 14:23). Ministers should never say to Christian parents, whose child has died in infancy, that he/she is automatically in heaven. Rather they should say that by faith in the Covenant of Grace, and its promises, they can have an assured hope that their little one is in heaven.

The blessing intrinsic to the benediction, though not automatic, is a reality for believers when they receive it by faith in Jesus Christ, in whom and through whom we receive 'every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 1:3).

A pattern of the benediction was given by Christ after his victory on the cross and just prior to his ascension to the glory:

> And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven (Luke 24:50, 51).

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[9] Peter Naylor, op. cit., p.3.
[10] *Constitution of RPCNA*, para.14, p.311.
[11] *Constitution of RPCNA*, para.8, p.247.

Following the example of Christ and consistent with the Aaronic Blessing and the Apostolic Blessing, ministers of the Word pronounce the benediction as the last act of worship in a service. As it is being pronounced the members of the congregation should not be complacent. They should receive the promised blessing by faith.

Peter Naylor emphasises this point:

> The indescribable riches of grace which reside in Christ, the Head of the church, are available only to those who are in union with their Head, and they are brought to us by the Holy Spirit. Our union with Christ must be actively pursued in communion with Him. Faith is indispensable. As the congregation listens to the benediction, they must be exercising their faith, affirming in their heart the truth of God expressed in it.…If the response of faith and obedience is lacking, the benediction does nothing, except perhaps to increase the misery of the hardened heart.[12]

The thoughtful, believing worshipper, listening to every syllable of the benediction will derive much blessing and encouragement. He will leave worship with the thrilling thought that:

- The *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ
- The *love* of God
- The *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit

is his promised blessing as a child of God, as he enters into the conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil, during the remainder of the week. Therefore, what an immense blessing to receive this covenant blessing weekly, along with fellow believers in the covenant community to which they belong.

In a world where the 'cult of individualism' is paramount what an immense blessing to be a member of a corporate community. Christians should cherish their church membership, enthusiastically embrace the duties and challenges of covenant life and rejoice that as each service of worship concludes the triune God imparts his blessing to them.

[12] Peter Naylor, op. cit., p.4.

HOW LONG WERE THE DAYS OF GENESIS 1, AND DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

Stephen Neilly

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'Time travels in divers paces with divers persons.'[1]

So speaks the mysterious Rosalind in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. She has inexplicably been banished to the forest which gives her time to pursue her true love by subterfuge. When pressed for the meaning of the statement above by the very Orlando who, unwittingly, has captured her heart, she says that Time ambles with some, trots with others, gallops with yet others and stands still with a few. The speed with which time passes is related to the circumstances of the individual. A betrothed girl longing for her wedding finds time trotting when she would prefer it to gallop, whereas a thief waiting to be executed senses quite the opposite, with time rushing on too quickly for him. Those in the morning of their life are often heard to complain about how time drags, while those approaching the evening are more aware of time's acceleration.

A particular verse in 2 Peter seems to breathe a similar atmosphere: 'But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' (2 Peter 3:8)[2]. Such a verse has been used to suggest that it is difficult to tie down specific timescales when we're talking about biblical matters. Peter, however, is commenting here not so much on the relativity of time as on the patience of God. People are impatient for the return of Christ. Some are asking, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' (v.4) and some are using the seeming delay to entertain sin and scepticism. In that context the first half of verse 8 – 'with the Lord one day is as a thousand years' – is explaining why Jesus has not returned yet. It may seem a short time to God – a matter of days – but for human beings hundreds, even thousands, of years have gone past. God, however, wants people to use that intervening time well, to repent of their unbelief and trust in Jesus (v.9).

For God's patience will run out. The second half of verse 8 seems to be saying that – 'and a thousand years as one day'. At God's choosing the long periods of time the world has survived will end in a day. Already the original world has been washed clean (v.5-6) and the new world that has emerged from the flood waters is reserved for a judgment of fire (v.7). So while God does not regard time in the same way as finite human beings, he is committed to a specific day when everything will come to a head (called here 'the day of judgment' (v.7) and 'the day of the Lord' (v.10)). What seems at first blush to be a rather elastic view of time with God has some fairly firm and fixed limits. What this paper will seek to do is examine the periods of time known as 'days' which we first encounter in the very first chapter of Genesis. How are we to understand those days, and what difference does it make to our understanding of other matters?

God reveals himself authoritatively in his Word, truly, but not exhaustively. The existence of God is assumed from the first verse and all else flows from that. God is the sole cause of all that is, and creation reflects his glory. As originally created, even in its primitive state, there were no imperfections anywhere. Death, as yet, was unknown, being the punishment for sin (Romans 5:12).

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[1] *As You Like It*, Act 3 scene 1 line 290.

[2] Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations are from the *English Standard Version*, (Harper Collins Publishers, 2002).

Preliminary matters

The opening of a book is one of the most important parts of it. If the book doesn't immediately capture the reader's attention he or she may not get much further than the first page. But Genesis chapter one reads like the beginning of a story intended to suck the reader in. Vern Poythress[3] has argued persuasively for the first verse of Genesis being the first action of the chapter rather than just a summary of what is going to unfold. In the very first sentence, one of the most complete in all literature, we are presented with a God who is already active. Poythress presents his case, *contra* Bruce Waltke, whose reasoning is taken as representative for what Poythress calls the 'summary view'. He says that the phrase in verse 1 'the heavens and the earth' does not need to mean the fully organised cosmos. He also highlights the obvious link from verse 1 to the description of the very first state of creation in verse 2, after that first creative act. The earth is 'without form and void', but yet totally under God's control, as even the presence of the hovering Spirit indicates. What's going to happen next?

As we would examine the structure of this opening chapter, alongside the virgin earth's first hearing of the mighty words of God, we see that the material is carefully organised into a succession of creative acts in a consecutive series of numbered days. The description of what God does on each day exceeds in length that of the preceding day. And, according to John Calvin, God has a purpose in this orderly presentation:

> Here the error of those is manifestly refuted, who maintain that the world was made in a moment. For it is too violent a cavil to contend that Moses distributes the work which God perfected at once into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying instruction. Let us rather conclude that God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men… God applied the most suitable remedy [for our vanity] when he distributed the creation of the world into successive portions, that he might fix our attention, and compel us, as if he had laid his hand upon us, to pause and reflect.[4]

There are not so many people today who argue for instantaneous creation, although there is evidence that the Westminster Shorter Catechism answer which speaks about God creating 'in the space of six days' is a deliberate attempt to refute that view[5]. However, many more favour something taking not days but aeons. Some have misinterpreted Calvin to say that the reason for the six days is Moses accommodating God's creation to our feeble minds[6]. However, in the passage above, Calvin clearly states that *God* takes the space of six days, not Moses, in order to encourage us to think and to worship such a great Creator. The actual creation is an accommodation to *us*, not so much the description of it in this passage. Calvin does seek to link what God does in creation with our capacity to take it in, even so far as a connection to the rhythm of our lives.

Thankfully, the account of how our world came into existence is expressed in language simple enough for a child to understand. That is surely one of the marks of the hand of God. If any nuclear or

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[3] Vern S. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden: A Guide to Faithfully Reading and Understanding Genesis 1-3* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), Appendix A, p.291-321.

[4] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker, 1989), p.78.

[5] See statement by the faculty of Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, *Westminster Theological Seminary and the Days of Creation*, 1999, p.2-3, obtainable as a pdf file.

[6] Poythress has an appendix seeking to clarify the misunderstanding by Kenton L. Sparks of Calvin on this point, *op.cit.*, Appendix C, p.341-353.

materials scientist were seeking to record the same thing, we should have to wrestle with something much more technical and much less straightforward. It is a very stylised account with much repetition, probably to aid memorisation, but, although it contains some poetic devices, it is a piece of Hebrew narrative. In the 2017 film *Is Genesis History?*[7] there is a segment where Genesis chapter 1 is discussed. Steven Boyd, Research Professor of Hebrew at Hebrew Union College (Cincinnati, Ohio) makes the expansive statement that the world's greatest Hebraists affirm that this chapter *is* a narrative. Dr. Boyd has performed statistical analysis on the Old Testament, counting all the occurrences of a waw consecutive with an imperfect verb (called *wayyiqṭōls* from the standard verb *qāṭal*). This would translate into English as 'and he said'; 'and he did'; 'and he saw', and clearly moves the action along. Boyd claims that in only 4% of poetic sentences is such a form found, whereas it's found in 52% of narrative sentences. This form can be detected frequently in Genesis chapter 1. In the short space of the three verses which describe the first day (v.3-5) this form occurs 7 times.

The book of Genesis is often compared with other creation accounts from the Ancient Near East. While there are some similarities between Genesis and these others, it is the differences that are more striking. In the Babylonian creation myth, for example, Tiamat is the goddess who is killed by the male god Marduk. He then employs her lifeless, hollowed-out body in order to create heaven and earth. God's resounding and irresistible 'Let there be light!' (Genesis 1:3) is morally quite distant from this. It contains no violence, no conflict among gods, and no bizarre imagery. In some Hittite creation stories the sun and the moon are themselves often capricious gods that can inflict much harm. In Genesis 1, however, the sun, moon and stars are quite clearly spatial bodies completely under God's control, created not on the first day but the fourth, to show their subordinate position. But what distinguishes the biblical account from all these other versions is that Genesis 1 is written in narrative, intended to be taken historically. All the ANE accounts are told in often exaggerated epic poetry.

The 24-hour day view

Let us turn our attention particularly to the days of creation. We shall examine four different views in turn to establish which of them seems to carry the most weight. In his discussion of the first occurrence of the word *yôm* (day) in Genesis 1 Gordon Wenham remarks:

> There can be little doubt that here 'day' has its basic sense of a 24-hour period. The mention of morning and evening, the enumeration of the days, and the divine rest on the seventh show that a week of divine activity is being described here.[8]

This says much in a short space. As we read through the opening chapters of Genesis we note several meanings of the word 'day'. On day four God creates lights in the heavens to separate the day from the night (v.14). Here the word 'day' means the daylight portion of the day, in other words half a day. Later, in Genesis 2:4, in the first of the series of summary statements thought to form the backbone of Genesis we read, 'These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the *day* (*b^{e}yôm*) that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens' (italics added). In that case the word 'day' is rather more vague, covering the period of several actual days. However, when, as Wenham states above, the word 'day' is used with a number, as in 'the first day', 'the second day' etc., it means an ordinary day.

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[7] *Is Genesis History?* written, directed and produced by Thomas Purifoy Jr., 2017 (available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UM82qxxskZE

[8] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol.1 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), p.19.

James Stambaugh[9] has examined the 359 occurrences he has counted of *yôm* in the Old Testament appearing with a number. Each time he says it refers to an ordinary day. What's more, Stambaugh has also calculated the number of times *yôm* appears with the word 'evening' or 'morning', as we have, for example, in Genesis 1:5. He calculates 23 occurrences. He also notes that the words 'evening' and 'morning' appear in association, but without the word *yôm*, some further 38 times. Putting these last two together, in each of the 61 cases the passage concerned is speaking of an ordinary day[10]. Stambaugh also suggests that if the writer of Genesis was wanting to indicate either that the creation happened a long time ago or that the creation days were of long duration he had other Hebrew choices which he did not make[11]. This does seem to be strong evidence supporting the literal treatment of the days in Genesis 1. Could it be the only passage to form an exception to all the other cases quoted?

Some sceptics have raised the problem of the sun not being created until the fourth day. How can you have a solar day without the sun? However, if we notice that the concluding sentence for days four, five and six, after the sun was created, is exactly the same as that for the first three days: 'And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day', etc., it would seem wise to assume, without any proof to the contrary, that each of the six days is just the same. What's more, in a significant passage, written by the finger of God (although that should not confer a higher level of inspiration or perfection on it than the other passages of Scripture) we have the activity of that first creation week summarised like this:

> For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Exodus 20:11)[12].

God is there using his completed creative activity of that first week to establish a pattern for his people of six days of work and one of rest. Two other time periods which God has set in place by the regular revolving of the lights he created on the fourth day are the month, the time it takes for the moon to make a full orbit of the earth, and the year, the length of a single tracking of the earth around the sun. However, the week is something God has singularly designed. It is how, even in a country that has largely forsaken God, we regulate our lives. Why should we observe such a pattern if God took much longer than 24 hours for each act of creation? How much more difficult would it be if we only had the month or the year to go by? Is this not all contained within the meaning of the days in Genesis chapter 1 and God's use of them in the fourth commandment?

Some years ago a number of biblical scholars came together to discuss the subject of the days of creation[13]. Ligon Duncan and David Hall produced the material on the 24-hour day which they argue has been the traditional interpretation of the Christian church until the middle of the nineteenth century. Apart from Augustine, who favoured the instantaneous model, most of the church fathers, all the magisterial reformers and the framers of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms believed that God created the universe in six 24-hour days. On what other biblical teaching is there such widespread and long-standing agreement?
Furthermore, in their chapter, Duncan and Hall give us a survey of the Scriptures. They are reacting to the next two views we shall discuss, the day-age view and the framework view, which require natural

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[9] James Stambaugh, "The days of Creation: A semantic approach", *Journal of Creation* 5(1), April 1991, p.71.
[10] *Ibid.*, p.72-73.
[11] *Ibid.*, p.74-75.
[12] Similar words are used in Exodus 31:15-17, where the craftsmanship and working week of Bezalel and Oholiab in the tabernacle are set beside God's greater work of creation in six days.
[13] *The G3N3S1S Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation* (Mission Viejo, Calif: Crux, 2001).

processes we observe today to have been at work in creation. Duncan and Hall stress, in places like Deuteronomy 4:32, where man is created in a day; Job 38:12, which sounds like the morning and evening of creation and Ezekiel 28:15, where the spiritual being in view is also created in a day, that there are no gradual, evolutionary processes. We could also make a connection to Jesus's miracles in the New Testament, which often take place suddenly or 'immediately' (e.g. the healing of the woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:29). Duncan and Hall are keen to emphasise God's 'unmediated creation'[14].

If for a moment I may indulge my love for C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* I think we may find a helpful parallel. The observers who have arrived in Narnia at its very beginning notice a tiny lamp-post growing under their gaze in the very spot where an iron bar from a London lamp-post had landed[15]. It's not long before it's the size of a tree. Equally they see the land bubbling like water in a pot until fully-formed animals like elephants, foxes and moles burst out. There are forces at work in creation week that have not been present in our world in the same way since, because, on the seventh day, God's work of creation was finished and his work of providence began (Genesis 2:2).

What is also present in that illustration from Lewis is the mature form of much that appears in creation week, from trees and animals to Adam himself. Adam and Eve, and indeed the trees in the garden, although they have just been created, are not merely babies or seedlings. Duncan and Hall are also careful to point out that what we read in Genesis chapter 2 as an extrapolation of the sixth day could have taken place within a 24-hour period, especially if Adam was the most sophisticated human being before Jesus Christ[16]. Their chapter provides very rich and fertile ground for further thought.

Before we leave this view some reference must be made to the work of Douglas Kelly[17]. In his chapter on the days of creation he is aware of the pressures on theologians to capitulate because of evolutionary theory swallowing up more and more disciplines. Dr. Kelly takes Gleason Archer, a reputable scholar whose contribution to the debate is addressed below, to task for questioning the 24-hour days of creation in a comparison Archer makes with the 8-day celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. Dr. Kelly states:

> It is an illogical procedure to empty the seven days of creation of their temporal meaning because the Feast of Tabernacles lasted eight days each year rather than forty years [the length of the wilderness wanderings] each year!... It is not far from the category of exegetical desperation.[18]

What unites the work of Ligon Duncan and David Hall with that of Douglas Kelly is their desire to defend the integrity of the Word of God and the glory of God without going further than the Bible warrants.

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[14] *Ibid.*, p.40.

[15] C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, (Glasgow: William Collins & Co. Ltd., 1955), p.102, 105-106.

[16] *The G3N3S1S Debate*, p.52.

[17] Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1:1-2:4 in the light of changing scientific paradigms* (Geanies, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 1997), especially chapter 6, p.107-135.

[18] *Ibid.*, p.110, fn.3.

The Day-age view

We do not have to read very far into the submission by Hugh Ross and Gleason Archer in *The G3N3S1S debate* on this topic to see them set out their stall:

> We build our day-age interpretation upon the conviction that we can trust God's revelation as truth in both the words of the Bible and the works of creation – including the entire physical universe. This conviction presupposes that truth is knowable, consistent, and, although sometimes paradoxical, never contradictory. Our day-age interpretation treats the creation days literally as six sequential, long periods of time. Integrating biblical and scientific data, we assert that the physical creation events reported in Genesis appear in correct sequence and in scientifically defensible terms.[19]

There are aspects of their approach with which we can agree. As we have argued above that Genesis chapter 1 is Hebrew narrative (not poetry) and therefore an historical, although highly stylised, account, we are happy to see that this view also takes the sequence of events in Genesis seriously. Many evolutionists believe that our sun appeared first and that subsequently the earth was formed as a molten ball of hot lava some 4.5 billion years ago. However, as we have already observed, Genesis 1 tells us that God made the earth before he ever created the sun for regular illumination. We would also want to agree with Ross and Archer that God may sometimes confound us, but that he never contradicts himself. Any seeming contradiction is down to our misperception.

Where we have significant problems with Ross's and Archer's statement comes in what they say about God's revelation. The way in which they express themselves, trusting God's revelation 'in *both* the words of the Bible and the works of creation' sounds as if they're placing these two aspects of revelation, special and general, on the same level. When that happens, the questionable category, like tradition in the Roman Catholic Church, ends up superior to special revelation. This implies that we can come to know God just as easily by observing his world as by reading his Word. However, this is to minimise the effects of sin on our understanding of the world and to bypass the teaching of Romans chapters 1 and 2. There the apostle Paul tells us, in a passage with a universal scope, that although we know that God exists through his creation, we twist that knowledge and either ignore him or worship what he has made instead.

In his very popular critique of evolution and presentation of biblical truth on origins, Ken Ham quotes a group of Australians who are committed to evolution effectively as a religion:

> Even if all the evidence ended up supporting whichever scientific theories best fitted Genesis, this would only show how clever the old Hebrews were in their use of common sense, or how lucky. It does not need to be explained by an unobservable God[20].

They're saying that nothing will convince them to reject evolution and believe in God. If people are committed to looking at the world with anti-God spectacles on, they're not even prepared to listen to what God's Word has to say. God's Word must rather govern and direct and correct how we understand the world. By what looks like an even-handed approach, Ross and Archer are actually

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[19] *The G3N3S1S Debate*, p.123.

[20] *The Southern Skeptic* (official journal of the South Australian branch of the American Skeptics), vol.2, no.5, autumn 1985, p.30. Quoted in Ken Ham, *The Lie – Evolution: Genesis – the key to defending your faith*, (Acacia Ridge, D.C., 1987), p.31.

conceding too much authority to changing science and not enough to the unchanging and determinative Word of God.

It may also be argued that the day-age view doesn't come from a careful examination of the text of Genesis. It arises more from a desire to accommodate the findings of modern science. Douglas Kelly critiques Hugh Ross's basis for developing this view. Dr. Ross states that the absence of the normal formula at the end of the first six days of creation week 'strongly suggests that this day has (or had) not yet ended'[21]. He then pulls in passages from Psalm 95 and Hebrews 4 that talk about a continuing (spiritual) Sabbath rest to support his contention that the seventh day is not a literal day. He concludes by saying, 'It seems reasonable…given the parallelism of the Genesis creation account, that the first six days may also have been long periods of time'[22]. Surely his observation that the seventh day seems different sets it apart from the other six. It's not actually parallel with the others. How can he then argue back from the more vague and indeterminate seventh, as he sees it, in order to empty the first six days of their time reference and fill them with long ages? Surely the fact that the seventh seems different argues much more persuasively for the first six days, with evenings and mornings, darkness and light, to be quite ordinary days?

It does seem difficult to reconcile these first six days, with their periods of darkness and light, with long ages. Were there, then, long periods of darkness in history? What's more, the admittedly different form of words in Genesis 2:2 can just as surely point to the ending of the seventh day as the more formulaic description does for the other six. So the basis for considering the days as something other than 24-hour periods appears quite tenuous.

Patrick Hines of Bridwell Heights Presbyterian Church, Kingsport, Tennessee states in an introductory message[23] to a series of sermons on the opening chapters of Genesis that Dr. Ross believes, because of current radiometric dating techniques, that Adam lived no more than 100,000 years ago. However, Dr. Ross is also very insistent that the universe has existed for much longer than that:

> The groaning of creation in anticipation of release from sin has lasted fifteen billion years and affected a hundred billion trillion stars[24].

This means that his attachment to modern, unbelieving scientific methods brings him into conflict with Scripture. For in Matthew 19:4 Jesus replies to a group of Pharisees asking him about divorce like this: 'Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female…?' According to Dr. Ross's timescale, Adam and Eve were only created (or evolved, according to natural processes) relatively recently, and nowhere near the beginning of the earth or of the universe.

Vern Poythress, after discussing the day-age view relatively briefly, concludes like this:

> The context of Genesis 1 connects the word 'day'… to the ordinary experience of Israelites, who experience an evening and a morning, and who work during the day and rest at night. By contrast, in its usual form, the day-age theory relies on the claim that in Genesis 1 the

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[21] Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs, Col: NavPress, 1994), p.47.

[22] Ross, *op.cit.*, p.49.

[23] Patrick Hines, 'Length of the Genesis 1 Days', to be found on SermonAudio website at https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=83117105822

[24] *Facts for Faith*, Issue 8, 2002.

> word *day* literally *means* 'a long period'. This claim is invalid, and the day-age theory (in its usual form) is therefore to be rejected (italics by the author).[25]

Hugh Ross and Gleason Archer may have the desire to reach many of the scientists whose data and methods they incorporate into their view, but, having bought into so many of their assumptions, would the trumpet they blow have a clear and certain sound?

The Framework Hypothesis view

To use the language of Lee Irons and Meredith Kline in their presentation of this subject in *The G3N3S1S Debate*[26], the framework view is 'that interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:3 which regards the seven-day scheme as a figurative framework'.[27] It was an idea first expressed by Arie Noordtzij of the University of Utrecht (Netherlands) in 1924 and taken up and expanded by Meredith Kline some 30 years later. This theory says that the days of creation are ordinary days according to what Genesis 1 says, but they are not literal, historical days. As an incisive biblical theologian, Dr. Kline has served the Reformed community well in his work on Hittite treaty documents[28] and in his discussion of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament[29]. However, Dr. Kline himself has given the following reason for his pursuing the framework hypothesis:

> To rebut the literalist interpretation of the Genesis creation 'week' propounded by the young-earth theorists is a central concern of this article.[30]

It is true that young-earth creationists can sometimes go too far. When Henry Morris and John Whitcomb first produced their ground-breaking *The Genesis Flood*[31] they argued for a canopy of water which descended on the earth at the time of the flood. It was an ingenious way of explaining where the water came from to flood the earth. However, it must be pointed out that in Psalm 148:4 the psalmist, living in a time after Noah's flood, continues to praise God for the waters above the heavens. The Word of God stands for ever, but scientific theories can come and go. All the same, it is of concern when a Reformed scholar like Kline seems to take such an animus against fellow believers seeking to honour the truthfulness of the Bible.

The framework hypothesists take the text of Genesis 1 seriously. They detect a careful literary pattern in the days. Day 4 seems to mirror Day 1, dealing with light and light-bearers; Day 5 equally with Day 2, to do with the sea and the sky, and Day 6 and Day 3 also bear striking similarities as they deal with the dry land. It seems quite legitimate to take the phrase 'without form and void' of the primitive creation (Gen.1:2) to be shaping what takes place on the days of creation. In days 1-3 God is bringing form to the material he has created, while in days 4-6 he is filling those forms, in the same way as he shapes and fills man on Day 6 (Genesis 2:7).

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[25] Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science: a God-centered Approach*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), p.112.

[26] *The G3N3S1S Debate*, p.217-255.

[27] *Ibid.*, p.219.

[28] Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: the Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963).

[29] Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, Baker Biblical Monograph, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980).

[30] Meredith Kline, 'Space and time in the Genesis cosmology', *Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith* 48 (1), 1996.

[31] Henry M. Morris and John C. Whitcomb, *The Genesis Flood: the Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing House, 1961).

Kline and Irons prefer to talk of creation kingdoms and creature kings. In fact they would say that what we have in the first and fourth days is the same act of creation viewed from two different angles. However, too much may be made of this literary framework. What happens on these days may not be as hermetically sealed as first appears. Wayne Grudem has found flaws in the relationships which Kline and Irons propose. For example, God places the heavenly bodies he creates in the expanse or firmament which doesn't appear until Day 2. Grudem writes that 'the correspondence in language is quite explicit: this *firmament* is not mentioned at all on Day 1, but five times on Day 2 (Gen. 1:6-8) and three times on Day 4 (Gen. 1:14-19).' He concludes that 'Day 4 overlaps at least as much with Day 2 as it does with Day 1'.[32] Similar points can be made about connections with days beyond the framework pairing in the other two cases as well. Perhaps it would be better, and safer, to describe this as a looser arrangement rather than a deliberate literary framework.

To push the literary aspect too hard can undermine the historicity of the account and can make the very clear progression through the days little more than incidental. John Currid further underlines the nature of Genesis 1 by saying there are no tropes there, no symbolism and no metaphors. He finds a dearth (instead of a plethora) of figurative language[33]. Should the days of Genesis 1 not be the archetypal days for all time, rather than somewhat shrouded in mystery and shadow? Indeed, the Reformed Swiss scholar Jean-Marc Berthoud detects an unhealthy dualism in similar work by Henri Blocher, which he brings to Dr. Blocher's attention in an exchange of letters, now printed, like this, 'You begin with the unspoken presupposition that what you term *literary refinement and literal reading* are basically mutually exclusive' (italics in the original).[34] It is to be feared that there is a similar dichotomy in the work of Lee Irons and Meredith Kline.

In an earlier article, Meredith Kline described the operation of ordinary providence within creation week as 'the most decisive argument against the traditional interpretation'[35]. One of the more difficult problems in the early chapters of Genesis is how to fit Genesis 2:5, to do with the state of vegetation at that point, into the onward progression of Genesis 1. Meredith Kline believes that this is speaking of the third day when there was an earth but no vegetation on it yet. The first part of the verse does sound like that: 'When no bush of the field was yet in the land', and verse 6 with its description of the mist rising and watering the ground does sound like God's ordinary providence.

However, the second part of verse 5 raises more questions: 'and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up'. John Currid argues that the verb translated there 'sprung up' doesn't have to do with the creation of the vegetation, but rather with its growth[36]. In other words, Genesis 2:5-6 has to do with not the third day but the sixth day, as indeed all of chapter 2 is occupied with, filling in further details on that day from chapter 1. The vegetation is there, but it hasn't grown because there's no rain and no-one to work the ground. So, Currid concludes, 'How were they [the plants] kept alive? By the extraordinary providence of God.'[37] In this way it can be shown that these verses harmonise with the progressive and sequential verses of the first chapter rather than supporting a figurative and non-sequential arrangement. Unusual forces were at work during that special week.

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[32] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (London: InterVarsity Press, and Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), p.300.

[33] John Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis*, vol.1: Gen.1:1-25:18 (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2003), p.39.

[34] In the periodical *Positions Créationnistes*, No.12, May 1990, published by 'Comité de l'Association Création Bible et Science' (Case postale 4, CH 1001, Lausanne, Switzerland).

[35] Meredith Kline, 'Because It Had Not Rained', *Westminster Theological Journal*, 20 (May 1958) p.148.

[36] Currid, *op.cit.*, p.41.

[37] *Idem*.

Patrick Hines[38] asserts that many seminaries in the United States now favour the framework hypothesis. A further, rather surprising comment by Meredith Kline reveals something of his motivation:

> The conclusion is that as far as the time frame is concerned, with respect to both the duration and sequence of events, the scientist is left free of biblical constraints in hypothesizing about cosmic origins.[39]

Does what the Word of God says not apply to *all* human beings, including scientists? Why should they, particularly, be free from biblical constraints? For are they free from sin? It does sound like rather too much reverence is being paid to scientists, who are just as capable of bias as any of us, and not enough consideration is given to thinking God's thoughts after him.

The Analogical-Day View

We want briefly to mention this view in the interests of completeness. It does not form part of the discussion in *The G3N3SIS Debate*, but some Reformed scholars in recent times have espoused it. The analogical-day theory regards the days of Genesis 1 as God's work days. As Vern Poythress says in a summary of the different positions he has provided, 'They [the days] are cycles of work and rest, analogous to the cycles of human work and rest in the daily cycle of human life'.[40] This view seeks to emphasise the aspects of work and rest – rest, though, is not actually mentioned in Genesis 1 until the seventh day – rather than the daily rhythm of morning and evening so clear in the text. It is agnostic as to the length of the days in Genesis 1 and wants to say that the analogy between God's work and man's work is the basis for the fourth commandment recorded in Exodus 20:8-11.

C. John Collins has written a commentary on Genesis 1-4[41] where he supports the analogical-day view. Frank DeRemer has written a review of this book[42], from which the following comments come. The reviewer commends some 95% of Dr. Collins' interpretation of Genesis, but says he makes four significant mistakes which mar his work. Collins sees verses 1-2 as a preface to the chapter; he favours a framework view for the days in the chapter; he says that the 7th day is ongoing and he seems to find several seasons in 2:4-6.

We have encountered some of these features before. DeRemer argues that 'the darkness' of Genesis 1:4-5 can only refer to 'the darkness' of verse 2, making verses 1-2 part of Day 1. DeRemer shows that a chiasm with seven parts corresponding to the days is a better structure than Collins' triads (which Kline and Irons also employ). Regarding the third point, DeRemer states that God is still resting from his activities of creating and making the physical universe, but that does not make the seventh day unending. Finally, DeRemer believes that Collins reads 'dry years' into Genesis 2:5-6 in order to move away from the 24-hour view. The reviewer favours a simpler solution, namely that by Day 6 the rain cycle had not yet started, but that it would presently. 'There is no hint of multiple years or dry

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[38] Hines, *op.cit. supra*.

[39] Kline, 'Space and time in the Genesis cosmology', *op.cit. supra*.

[40] Vern S. Poythress, *Evangelical Interpretations of Genesis 1-2*, an essay on The Gospel Coalition website, accessible at https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/evangelical-interpretations-genesis-1-2/

[41] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4, A Linguistic, Literary and Theological Commentary*, (Phillipsburg, NJ, P & R Publishing, 2006).

[42] Frank DeRemer, 'Good approach misapplied to get 'analogical days'', *Journal of Creation* 21(2), 2007, p.35-39.

seasons in the text, and clearly they are not needed,' DeRemer concludes.[43] For these reasons Frank DeRemer rejects the analogical-day view in favour of literal 24-hour days.

Vern Poythress has spent much energy and effort on the subject of the days of Genesis 1.[44] He has time for the 24-hour view, although he does not see it clearly and unequivocally taught in the Bible. He expresses a preference for the analogical-day theory,[45] arguing that God's rest and man's rest in the Bible are analogical, not identical. He seems to have been one of the significant hands behind Westminster Seminary's statement on the days of creation, which says:

> With Augustine and E. J. Young, the revered teacher of our senior faculty members, we recognize that the exegetical question of the length of the days of Genesis 1 may be an issue which cannot be, and therefore is not intended by God to be, answered in dogmatic terms[46].

We recognise Westminster's desire to stand in the Old Princeton tradition of B.B. Warfield and A.A. Hodge, carried on by men such as Gresham Machen and E.J. Young. Vern Poythress has been a sterling divider of the word of truth for generations of students at Westminster. However, in light of the fact that he is arguing for less than a worldwide flood[47] in spite of the universalistic language of Genesis 7, and arguing for long periods of time to honour certain scientific measurements[48] (although there is much evidence from our own solar system to support a young earth[49]), we may need to ask if there is not a little more bias against the literal truth of the Bible than there need be.

Conclusion

The exact nature of the days of Genesis 1 has generated much debate. Some of that debate has been aired in this paper. The day-age view is open to the charge of allowing too much compromise. Facts do not speak for themselves – they depend for their interpretation on the framework in which they're placed. If we allow long ages in the universe, which the Bible's traditional timeline does not, we open the door to major divergence on the question of origins, the history of the human race and the development of life on earth, to name but three. What, then, is left of the gospel? The framework hypothesis has been questioned by John Currid as being 'a bit too clever'[50]. There is another more persuasive way of structuring the chapter without sacrificing its chronological import. And the classification of Genesis 1 as some form of poetry is a category mistake. The least space has been given to the analogical-day view, although some of the concerns about the other two hold here too. More thinking and reading are required for a fuller response. But is there a little too much leeway given to unbelieving science and a little too much room to esteemed predecessors? We do favour what has been the dominant view for most of human history, that the days of Genesis 1 are simply 24-hour days. These are the archetypal, objective days which God filled with supernatural, special activity so

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[43] DeRemer, *ibid.*, p.38.

[44] Vern S. Poythress, *Christian Interpretations of Genesis 1*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2013. See also *Interpreting Eden*, *op. cit. supra*, pp.265-277, and *Redeeming Science*, *op. cit. supra*, where chapters 9 and 10 (p.113-148) address the differing views of the days of Genesis 1.

[45] Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, *op.cit.*, p.146.

[46] 'Westminster Theological Seminary and the days of creation', pdf statement accessible at https://gbenthien.net/assets/docs/Westminster%20Theological%20Seminary%20and%20the%20Days%20of%20Creation.pdf

[47] Poythress, *Redeeming Science*, *op.cit.*, p.127-130.

[48] Poythress, *ibid.*, p.147.

[49] See, for example, 'The Solar System Declares God's Handiwork', Dr. Jason Lisle, available on YouTube on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHs7fpxh8eo&t=10s

[50] Currid, *op.cit.*, p.41.

that our more subjective days may be filled with repentance, with faith, with obedience and with worship. Noel Weeks salts his conclusions with a truism:

> In the absence of any Biblical evidence to the contrary, and the presence of frequent references to the narrative as historical narrative, the obvious way to read the text of Genesis 1 is the obvious way…If Genesis 1 was not meant to be taken as a literal account, why was it written that way?[51]

'Let God be true and every man a liar' (Romans 3:4)[52].

[51] Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*, (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988, p.115.
[52] *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, London, (Sydney, Auckland, Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1978).

COMPOSING SERMON APPLICATIONS

A Theological Reflection on beyond method elements for composing application for the expository sermon

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While there are not many homiletic works on the composition of application for the expository sermon, there are some (Adams, 1990; Doriani, 2001; Carrick, 2001; Fabarez, 2003; Johnson, 2007; Overdorf, 2009; Capill, 2014; Green, 2015). The expository method for composing sermon application distilled from these key texts can be summarised as; sourcing, developing and integrating application. However, latent within these key texts and the wider body of homiletic literature, is the idea that the composition of effective application for the expository sermon involves more than refined technique. Other factors beyond homiletic method, critical to composing application, are mentioned. Five of these factors are: the Holy Spirit, pastoral visitation, elements of public worship, mid-week fellowship meetings, and godly character. This article is a theological reflection on these five 'beyond method' elements, thereby assessing their significance. Church tradition and Christian Scripture, main components of Christian theological reflection (Swinton and Mowat, 2016, p.90) are engaged in conversation with these elements.

1. Church Tradition

Kolb and Kolb (2005) emphasise the importance of church tradition for understanding personal experience. They claim consideration of experience alone misses 'the degree to which our religious tradition can expand our experience and correct distortions in our perception of it' (2005, p.13). Similarly, Ballard and Pritchard emphasise the superiority of the collective wisdom of the Church over an individual's wisdom. They therefore claim that practical theology is to be done within the community of faith, so there is no monopoly of wisdom by any one person, generation, or denomination (Ballard and Pritchard, 2006, p.41). Thus, church tradition is important in theological reflection to provide a broad perspective on any pastoral practice.

While recognising the presence of preaching in Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, Wilson (1992, p.15) claims it has been Protestants who have placed most emphasis on preaching by making it the centre of their worship. From the numerous Protestant traditions, the Reformed tradition is selected for theological reflection in this article on composing sermon application. However, there is overlap with Anglican, Baptist, Charismatic and Independent traditions in the 'voices' selected.

1.1 'Joy Unspeakable': The Holy Spirit

Though the Reformed tradition has given considerable attention to pneumatology (Owen 1687; Buchanan 1843; Smeaton 1882; Vaughan 1894; Kuyper 1904; Ferguson 1998), it has not given much attention to the Holy Spirit and the preacher (Ferguson, 1998, p.277). One significant debate within the tradition, however, has discussed this issue. The debate began with the publication of *Joy Unspeakable* (1962) by Martyn Lloyd-Jones. In his book Lloyd-Jones argues for a transformational experience of the Spirit, subsequent to a Christian conversion experience (1984, p.32). He calls the transforming experience 'Spirit-baptism', and claims it results in direct and special revelation by the

Spirit to the subject (1984, p.93). In a subsequent book, *Preachers and Preaching* (1971), Lloyd-Jones applies his views to the preacher.

Four roles of the Spirit in relation to the composition of sermon application can be identified in his book on preaching.

First, the Spirit enables the preacher to discern the significance of the text. Lloyd-Jones acknowledges the difficulties encountered in the hermeneutical and homiletical processes and insists that the help of the Spirit is essential to discerning the interpretation and applications of the text (1982, p.201).

Second, the Spirit creates sudden impulses in the preacher to pray for help during sermon composition. Lloyd-Jones argues that, during the hermeneutical and homiletical processes, the preacher can experience a sudden urge to pray. He writes, 'Where does it come from? It is the work of the Holy Spirit' (1982, p.171). He insists such urges should always be obeyed.

Third, the Spirit provides the preacher with unexpected messages. Lloyd-Jones describes the experience of a preacher's attention being suddenly gripped by the message of a random text. He believes such impressions are from the Spirit and encourages preachers to record those messages for future use (1982, p.173).

Fourth, the Spirit suggests further applications. Lloyd-Jones believes the Spirit continues to suggest applications after the composition of the sermon, primarily during preaching. He encourages preachers to desire this experience (1982, p.325). Consequently, he rejects reading or memorising the sermon. Instead, he recommends preaching from skeleton sermon notes, to be 'free to the influences of the Spirit' (1982, p.229). Lloyd-Jones, therefore, considers the Spirit to fulfil the roles of discernment, urging, impression, and suggestion, in the preacher. In his view, the role of the Spirit in composing sermon application is essential to the process of composition, but also extends beyond it.

Donald Macleod responds to Lloyd-Jones' understanding of the role of the Spirit in the preacher, in his book *The Spirit of Promise* (1988). He rejects 'new revelations of the Spirit' (WCF, 1.6) because of the sufficiency and finality of Scripture (1988, p.76). He considers claiming impulses, urges, and suggestions to be from the Holy Spirit, as mentioned by Lloyd-Jones, to be examples of 'new revelations'. In discussing preachers claims to be led by the Spirit to a text or series to preach on, he writes:

> All we have is our own decision, in which we may be more or less confident, but which is always fallible and always liable to be falsified by events. I can never get beyond, 'This is what I think is right. So help me God' (1988, p.67).

In adopting this position, Macleod follows the view of John Murray, who argues that, while we may have 'feelings, impressions, convictions, urges, inhibitions, impulses, burdens, resolutions' (1982, p.188), we cannot interpret any of these as direct intimations of the Spirit. Murray limits the work of the Spirit in the preacher to discerning the meaning and application of Scripture and giving the desire and strength to obey it (1982, p.189).

The history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI), a denomination committed to the WCF, contains cases of preachers who seemed to be the recipients of direct revelation by the Spirit. For example, the Covenanter preacher Alexander Peden (1626-1686) was widely known as 'the prophet' because he accurately predicted numerous future events (Howie, 1974, p.509-515). This experience of Peden creates tension with the WCF as interpreted by Macleod and Murray. Macleod

mentions an instance of this very tension in his own denomination, the Free Church of Scotland. He considers elements of the account of confessional preachers in the Scottish Highlands in the book *Days of the Father's in Ross-shire* by John Kennedy to be at odds with the confessional position (1988, p.76).

A possible solution to the tension Macleod perceives between the WCF and the experience of some is the adoption of an alternative interpretation of the WCF. The phrase 'no new revelations' could refer to the role of the Spirit in inspiring Scripture, and not to the roles of the Spirit as described by Lloyd-Jones. In support of this proposed solution is the general recognition within the Reformed tradition of the leading of the Spirit in other areas. For example, the tradition acknowledges the Spirit's involvement in the call to the ministry. Spurgeon describes it in terms of being 'moved by the Holy Ghost to give oneself up wholly to the proclamation of the gospel' (1990, p.20). Another example is in the preaching event. From John Calvin (Parker, 1975, p.92) to Albert Martin (2018, p.206), a minimal sermon manuscript is encouraged to promote dependence on the Spirit in preaching. Therefore, because there is some recognition within the tradition of the leading of the Spirit in these areas, and personal consciousness of it, recognition of the Spirit's role in composing application should also be acknowledged.

The two positions are close but different. Macleod and Murray desire the Spirit to direct and empower preachers, Lloyd-Jones claims certain feelings, impressions, or suggestions are the work of the Spirit. This debate within the Reformed tradition supports the importance of this beyond method element in composing application, as both parties recognise the important role of the Spirit in the process. However, the debate also indicates the possibility that preachers within the Reformed tradition will hold to a variety of opinions concerning the experience of the Spirit in composing application.

1.2 'Baxter's Model': Pastoral Visitation

The requirement of the RPCI Code (2008, 3.30) for annual pastoral visitation reflects the model created by Richard Baxter during his pastorate in Kidderminster (1640-1655). With two assistants, Baxter devoted Monday and Tuesday afternoons and evenings each week to the visitation of families in Kidderminster parish (Ferguson, 2008, p.36). By this model all congregants were visited once per year and the parish of Kidderminster was transformed (Packer, 1997, p.400). During these pastoral visits, he claims, the preaching portion 'was more easily applied than in public preaching and seemed to do much more upon them' (Baxter, 1998, p.51).

Baxter discloses that his reason for adopting this practice was the discovery that his sermon applications were ineffective. He writes:

> I frequently meet with those that have been my hearers eight or ten years, who know not whether Christ be God or man, and wonder when I tell them the history of his birth and life and death, as if they had never heard it before. And of those who know the history of the gospel, how few are there who know the nature of that faith, repentance, and holiness which it requireth or, at least, who know their own hearts...I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse of conscience in half an hour's discourse, than they did from ten year's public preaching (1829, p.196).

In commending this practice to fellow ministers, Baxter lists twenty benefits of pastoral visitation. The third claims visitation is essential for an effective preaching ministry:

> It will make our public preaching to be better understood and regarded…without this you may lose the most of your labour…As you would not, therefore, lose your public labour, see that you be faithful in this private work (1860, p.349).

Though Baxter is regarded as a powerful applicatory preacher (Capill, 2003), he used and promoted the practice of pastoral visitation to supplement preaching. In his influential book *The Reformed Pastor* (1656) Baxter surprisingly does not explore application in preaching as a means of transforming congregants, instead, he promotes pastoral visitation. Adam notes this surprising emphasis when he writes, 'We might have expected *The Reformed Pastor* to defend the preaching office. In fact, Baxter promotes a rather different model of pastoral ministry' (1996, p.67). Packer considers Baxter's model of pastoral visitation to be his most significant contribution to the Reformed tradition. He writes:

> To upgrade the practice of personal catechising from a preliminary discipline for children to a permanent ingredient in evangelism and pastoral care for all ages was Baxter's main contribution to the development of Puritan ideals for the ministry (1997, p.400,401).

His practice of organised, annual, pastoral visitation has been commended by subsequent homileticians in the Reformed tradition (Shedd, 1965, p.352-355; Dabney, 1979, p.267). For example, Capill writes:

> Preaching needs a pastoral ministry to undergird it, inform it, shape it and complement it. Preaching cannot do everything in the life of the church. Although it is central, and although it is granted under God's hand the greatest blessing and the highest place, it is unrealistic to expect that preaching alone can grow a church and transform a people. It must go hand in hand with effective pastoring (2003, p.65).

Similarly, Ferguson, in discussing Baxter's ministry model, concludes, 'Something of the same order, however contemporary its garb, is surely needed today' (2008, p.37). Although Baxter is the stand-out practitioner of pastoral visitation in the Reformed tradition, he is not unique. Reformers and Puritans also combined preaching with pastoral visitation. Ferguson writes,

> Neither the Reformers nor the Puritans thought of their task as the public exposition of Scripture without finding ways of anchoring what was heard in the minds and memories of their hearers (2008, p.34).

However, despite such commendations of Baxter's model and the comprehensive approach to ministry adopted by the Reformers and Puritans, pastors currently minister in an era in the Reformed tradition characterised by an almost exclusive emphasis on preaching as the vehicle for transforming congregants (Piper, 2018; Ross, 2006, p.45-53). This emphasis in the tradition is illustrated by a recent debate on pastoral visitation (www.banneroftruth.org, 2016). Thom Rainer claims pastors should visit congregants infrequently to prevent giving the impression that preachers are mere counsellors. Andrew Roycroft responds to Rainer by appealing to the example of Baxter, and listing 15 benefits of pastoral visitation. Among the benefits he suggests are, 'it develops sensitive application and produces specific application by personal knowledge of the condition of congregants'. Thus, the model of pastoral visitation used by Baxter challenges its omission from some current ministry models and illustrates its importance in composing sermon application.

1.3 'The Directory': Elements of Public Worship

In the Reformed tradition the elements of corporate worship are considered in *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* (1645). The *Directory* was drafted by nine members of the Westminster

Assembly, who drew largely on the *Book of Common Order* (1562) produced by John Knox when he was in Geneva (Dale, 1988, p.vii). The *Directory* was adopted by the English and Scottish Parliaments in 1647 (Beeke, 2018, p.191). Its aim was uniform practice in worship, covering such areas as behaviour of congregants in worship, administration of the sacraments, burials, and marriages (Dever and Ferguson, 2007, p.26). In a section on the elements of Public Worship, the *Directory* includes 'Prayer after Sermon' and 'Closing Praise' (1973, p.148,149).

Though much briefer than the section on 'Public Prayer before the Sermon', the *Directory* lists numerous topics for 'Prayer after Sermon'. One topic suggested for prayer is the effectiveness of the sermon in the life of congregants. It directs preachers:

> to turn the chief and most useful heads of the sermon into some few petitions; and to pray that it may abide in the heart, and bring forth fruit (1973, p.148).

In these instructions, the *Directory* encourages preachers to connect the closing prayer to the sermon. The final three stages of persuasion identified by Hargie (2017) are discernible in these suggestions. The third stage of 'yield' is fulfilled by the direction to offer 'some few petitions' based on the sermon headings. The fourth stage of 'retention' is contained in the phrase, 'may abide in the heart'. The final stage of 'action' is included in the term, 'bring forth fruit'. The *Book of Common Prayer* (68) supplies a closing prayer for 'After Worship', which parallels the suggestions of the *Directory*:

> Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer includes the stages of 'yield' in the words 'be so grafted in our hearts', and 'action' in the petition 'bring forth in us the fruit of good living', but not the stage of 'retention'. However, it does emphasise the necessity of divine 'grace' to properly respond to the sermon.

The instructions of the *Directory* concerning the 'Closing Praise' are much briefer. In mentioning the element of song after sermon, it adds 'if with conveniency it may be done' (1973, p.149). The 'conveniency' refers to the availability of a precentor, the amount of time taken up by the sermon, or the literacy of congregants (Muller and Ward, 2007, p.125). Besides treating the closing praise as optional, no mention is made of the role of this element of worship in relation to sermon application. However, the *Reformed Book of Common Order*, which is an update of the *Directory,* does link the sermon with closing praise. It suggests that praise after the sermon 'may continue the theme of the sermon or be one of dedication' (Dale, 1988, p.10).

1.4 'The Fellowship Meeting'

Thomas Houston, an ordained minister in the RPCI, provides guidelines for congregational mid-week meetings in his book *The Fellowship Meeting* (1856). He notes no guidelines were given regarding it in *The Directory for Public Worship* or in subsequent literature (1856, p.23). Thus his book is an attempt to fill a gap in the literature within the Reformed tradition.

Houston defines the Fellowship Meeting as 'an association of Christian brethren for joint religious worship and mutual edification, by means of spiritual converse and united prayer' (1856, p.32). The aim of the meeting is to 'promote Christian edification and godliness' (Houston, 1856. p.155). Houston finds biblical warrant for the meeting in Malachi 3.16, and theological warrant for it in the

doctrine of the communion of saints (1856, p.9,21). He traces its history to the early church period, the Waldensians, and the Reformed Church (1856, p.67ff). He notes that, though the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1641 (fearing the promotion of heresy) limited Fellowship Meetings to households, the meeting has always been used in the RPCI (1856, p.84). The guidelines given by Houston for the meeting require all church members to attend, participate, and lead (1856, p.155).

A major difference between the meeting described by Houston and the mid-week meeting of the Puritans is that in Houston's model the sermon is not discussed. Houston suggests subjects which will be profitable for discussion, including the work of the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual experiences of Christians (1856, p.97-118). He also suggests texts for discussion, such as Scripture, RPCI Testimony, and WCF (1856, p.154). However, he does not suggest discussing the sermon. In his opinion the Fellowship Meeting prepares congregants for hearing the next sermon, rather than developing the previous sermon (1856, p.155).

Congregational, family and private worship were important to the Puritans. Smith claims Puritans related religious worship to the principal activity of believers in heaven. He writes, 'Thus the principal activity that they envisioned occurring in heaven - worship, was an extension of their earthly passion' (2011, p.16). The contexts of family and mid-week congregational worship provided opportunities to develop the application of the sermon. Ryken claims the sermon was developed during family worship on Sundays. Each Sunday, the Puritan family attended church, then 'assembled after dinner and/or in the evening to repeat the key points of the sermons' (1990, p.24). Sermon application was also developed at mid-week congregational meetings. For example, in Richard Baxter's congregation members met in his home on Thursday evenings to develop the application of the previous sermon (Baxter, 1998, p.42). On Saturday evenings, congregants met in members' homes to reflect on the previous sermon and prepare for the next day (Baxter, 1998, p.43). Baxter describes the benefit of these mid-week gatherings:

> Our private meetings were a marvellous help to the propagating of godliness among them; for thereby truths that slipped away were recalled, and the seriousness of the people's minds renewed, and good desires cherished…And here I had opportunity to know their case (1998, p.49).

While this format of developing the previous sermon addresses some of the fears raised by the 1641 Scottish General Assembly, problems can still be experienced.

1.5 'Ethos': Godly Character

Within the Reformed tradition, character supporting sermon application has been given lengthy consideration by Richard Baxter (1860, p.164-182) and Charles Bridges (1961, p.103-184), among others. However, not much attention has been given to the influence of character on composing sermon application.

E.M. Bounds makes the general connection between character influence and the sermon when he writes,

> the preacher is more than the sermon. All the preacher says is tinctured, impregnated by what the preacher is…The sermon cannot rise in its life-giving forces above the man (1907, p.8,9).

Gardener Spring makes a specific connection between character and application when he considers the detrimental effect of a preacher with bad character. He argues the absence of godly character removes 'boldness and tenderness' in sermon applications, through shame for lacking the duty exhorted or through unfamiliarity with the difficulties involved in performing the duty (1986, p.153).

However, it is Robert Dabney who explores more fully the influence of godly character on the composition of application. He discusses the godly character of the preacher in the context of the distinction between the persuasive appeal (Plato) and the projected appeal (Aristotle) of the speaker. While Aristotle allows a perceived moral goodness in the speaker - projected appeal, even though essential goodness is lacking, Plato demands sincere moral goodness - persuasive appeal. Following Plato, Quintilian claims, 'no man, unless he be good, can ever be an orator' (2015, p.638). He argues evil is a distraction to the mind of the orator in the process of composition and asks:

> Is not temperance necessary to enable us to sustain the toil of study? What expectations are to be formed, then, from him who is abandoned to licentiousness and luxury? (2015, p.638).

Dabney applies Quintilian's argument to the preacher, by maintaining godly character is essential to and influential on, the composition of application. Drawing on Aristotle's definition of *ethos,* Dabney (1979, p.264-267) defines the godly character of an effective preacher as competence, probity, and good will. He explains 'competence' as the preacher's mastery of the subject of the sermon. He claims 'probity' should increase to 'sanctity' in the preacher in all transactions and relations. 'Good will' is expressed by the preacher towards congregants in a deep desire for their spiritual good. He concludes, though without developing his conclusion, that these character traits clothe 'instructions with a weight and sweetness which no talent or learning can give' (1979, p.266). Dabney, therefore, argues that the godly character of the preacher, especially 'probity and good will', conditions sermon applications ('instructions') by infusing them with a 'weight and sweetness' which nature or nurture cannot provide.

These instances within the Reformed tradition of discussing and promoting the beyond method elements indicate and illustrate the importance of these elements in composing sermon application.

2. Christian Scripture

In using Christian Scripture in theological reflection, inter-illumination is sought between the situation researched and the sacred text (Thompson, 2017, p.75). From the various methods of Scriptural reflection suggested by Graham et al. (2019), the canonical narrative theological method (CNTM) is selected for reflection on the beyond method elements in this section. This method regards the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Jesus as 'the central reality of existence' (Graham et al., 2019, p.87). Consequently, it attempts to 'embody the way of Christ to the fullest possible extent' (Graham et al., 2019, p.93) and 'inhabit the stories of Jesus to discern God's will and purpose' (Graham et al., 2019, p.96) for the church today. The task for the Christian Church, it claims, is to 'identify forms of practice that are coherent with the narrative of Jesus' (Graham et al., 2019, p.87).

The CNTM provides a nuanced approach. In citing the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Jesus as the 'central reality of existence', a macro approach is suggested. In this macro approach church ministry retells the story of Jesus through these three major events. However, the CNTM also suggests a micro approach by claiming the stories of Jesus provide concrete examples to 'model our lives on Christ in very direct ways' (Graham et al., 2019, p.88). Graham et al. (2019, p.96-98) claim *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius exemplifies a macro approach, while the Anabaptists who attempted 'to live as Christ lived' embody the micro approach. In the macro approach, the 'Story of Jesus' is retold; in the micro approach the 'Stories of Jesus' are indwelt. In this reflection both approaches are utilised.

2.1 Incarnation

Incarnation is a key element in the story of Jesus. Indeed, Sam Wells (2015, p.11) considers the word 'with' to be the most important word in theology. Incarnation is intentional and purposeful. The incarnated person not only comes among others but comes among others with a mission. Incarnation involves entering and remaining in the world of others, with a view to helping and transforming them. One possible way in which the incarnational abiding of Jesus can be retold and symbolised by the Church today is pastoral visitation. In such ministry, the preacher enters and abides in the world of congregants with a view to listening, sharing and transforming. Pastoral visitation could be considered 'a symbol of God's being with us' (Graham et al., 2019, p.111).

This concept of pastoral visitation as an incarnational abiding is discernible in the stories of Jesus. On numerous occasions Jesus developed sermon application in private settings (Peabody, 1987; Dever and Ferguson, 2008, p.37). His public preaching was often followed by further applications in private homes (Matthew 13:10; Luke 10:38-42). His practice reflected the first century rabbinic practice of public teaching in the temple and synagogue being followed by further private applications in rabbinical schools (Old, 1998, p.105-110). This pattern in the ministry of Jesus is most discernible in the stories of Jesus recorded in the Gospels of John and Mark.

The Gospel of John is commonly divided into two parts: ch.1-12 the Book of Signs, and ch.13-21 the Book of Glory (Kruse, 2008, p.51). The term 'his own' (1:10; 13:1) occurs in the opening verses of the two sections, highlighting and contrasting the groups addressed by Jesus in these two major sections. Privately teaching 'his own' apostles, comes after publicly teaching 'his own' Jewish people. The ministry pattern of public preaching, followed by further application in private, is therefore indicated in the structure of the Gospel of John (Morris, 1992, p.610,611).

A similar pattern of ministry is evident in the Gospel of Mark. Mark records a collage of 'house meetings' when 'public teaching becomes private instruction of disciples: 4:1-2,10; 7:14,17; 9:14,28,33; 10:1,10' (Edwards, 2012, p.281). Lane notes the specific and supplemental nature of these private teaching sessions when he comments that 'on each occasion these conversations provide supplementary teaching reserved for the disciples alone' (1974, p.335). Similarly, Gundry claims, 'Mark writes repeatedly about Jesus going into a house with the disciples for private dialogue' (1993, p.500). He extends the list of references to private dialogue identified by Edwards, to include '1:16-20; 29-31; 35-38; 3:13-19; 4:34, 35-41; 6:6-11, 45-52; 8:14-21' (1993, p.501). It therefore appears that, in the preaching ministry of Jesus, a pattern of public teaching to many was supplemented by subsequent private instructions to a few. In answering the questions of the few and giving further applications to them in such private settings, Jesus entered more fully into their world.

Boyd-MacMillan confirms this analysis of Jesus' ministry and applies the pattern to current ministry. He divides the preaching of Jesus into monologues to large crowds, dialogues to small crowds, and apprentice-teaching 'with his intimate circle of the twelve and the women who followed him' (2006, p.232). He claims this pattern is crucial for current ministry when he writes, 'If I am to influence my congregation or target group, I must do more than talk to them in larger groups' (2006, p.233).

This incarnational ministry pattern of Jesus was followed by his apostles. In describing apostolic ministry, Old writes,

> There was more to the ministry of the Word than just preaching; there were the daily study sessions like those held in the rabbinical schools (1998, p.165).

In the Book of Acts, the phrase 'house to house' (2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 20:20) occurs four times. It does not appear to refer to door-to-door visitation but rather to 'private assemblies' (Hackett, 1992, p.238) or 'household groups' (Bruce, 1990, p.74) instructed by the apostles. Private group instruction, therefore, supplemented their public preaching in the temple (Acts 5:42), synagogue, or rented school (Acts 19:8,9). Pastoral visitation addressing individual circumstances, as Baxter attempted, is one way of retelling the incarnation in current ministry.

2.2 Passion

The Gospels indicate a clear connection between passion in the story of Jesus and godly character. Retelling the story of Jesus' passion is the gateway to such character. The heart of the story of Jesus' passion is the cross. Therefore, retelling the story of Jesus' passion means retelling the story of the cross. Indeed, Jesus promotes such a retelling of his passion when he exhorts every potential disciple 'to take up his cross' (Mark 8:34). Thus, Jesus demanded more from his disciples than the adoption of his teaching. Marshall observes that while Greek philosophers and Jewish rabbis in the first century were surrounded by pupils who adopted their distinctive teaching, Jesus insisted on 'personal allegiance to him, expressed in following him and giving him an exclusive loyalty' (1990, p.285). Carson et al. (1992, p.101,107) observe that Jesus' teaching about discipleship reaches a climax in the dual themes of the suffering of Jesus and the suffering of his disciples expressed in Mark 8:34: 'If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me'. The literary positioning of Mark 8:34 develops these dual themes.

Located at the beginning of the second half of Mark's Gospel, 8:34 belongs to a section (8:31-10:34) in which Jesus begins to tell his disciples about the cross. In the section Jesus predicts his crucifixion three times (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34), which Bayer compares to 'a pregnant woman's repeated contractions prior to giving birth' (2012, p.101). Each prediction is followed by instruction on discipleship (8:32-38; 9:33-37; 10:35-45). Commenting on this literary feature, Bayer says:

> The very structure of this section in Mark tells us that there is an interconnection between what befalls Jesus and what happens to his disciples. He imprints his patterns on them and us (2012, p.101).

Thus, retelling the passion of Jesus, involves cross-bearing discipleship.

The phrase 'take up his cross' (Mark 8:34) was common in first century society. Bayer supplies the historical background to this metaphor of discipleship used by Jesus:

> In preparation for crucifixion the vertical beam of the cross was often lowered into the ground beforehand. After a person had been convicted and condemned by a Roman court, he was to carry the *patibulum,* the horizontal bar of the cross through the streets in shame, to the public place of execution…Most likely then Jesus calls his disciples to carry figuratively speaking their own *patibulum* thereby causing them to realize that their lives are no longer their own (2012, p.181,182).

However, the meaning of this metaphor is debated. Cranfield claims it means being 'ready to face martyrdom' (Cranfield, 1997, p.282). Similarly, Marshall (1990) suggests it refers to a willingness to endure persecution for the Christian faith. Edwards offers a broader interpretation when he defines it as, 'a total claim on the disciple's allegiance and the total relinquishment of his resources to Jesus' (2012, p.256), which echoes the language of Bonhoeffer: 'exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ' (2019,

p.43). Similarly, Bayer suggests 'surrender of self-determination' that is 'our illegitimate, God-defying control over ourselves' and complete submission to Jesus (2012, p.184,185). However, he maintains, such surrender does not include self-deprecation as Bonhoeffer promotes in his phrase 'become completely oblivious of self' (Bonhoeffer, 2019, p.43). Rather, cross-bearing discipleship should retain self-love, as people made in the image of God (Bayer, 2012, p.185).

This call to retell the story of Jesus' passion, couched in negative terms, is followed by the positive injunction, 'follow me' (Mark 8:34). Edwards (2012, p.257) suggests the phrases are parallel and both explain the preceding injunction, 'come after me'. Thus, retelling the story of Jesus' passion, 'take up his cross', is the gateway to producing godly character, 'follow me'.

In the stories of Jesus, the significance of godly character in the preacher is demonstrated by positive correlation between character and message. A general example of such perfect positive correlation in Jesus is evident in his famous appeal, 'learn from me' (Matthew 11:29). In this phrase Jesus illustrates discipleship-learning by the metaphor of an agricultural yoke being placed on two animals to pull heavy loads (Carson, 1984, p.78). A yoke was a common metaphor for moral teaching in the first century (Hagner, 1993, p.324). However, Jesus equates the object of learning with 'me', the one who is 'meek and lowly' in character (France, 1994, p.201). This assimilation of message and character indicates their correlation in Jesus and emphasises the significance of godly character in the preacher.

A specific example of this positive correlation in the stories of Jesus is the announcement of the new commandment, 'love one another' (John 13:34). The degree and manner of love required in this command is specified in the words, 'as I have loved you'. Wescott claims the phrase, 'as I have', is better understood of the ground of the command, rather than the behaviour of Jesus (1886, p.198). He argues the appended phrase is a motive to obedience, rather than a model of loving. However, the action of Jesus as a model of loving cannot be ruled out. The immediate context is Jesus' exemplary love in washing the disciples' feet and the general context is the cross (Morris, 1992, p.614). Thus, the character of Jesus has perfect correlation with his imperative to love.

The apostles recognised this perfect positive correlation between character and message in the stories of Jesus by appealing to the character of Jesus as an example of Christian teaching (Ephesians 4:20; Philippians 2:5; 1 John 2:6). The apostle Peter even coins a Greek word, (*hupogrammos*; 1 Peter 2:21), to describe this correlation. Thayer explains the word as, 'a writing-copy, including all the letters of the alphabet, given to beginners as an aid in learning to draw them' (1981, p.642). To follow Jesus, therefore, is to follow his message. Consequently, the apostles exhort preachers to exhibit positive correlation between their message and character (1 Timothy 4:12: Titus 2:7).

Thus, for disciples of Jesus, and especially for preachers, retelling the story of Jesus' passion involves cross-bearing. Such cross-bearing produces godly character. Such character supports the message proclaimed and as Dabney has demonstrated, influences the composition of application.

2.3 Resurrection

Resurrection contains the twin ideas of new beginning and continuity. Therefore, retelling the story of Jesus' resurrection, involves these elements. These two elements seem to be retold in the coming of the Holy Spirit and the Great Commission.

A. 'In the power of the Spirit'

One aspect of resurrection is new beginning. One expression of new beginning in the story of Jesus' resurrection is the donation of the Holy Spirit on the Church to empower ministry. This aspect of resurrection is evident in a post-resurrection story of Jesus recorded in John's Gospel (20:19-23). In this story Jesus breathed on his disciples and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (20:22). This unusual action of Jesus suggests a new beginning for the Church. Kostenberger comments on the action of Jesus:

> The theological antecedent plainly is Gen.2:7, where the exact same verb form is used. There, God breathes his Spirit into Adam at creation, which constitutes him as a 'living being'. Here, at the occasion of the commissioning of the disciples, Jesus constitutes them as the new messianic community in anticipation of the outpouring of the Spirit subsequent to his ascension (2004, p.575).

Such Spirit-empowered ministry, an expression of the element of new beginning in the story of Jesus' resurrection, was a feature of the stories of Jesus. Therefore, retelling the story of his resurrection, involves consideration of the role of the Holy Spirit in church ministry. The Gospels of Luke and John emphasise the role of the Spirit in the stories of Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke contains most references to the Holy Spirit in the Synoptic Gospels (Guthrie, 1990, p.105). Indeed, Carson et al. (1992, p.131) claim the Gospel of Luke mentions the Spirit more times than Matthew and Mark combined. They identify references to the Spirit in the life of Jesus in Luke 1:35; 3:16; 3:22; 4:1; 4:14, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 12:12; 24:49 (1992, p.131). Ferguson (1998, p.58) analyses these references and suggests three stages of the relation of Jesus to the ministry of the Spirit:

- stage one: the conception of Jesus by the Spirit
- stage two: the public ministry of Jesus, conducted in the power of the Spirit
- stage three: Jesus sending the Spirit on the Church at Pentecost to empower the ministry of the Church.

This reflection focuses on stages two and three.

Stage two begins with the Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:16). The significance of this event seems to be, enablement for preaching and healing ministries (3:22). Ferguson (1998, p.51) argues this interpretation is supported by references to the Spirit leading (4:1), empowering (4:14), and equipping Jesus (4:18). The Spirit also appears to fulfil the role of teacher. Commenting on the words of Jesus to his disciples, 'for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say' (12:12), Morris says, 'it is not easy to think that they would have the Spirit and Jesus not' (1974, p.45). Thus, the Spirit fulfils the roles of guiding, empowering, equipping, and teaching in the ministry of Jesus. The dependence of Jesus on the Spirit is evidenced by his praying (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18,29; 11:1; 22:45).

Morris claims there is a clear 'bond of continuity' in the Lucan writings between stage two (the role of the Spirit in Jesus) and stage three (the role of the Spirit in the apostles) (1974, p.46). France (in Ladd, 1984, p.243) concurs with this observation and argues Luke depicts the preaching of the apostles as dependent on the Spirit (Acts 4:8, 31; 5:32; 6:10; 7:55). Such is the centrality of the Spirit in the

Lucan account of the Early Church that France claims, 'without the Spirit there would be no mission, no story for Luke to relate' (in Ladd, 1994, p.244).

Out of the four Gospels, the Gospel of John contains most references to the Spirit (Carson, Moo and Morris, 1992, p.174, 175). Ladd detects an indication of stage two in the statement, 'he gives the Spirit without measure' (3:34). While acknowledging the difficulty of interpreting this verse, he claims the following verse (3:35) indicates the meaning is 'the Father gives the Son a full measure of the Spirit' for his preaching ministry (1984, p.324). He also detects evidence of Jesus' reliance on the Spirit in his ministry when he bestowed on the apostles (20:22-33) the same Spirit that empowered him (1994, p.324,325).

Most references to stage three in John's Gospel occur in the Upper Room discourse (ch.14-16). In it the Spirit is described as the Paraclete, a prosecuting advocate to the world, but an instructor of disciples (Ladd, 1994, p.330). Jesus predicts the Spirit will fulfil the roles of empowering (14:14; 16:7) and teaching the apostles (14:17). Ladd considers it 'noteworthy that John attributes nothing of the ecstatic or marvellous to the coming of the Spirit' (1994, p.333). Thus, the Spirit is to fulfil in the apostles two of the same roles he fulfilled in Jesus: teaching and empowering.

While not addressing the composition of application directly, the stories of Jesus emphasise the role of the Spirit in the preacher and contain promises of the Spirit's advent on the Church. Thus, inhabiting the stories of Jesus and retelling the new beginning element of the story of Jesus' resurrection, involves a recognition of the role of the Spirit in preaching.

B. 'Didasko'

Continuity is another feature of resurrection. While resurrection is a new beginning it is not a new creation. Resurrection implies links with what was. Thus, in retelling the story of Jesus' resurrection, the factor of continuity with the stories of Jesus is to be included. The Great Commission, recorded most fully in the first Gospel, is a symbol of such resurrection continuity. Matthew's Gospel contains large, concentrated blocks of the teaching of Jesus (Carson et al., 1992, p.84). However, the Gospel ends, not with a block of teaching, but with Jesus commissioning his disciples to pass on his teaching to future disciples (28:18-20). France (1994, p.415) and Carson (1984, p.599) explain Jesus' commission as the Church taking over his role of teaching in the world, 'to the end of the age'.

Carson discusses the important question: who is to teach in the absence of Jesus? He argues the command to 'disciple' is given to all church members. He claims the term 'my brothers' (Matthew 28:10) suggests a larger group than the apostles. He also suggests the apostles are commissioned as representatives of all disciples of Jesus. Therefore, he concludes, 'Either way it is binding on *all* Jesus' disciples to make others what they themselves are - disciples of Jesus Christ' (1984, p.596). Thus, it appears Jesus envisages all congregants to supplement preaching by teaching fellow congregants, which is a retelling of resurrection continuity. A mid-week meeting, such as Houston and Baxter described, is one suitable context for retelling this aspect of the resurrection story.

However, it appears the Early Church also expressed the element of continuity in another way. The word 'teaching' (*didasko*) used in the Great Commission, is also used to describe the effect of congregant singing in corporate worship: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching (*didasko*) and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God' (Colossians 3:16). Thayer claims the word *didasko* is 'used of those who enjoin upon others to observe some ordinance, to embrace some opinion, or to obey some precept' (1981, p.144). The author of Colossians used the term 'teaching and admonishing' of

preachers in 1:28. In 3:16 it is applied to all congregants when singing. Bruce observes the punctuation of the sentence is difficult, and therefore the interpretation is disputed (1984, p.158). A key discussion concerns whether 'teaching and admonishing' should be related to 'wisdom', or to 'singing'. Bruce makes a strong case for relating teaching to congregational singing, by appealing to the parallel passage in Ephesians 5:19, 'addressing one another'. Bruce concludes his discussion by claiming congregational singing is 'a means of mutual edification, as well as a vehicle of praise to God' (1984, p.158).

Ward also mentions this function of song lyrics when discussing public worship. He claims that 'a deliberately communicative kind of theologizing designed to convict and convince' (2017, p.15) occurs when songs are sung in corporate worship. He attempts to detail the beneficial impact of congregational singing:

> Songs and singing build communities in mysterious ways. Community itself exists as a cohabitation with those in the church, but we are also indwelt by the presence of God…As the community sings, it remembers, and as it remembers, Jesus becomes present by the power of the Spirit (2017, p.15).

There is, therefore, a case for the partial fulfilment of 'teaching', commanded in the Great Commission, to be fulfilled through song lyrics in corporate worship.

Other voices in the worship service, therefore, besides the voice of the preacher, fulfil the injunction of the Great Commission 'teaching them to do' (Matthew 28:19). Songs, appropriate to the sermon, will not only enforce, expand, and internalise the application for individual congregants, but will also teach other congregants the application. One implication of this symbol of resurrection continuity for preachers and worship leaders therefore is that care should be taken in the selection of songs for corporate worship to fully utilise the mutual teaching aspect of congregational singing.

The story of Jesus' resurrection includes the elements of new beginning and continuity. Retelling the story of his resurrection seems to include Spirit empowered preaching, post sermon dialogue groups, and congregational singing.

2.4 Evaluation

One concern in using the canonical narrative theological method (CNTM) approach is, 'who decides how the story of Jesus is told today?' (Graham et al., 2019, p.87). Therefore, the question arises: are the five beyond method elements in this study a faithful retelling of the story of Jesus and an honest indwelling of the stories of Jesus, as this theological reflection has argued? The move from the story of Jesus to current church ministry involves numerous challenges. Newbigin (1988, p.5) identifies contextualisation as one of those challenges, in his discussion of the gospel and culture. He claims there is a danger of losing the story of Jesus when attempting to create a local theology. This issue of contextualisation is important in considering the legitimacy of the five elements as a retelling of the story of Jesus. Support for the five elements being an honest indwelling and retelling of the stories and story of Jesus by the Church today seems to be found in the appearance of the five elements in both apostolic ministry and church tradition, as this theological reflection has shown.

However, the main aim of the CNTM is to provide a habitus for ministry rather than establish a set of rules. Graham et al. write:

> This method does not establish abstract rules or principles...Rather it invites the Christian to develop a habitus or way of life, through which the story of Jesus continues to be told in the life of the story-shaped community of the Church (2019, p.87).

In this theological reflection, a habitus of Jesus concerning the church practice of composing application rather than a set of 'abstract rules or principles' seems to emerge. The habitus involves dependence on the Holy Spirit for ministry, occasional and annual pastoral visitation, post-sermon dialogue groups, elements of corporate worship, and godly character. These factors, especially Spirit dependence and godly character, suggest that the composition of application involves more than a study-desk, multiple Bible commentaries, and a refined homiletic method. It involves the life of the preacher, conditioned by the story of Jesus, beyond study walls. The adoption of such a habitus will ensure the preacher not only retells the story of Jesus in sermons, but retells the story of his incarnation, passion, and resurrection in a 'story-shaped' life and ministry. Such a habitus will confirm, exemplify, and condition the message proclaimed.

Conclusion

In this article five elements beyond the defined expository method were identified as important in the process of composing application. The elements were: the Holy Spirit, pastoral visitation, congregant input, corporate worship, and godly character. Some references in church tradition to these elements were examined and using the canonical narrative theological method, indications of their presence in the story and stories of Jesus were explored.

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PREACHING TO GOD'S IMAGE-BEARERS

Why the Charismatics have got it right, but don't know why

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My aim in this article is to embolden preachers and encourage evangelists as we understand more fully how God has made us.

A Sense of the Divine

There is not a human being that you will ever meet who is not made in the image of God. No matter how fallen, how broken, how unbelieving, each and every one of us has God's image stamped upon us. The sceptical agnostic, the hardened atheist, whether they like it or not, have been made by God and in the image of God.

John-Paul Sartre, atheist, said in the 20th Century, 'that God exists I cannot deny, but that my whole being cries out for God I cannot forget.'[1] Each and every one of us has a hunger for God. Blaise Pascal famously said,

> What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself.[2]

John Calvin's exposition of *sensus divinitatis* in Book 1 of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is seminal. He says,

> No long or toilsome proof is needed to elicit evidences that serve to illuminate and affirm the divine majesty…there is within the human mind...an awareness of divinity, a sense of divinity can never be effaced…God has sown a seed of religion in all men.[3]

Bavinck succinctly puts it,

> that the revelation of God in all the works of his hands would be quite unknowable to man if God had not planted in his soul an inerasable sense of his existence and being. The indisputable fact is that God Himself has added to the external revelation in nature an internal revelation to man.[4]

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[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Aesthetics*, (Washington Square Press 1966), p.11.

[2] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Translated with an Introduction by A J Krailsheimer, (Penguin Books, 1995) – X, 147, p.45.

[3] John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Translated by Ford Lewis Battles, (The Westminster Press, 1960), 1.5.9 (p.62), 1.3.1 (p.44), 1.3.3 (p.45), 1.4.1 (p.47).

[4] Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, (Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), p.26.

He speaks of man even in his fallen state,

> even though like the lost son in the parable he has fled his paternal home, still even in the most distant straying, he cherishes a memory of his origin and destination. In his profoundest fall he still retains certain small remains of the image of God after which he was made.[5]

What this immediately does is instil confidence into our preaching and our evangelism. We are speaking to what is known.

Of course, Romans 1 is a brutal exposé of what humanity has done with that knowledge. Paul writes, 'For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.' For the purposes of this article, we need to know that the Apostle is stating: what can be known about God is plain to them, God has shown it to them, and in v.21 'for although they knew God', of course that knowledge he is speaking about is not saving faith, but humanity, through creation and their conscience which has a sense of the divine.

One of the battles we face as Christians in our day is that of discouragement, of a feeling that nothing is working. There is no doubt that the work in the UK at the moment is slow. Whilst the gospel runs in other parts of the world, it seems like it is retracting in many parts of Britain. However, the fact that men and women are made in the image of God should give us huge encouragement.

The people to whom you preach and are seeking to reach know there is a God. When you preach the gospel to them there is something in them that chimes with its message. It is that which often produces the antagonism and antipathy to it, but our preaching and teaching is not in vain.

Our applications must drive at people's conscience. In our evangelism we recognise that the people we are speaking to have an intrinsic worth, but more than that there is within them a recognition that there is a God. The truth and reality are on our side.

In the story of Peter Pan we are told that every time someone says they don't believe in fairies, a fairy dies and so boys in school playgrounds have terrorised girls by repeatedly shouting 'I don't believe in fairies'. but with God the fact that people claim that he does not exist has no bearing on the reality of his existence. We must not lose confidence in what God has told us regarding our humanity.

North is north regardless of whether people like it or not. They may protest it and deny it, but north is still north. Holding to the truth that people are made in God's image and have a sense of the reality of God, doesn't change, no matter how much people protest.

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[5] Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, p.26.

Made in the Image of God

We are further helped as we clarify what it means that men and women have been made in the image of God. The image bearer derives his dignity from God. That in itself is quite important: man is a creature, and his dignity and worth are grounded in God's creation. As R. C. Sproul says, 'Man's dignity is derived and dependent, not intrinsic'[6].

We are not God and yet in a sense we are like God. An image reflects something of its creator. It is a likeness of something beyond itself. It is not the original, but it mirrors the original. So, in what way are men and women made in the image of God?

The Westminster Catechism gives a masterful answer to Q10 'How did God create man?' God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness and holiness with dominion over the creatures.

In some ways it is hard to think of a more prescient answer than this one. There are two biological sexes - male and female that are given by God. There are not numerous genders from which you can choose.

Humankind is created with knowledge. God created Adam with a true understanding of the world he had put him in, it wasn't an exhaustive knowledge, but he knew about God, himself, and the world. Sin has affected that and marred it, but that knowledge, though tainted, remains.

When Adam was created, he was holy and righteous, he knew what was good and right and desired to do that. As the catechism outlines, the task that he was given was to have dominion over the creatures - to fill the earth and subdue it. Mankind is given a purpose to fulfil.

As Linleigh Roberts puts it, 'Man is wonderful only because he is made by God, like God and for God'.[7]

Of course, sin has tragically affected this. As a result of the fall, human beings are darkened in their understanding and are ignorant, without God, and without hope. Their righteousness and holiness have been stripped from them, there is none righteous no not one and yet the mandate of being fruitful and multiplying which was given to Adam and Eve remains. We see that same command reiterated to Noah and his family when they come out of the ark after the flood.

What is the image of God in man?

Theologians have debated endlessly on what this means. Phillip Edgcumbe Hughes in his book *True Image* helpfully outlines 6 aspects of what it means for human beings to be made in the image of God.[8]

Firstly, *Personality* - the God of the Bible is one God in three persons. Human beings reflect God in his personhood.

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[6] R.C Sproul, *Right Now Counts Forever*, (Ligonier Ministries, 2021), Volume 2, p.200.

[7] Linleigh Roberts, *Let us make Man*, (Banner of Truth, 1988), p.13.

[8] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The True Image*, (William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), p.51-62.

Secondly, *Spirituality* - Hughes argues that we are 'religious' beings. We were made to worship. As we see in our age, even though man has stopped worshipping the God of the Bible, it isn't that they have ceased to worship, it's that they worship anything.

Thirdly, *Rationality* - as God thinks, so do human beings. They have the God-like capacity of being able to think, reason, speak, plan.

Fourthly *Morality* - at creation God created man to be holy as he is holy.

The fifth element is *Authority* - as we noted above, man is given authority over the earth, he is to reflect God's ultimate authority.

Lastly, *Creativity* - as God is a creative being so are we, as he shaped and fashioned this world, under him, we are to do the same.

Each of these aspects has been marred by sin's entrance into this world and yet these elements of our being made in the image of God has not been obliterated. To use Francis Schaeffer's magnificent phrase, we are 'glorious ruins'.

Dick Keyes very simply defines the image of God thus: 'Humankind bears the image of God in two ways. Adam was like God in the way he was, and also in what he did, in his being and also in his doing.'[9]

All of this helps us in our preaching. Romans 1-4 clearly expounds that man is without excuse: both the internal witness of the conscience and the external witness of creation give us confidence to address every person we meet knowing that as we speak to them about the God who made them and they are aware that he exists.

Their conscience still speaks to them. The well-known illustration is that of a ball you want to keep under water in the swimming pool, but it keeps popping up. The more you press it into the water, the more it bursts up above the surface. And so it is with the denial of God. As people deny the God in whom they live, move, and have their being, they cannot but help come up against the reality that he is, and that there is a God who gives their lives meaning. The conscience itself is unreliable, tainted by sin, damaged over time, and yet the witness of Scripture is that it speaks of the reality of God.

Creation mandates

As we further explore Genesis 1 and 2 we find that God has hardwired certain things into creation. There are creation mandates common to all of humanity. John Murray in his outstanding work *Principles of Conduct*, says,

> The creation ordinances, as we may call them, are the procreation of offspring, the replenishing of the earth, subduing of the same, dominion over the creatures, labour, the weekly Sabbath and marriage.[10]

These are pre-fall and yet survive the fall. They have been given by God to humanity for the good and flourishing of all his creatures. Where these creation ordinances are deliberately set aside, only harm

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[9] Dick Keyes, *Beyond Identity*, (Paternoster Press, 1998), p.33.
[10] John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, (William B.Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), p.27.

can be the result. The lack of emphasis on these in the contemporary Reformed church in the UK has been to the detriment in church life and for society.

As churches we have spoken out faithfully against the redefinition of marriage, and yet I fear that we have not spoken as clearly on how we are pro marriage. We have often been reluctant to address problems that married couples face or work hard at strengthening the marriages within our church. Even within our congregations there is an alarming number of marriage breakdowns.

As a minister I need to realise that when the question of marriage and sexuality comes up, I am immediately into speaking about the gospel. Not one of us is without sin in this area. We must talk about God's good design, repentance and forgiveness and God's law. In many ways this issue, as hard as it is, is a wonderful opportunity.

We need to think holistically. Countering the narrative that the world gives on relationships, will mean teaching specifically focussed on the needs of married couples, singles, young people and even our children who are growing up in a sexualised world. What I have come to see is that the Christian sexual ethic is in itself beautiful and attractive. We have a better story and a better alternative to the world.

It is not difficult to see the damage that so called sexual liberation has done to our culture. We need to recover our boldness in not only defending a biblical worldview of marriage and sex, but actively proclaiming it, being unashamed of Jesus' words in this area. We cannot hide behind expository preaching in saying that we will address it when the topic comes up in the Bible. It will mean addressing these subjects head-on and bringing God's truth to bear. It needs to be done from the pulpit, but also in other teaching contexts in church life and evangelism, allowing time for push back and questions.

The family breakdown over the past 40 years is at epidemic levels, and yet God's good design for the family is wonderfully attractive. Sometimes I think a Christian family just living a normal, faithful, God-honouring lifestyle with a husband loving his wife, a wife submitting to her husband and children honouring their parents, is more radically counter-cultural than anything else in our culture.

On issues of life and death as Christians we cannot be silent. With regard to abortion, we again are right to speak out of this evil, but more than that is demanded of us. We must seek positive ways to engage in this issue so that the world does not only hear from us this is wrong, but that there is hope and forgiveness and healing.

Euthanasia seems to come up with alarming regularity in our media, and as Christians over the centuries we have been at the forefront of caring for those at the end of life. We have a message for the world that life is given by God. Yes, modern medicine and advances in science do create some difficult circumstances, and yet that God is the one who gives and takes away, resonates with mankind.

In the whole area of vocation, we need to teach that we have been created to work and work in and of itself is a good thing. Work is tainted and spoiled by the fall, but work is a gift of God. In our daily work, whether it be paid or unpaid, we are fulfilling that mandate we have been given by God to bring order out of chaos, to subdue the earth and to rule over creation. As teachers of God's word, we must do the hard yards of helping God's people connect their daily drudgery to God's purposes and plan from creation. To know the dignity of work and its rightful place in our world. This again is radically different from a world which either makes too much of work in idolising it, or too little of it, regarding it as a shackle from which to be set free.

The Christian is given a picture of life in God's world lived with purpose and meaning. Our understanding of what God has done in creating humanity effects the drudgery of our 9 to 5 and transforms it with meaning. It speaks powerfully to our world.

Creator/ Creature distinctive

As God's creatures we are finite, and our limits reflect God's design. That is our Creator's intent and is good news. We live in a world that has bought into the pressure of efficiency and endless 'to do' lists. But we were made to be dependent on God, dependent on others and even dependent on the earth. As a church we are to radically model this, but also hold it out to the world.

We need to talk more about sleep! God doesn't sleep - he neither slumbers nor sleeps - but you as a creature need sleep. In fact, it is a precious gift from God. You sleep because you are a creature, it is a reminder you need rest, you cannot do it all. You have a finite number of hours to get your work done and so you need rest. I live in a city which prides itself on working ever increasing hours, where the standard response to the question 'How are you?' is 'I'm tired'. As Christians we can live radically different lives with different values knowing that we were made for a different purpose

The Law written on their hearts

One other aspect that the Apostle Paul draws out in Romans 2 when speaking of the Gentiles, is that they did not have the law in the way the Jews did, but they still at times conformed to the law. He makes the shattering assertion, '*They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts*.' Paul is not saying that the Law is written on the unbelieving heart in the same way as Jeremiah has prophesied in Jeremiah 31:33 that, in the new covenant, 'I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts,' but John Murray states that '*The work of the law is in generated on our nature, is antecendant to the operations of conscience and the cause of them'*.[11] Murray is saying there is an innate and an inborn understanding of the law which comes before the work of conscience in awakening the sinner. The conscience wakes us up to the reality of a broken law, it is in that sense that the law is written on the unbelieving heart.

Calvin is worth quoting at length:

> We cannot conclude from this passage that there is in men a full knowledge of the law, but only that there are some seeds of justice implanted in their nature. This is evidenced by such facts as these, that all the gentiles alike institute religious rites, make laws to punish adultery, theft, and murder, and commend good faith in commercial transactions and contracts. In this way they prove their knowledge that God is to be worshiped, that adultery, theft, and murder, are evil, and that honesty is to be esteemed.[12]

It is not that people know who this God is, as their understanding is darkened, but as Calvin says, 'It is sufficient to know that they think there is a God, and that honour and worship are due to Him.'. That gives us enough to work on as preachers as we can confidently appeal to both creation and their conscience.

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[11] John Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1967), p.75.

[12] John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries. The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and Thessalonians*, Translated by R. Mackenzie, (Oliver and Boyd, 1960), p.48.

What is the law to which Paul is referring? From the context in Romans, it is clear that it is the law he is describing which has been revealed to Israel, the moral law of God, supremely revealed in the 10 Commandments at Sinai, but as is clear, even from what Paul has alluded to, in Romans 2 that everyone knows this law.

The Law in the Garden

We can go further, as divines such as Thomas Boston and Thomas Watson have done, and understand that Adam in the garden of Eden broke the 10 Commandments. At one point in Reformed thought this was common, but it is extremely rare to see this expounded today.

Let me briefly outline how Adam broke the 10 Commandments:

1. He broke the first commandment by not putting God first, he put himself first. He made himself God.

2. The second commandment was broken by his refusal to follow God's directions for how he is to be worshipped.

3. The third commandment was not kept by Adam and Eve as they tarnished his name, they took him for granted. In Luke 3:38 we are told Adam is God's son, he bore God's name and he bore it in vain when he fell.

4. Remember the Sabbath Day to Keep it Holy - Adam did not continue in that rest. He took matters into his own hands instead of relying on his God.

5. Adam did not honour his Heavenly Father, when he sinned against God.

6. Adam became a murderer - the wages of sin is death.

7. He committed spiritual adultery against God.

8. He allowed his wife Eve to reach out for what was not hers, thus stealing from God.

9. In believing the lie of the serpent, he doubted the character of God.

10. He allowed discontentment to fester in his heart leading him to covet and act.

The Law at Sinai

The revelation of the law at Sinai functions in a number of ways. 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt out of the house of slavery.' It is a declaration of who God is and of his character. It is, if we can illustrate it, a portrait of our God – 'I am, so you will be' - the command 'Be Holy for I am Holy' (Leviticus 11:44,45, 19:2, 20:26, 1 Peter 1:16). The Lord portrays God's holiness to us and as his people, Israel was to reflect who he is. He is the only God and so we must worship only him. He is faithful and so we must be faithful. He has given us all we need and so we must not steal. Our lives are in his hands and so that should made us content.

His law is also a mirror - it shows us our sin. It reveals to us how far short we fall. In the words of Galatians 3:24 - the law is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, the one who perfectly fulfilled God's law.

But the law is also a window - it shows us the paths of obedience and fruitfulness, it puts before us the way of blessing and prosperity. It showed Israel how they were to live and the fruit of living that way.

The moral law of God is permanent and timeless. Even in the way that the laws were given at Sinai, that is made clear. The 10 Commandments were spoken by God and written by the finger of God. The other laws were given through the mediator Moses, but there is a distinction made in Exodus 19:19, 20:1. The people hear the thunder of his voice. The 10 Commandments were written on tablets of stone, whilst the rest of the law wasn't. The two stone tablets were placed in the Ark of the Covenant, whilst the rest of the law wasn't.

Preaching God's Law Evangelistically

As we preach God's law for God's world in this way it has enormous potential to gain traction with unbelievers. There's not a culture in the world that thinks murder and stealing are a good thing. The moral law is written into God's world as the way to live.

J. John, who is a Charismatic evangelist, has understood this regarding the 10 Commandments and although we might disagree with some of his applications from a Reformed perspective, he models to us how to preach the 10 Commandments evangelistically.[13]

His title headings for his sermons on the Decalogue, beginning at the tenth of the 10 Commandments, are as follows:

1. Find true contentment - You shall not covet
2. Hold to the truth - You shall not lie
3. Prosper with a clear conscience - You shall not steal
4. Affair-proof our relationships - You shall not commit adultery
5. Manage your anger - You shall not murder
6. Keep the peace with your parents - Honour your parents
7. Catch your breath - Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy
8. Take God seriously - You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God
9. Know God - You shall not make idols
10. Live by priorities - You shall have no other Gods

J. John takes the commandments and shows us the positive application of the law. He does speak of the prohibition too, but also points us to Jesus Christ who alone fulfilled the law perfectly.

In researching this article, it has been interesting for me to see that much of the Charismatic church's evangelism is around the creation mandates, whilst more Reformed churches have shied away from this. It is often said that the gospel is not primarily about peoples felt needs, and of course it isn't, it is about our ultimate need to be brought back to God. But those felt needs are pointing to something. The felt needs point us to our ultimate need which is found in Jesus Christ.

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[13] J. John, *The Ten Commandments*, (Philo Trust, 2020).

In not having a fully orbed view of God's law we have lost some of our ability to speak relevantly into the daily needs, desires, and problems of our day.

We are living in a culture where moral life is disintegrating, and yet I fear that much of the way we in the Reformed world have done evangelism, is not gaining traction with the world.

Potential ways forward

I realised this personally when I met regularly with a group of men in their 20s to discuss the Christian faith. We read through Mark's Gospel and John's Gospel and what I noticed was that, regardless of what passage we looked at, their questions were all around the creation mandates and the Creator/ creature distinction:

Marriage - how can my relationship be better? Why are my relationships constantly breaking down?

Parenting - my partner and I are struggling with a new-born. How do you discipline a toddler?

Sex - how can God forgive me after what I've done? Isn't the Christian view of sexuality impossible, abhorrent, and yet beautifully attractive? I'm addicted to porn.

Life - how can you think abortion is wrong?

Death - why is it so painful? Why can I not get over this? Is there any hope beyond death?

Work and rest - why is work so frustrating? Does it ever change? What is the point? Why am I always tired even when I go on holiday? How can I stop work from taking over my life?

I want to argue that God has put these questions into the heart of man. It is as if he has laid down grooves into which we can pour the gospel. There is an echo in their conscience as we address these issues. The danger is in answering these questions, we can end up looking like life coaches. But a biblical answer to all of the above will bring a person to an end of themselves and show them the provision of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Getting Practical

In all the areas I've listed above there are ways that we as a church can speak into this and embed the good news of the gospel into the answers to these questions. Many of the Charismatic churches are doing this, but as far as I can tell, few Reformed churches in the UK are doing so.

Marriage. Are there ways we can run evenings on marriage? It is an easy invite to people. There are people in our churches that have had fruitful marriages for 40 or 50 years. People will listen, there is wisdom to be mined from such people and we cannot speak of marriage without pointing them to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The truth is that relationships break down ultimately because our relationship with God isn't right.

Sex. Sex is a beautiful gift from God, it is given only to be used within the safe space of marriage between a husband and wife. The damage that sex breaking out of that safe space has done in our society and in millions of lives is incalculable. But there is forgiveness, there is cleansing. On the issue of pornography, we must expose it and show it for what it is. The life according to God's law is the good life. We have a message of hope and freedom that our world needs. The danger is that when

this subject comes up we can be defensive and (dare I say it?) embarrassed, at the biblical world view. Yet the biblical perspective is life giving and wonderfully attractive.

Parenting. Could we reach out seeking to help families in our area? John and Ann Benton have written some brilliant material helping churches to do this and again you cannot speak of parenting without speaking of God's purposes that there is only one perfect Heavenly Father.[14]

Work and rest. In a city that never sleeps, where there is the constant battle with tiredness, where the joy and wearisome nature of work is clear, the Creator and creature distinction could not be more needed in our world. It would take creativity to address this in a way that speaks to non-Christians, but the topic could not be more relevant.

Life and death. It is here that I think as Christians in the light of the Covid pandemic, where once again death was front and centre, we can speak clearly to our culture. As Christians we understand the horror of death and what it has done. For years it was the unspoken hidden reality, and then for two years, every time you watched the TV, death and its victims were paraded in front of your eyes. As Christians we can talk about grief, that death brings a separating from ourselves and from the people we love and ultimately from God. We can reach out into our communities with the love of Christ and the hope of the gospel in the light of death.

Tim Keller is one modern writer who has published three short evangelistic books on birth, marriage and death.[15] These are touching points in many lives, easy give aways to people who are at those stages of life.

Not enough…

What I am arguing for is that these felt needs are pointing people to a deeper need. By seeking to speak to people along these grooves that God has put in the human heart, we are more likely to gain a listening as we explain what Christ has come to do for us and bring to us.

The creation mandates an understanding. So often our preaching of the gospel does not get traction, doesn't stick. I wonder if by reaching out along the lines I have outlined above we show to people the credibility of a Christian worldview, we demonstrate the difference that the Lordship of Christ has made.

There are tramlines which God has put into the heart of humans on which the message of the gospel is to run.

Our preaching must convey to people that God is not just some concept, some idea, but he is the sovereign living God who has not spared his only Son but given him up for us all. He has visited and redeemed his people in the person of his Son Jesus Christ. We live in his world; we breathe his air; we owe him.

The preacher in Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us, 'He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.'

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[14] John and Ann Benton, *Aren't they lovely when they're asleep?* (Christian Focus Publications, 2011). The Bentons have written a number of helpful books in the area of parenting and marriage that are all helpful.

[15] Tim Keller - *On Birth*, *On Death*, *On Marriage* - all 3 published by Hodder and Stoughton, 2020.

We see the reality there that God has placed into humanity - *eternity*. They are aware there is a God, they are aware there is a being greater than they, they understand that this life is not all there is. Every time I take a funeral at a crematorium there is the reminder that this life cannot be all there is. No one goes to a crematorium and thinks this is what it was meant to be, this is how life should end. God has put eternity in our hearts and yet without God working, we cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

You can convince men and women of the existence of God and that he has created them, but without saving faith in Jesus Christ, there is no way to the Father. There is one Mediator between God and Man, the man Christ Jesus. We preach him - the true man, the final Adam.

We point to him. Colossians 3:15,16. 'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him.'

He is the goal of creation. We mustn't be satisfied by diagnosing humanity's problems, but as we show people the needs that they have, the ache that they long for that Christ meets all the needs.

We preach the image of the invisible of God to the image of God.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in Thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick and lead the blind.
Just and holy is Thy name,
I am all unrighteousness;
Vile and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace.

PRAYER OF FAITH

Bill James

Bill James is Principal of London Theological Seminary.

I remember in the early days of pastoral ministry being asked by an elderly lady if I would bring another elder and anoint her with oil and pray over her for her healing. I replied that I would be happy to oblige, but that honestly I wasn't sure that James 5:14-16 to which she referred meant what she thought it meant. I was more persuaded that this was a special case of physical sickness being linked to sin, specifically a breach of fellowship with other believers. This explains the role of the elders, the anointing with oil, and the assured link between physical healing, confession, and forgiveness.

My church member was unimpressed, and responded 'If you don't believe it, don't bother. If you can't pray a prayer of faith it won't work.' Happily, there was no breach between us on this issue and I trust this faithful believer still remembers me with a measure of the affection I have for her. Nevertheless, the question remained: what is this 'prayer of faith'? How is it different from any other prayer? Should we seek to pray 'prayers of faith' rather than just 'ordinary' prayers? Not long after this incident I happened to read a biography of James Fraser of Lisuland and was interested in his study and experience of this question. The idea of a 'prayer of faith' was adopted by a number of leaders, especially in the late 19th century, and has been taken up more recently by Stuart Olyott[1]. This article attempts to address the issue, and while not all (like my former church member) will agree with me, I trust that we will all be driven to more earnest and effectual prayer.

We begin by examining the arguments of James Fraser and Stuart Olyott before providing not only evaluation but a wider context of faith and prayer. We will then look briefly at the ministry of the Spirit in prayer before pointing to some pastoral applications.

Proposals regarding the Prayer of Faith

James Fraser

James Fraser exercised a remarkable pioneering missionary work in Lisuland in the first half of the twentieth century. He saw both remarkable progress and overwhelming discouragements. Above all, there was a sense of spiritual warfare and wrestling with evil powers. He was dependent upon the support of a group of prayer warriors back home, but also became impressed that progress in the work depended on his close walk with God and a life of prayer.

Fraser wrote to his prayer supporters,

> If two of you shall agree…I feel, even when praying alone, that there are two concerned in the prayer, God and myself…I do not think that a petition which misses the mind of God will ever be answered (1Jo.5:14). Personally, I feel the need of trusting Him to lead me in prayer as well as in other matters. I find it well to preface prayer not only by meditation but by the

[1] I am grateful for Stuart Olyott's helpful and constructive comments on this paper. He pointed me to the following as advocates of this position: D.M. M'Intyre, Augustus Toplady, C.H. Spurgeon, Hudson Taylor, D.E. Hoste, C.T. Studd, William Burns, J. Elwyn Davies, John Hyde, George Muller, Gladys Aylward, Amy Carmichael.

> definite request that I may be directed into the channels of prayer to which the Holy Spirit is beckoning me.[2]

Fraser makes a clear distinction between 'general prayer', which is the duty of us all, and 'definite prayer' which is the 'prayer of faith'. Such prayer is a definite request in definite faith for a definite answer. He uses an illustration of an English farmer setting out for Canada to take advantage of the generous offer of farmland in that country. He may be enticed by the enormous scope of millions of acres waiting to be claimed, and the range of inducements offered by the Canadian government. But when he arrives, he will be allocated a specific plot of 160 acres. So it is with the prayer of faith. It is a move beyond the general and ambitious prayers for the conversion of the nations to particular and specific requests with 'fixed limits'. Just as Paul had a specific field allotted to him (2Corinthians 10:13), so we are called to prayer according to our faith. Fraser asked the Lord for several hundred Lisu families out of two thousand in the province. He did not have faith to ask for more – several hundred was his portion.

Referring to 1John 5:14-15, Fraser emphasises that we should wait upon the Lord to know his will in our prayers. Unanswered prayers remind us that we need to know more of God's will. We need more holiness, more prayer, more of the fellowship of Christ's death. Too much prayer is asking God's blessing on our work, without the assurance that we are in the right place doing the right work.

Fraser testifies that he prayed continually for over four years for several hundred Lisu families to be converted. But then he received a specific burden: he prayed and enjoyed a restful conviction that he had received the answer. After that he never repeated the request and had no need to. In a strange reference to the parable of the persistent widow he testifies that, 'One real asking is enough for a life-time.'[3] Like the farmer receiving his plot of land from the Canadian government, all that remains is to go and work it. Now it was for Fraser to reap the harvest. While the devil does not mind carnal rambling prayers, it is the prayer of faith which alarms him as a 'notice to quit'. Like Shammah, Fraser had been given his field and now would fight to claim it (2 Samuel 23:11-12).

Fraser developed the discipline of praying through all the details of the work, including all aspects of the ministry and practical arrangements. He says, 'Such detailed prayer is exhausting, but I believe effectual in regard to ascertaining the will of God and obtaining His highest blessing.'[4]

Stuart Olyott

Stuart Olyott's focus is on 1John 5:14-15, and he develops his theme in a very similar way to James Fraser. According to Olyott, we are promised whatever we ask 'according to His will.' This is understood as being in parallel to asking in Jesus' Name (John 14:13-14, 16:23-24). Olyott claims that to pray 'in His Name' is not just to come to God in sole dependence on the finished work of Christ as the basis of our acceptance. Rather it is to come in the full confidence that we will receive what we ask.

The great question, then, is how we know the will of God. Olyott reminds us that God's will is revealed in Scripture, but then he goes further and insists that general prayers are not enough. He says that as

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[2] Mrs Howard Taylor, *Behind the Ranges*, (Lutterworth Press, 1944), p.107. The chapter 'The Prayer of Faith' has also been reprinted as a separate booklet by OMF.
[3] Op. cit. p.112.
[4] Op. cit. p.116.

a preacher, '… I ask the Lord to show me what I should preach on and exactly what I should say. Not only so, but what does He want to happen when that message is given?'[5]

Olyott continues, 'It is essential, therefore, that a major part of our prayer life should be that of waiting on the Lord until He reveals to us what we should ask.' Even when we know who or what to pray for, 'we do not always know "what we should pray for as we ought… (Romans 8:26).""[6]

There is much in Olyott's writing in this book, and in this chapter in particular, with which I heartily concur. He illustrates his point with a number of examples from his own experience and from church history where individuals have been moved to pray for a specific person or individual and seen those prayers answered in remarkable ways. Sometimes the believer in prayer receives a great assurance of peace that prayer has been heard and answered. I deny none of that. Not only is it clear that the Lord works in these ways, but also that such experiences are of great encouragement and help to the Lord's people.

The question is whether this is to be presented as normative experience, and whether it is to be urged upon all believers as their regular practice and expectation. Olyott draws a parallel with guidance, that the Lord can use all manner of providences, promptings, compulsions, and reminders of Scripture texts. But does the Lord promise that every believer can enjoy a certain peace and assurance that they are following the Lord's guidance when they make a specific decision? Are we intended to wait before making any decision until we receive an assurance regarding the choice to be made?

The promise of answered prayer

Before proceeding with this theme, it is necessary to consider briefly the text upon which the arguments of Fraser and Olyott rely, 1John 5:14-15. The context is our assurance that through faith in Christ we have eternal life. This leads to a confidence in the presence of God, so much so that we have confidence that he will hear and answer our prayers. We are reminded of Romans 5:2 '… we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand' (ESV). Like Esther, we find that the king is well disposed towards us and welcomes us into his court to hear and answer our requests. Up to this point I am in agreement with Fraser and Olyott.

The meaning of these verses hinges on what is meant by 'according to His will'.

There are two possible interpretations of this expression. The **first** is that we are assured that the Lord will hear and answer when we pray according to his revealed will. The **second** interpretation is that the Lord will answer when we pray according to his specific will in a certain situation which has not been revealed in Scripture, but may be revealed to the believer. Is there any indication what is meant here?

The setting of the letter is that some have 'gone out' from the church, and are clearly regarded as apostate, having denied that Jesus is the Christ (1John 2:18ff). The secessionists' teaching may have included claims to sinless perfection. John teaches that while believers must not continue in sin, yet they are still sinners and can have confidence that as they repent and confess their sins, they can enjoy forgiveness and restoration (2:8-10).

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[5] Stuart Olyott, *Something Must be Known and Felt* (Bryntirion, 2014), p.118.
[6] Op cit.. p.119.

Within this context 1John 5:16 makes perfect sense. When the church sees a believer falling into sin they should not regard him as lost, but rather be assured of the Lord's will that he find repentance, forgiveness, and restoration. They should pray with confidence that such restoration will take place. It is only apostates who deny Christ who are excluded from such confident prayer, because in denying the Lord, they have excluded themselves from the possibility of forgiveness. Either John is saying that we can have no confidence in praying for such apostates, or he is actually forbidding us from doing so (cf. Jeremiah 7:16ff).

John's argument seems to be clear. When he speaks of praying according to the Lord's will, this is regarding the restoration of sinners.

This brings us to James 5:14-16. It is generally agreed that these verses refer to cases of physical sickness, but there are a number of questions regarding the traditional interpretation. First, why are the elders to be called, rather than those with gifts of healing? Second, there is the association of sickness with sin; we notice the reference to forgiveness at the end of v.15, and this is followed by an exhortation to confess our sins to one another. Third, there is the question of anointing with oil: what role does that play? Fourth, there is the certainty of a positive outcome, that the sick believer will be raised up. The traditional interpretation suggests that this involves a special gift of faith, hence 'prayer of faith' as opposed to any other sort of prayer. But that rather begs the question. Are we to imagine that there would be times when the believer is not raised up? In such cases is the prayer of faith impossible because healing is not the Lord's will, or would the elders be culpable because of their lack of faith? The sick person might lament that if only they had more godly and spiritual elders they could have been instantly healed. The text does not envisage such negative outcomes.

These problems are resolved if we suggest that this is a case of physical sickness associated with sin, as in 1Corinthians 11:30. In both Corinth and the churches to which James writes there is evidence of division between believers. If this is the root of the problem, then it is most natural that the elders should be summoned for this to be resolved on behalf of the church. The sick believer fears that perhaps their illness is due to sin and they desire to confess and be reconciled. Anointing oil is applied as a token of unity in the Spirit (Psalm 133), prayer is offered in faith that the penitent sinner be restored, and that prayer is heard and answered.

If this is the situation in James, then the parallels with 1John 5 are clear. In both cases believers have fallen into sin. Prayer is offered, and there is a confident expectation of prayers answered. The sinner is forgiven, raised up, and restored to fellowship. In neither case is there any hint that some sinners will be restored (if faith is given to the prayer for that specific request), while other sinners will perish. What is striking about both texts is the positive assurance that this is the procedure to be followed in all such cases, and the outcome is assured.

Turning to John 14:13-14, the disciples are being promised that the Lord will hear and answer their prayers so that they will be enabled to do 'greater works'. Empowered by the Spirit of Christ, they will be enabled to do his work and glorify his Name in the world.

If these texts provided a general promise for believers to receive spiritual wisdom to ask exactly what the Lord wills for them, it is surprising that no example of this is given in the lives and ministries of the apostles in the book of Acts:

- When specific guidance is required in prayer regarding the twelfth apostle, this is ascertained by casting lots (Acts 1:24-26).

- In Acts 4:23-31 the church, led by the apostles, prays for boldness and for signs and wonders to be performed in the name of Jesus. This accurately reflects the promise of John 14:13-14.

- The apostles pray for Samaritan converts to receive the Spirit (Acts 8:14ff).

- When Peter is in prison, the believers are clearly unsure how to pray and certainly don't expect his release (Acts 12:12ff).

- The church in Antioch is given specific direction to send out Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-3). It is striking that prayer is not specifically mentioned (even though the church was undoubtedly praying), but only worship and fasting. The missionaries are identified by a prophetic word, and only afterwards are we are told that the church prayed and sent them out.

- When Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi, we are told that they were praying before the earthquake which liberated them. We are not told if they were praying specifically for this to happen.

- On Malta Paul prays and lays hands on Publius' father for his healing (Acts 28:8). This is the clearest example of specific prayer being answered miraculously, and is in accordance with the apostles' preaching being accompanied by signs and wonders.

When we come to the epistles, we find a similar pattern in the prayers of the apostle Paul. They are general prayers for the spiritual growth and perseverance of believers which are rooted in the revelation of the gospel. In the words of Gary Millar, '…*everything Paul prays for* has already been achieved for us, and is held out to us in the Gospel.'[7] There is no indication that Paul was given insight into details of the Lord's purposes as he prayed. For example, in prayer for the Roman church we are told that he was '…asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you' (Romans 1:10 ESV). He clearly does not know if this will be possible or not.

The only prayer where we have specific information is a prayer which was not answered in the way Paul desired, when he asked three times for his thorn to be removed. This is not presented as evidence of 'carnality' in Paul, or lack of spiritual wisdom, but rather normal Christian experience.

Faith and prayer

The argument that praying 'according to his will' means the Lord's revealed will is strengthened if we take a wider perspective on the relationship between faith and prayer.

From the early chapters of Genesis we read that there were those who 'called on the Name of the Lord.' This is the essence of prayer. You notice that there are two essential elements here.

First, there is a recognition of need, of weakness, of crying out for help. Seth and his offspring knew only too well of the curse announced in the Garden of Eden. In a fallen world, they suffer all the

[7] J Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord*, (IVP, 2016).

struggles and frustrations of daily life. We read in Genesis 4 of violence and immorality beginning to grow and increase. There are broken relationships, threats, fear, and ultimately death itself, and these prompt the call for help.

Second is the call to the Lord who is able to help in times of distress. Prayer is made to him in faith that he is willing to help his people. Ultimately there is confidence in the promise that he will raise up the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head.

In Genesis 4:26 this calling on the Name of the Lord introduces the genealogy of Adam through his son Seth. It is the godly line, and it seems that the mark of the Lord's people was calling on his Name. Indeed, God's people in every age are those who call on the name of the Lord, and the pagans are those who do not. 'For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord' (Zephaniah 3:9), 'Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call upon your name!' (Psalm 79:6 ESV).

In the New Testament, this expression is picked up in Romans 10 and used to describe what it means to be a Christian believer: 'For everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved' (Romans 10:13 ESV). This is the mark of true faith.

So to have faith is to pray. There is this inseparable connection between the two. If you have faith, then inevitably you will express that faith in prayer. You remember that when Saul of Tarsus was converted, a doubtful Ananias was reassured of the reality of Saul's conversion when the Lord said, 'He is praying' (Acts 9:11). That is an extraordinary statement. Surely Paul had been praying all his life: he was a good Jew and a Pharisee. Not a day would have gone past without times of prayer. Ah, but now something is different. Now he has true faith. Now he is coming to God in the Name of the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Now this is no longer merely words; this is no longer merely a religious form. This is the prayer of faith. Behold, he prays!

That is how we begin the Christian life. We have a sense of our desperate need. Most of all we see our sinfulness, and our guilt, and the coming judgment. We cry out to the Lord for mercy. We put our hope and trust and confidence in him alone, because only he can help us. Like the tax collector in the temple court, we cry out, 'Lord have mercy on me, a sinner.'

From that time, the whole of our Christian life is characterised by this continuing sense of need. We are, as the Lord Jesus describes us, those who are poor in spirit. Every day as we go on in the Christian life we have a greater sense of our sinfulness and unworthiness. We have so many needs, both spiritual and practical. More than that we are burdened for the world around us. We want to see God's Kingdom come, and his will being done. We long to see him being glorified in all the earth, and so we call on the Name of the Lord.

As we come to the Lord, we come in confident expectation that he is willing and able to hear and answer. Remember the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:6, 'And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him' (ESV).

We see that faith and prayer are inseparable. Prayer is the outward expression of our faith. At the end of the parable of the persevering widow we might expect the question, 'Will He find prayer continuing on the earth?' Instead we find, "Will he find faith on the earth?' They are two sides of the same coin.

Faith and the promises of God

Now if we are to pray in faith, then what are we to pray for? If we have faith, what do we have faith in? Our assurance of faith is rooted in the promises of God. That is the basis of our prayers.

The promise of salvation is given to Abram and his seed in Genesis 12, and then Abram begins to build altars and to call on the Name of the Lord (Genesis 12:8 & 13:4). There is a link between the promise of God and prayer. Why? Abram had left everything in obedience to the call of God, but he arrives in the promised land to find himself living in tents, a stranger in a strange land. He calls on the Name of the Lord, longing that God would fulfil his promise.

We see the pattern repeated with Isaac (Genesis 26:24-25), and then through the whole of the OT there is a connection between the promises of God and prayer. The example of Elijah is particularly appropriate given the reference in James 5. He bursts onto the scene in 1Kings 17:1 with a prophetic declaration that there will be no rain in Israel for three years. Yet in James 5:17 we are told that the lack of rain is due to Elijah's prayers. Which was it? The answer is both, that he received the word of the Lord, and prayed that this word would be fulfilled to drive the nation to repentance.

When the three years comes to an end Elijah goes to Mount Carmel, and having dispatched the prophets of Baal he prays again. Notice that he prays both on the basis of God's covenant promises and also the specific word of the Lord regarding rain. 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things **at your word**. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back' (1Kings 18:36-37 ESV).

We could mention the prayers of Nehemiah and Daniel. What is striking is that their confidence and assurance of faith in the promises of God regarding restoration from exile leads to persevering prayer. Perhaps we might think the opposite. We might say that if God has made a promise, then we can be sure that He will do it and we need do nothing. Not at all! The mark of faith is a longing for faith to become sight. We have an obligation to pray, as Calvin puts it, '... nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayers. So true is it that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.'[8]

When I was a small child, if my mother wanted to persuade me to do something she would say, 'You'll never see what I'll buy you.' I thought that this sounded really good, and only after some time did I work out that if I never saw what she would buy me, it wasn't worth having. A promise is only valuable if we know that we will be able to see and touch the thing promised.

So in Scripture, there is this impatience to see and touch the fulfilment of the promises. This is the heart of persevering prayer. Think for example of Nehemiah praying for four months, or Daniel praying three times a day. Simeon and Anna prayed for the birth of the Messiah day and night over a whole lifetime. Their example of persevering prayer seems to be very different to our modern practice and our present experience.

There is in faith a sense of impatience, that if the Lord has promised we want to see that promise delivered. This is why the Lord Jesus describes God as like an unjust judge in the parable of the persistent widow. When we pray the Lord seems to be unjust insofar as he has promised something

[8] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 3.20.2 on the Necessity of Prayer.

which he has not yet delivered. So we will not rest until he fulfils what he has said, as Isaiah teaches us, 'You who put the Lord, in remembrance, take no rest, and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth' (Isaiah 62:6-7 ESV).

In the New Testament we see the pattern of longing or straining towards the goal, whether it be our groaning in Romans 8 as we strain towards the New Creation, or our impatient waiting for the Second Coming of Christ.

This is the central challenge for us who seek to pray by faith. We need to ask if our prayer lives are rooted first of all in the promises of God. Do we not only believe the promises, but long and strain towards their fulfilment? When the Lord does not immediately give us what we ask for, he is testing our faith. He is challenging us: do you trust me? So we are called to pray and pray again, and it may seem as if the Lord is like an unjust judge in the parable of the persistent widow. But we know that he is not unjust. We know that he is loving and faithful and gracious. We are impatient to see the reality of all of that. We bring the Lord's promises to him. Will you not hear and answer? Will you not bring relief today? And there is to be that persistence, and that impatience, and that groaning as we pray and pray until at last his promises are fulfilled and faith is sight.

Perhaps there is no specific promise regarding our prayer, but still we pray on the basis of God's character. Think of the parable of the friend at midnight who beat on the door until he got what he needed. He knew that his neighbour was a good man who would be ashamed if a visitor was not offered proper hospitality. So he kept on knocking. So with the Lord, we know that he is gracious. He loves us with fatherlike care, and he is concerned for our distress, and our personal circumstances. Or we pray for the conversion of those around us. We know that he loves to be gracious, and he does not desire the death of the wicked. We take hold of the Lord in prayer.

There will be times when our prayers are not answered as we wish. Paul prayed earnestly for the removal of his thorn in the flesh, but ultimately accepted that this was not the Lord's purpose and rather he would receive grace to bear it. He had a willingness to accept the Lord's providence in this. The ultimate example is the Lord Jesus Christ in Gethsemane. Faced with overwhelming anguish as he comes to the cross, he shrinks from it. Because he is fully human, he shrinks from the pain and shame of the cross. Because he is the sinless Son of God he shrinks from the prospect of becoming a curse and bearing the sin of his people, and in his human nature bearing the Father's wrath. So he prays that if it be possible this cup be taken from him. Yet he submits to the Father's will, knowing that the Father's way is best and will bring greatest glory for him and the Father's purposes of salvation of his people.

So there comes a point in our prayers where we just have to leave our requests with the Lord and simply trust him that his ways are perfect. He knows and we do not. He sees the end from the beginning, while we are mortal and temporal creatures.

Prayer and the Spirit

We have laid out the Biblical principles for praying in faith. But we enter into the mystery of prayer when we come to examine the ministry of the Spirit as we pray. We are urged to 'pray in the Spirit' (Ephesians 6:18, Jude 20), and what this means is most clearly expounded in Romans 8.

First, in Romans 8:14-16 we are taught that the Spirit gives us confidence in the presence of the Father. This is a very rich text, and I will only make a few brief observations. First, it is clear that Paul is reminding us of our status as sons of God by virtue of our union with the Son of God, the Lord Jesus

Christ. Not only does this mean that we have confidence in the presence of the Father as we pray, but our prayers are energised and directed by the Spirit of Christ himself. Paul's use of the untranslated Aramaic word *Abba* indicates that he is identifying our struggles in prayer with the anguish of the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. We enjoy the same assurance that even though now we endure troubles and our prayers are not answered in the way we might desire, yet ultimately the Father is working all things for our good and his glory, and is bringing us ultimately to our inheritance.

We need to acknowledge the vital ministry of the Spirit in our prayers, which brings us to the second observation from this text that our identity as sons of God is inseparable from being 'led by the Spirit' (Romans 8:14). Godly living goes hand in hand with our fellowship with the Spirit as we seek to walk in step with him. There is a parallel here again with James 5 as we are taught that 'The prayer of a righteous person has great power' (James 5:16). This is not to say that our prayers are accepted on the basis of our own merits; that is not the issue. Rather it is a matter of fellowship with the Spirit who directs and energises our prayers by faith.

Moving on to Romans 8:26-27, we see another aspect of the ministry of the Spirit in prayer. This is not entirely separate from Paul's theme in v14-16, but now his focus is upon our weakness in the context of a fallen world. Our weakness may be described in a variety of ways. It could be physical or psychological weakness, both of which have an impact on our prayers. There will be times in the life of a believer when prayer seems almost impossible, perhaps because of sickness or depression. However, our weakness can also be understood in spiritual terms, as our spiritual experience and godliness is still far from perfect. As Paul reminds us in v23 we only have the 'firstfruits' of the Spirit, and our full adoption will not come until the redemption of our bodies. We may well lament how far short we fall, especially in our prayer lives, of where we would love to be.

Yet it is precisely in such experience of weakness that the Lord meets with us by his Spirit. 'We do not know what to pray for as we ought.' In other words, we have the revealed will of God, but struggle to see and understand how the promises of God apply to our situation. Whether it be because of the confusion of our own mind and heart, or because of the complexity of the situation we face, we are unsure about how progress can be made. We seek the Lord's face. We pray according to his promises and his character, but as we pray we are left perplexed. It is here that Paul assures us that the Spirit is praying with us and for us. We may not know the specific will of God regarding our situation, but the Spirit does, and prays accordingly for us. It seems to me that this is what is meant by praying 'in the Name' of Jesus. It is not just coming in confidence of acceptance by the Father on the basis of Christ's finished work, but also coming in conscious dependence on the Spirit of Christ in us who is praying in us and for us in ways beyond our own capacity.

Notice the way in which Paul speaks of God both searching our hearts and knowing the mind of the Spirit in v27. There is a great assurance when we are unable to articulate our prayers, or even fully comprehend what we are to pray for that the Lord knows our hearts and is able to reshape our prayers according to his will. There is nothing here to suggest that we can be negligent of prayer and let the Spirit pray for us. Rather it is as we pray in our weakness that the Spirit works. But there is tremendous pastoral encouragement here for us in our experience of prayer.

One of the most remarkable (and surprising!) chapters of Calvin's *Institutes* is his section on 'Hearkening to Perverted Prayer.'[9] Calvin acknowledges that our prayers can be prompted by mixed or even ungodly motives (he cites the final prayer of Samson as an example). Yet the Lord is gracious and can hear and answer even such prayers in a remarkable way. We might think for example of the

[9] *Institutes*, 3 20.15.

brief prayer of Naomi, 'May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!' (Ruth 1:8-9 ESV). We might wonder at the state of Naomi's heart at this point, gripped with bitterness and even a measure of despair. Is she praying for anything more than earthly comfort for her two daughters in law? Yet, remarkably, the whole of the Book of Ruth proves to be an answer to her prayer. Not only does Ruth find rest in the house of her husband, but she gives birth to the grandfather of King David, in the line of the coming Messiah. This is prayer answered more than we can ask or imagine!

Another example is the prayer of Hannah. To what extent was she praying and weeping out of the natural distress of infertility, and the persecutions of Peninnah? To what extent was her vision broadened by the Spirit to see the need of the nation for a godly leader, and that her son might be the answer to that need? Whatever her precise motives, the Books of Samuel are then the answer to her prayer.

This brings us now to the heart of the matter. As we pray, the Spirit will direct and reshape our prayers according to his will. It is the experience of believers that we may experience this consciously, that through a variety of providential circumstances, burdens, trials, and opportunities the Lord directs our concerns in prayer towards specific ends. At times this may be very clear. It is evident that for Simeon and Anna there was a clear conviction not only that the Messianic promises would be fulfilled but even in their lifetime. However, this clarity is not always given to us. In many cases, we experience perplexity and uncertainty in prayer. However, it is our assurance that the Spirit is able to shape and direct perplexed and even 'perverted' prayers and use them for the accomplishment of his perfect will.

Practical application

One of my great anxieties in writing this paper is that the reader might conclude that James Fraser and Stuart Olyott are mistaken and that therefore their testimony can be dismissed. Not at all! One of the greatest needs of the modern church is to have a deeper understanding of the supernatural character of Christian life and experience. When we engage in prayer, we are meeting with the living God. We are assured that we can come with boldness and confidence into the Most Holy Place through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. But more than that, we know that the Spirit is both inspiring and directing our prayers. We need to be more conscious and sensitive to the ministry of the Spirit. My goal is simply to refine our understanding of prayer so that we might give clearer and more helpful pastoral applications.

Our **first** priority in encouraging prayers of faith is to have greater focus on both the promises of God and his character. It is the revealed will of God which provides both the basis of our prayers and gives us confidence that they will be heard and answered. I fear that too often we (both individually and corporately) just ask without considering the grounds of our faith. Furthermore, if we took more time to consider the promises of God it would enlarge our vision regarding what to pray for. Our prayer meetings can be too easily dominated by the small and mundane, with little consideration of the great purposes of God and a longing for their fulfilment when the whole earth will be filled with His glory.

Second, we need a more conscious focus on praying in the Spirit, both as One who gives us confidence in our prayers, and who guides and directs us as we pray. This is part of a wider theme as we need to emphasise the ministry of the Spirit in every aspect of the life of the believer. Such an emphasis encourages both a sense of constant fellowship with the Lord, but also godliness as we walk in step with the Spirit. In prayer, we are to expect and anticipate that the Spirit will guide our prayers and give us specific burdens and direction from time to time. Indeed, he is able to shape and direct every element of our circumstances and experience as he fashions and uses us according to his will. This is

not to divert us from praying according to the revealed will of God (word and Spirit are never to be divided). But our prayers in the Spirit grow and develop as we seek to pray according to his will.

Third, we need the encouragement that in the midst of our often stumbling and even defective prayers, yet the Spirit is at work and can draw straight lines with crooked sticks. It would be pastorally unhelpful to suggest that true prayer is only that in which we have a clear indication of the specific will of God, or when we enjoy a certain peace regarding an answer. While we rejoice in experiences of such clarity, their absence should not crush us with a sense of sinfulness and lack of spirituality.

May the Lord enable us to grow in faith and prayer in the Spirit.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Rise and Fall of Christian Ireland, Crawford Gribben, Oxford University Press, 2021, hbk., 307 pages, £25.00.

Crawford Gribben, a historian of renown, based at Queens University, Belfast, has in this volume met a long-standing need for an overview of Christianity in Ireland from an evangelical standpoint. Although the author's own evangelical convictions are not explicitly stated in the book, they are there not far beneath the surface and can be detected by the perceptive reader. Indeed, it might even be said that he devotes almost too much attention to the activities of smaller evangelical groups. Nevertheless, he manages to give us a comprehensive analysis of all the main features of Christianity in Ireland from its arrival on the island right up until the present day.

What will of great help to researchers is the extensive bibliography extending to some 30 pages, and the footnotes, (some of them quite extensive), run to over 50 pages! Nevertheless, the book is written in a very accessible style which should make it of value to the general reader as well as to the scholar.

There isn't anything very new in the treatment of the early centuries, but it is a competent summary of existing scholarship. Readers will benefit from the overview given of the role played by key figures such as Patrick and Columba. Many original insights are contained in the succeeding chapters, and those unfamiliar with the late medieval period will come away much better informed. Of particular value are the descriptions of the reformations and revivals which Ireland experienced between the 16th and 19th centuries. This comes as no surprise given the fact that these time periods happen to be the main focus of Gribben's personal scholarly research. Considerable attention is paid to the relationship between religion and politics over the centuries, and rightly so.

In dealing with developments in the 20th century, the author portrays the dominance of Roman Catholicism in the Republic of Ireland. He then goes on to analyse the dramatic decline of its influence in recent decades, giving a very bleak account of the abuses and scandals that shattered its hegemony. This paints a disturbing picture, and the bleakness is intensified by the depiction of Protestantism in a gradual, but seemingly inexorable, retreat in Northern Ireland. The book will definitely hammer home the impression that we are living in an increasingly post-Christian society in both parts of the island and will cast light on why things have gone so awry.

Despite the gloominess of the closing chapters, and the unmistakable sense imparted by the book that Christianity has 'fallen' in Ireland to a disturbing degree, Gribben manages to end on a relatively optimistic note. He writes of 'opportunities for new kinds of religious expression' and expresses the hope that 'new Patricks' may shape the 'the rise of another Christian Ireland.'

Overall, then, this book can be warmly recommended both to the general reader who wishes to gain a better understanding of Christianity in Ireland and also to the scholar who can use it as a launching pad for more detailed research. It ought to be required reading as well for anyone embarking upon church planting or mission work in an island reputed to be the abode of 'saints and scholars.'

Raymond Blair

Zwingli. God's Armed Prophet, Bruce Gordon, Yale University Press, 2021, hbk., 349 pages, £25.00.

When people think about the development of the Reformation in Europe, the names that immediately come to mind are Martin Luther and John Calvin. Few think of Huldrych Zwingli of Zurich, and fewer still are acquainted with his theology. That is a sad situation since Zwingli played a major role in the Swiss Reformation and indeed arrived at his insights independently of and as early as Luther. He deserves to be much better known and this excellent biography should help to remedy this neglect.

Bruce Gordon, Titus Street Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Yale University, is one of the leading authorities on Reformation history, especially in Switzerland. Among his many publications are a wide-ranging history of the Swiss Reformation (2002) and a major biography of Calvin (2011). By any standard this is a most important contribution to our understanding of a complex theologian and his role in the work of reform in Switzerland.

Beginning with Zwingli's birth in Wildhaus, an Alpine village in the Toggenburg valley, in 1484, Gordon traces his early life and education in Basel, Bern and Vienna, until he entered the priesthood in Glarus, where he served from 1506 until 1516. He was a diligent priest in many ways, although he had a number of relationships with various women, a fact which was often quoted against him by opponents. He was also an able scholar, a wide and deep reader, and was profoundly influenced by the humanist scholar Erasmus. His political views, especially his opposition to Swiss involvement in the supply of mercenaries for European wars, led to such unpopularity that he had to find another post, this time in Einsiedeln. It was there that Zwingli experienced conversion and, as he put it, 'Before anyone among us had heard the name of Luther, I had begun in 1516 to preach the Gospel of Christ' (p.41). In December 1518 Zwingli was elected 'people's priest' in the Grossmünster in Zurich and in 1519 he began his revolutionary ministry in the city which is inextricably linked to his name.

Gordon then traces in detail the reforming career of Zwingli, beginning with the gradual introduction of Reformed patterns of worship and the sometimes difficult relationship between Zwingli and the civic authorities in Zurich, a theme which will resurface regularly. The growing acceptance of Reformed doctrine is set out and the controversies in which Zwingli was embroiled, especially concerning the Lord's Supper, are clearly described. Zwingli's fraught relationship with Luther, including the discussion of the sacraments at the Marburg Colloquy, shows how the paths on which the two Reformers were set diverged radically. Here too is Zwingli's controversy with the Anabaptists and his sanctioning of the execution by drowning of some of them. It is noteworthy that Zwingli was not the single dominant figure in the Swiss Reformation that Luther was in the German, and the need for Zwingli to seek cooperation with others such as Bucer and Oecolampadius helped to shape his work.

The involvement of Zwingli in the political affairs of the Swiss Confederation also affected his career profoundly, in particular, the deteriorating relationships between Protestant and Roman Catholic dominated cantons. Zwingli came to believe that military force could and should be employed to resolve the divisions, leading to the first and second battles of Kappel, in the second of which Zwingli perished. It was a sad end to a ministry which had done so much to promote biblical truth.

The final two chapters consider Zwingli's subsequent reputation and influence. As Gordon indicates, he was both 'remembered and forgotten'. Chapter 11 considers the immediate aftermath of his death in Switzerland and beyond, whilst Chapter 12 ponders his 'legacies'. Responses varied widely. For some he was a hero, for example to his first biographer, Oswald Myconius. Luther, however, expressed freely in his *Table Talk* his view that Zwingli had died under the wrath of God and was damned.

Calvin maintained a diplomatic distance, hoping to bring about unity in the fragmented Reformed camp. The views of later historians exhibit a similar diversity.

Gordon is an outstanding scholar, deeply versed not only in the works of the Reformers, but also in the secondary literature in various European languages, and yet he writes in an accessible and very readable style. His notes run to over thirty pages and an extensive bibliography is also provided. A number of photographs enhance the text. This is an extremely valuable resource for both scholar and general reader.

David McKay

The Trellis and the Vine – the ministry mind-shift that changes everything, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, Matthias Media, 2021, pbk., 216 pages, £8.99.

The title of this volume by Marshall and Payne, graduates from Moore Theological College (Sydney, Australia), is intriguing. They adopt the picture of the trellis and the vine to illustrate points being made about church structures (the trellis) and church life (the vine).

The main thrust of the 12 chapters of the book comes from the Great Commission.

> All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt 28:18-20)

The authors make a careful and accurate exegesis of the passage by placing an appropriate emphasis on the authority of the One who issued this commission. Jesus has been given '*all authority*' – a fulfilment of Daniel 7:13, 14. With this insight Marshall and Payne correctly draw the reader's attention to the unique authority possessed by Jesus.

> It is on this basis – the unique, supreme, and worldwide authority of the risen Son of Man – that Jesus commissions his disciples to make disciples of all nations.

Many Christians give the impression that the main emphasis in the commission is '*go*'. However, as the authors point out, the main verb in the sentence is not 'go' but '*make disciples*'. The other three verbs in the commission are all subordinate participles which in their own way relate to this main verb. From this observation they draw a very simple conclusion – a conclusion that is profound in its implications.

> It's a commission that makes disciple-making the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple.

Marshall and Payne, having observed church life over many decades, conclude that most congregations look to the minister to be the disciple-maker. For the most part church members, apart from engaging in worship on the Sabbath, are simply observers. Many may play an active part in the structures of the church (the trellis) by helping to run the youth clubs, being active on committees, etc., but not discipling.

In order to make their thesis convincing Marshall and Payne demonstrate from Scripture that 'making disciples' was not limited to the apostles or their successors, the pastor/teachers. For example: the

Hebrew Christians were to 'exhort one another every day'. (Hebrews 3:13); the Thessalonian believers are commended for being excellent disciple-makers, 'for not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything' (1 Thessalonians 1:8); the Philippian church members are commended 'because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now' (Philippians 1:5) In the same letter reference is made to Euodia and Syntyche, two women 'who have laboured side by side with me in the gospel' In the same verse Paul makes reference to 'the rest of my fellow workers'.

The authors of this volume believe that this involvement of church members is the reason why, under God, the New Testament Church (the vine) grew so rapidly. In contrast, for many 21st century churches the trellis (church structures) may be in excellent condition, but the vine (the church) is often stunted, with little or no growth either spiritually or numerically and sadly, in many cases, is withering.

It is pointed out that ministers in preaching often challenge congregants to be disciple-makers. However there is often little response since seldom is any practical help or training provided to prepare members to do this effectively. The authors direct pastors to Ephesians 4:12 where at least part of their role is 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ'. Much is made of 2 Timothy 2:2 where Paul challenged Timothy 'and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.'

Emphasis is placed on selecting members (a small number to begin with) and training them to become disciple-makers. They see this as the role of the pastor, but this reviewer believes it would be wiser if the session was involved in this process. They identify available resources, e.g, Colin Marshall's book *Making Disciples – 8 Bible studies unpacking Jesus' great commission for our lives and churches*.

They answer the objection that most ministers give of being too busy to embark on a programme of training members to be disciple-makers. Marshall and Payne argue that ministers are busier than they ought to be. Investing time in training elders or church members to be effective disciple-makers will pay rich dividends. Much more work, as a consequence, will be carried out within the parameters of the church. One such consequence, with God's blessing, will be a healthy, growing, fruitful vine which will be an encouragement to many and glorifying to Christ.

In commending this book I do not endorse everything that Marshall and Payne have written. They believe that a special sense of 'divine call' to the Christian ministry should <u>not</u> be given the priority historically allocated to it. Rather, they believe that future ministers should be actively recruited from gifted, effective disciple-makers from within the congregation. Apart from this, I do believe that many teaching and ruling elders will derive much blessing from this volume which will help to shift the emphasis from 'the trellis' to 'the vine' where it truly belongs.

Robert McCollum

BOOK NOTICES

Authentic Ministry. Serving from the heart, Michael Reeves, Union Publishing, 2022, pbk., 115 pages, £8.99.

Many books for pastors focus on techniques and programmes for ministry. These have their proper place and careful attention to the details of the work of ministry is essential. Our first concern, reflecting the heart of the God we serve, must however be with *being* rather than *doing*. We need to ask what kind of people we ought to be. That is the central theme of *Authentic Ministry*, based on lectures to theological students by Michael Reeves, President and Professor of Theology at Union School of Theology. He takes as his starting point Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28 'Pay careful attention *to yourselves*'. As Reeves puts it, 'The simple aim of this little book is to help you pay attention to yourself and so cultivate the inner fitness necessary for outward service in the church' (p.10). The foundation is laid in the first of nine chapters, entitled 'Delight in God'. Without this delight, the heart of ministry is missing. We are to seek a constantly renewed sight of 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6). As Reeves aptly says, 'If you try to minister without constantly re-filling your eyes and heart with this light, then in the power of your own adrenaline and wisdom you will go out and you will burn out' (p.18). The following chapters consider 'Boast Only in the Croiss', 'Pray Boldly', 'Relish Humility', 'Esteem Friendship', 'Grow through Suffering', 'Love the Church, 'Be a Theologian, But Take Care' and 'Run the Race'. Each is concise, yet full of practical advice rooted in the Scriptures. A valuable book for those setting out on ministry and also an encouraging refresher course for the experienced.

Reformed and Evangelical across Four Centuries. The Presbyterian Story in America, Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Gareth M. Rosell, Kenneth J. Stewart, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2022, pbk., 364 pages, £23.99.

Presbyterianism has a rich history in America and this comprehensive study of the history of American Presbyterianism will undoubtedly be a fundamental resource for the study of the subject for many years. The picture is one of tremendous diversity, as the Genealogical Table of American Presbyterians (p.332-333) demonstrates, yet it is also one in which a number of uniting themes are evident. The story is traced in the first five chapters from the Lutheran and Calvinist strands in the European Reformation, through the religious conflicts in England and Scotland in the Tudor and early Stuart periods. With chapter 6 attention is turned to the New World and the transplanting of Reformed religion to North America. The story continues through the Colonial period, culminating in American independence, and then into the days of the early Republic. Included is the development of distinctive varieties of American theology, often in response to the thought of Jonathan Edwards, the first evangelical revivals and the growth of missionary vision. Chapter 11 is devoted to the issue of slavery, a subject on which the descendants of the Scottish Covenanters in the Reformed Presbyterian played a part far exceeding their numerical strength as they opposed the church membership of slaveholders. After a consideration of the Civil war era, chapter 13 examines the Darwinian challenge, noting in particular the perspectives of the Princetonians Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield. All the significant social and intellectual movements are carefully evaluated – immigration, urbanization industrialization, the impact of German universities, the Fundamentalist/Modernist debate, the effects of the World wars, the challenges posed by the place of women, the civil rights conflicts, theological drift in some denominations, the decline and resurgence of Evangelicalism. The Conclusion considers 'Presbyterians as Evangelical'. There is, of course, scope for disagreement over certain statements

and arguments – inevitably so in a book of this scope – but there is so much to ponder and appreciate in these pages. Many lessons can be learned and warnings taken. In a day when American Presbyterian continues to develop and fragment, this is important reading. (Note – this is a history of Presbyterianism in the United States. Readers seeking enlightenment on matters north of the border in Canada will have to look elsewhere).

In the Beginning. Listening to Genesis 1 and 2, Cornelis Van Dam, Reformation Heritage Books, 2021, hbk., 371 pages, $30.00.

There are many popular level defences of the historicity of the opening chapters of Genesis and studies of their relationship to the theories of science regarding the origin of the universe, but this book provides a scholarly, well-argued defence of the traditional position which is stimulating and most informative. Cornelis Van Dam was Professor of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario, and is eminently qualified to undertake this study. The opening chapter sets the tone for what follows as Van Dam outlines his 'basic presuppositions: the need for faith, the clarity of Scripture, the importance of genre, the Bible's not contradicting itself and using the text that God has given us. He goes on to consider the place of extrabiblical evidence in interpreting Scripture, in this case ancient Near Eastern literature, science and general revelation Chapter 2). The following chapters examine issues such as the historicity of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, the phrase 'In the beginning', the days of creation, the expression 'God created', the phrase 'the heavens and the earth' in relation to cosmology, the work of each day of creation, and the historicity of Genesis 2 and the Garden of Eden. The final chapter related the work of creation to the gospel. Van Dam is thoroughly acquainted with his source material, biblical, theological and scientific, and interacts with a very wide range of sources. Readers must be prepared to do some hard thinking as they work through the book, but Van Dam's style is readable and accessible. It is well worth the effort, since the opening chapters of Genesis are foundational to all that follows in biblical revelation.

Charges and Addresses, J. C. Ryle, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2021, hbk., 445 pages, £15.00.

Beginning his ministry as the first Bishop of Liverpool at the age of sixty-five, J C Ryle (1816-1900) faced a massive challenge. Aside from the heavy demands of parish ministry, Ryle had to fight significant theological battles as he sought to preserve the Reformed foundations of the Church of England. Modern readers may well be familiar with some of Ryle's writings, such as *Holiness* and *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, but this volume brings together shorter writings than will be unknown to most. Most were first delivered as addresses in the context of clergy gatherings and conferences, including formal visitations of churches under his oversight. Eight of the seventeen pieces printed here were delivered at Liverpool Diocesan Conferences between 1885 and 1898. Although the addresses touch on numerous topics, central to all of them is the necessity for faithful adherence to biblical Christianity, in both life and ministry. Some of the titles give a good sense of the issues that deeply concerned Ryle: 'No Uncertain Sound', 'For Doctrinal Christianity', 'Our Position and Our Dangers', 'Hold Fast', 'Stand Firm' and 'The Present Distress'. Inevitably Ryle's material reflects his nineteenth century context and also the Anglican environment in which he ministered, but it is not difficult to relate what he says to our modern context, where many of the same threats to robust biblical Christianity remain. Although written over a century ago, the various pieces in *Charges and Addresses* provide much food for thought.

John Calvin and the Righteousness of Works, Kevin P. Emmert, Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 2021, hbk., 209 pages, €110.00.

The role of good works in the life of the Christian, particularly in relation to justification, has been a matter of debate throughout the history of Christian theology. One of the fundamental insights of the sixteenth century Reformers was that good works cannot play a meritorious role in justification. That is certainly a view expressed by John Calvin. Nevertheless, there are passages in his writings where he expresses a positive view of 'works righteousness'. How can these two, apparently contradictory, positions be harmonised, if indeed they can? This comprehensive academic study of Calvin's view of faith righteousness and works righteousness and the relationship between them is a major contribution to the debate. It is the fruit of doctoral study at the London School of Theology by Kevin Emmert, now an academic editor in the book division of Crossway. He rightly stresses at the outset that Calvin was above all a reverent exegete of Scripture and so sought to deal faithful with all of the biblical material, including texts which make reference to justification by works. In the first chapter Emmert surveys the various approaches that scholars have taken in wrestling with the perspectives that are encountered in Calvin's writings. The succeeding chapters examine human nature and ability, good works and divine acceptance, the soteriological value of good works, and finally the content of good works. In his conclusion the various threads of the discussion are concisely drawn together. Emmert argues that for Calvin faith alone secures justification, but that as a consequence the imperfect works of believers are perfected in Christ and are crucial to the promotion of personal holiness and righteousness. Calvin sought to take into account all that the Bible says on these matters and his treatment of faith righteousness and works righteousness demonstrates his view that 'Scripture may, without quibbling, be duly brought into agreement with itself' (*Institutes* 1539 ed., 3.17.8). This is a most informative and stimulating study of a number of vital theological issues.

David McKay