

SBJT: Whom would you name as someone whose contributions have been overlooked?

D. A. Carson: I confess I find the assigned topic this quarter unusually difficult. It is not that I cannot think of anyone who might qualify. The problem is that there are so many who might qualify, and I cannot find adequate criteria for adjudicating among them. A friend of mine who named his son Calvin told me (his tongue only slightly in his cheek) that he would have preferred Oecolampadius, but that too few people knew who this hero of the magisterial reformation was. Many have wondered how influential Balthasar Hubmaier would have become in the Anabaptist wing if he had not been killed so young. To make the matter of criteria still more difficult, I have to admit that various writers were a help to me when I was at some stage or other of my pilgrimage, even though later reflection has led me to think less of their views. When I was fourteen years of age, I read Watchman Nee's *The Normal Christian Life*, and found it a wonderful incentive to personal holiness. I remain grateful for that spur to holiness, even though a little more study has convinced me that in his major emphases Nee is exegetically dubious, theologically mistaken, and sometimes pastorally dangerous. So where do I rank him?

Moreover, a choice like this should be made with respect to the readership. If all the readers of *SBJT* were professional academics, my choice would be slanted in a different way than if they were all vocational evangelists. So bearing in mind the readership of this journal, I shall choose Robert Murray M'Cheyne.

M'Cheyne was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on May 21, 1813. He died on March 25, 1843, not quite thirty years old. He had

served as the minister of St. Peter's, Dundee, since 1836. Though he was the minister of this one "kirk" (church), his reputation extended all over Scotland and beyond. Throughout Scotland he was referred to as "the saintly M'Cheyne."

Where M'Cheyne excelled was in his mix of serious study and eminent piety. While still a theological student in Edinburgh, he met regularly with Andrew Bonar, Horatius Bonar, and a handful of other earnest ministers-in-training. The purpose of these informal meetings was to pray, to study, and to work through Greek and Hebrew exercises—disciplines M'Cheyne preserved throughout his short life. This group of students took the Bible so seriously in their living and preaching that when the eminent Thomas Chalmers, then Professor of Divinity, heard of the way they approached the Bible, he said, "I like these literalities."

M'Cheyne was constantly attempting to foster serious Bible reading. He prepared a chart for the people of his own parish to encourage them to read through, in one year, the New Testament and Psalms twice, and the rest of the Old Testament once. (That chart is still very much in use. John Stott has followed the M'Cheyne Bible reading scheme for decades.) To one young man he wrote,

You read your Bible regularly, of course; but do try and understand it, and still more to feel it. Read more parts than one at a time. For example, if you are reading Genesis, read a Psalm also; or if you are reading Matthew, read a small bit of an Epistle also. Turn the Bible into prayer. Thus, if you were reading the First Psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you, and kneel and pray, 'O Lord, give me the blessedness of the man let me not stand in the counsel of the ungodly.' This is the best way of knowing the meaning of the

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Bible, and of learning to pray.

Stories of M'Cheyne are legion. At one point he used to go for a walk on Monday with Andrew Bonar. The two men served separate churches, but they often compared notes and prayed together. On one occasion Bonar told M'Cheyne that on the previous day he had preached on hell. M'Cheyne quietly asked him if he had been enabled to preach it with tears.

It was Andrew Bonar who, after his friend's untimely death, collected some of M'Cheyne's letters, sermons, and miscellaneous papers, and published them, along with a brief biography. The work appeared in 1844 under the title *Robert Murray M'Cheyne: Memoir and Remains*. Within twenty-five years it went through 116 British editions, in addition to those in America and elsewhere. It is still widely recognized as one of the great spiritual classics.

So why do I recommend M'Cheyne? First, he typifies a host of ministers who were scholar-practitioners, pastor-theologians, serious students yet fervent evangelists. The bifurcation between scholar and pastor that cripples so much of ministry today was not for him. Second, he brought piety and serious study together in unashamed union. So much of the Western tradition of study magnifies dispassionate distance from the subject. Certainly we need the careful listening to the text that avoids mere subjectivism. But our aim should not be to become masters of the text but to be mastered by the text. Third, M'Cheyne was passionately committed to reforming the church by the Word of God, and did all he could to promote a broad, deep, and reverent grasp of Scripture. By his standards, so much ecclesiastical ministry today seems mis-focused or even frivolous.

So I recommend M'Cheyne—and not just M'Cheyne, but a host of pastor-theologians who manifest similar values. They will inform our minds, warm our hearts, and steel our wills.