Themelios

THE
GOSPEL
COALITION

Contents

The Servant Solution: The co-ordination of evangelism and social action
The John Wenham Lecture 2006

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Introduction

In his popular and penetrating theodicy, *The Enigma of Evil*, John Wenham concludes his study with an attractive presentation of the character of God as revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He writes:

> Jesus was kind as well as severe – kind in an utterly unsentimental way, which combined depth of feeling with total self-giving. He pre-eminently showed the kindness of God to the world, for he taught God's love, he taught his followers to love and he demonstrated love by deeds and words and demeanour, and supremely by accepting his vocation to shed his blood for the remission of the sins of his enemies.[1]

Note the nature of that revelation: Jesus 'taught' God's love and his followers to love; a love 'demonstrated' by 'deeds' and 'words'. This, it

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1   J. Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 177.

would be argued by many, is sufficient justification for maintaining that it is the task of the church likewise to express the same divine love to a needy world by declaration and deed, evangelism and social action. So writes John Stott:

> It is exceedingly strange that any followers of Jesus Christ should ever need to ask whether social involvement was their concern, and that controversy should have blown up over the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility. For it is evident that in his public ministry Jesus both 'went about ... teaching and preaching' (Matthew 4:23; 9:35) and 'went about doing good and healing' (Acts 10:38). In consequence evangelism and social action have been intimately related to one another throughout the history of the church ... Christian people have often engaged in both activities quiet unselfconsciously, without feeling the need to define what they are doing or why.[2]

Whether it is strange or not, the fact is that tensions and controversy do exist amongst evangelicals on this matter. The controversy does not centre on *whether* Christians should engage in social action, understood as acts to improve the physical, psychological and social welfare of people;[3] but *how* that action might appropriately be expressed and upon what theological basis it should proceed. As Robert K. Johnstone accurately observes:

> *That* evangelicals should be involved socially has become a foregone conclusion ... but *how* and *why* evangelicals are to be involved themselves in society have proven to be more vexing questions. That they are to be involved brings near unanimity; how that involvement takes shape and what is its Christian motivation brings only debate.[4]

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2 John R.W. Stott, *Issues facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan and Scott 1984), 3.

3 This definition is put forward by John Woodhouse, 'Evangelism and Social responsibility' in B.G. Webb (ed.), *Christians in Society*, (Explorations 3, Lancer, 1988), 5.

4 Robert K. Johnstone, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1979), 70.

Current issues

On one side of the debate may be placed Tim Keller who states: 'The ministry of mercy is not just a means to the end of evangelism. Word and deed are equally necessary, mutually interdependent and inseparable ministries, each carried out with the single purpose of the spread of the kingdom of God.'[5] On the other side is Gary Meadors who argues: 'Jesus did not call Paul or present day Christians to a primary task of changing the world-system, but to evangelise individuals, to teach them all things he commanded, and to recognise that Satan is the 'god of this world' and that our only hope for ultimate political correction is Jesus' second advent.'[6] But he is equally insistent that: 'We do not disagree that we should have compassion for starving people and for those who suffer from political injustice.'[7]

Answers to questions of priority and motivation in evangelism and social action are inevitably shaped by the theological framework in which they are viewed. It is understandable that some evangelicals have reacted strongly against theological models which, in their eyes, are remarkably reminiscent of the 'social gospel' which wreaked havoc in many Western churches from the late 19th century throughout the 1930s and well into the 1960s, not least when definitions of what constitutes the Kingdom of God seem far removed from the way the New Testament writers use the term. Such a warning was issued by the late Sir Norman Anderson at the 1967 Anglican Evangelical Conference at Keele University:

> There is a sense in which that Kingdom is already a present reality, for the King is already on his throne, waiting till all things are put under his feet … But is there a wider sense in which one can think of the Kingdom as advanced wherever the will of the King is done, even by those who do not give Him personal allegiance? This, it seems to me, is dangerous ground, for we cannot regard the Kingdom of God as having materialised in a factory for example, merely because social

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5   Tim Keller, Ministries of Mercy, The Call of the Jericho Road (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P. & R. 1997), 106.

6   Gary T. Meadors, 'John R. W. Stott on Social Action', *Grace Theological Journal* 1/2 (1980), 146.

7   Meadors, 'John R.W. Stott on Social Action', 146.

justice and harmony reign therein ... The Evangelical holds no brief for the so called 'social gospel', for society, as such, cannot be 'redeemed' or 'baptised into Christ' ... But it can be reformed.[8]

How, then, are evangelicals to react when they read such a statement as this: 'All the earth is the Lord's and so we trace the Spirit at work *beyond* the Church, especially in movements that make for human dignity and liberation'?[9] Anxiety and caution will be expressed by some and disdain and outright opposition by others. The danger, however, for the more conservative evangelical, is over-reaction, a concern raised by Ranald Macaulay when he writes of the move in some quarters to 'place exclusive emphasis on evangelism'.[10]

Is it possible to co-ordinate evangelism and social action in such a way that it reflects faithfully the pattern of the New Testament; enabling each to reinforce the other while avoiding the extremes of exclusive gospel proclamation on the one hand and the collapsing of evangelism into social action on the other? The contention of this article is that such a course is possible and that it is to be found in the 'Servant solution' which lies behind Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.[11]

We shall examine in detail the form that solution might take with special reference to Matthew 5:13ff. and the metaphors of salt, light and a city on a hill. This will be followed by a consideration of the extent to which the early church implemented this teaching as recorded in the Book of Acts. Brief reference will also be made to the impact Christianity made upon Greaco-Roman Society by virtue of its distinctive beliefs and practices. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn regarding what lessons the Church might learn for today.

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8   J. N. D. Anderson, 'Christian Worldliness-the need and limits of Christian Involvement', *Guidelines*, J. I. Packer (ed.), (CPAS 1967), 231.

9   Nigel Wright, *The Radical Evangelical* (London: SPCK, 1996), 112.

10 Ranald Macaulay, 'The Great Commissions', *Cambridge Papers* 2/7 (1998).

11 For a full discussion on the historical developments and theological implications of Evangelicals and social involvement see Melvin Tinker, 'Reversal or Betrayal? Evangelicals and Socio-Political involvement in the Twentieth Century' in *Evangelical Concerns*, (Fearn: Mentor, 2001), 139–66.

The Sermon on the Mount and its Isaianic background

Jesus' teaching in the section on the Sermon on the Mount, running from 5:13–16, in which he likens his disciples to salt and light, has frequently been drawn upon not only to provide a theological rationale for Christian social action, but also as being suggestive of the means. Thus, John Stott can write:

> Both images set the two communities (Christian and non-Christian) apart. The world is dark, Jesus implied, but you are to be its light. The world is decaying, but you are to be salt, and hinder its decay … Although Christians are (or should be) morally and spiritually distinct from non-Christians, they are not to be socially segregated. On the contrary, their light is to shine into darkness, and their salt to soak into the decaying meat … Before the days of refrigeration, salt was the best known preservative … Light is even more obviously effective; when the light is switched on, the darkness is actually dispelled. Just so, Jesus seems to have meant, Christians can hinder social decay and dispel the darkness of evil.[12]

Without wishing to deny that Christians can and do hinder social decay and dispel evil in a society, it is doubtful that this is the way Jesus intended these metaphors to function within the context of the address given from the Mountain. What such interpretations as Stott's tend to do is to understand 'salt' and 'light' as universal metaphors and then read off their sense as presently understood (preservation and illumination) and assume that this is what Jesus meant. This carries the obvious danger of engaging in an anachronistic reading of the text. What is more, the metaphors tend to be detached from the wider canonical context. They are then treated in isolation from the more immediate literary context, without exploring whether there is any *theological* connection to be made between them. Also, there is often a failure to note that Jesus uses *three*, not two pictures: there is also a 'city on a hill'. What is necessary is first, to consider how this part of Jesus' discourse relates to the immediate context; second to ask whether what is being said has Old Testament associations and thirdly, to

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12 Stott, *Issues facing Christians Today* 65

tease out how such metaphors function in relation to both considerations. This will then enable us to identify more precisely the meaning of Jesus' teaching and its significance for his followers given that it is actual and prospective disciples which are in view.[13]

The wider picture

Matters of setting, background and context

In Matthew's Gospel, the setting is the sermon delivered from the mountainside. Parallels between Jesus and Moses have often been made at this point,[14] for example, the gathering of God's redeemed people before the mountain, the delivering of God's word to them by God's appointed mediator. Without wishing to deny such allusions, I would suggest that they are secondary to the more striking points of contact which exist with the heralding Servant in Isaiah 40–66. The identification of Jesus as this Servant has already been made explicit at his baptism (Matthew 3:17). Jesus is then presented by Matthew as the great fulfilment figure, with the quotation from Isaiah 9 in 4:14–16, who begins his ministry by proclaiming the Kingdom of heaven and the concomitant call to repent. This is in line with the mission of the Servant as found in the central sections of Isaiah who is given the task of announcing the arrival of God's reign in salvation (Isaiah: 52:7), a salvation which is established through his teaching and suffering (Isaiah: 50:4–11; 51:4, 16; 52:13 – 53:12).

Matthew's relating of the ministry of Jesus which immediately precedes the Sermon on the Mount also testifies to the fulfilment of the Isaianic vision (Matthew 4:23–25). There we observe that there is an *outward* movement in which Jesus heralds the good news amongst people who had no difficulty at all in recognizing their needy downtrodden state. At the same time as announcing the kingdom he acted to lift people out of their needy situation as evidenced by healing the sick and liberating the demon possessed (4:24). There might also be a hint of the wider ministry of Jesus as a 'light to the Gentiles' by the passing reference that news spread all over Syria.

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13 Note the withdrawing from the crowds and it is when his disciples came to him that we read: 'And he opened his mouth and taught *them* saying'.

14 E.g. Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, (New Jersey: P & R, 1991), ch. 17.

This is followed, in the second place, by an *inward* movement: the gathering of Israel as represented by the large crowds of verse 25 which came from 'Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan' (cf Isaiah 60:4).

The commencement of Jesus' programmatic ministry in his hometown synagogue by Luke is well known with the assertion that the prophecy of Isaiah 61 had been fulfilled in the hearing of the congregation (Luke 4:16 on). What is not so readily recognized is that the same passage lies behind the commencement of Jesus' public ministry in Matthew as represented by the Sermon on the Mount.

For example,· a convincing case can be made that the first four beatitudes have their grounding in Isaiah 61:

Blessed are the *poor* in spirit for there is the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).
The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the *poor* (Isaiah 61:1).

Blessed are those who *mourn* for they shall be *comforted*' (Matthew 5:4).
He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted ... to *comfort* all who *mourn* and provide for those who grieve in Zion (Isaiah 61:2–3).

Blessed are the meek for they shall *inherit* the *earth* (Matthew 5:5). Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their *inheritance*; and so they will *inherit* a double portion in their *land* (Isaiah 61:7).

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after *righteousness* for they will be filled (Matthew 5:6).
'They will be called oaks of *righteousness*, a planting of the Lord' (Isaiah 61:3).[15]

There are other themes in Isaiah 61 and the surrounding chapters (60 and 62), which have direct bearing on the three metaphors which Jesus

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15 W. J. Dumbrell has given some very helpful exegetical thoughts on the Old Testament background to the Sermon on the Mount in 'Seven Exegetical Studies in Matthew 5:1–17' (Moore Theological College, Sydney).

goes on to use in verses 13 onwards which we shall return to in due course. At this juncture let it suffice to note that there are several themes and motifs which are common to both the Sermon on the Mount and the Servant Songs.[16]

It, is however, to his immediate circle of disciples as distinct from the larger crowd, that Jesus addresses his words.[17]

These are they who are described as 'blessed.' In the LXX *makarios* renders the Hebrew comparative article, 'ashrey'. It therefore functions as a description of a state of affairs rather than acting as a performative announcement which brings into being a state of affairs. As such the addressees are the 'enviable ones' who are in a prized position. The fortunate situation in which they find themselves relates somehow to 'the kingdom' – a term which constitutes the *inclusio* for the beatitudes in verses 2 and 10. Given that the opening beatitude and the closing beatitude define the members of the kingdom, it is to these we shall give some detailed attention.

Jesus describes as enviable those who are 'poor in the realm of the spirit' (note the use of the dative). This is not a description of people lacking spiritual things as such – having a spiritual deficiency of some kind – but a description of someone's lower standing in relation to someone else. *Ptochos* is a depressive word describing a person who is in a dependent-client relationship; it refers to the destitute who could only exist with the help of charitable assistance (e.g. Lazarus in Luke 16:20).[18] It is hardly likely that Jesus was applying this term to describe the physical poverty of his followers as by the standards of the day they were not poor at all, indeed, they carried a money bag and gave alms rather than received them.

The background again is Isaiah. We see in Isaiah 11:4; 61:8; 49:13 that while the Messiah is most certainly presented as one who will be

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16 'There are many themes and motifs common to both the Sermon on the Mount and the Servant Songs: The Messiah as teacher, the declaration of the gospel from the mountain, the gathering of Israel, the salvation of the poor, the kingdom of God, satisfying the hungry, giving gladness and laughter to those who weep and mourn, the reproach of people, being cast out for the sake of the Servant's name, reward and consolation, the importance of hearing, the blind and those who see, turning the other cheek, the mercy of God, the coming of the light, obedience to the Servant.' David Seccombe, *The King of God's Kingdom. A solution to the puzzle of Jesus*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 253.

17 Although, given the response of the crowds to his teaching in 7:28 caution should be exercised against making any hard and fast distinction between his immediate followers who are called to himself and the larger gathering of potential disciples.

18 See David Seccombe, *Possessions and the Poor in Luke–Acts*, (Lintz: SNTU, 1983), 137.

concerned with the physical poor, those whose state of poverty is a result of oppression and injustice, the term poor/afflicted ones (ani) has been extended to describe the *whole* nation, which finds itself destitute and beggar-like in Exile, as it stands in a dependent-client relationship with Yahweh, wholly dependent upon him for salvation. As Seccombe writes: 'Seeing Israel as poor became so intrinsic to national self-understanding that sectarian groups like the Qumran community could seize the title and actually name themselves 'the Poor'.[19]

Thus the poor, *anihim* (LXX *ptochoi*), are those who are in a state of oppression and affliction; designated as being of lowly, humble status. This is the state which characterizes the true people of God.[20] But why should this be described as a fortunate position to be in? The answer is that to such is promised the 'kingdom'. With Isaiah 61 providing the theological backcloth to the beatitudes, what is being promised is the restoration of God's people – an end to Exile[21] and the announcement of the day of favour of Yahweh – the Jubilee. While this is a teaching that is open to all, it only becomes effective for those who identify themselves with Jesus. This will entail suffering which leads to the final beatitude in verse 10 and its extended treatment in verse 11: 'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

It has already been noted how the members of the Qumran community identified themselves as the poor. They described themselves as the *ebyonim*, a term considered appropriate not as a moral quality but because of the 'affliction' they suffered which is the lot of the remnant of Israel.[22] The perfect tense is used to describe Jesus' followers as the persecuted ones, 'Blessed are those who *have been* persecuted' and this reinforces the understanding that this is something which will occur repeatedly. In verse 10 the persecution is said to arise because of righteousness, but in verse 11 it comes about on account of Jesus. In verse 12 a direct association is made with the former prophets, presumably because they too were persecuted on account of righteousness. This raises the question: what 'righteousness' did the prophets perform, and the disciples were about to perform, which leads to such opposition?

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19 Seccombe, *The King of God's Kingdom*, 162.
20 This is a position argued in detail by Warren Heard Northbrook, II, 'Luke's Attitude Toward the Rich and the Poor' A Puritan's Mind, <www.apuritans mind.com>
21 The most notable advocate of this view is N. T. Wright in *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (London: SPCK, 1993). Also see, Mervyn Eloff ('From the Exile to the Christ', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Stellenbosch) who argues that 'return from exile is a valid 'hermeneutical prism' for the interpretation of Matthew's gospel' in its entirety.
22 1 QM 14:7

In the Old Testament righteousness is that which is well pleasing to God, that which receives approval in the heavenly court.[23] The connotation is not distributive justice, guaranteeing fairness so that each receives what is deserved, but acts on behalf of people who cannot help themselves. It is supremely in salvation, therefore, that God exhibits his righteousness (e.g. Isaiah 46:13: 'I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendour to Israel.'). As with John the Baptist who, 'Came in the way of righteousness' (Matthew 21:32) to 'turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God' (Luke 1:16) so is the 'saving righteousness' performed by all true prophets. It is this calling of people to covenant fidelity, a total way of life given over to the Creator-Redeemer God which fulfils the righteous saving purposes of God.[24]

It is noteworthy that the manner in which this persecution comes is 'insulting' and 'speaking evil'. The nature of the prophetic ministry is such that it is invariably met in this way. Why that should be so turns on what the nature of that ministry is, which, having just been touched on above, is elucidated further by the section which lies on the other side of Jesus' 'salt and light' pericope, concerning 'the fulfilment of the law and the prophets' (Matthew 5:17–20).

In verse 17 Jesus says to his disciples, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and/or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.' The use of the aorist subjunctive suggests that Jesus was heading off a future objection, which might be raised in the light of his teaching, rather than countering one currently being held by his followers. The identical term, 'law and the prophets' is used again in 7:12 forming an

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23 See S. Motyer, 'Righteousness by faith in the New Testament' in, *Here We Stand*, ed. J. I. Packer, (London: Hodder 1986), 35.

24 Motyer writes of the Sermon on the Mount, 'We are struck by the way Matthew does not distinguish between God's righteousness and man's. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" probably does not refer primarily to the ethical righteousness which Jesus' disciples must seek to attain, but (in parallel with to "kingdom") to the eschatological completion of God's salvation for which we yearn. If that is correct, then this will be the meaning of "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness" (5:6) also. But it would be wrong to deny that in both these verses the thought is of righteousness resting upon man, for the longing expressed in 5:6 is to be caught up in God's saving purpose. Then 5:20 makes it clear that this places a rigorous ethical demand on us, 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven', and 6:1 NIV speaks simply of "your acts of righteousness". This ethical meaning fits in with Matthew's overall emphasis on the call to discipleship, and is always in mind when he uses the adjective *dikaios*.' 'Righteousness by faith in the New Testament', 36–37.

inclusio for the whole of this section and so strongly intimating that Jesus is emphasising continuity between former revelation and his present ministry, something which he goes on to expound at length. Also, from the fact that in verse 18 Jesus deals with the matter of the law alone, it would be legitimate to infer that the use of the term 'prophets' indicates that Jesus has in view the wider extension and application of the law, the 'spirit' as well as the 'letter'. This would be so since it was the function of the prophets to correct the people's misapplication and neglect of their covenant obligations (as Jesus himself does in the remaining section running from 5:21 – 7:12). This aspect of the prophets' ministry is summarized in 2 Kings 17:13: 'The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all of his prophets and seers, 'Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.'

In what sense, therefore, do Jesus and his followers 'fulfil' the law and prophets? The word *pleroo* occurs 16 times in Matthew. Twelve of these occur in relation to the fulfilment of prophecy. Not counting the one here in verse 17, the other three occasions, (3:15; 13:48; 23:32), indicate the completion and finality of something – the 'filling' of covenant obligations in baptism, the 'filling' of a net with fish, and the 'filling up' of God's judgement. So it would seem that the meaning in verse 17 is that in the new age of the Messiah amongst the Messiah's new community the final expression of the law will be manifest, its *telic* end will be reached.[25] Theirs will be a righteousness which exceeds that of the Pharisees (20), whose attitude was anticipated and condemned by Isaiah (Matthew 15:7) with their principle of 'minimum requirement' which is in the sights of much of Jesus' teaching in the following section. By way of contrast, Jesus, in true prophetic style, is concerned not only with outward action but also with inner attitude, motives as well as methods. He commends the principle of 'maximum application'. As the prophets in the past called God's people back to the true nature of their covenant obligations, not least in the realm of social justice, and were met with scorn and derision, so the followers of the Servant, who exercise such a prophetic ministry, will meet the same.

To summarize: the Servant heralds good tidings from the mountain; it is the time when the exile is ended and restoration begins for the people of God. The state of those who recognize their afflicted situation is one of

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25 See, Zoe Holloway, 'Understanding and Misunderstanding the Discontinuity that Christ Makes to the Moral Order and the Mosaic Law: A Conceptual Foundation for Using the Mosaic Law in Christian Ethics' (Unpublished Thesis, Moore College Sydney).

great fortune for to them belongs the kingdom. This paradoxical state of blessing/affliction will continue in the form of the persecution of those who carry out a prophetic ministry. This happened with the former prophets and will continually re-occur as people are called to covenant fidelity. In this sense Jesus and his new community stand in direct line with the prophets of old and the righteousness spoken of in Isaiah 61 begins to be fulfilled amongst his followers.

A few further notes are in order on the Isaianic background to the Sermon on the Mount before studying three metaphors of 5:13 following.

Isaiah 61 links both back to chapter 60 and forward to chapter 62. Chapter 60:1–3 has the people awaiting the return to Zion with the promise that, 'Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.' Verses 4–11 picture the rebuilding of the city on a hill – Jerusalem. Towards the end, in verses 21–22, we hear echoes of the Abrahamic covenant with references to the giving of the land and the growth of a mighty nation: 'Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land for ever. They are the shoot of the planted, the work of my hands for they display my splendour. The least of you will become a thousand, the smallest a mighty nation. I am the Lord, in its time I will do this swiftly.' In chapter 62 the blessings of the 'everlasting covenant', announced in 61:8 are elucidated further with the note of righteousness to the fore: verse 1, 'For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quite, till her *righteousness shines* out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your *righteousness* and all kings your glory.' All of this fulfils the eschatological vision in chapter 2 of Isaiah:

> In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief amongst the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many will come and say, 'Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we might walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Isaiah is the only prophet who uses the light metaphor to any significant extent. The link between God's presence, the change this occasions amongst his people and his salvific purposes for the world, is a close one. Motyer commenting on Isaiah 60 writes:

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When the Redeemer has come to Zion, gathered his penitents (59:20) and appointed a covenant mediator to share the Lord's Spirit with them, it is not just that they are bathed in light but that they are irradiated, inwardly charged with new, outshining life ... This subjective experience has an objective basis, *for your light has come.*[26]

The presence of God as symbolized by the light metaphor and its saving and transforming witnessing effect, are also associated closely with the theme of 'righteousness' which is dominant in chapter 62 and the work of God's 'Anointed One'. The work of this divine agent which has been set forth in chapter 61 is to bring about a new status of righteousness before God, a rescue from bondage (verse 1) and a visible righteousness of life (2).[27]

Thus, the flow of the revelation in this section is the elevation of a New Jerusalem. It is the formation of a people of righteousness who will become a light to the nations. It will be a time of unprecedented covenant fidelity that will result in an inward movement of peoples drawn to the light, and an outward movement of God's word/law.

All of this has direct bearing on our key section and, in turn, our understanding of the relation between gospel proclamation and social involvement.

Jesus speaking to his disciples (the 'poor'- afflicted ones who engage in prophetic ministry), is emphatic: '*You are* the salt of the earth; *you are* the light of the world.' Here we discover a correspondence with the structure of the beatitudes themselves: the first four describe the condition of the members of the kingdom, the second four relate their activity. In other words, their 'doing': showing mercy, godliness (pure in heart); peacemaking and a prophetic ministry of righteousness: arising out of their 'being'. This is also very much in line with what has been seen regarding the Zion of the last days. It is because of the salvation experienced through God's servant that not only has a new status of righteousness been bestowed, but a new life of righteousness is being lived.

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26 A. Motyer, The Prophecy of Isaiah (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 494.
27 Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 506.

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The sense and referent of the metaphors

The meaning of the two metaphors salt and light and their connection with the third metaphor, a 'city on a hill'.

First, there is the description of the disciples as the 'salt of the earth'.

Given the substantiated premise that Isaiah 40–66 stands behind the Sermon on the Mount, it is perhaps suggestive that the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 42:6 is described as one who is sent 'to be a covenant of the people and a light to the Gentiles'. On the basis of the covenant renewal, the light goes forth to the ends of the earth. This was to be the task of Israel as symbolized by Mount Zion in Isaiah 2, a servant which failed and which became blind and deaf (Isaiah 42:18) and so was as much in need as the Gentiles. This task has now been fulfilled by Jesus (Matthew 5:17 following) and, in turn, his gathered community. If the parallel is to be maintained it follows that being the 'salt of the earth' is a symbolic reference to maintaining the covenant. This is an interpretation which is justified by a consideration of the Old Testament use of 'salt' in covenantal agreements, for instance Leviticus 2:13: 'Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings'; 2 Chronicles 13:5: 'Don't you know that the Lord, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants for ever by a covenant of salt?' Could not the way the metaphor functions be that just as salt has the quality of making something last which would otherwise decay, having a preserving quality, so there is a concern to preserve the covenant, thus making it last when otherwise it would not? When this metaphor is transferred to the work of the prophets it is easy to see how it would operate. The task of the prophetic ministry is to remind the people of the covenant and the way of life which is consistent with that covenant and so ensure its continuing operation. This way the prophets acted as 'salt of the covenant', seeking to maintain the covenant's integrity amongst God's people.

For the disciples to fulfil their duty of being the salt of the earth (salt of the land?), they, like the prophets, have to remain distinctive and speak God's truth. *At first sight*, therefore, if a strict parallel is to be maintained, we would maintain that it is a proclamatory ministry which is being envisaged here as was the case with the Old Testament prophets.[28] Acting

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28 Since this Sermon constitutes the platform for Jesus' ministry in Matthew, with Jesus gathering his disciples to prepare them as his followers, and given the

in a salt-like capacity involves calling people to be true to the way of life of the new covenant community, a way of life Jesus expounds in the rest of the Sermon. Such a ministry will invariably meet with resistance, as Jesus has just warned. It is however, when faced with such opposition that his followers run the danger of losing their saltiness'. This may be by adopting values and lifestyles that are indistinct from the people being addressed and/or by diluting the message being brought to bear, and so, in effect becoming a false prophet (Matthew 7:15 following). If this happens, as it did with Israel herself, there will be a 'trampling under foot' in judgement (cf. Isaiah 5:5; 10:6; 22:5). The salt metaphor then, has little to do with 'penetrating society' and so 'preserving' it. It has much more to do with the followers of Jesus engaging in a 'prophetic' word ministry which brings people into a covenant relationship with the one true God through Jesus Christ, as well as a change of values and lives which flow from that covenant.[29]

The second metaphor, 'the light of the world', is specifically linked to the 'city on a hill which cannot be hidden' (14).

In Isaiah it is Zion which is to be such a city, the community of the redeemed whose light and shining righteousness attracts the nations in the end times (60: 1–3; 62:1–3). The 'irradiated' 'inwardly charged, new life' which shines like a light referred to by Motyer, is, according to the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah, brought about by the pouring out of God's Spirit and the bestowal of new hearts on which are written God's law (Ezekiel 36:24–32; Jeremiah 31:31–34). It would appear, however, that Jesus is giving the symbols of light and a city a new referent, namely, the poor/prophetic community of his followers. In Isaiah 62:2, the nations (Gentiles) will 'see the righteousness' of the redeemed which 'shines out of them like a torch'. Likewise, the new 'city' of the redeemed cannot be hid and their righteous good works (which are to exceed those of the Pharisees), will be seen and result in the offering of praise to God the

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centrality of preaching in his own ministry (Mark 1:38), it would be most extraordinary to say the least, if *no* instruction were offered by Jesus on the proclamatory aspects of ministry. What is more, one of the main characteristics of the Servant in Isaiah is that he is one who proclaims God's Word (Is. 49:1, 2, 52:7, 53:1, 61:1–2). This interpretation of the disciples being salt fills what would otherwise be an astonishing lacunae in the Sermon.

29 The apostle Paul may be using the metaphor of salt in this way in Col. 4:6: 'Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.' The content of this 'conversation' is 'the mystery of Christ' (2), which is why he is in chains and asks for prayers so he can proclaim it clearly (3). Here then, in the life of Paul, is another example of the prophetic word salt ministry and which results in persecution.

Father (16). It is by being salt within one's own circle, calling God's people to be true to his covenant and being true to it oneself, that the covenant community will influence the world in drawing others to the one true God. It is also from this community that God's law/word goes into the world as a source of blessing (cf. Isaiah 2:3). This is the *raison d'etre* of the community: just as a lamp placed on a stand is to illumine the whole house, a hidden lamp is self-defeating, so there can be no retreat *from* the world for these kingdom people if they are to be a light *to* the world. It is 'before men' that such deeds are performed and so producing a desired doxological effect (5:16).

It is not without significance that the same programmatic pattern, established here at the beginning of his Gospel, is repeated by Matthew at the end in chapter 28:16 onwards. On that mountain the Son of Man, who has received all authority and an everlasting kingdom (cf. Daniel 7:13), gathers his people in order to disperse them into the world with the specified task of proclaiming and demonstrating his rule. This involves making disciples of all people's groups, baptizing them into his teaching[30] so that they will obey all that has been commanded (cf. Matthew 5:19). This is the calling of his people which they are to maintain until the end of the age, when the reign of God which has been inaugurated will be consummated. What is anticipated and promised in Isaiah, a new heavens and new earth (66:22), will finally be realized at the end of time. It is the renewed covenant community, the city on a hill, which is God's chosen vehicle for achieving these things.

Seccombe expresses well the relationship between the Servant, his gathered people and their mission:

> At the time of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus evidently did not see himself carrying out the Servant's mission as an isolated individual. We observe, how, having declared the gospel, he appeals to all who have ears to hear. This is a plea for response, and the nature of that response is to become his disciple and join him in his mission of

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30 D. B. Knox presents a very strong case that this is the correct understanding of the use of 'baptism' in Matthew 28 in his chapter 'New Testament Baptism' in *D. B. Knox Collected Works, Volume* 11 (Kingsford, NSW Australia: Matthias Media, 2002). He concludes: 'The "great commission" of Jesus contains no reference to administering water baptism. The reference to baptizing is entirely metaphorical in line with other uses of the word by Jesus. It is a command to proclaim the news of the Messiah's coming to the nations to make them disciples of the true God, to immerse the nations into the revealed character of God so that their whole way of life is changed and their cultures sanctified (*cf.* Rev. 21:26)', 278.

suffering; he warns them that if they will not they will never see his kingdom. This is because first, the role of the Suffering Servant was Israel's role; secondly only in default did the task pass on to the disciples, and finally with their defection, to one individual. Thus Jesus calls upon all who heard him to join him in an active programme of outgoing love and generosity that would engage with others and demonstrate God's goodness. It would meet opposition with generosity, prayer, and a willingness to suffer. God was seeking to be reconciled with his enemies, and his sons were called to participate in the peacemaking initiative (Luke 6:27–38).[31]

The co-ordination of evangelism and social action

We are now in a position to see how evangelism and social action are to be co-ordinated, arising out of, and modelled by, the Sermon on the Mount and how they are shaped by the Isaianic motifs which lie behind it.

First, there is the heralding of the good news, the *euangelion*. The blessings themselves are evangelistic, declaring the good news of the year of the Lord's favour to his afflicted people, the *ptochoi*, that the kingdom is theirs.[32] As the word of the Lord was to go out from Mount Zion in Isaiah's oracle, so it now goes out from the 'new city on a hill' as represented here by Jesus' disciples. Evangelism is the priority ministry so that all nations will receive the blessing promised to Abraham (Genesis 12), will hear the news that there is now an appointed ruler of the house of David (2 Samuel 7) and that his name is Jesus who is the Christ (Matthew 1:1). The time of Exile is now over, God has come to dwell amongst his people in the form of the one who is called 'Emmanuel' (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). As the suffering Servant, he atones for the sins of his

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31 Seccombe, *Possessions*, 259. Similarly David Peterson can write of Jesus' ethic as presented in the Sermon on the Mount: 'It is an ethic for the community of disciples, called to live for Jesus in a special relationship with one another and with a hostile world, holding forth to the world the message of the kingdom and living out the values and attitudes of the kingdom in anticipation of its consummation by God at the end of human history. Jesus does not provide a pattern for transforming society *per se*, but intends that the lifestyle of the disciples individually and collectively should be both judgement on fallen humanity and a pointer to the possibility of renewal and change under the rule of God', 'Jesus and Social Ethics' in '*Christians and Society*' 92 (Lancer, 1988).

32 Those who have argued at length for the evangelistic character of the beatitudes are reviewed by Seccombe in his *Possessions*, 34f; 85f.

people (Matthew 1:21/ Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12). What was said of the Servant can also be said of his servants: 'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns".' (Isaiah 52:7/ Romans 10:15).[33] Furthermore, given the cataclysmic nature of not responding to this message (Matthew 7:13, 23, 27) the urgency as well as the priority of Gospel proclamation is underscored.

Second: as salt, the followers of Jesus are to engage in a prophetic ministry and ensure that the new covenant remains operative. Here again is stressed the priority of word ministry – declaring to people Gospel truths. These truths are not to be understood in a reductionist fashion, they embrace the concerns for justice and right living that God has. Social relations lie at the heart of Jesus' prophetic application of the law (Matthew 5:21 – 7:12) as they did for Isaiah himself (Isaiah 1; 2:6 following; 5:8 following). At the centre of the great 'Jubilee' passage of Isaiah 61 we find these words: 'For I the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity' (8). If his followers are to be faithful to their calling as 'prophetic salt' in maintaining the integrity of the covenant, can they settle for anything less? Such ministry is costly and it is often from the professing religious people that opposition will most likely come (as Jesus and the apostles were soon to discover).

Third: as a community of light, God's people are to embody and express the new life of the kingdom amongst themselves and outwards to others: being, as prodigal, in loving forgiveness as God is himself (Matthew 5:44); giving generously to those in need (6:1following); refusing to serve Mammon and instead storing up treasures in heaven (6:19 following; learning contentment and eschewing judgementalism (7:1 following). This is a community of light which will shine; whose deeds will impact upon a watching world and act as a witness to the reality of the breaking in of God's kingdom here on earth.

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33 Note the priority of proclaiming God's truth 'justice' in the first servant song. Motyer writes: 'Justice is the leading idea in this first Servant Song, pointing to the scope of the servant's work, his reliability in its discharge and his perseverance through to its accomplishment. The word '*mishpat*' is versatile, but its sense is plain in this context ... it is a summary word for his revealed truth (cf. in verse 4, the parallelism between justice and law/'teaching') and its requirements. In this wide sense the servant brings the truth of God to the world, a pointed contrast to their former situation', *Prophecy of Isaiah*, 319.

Salt, light and a city on a hill in Acts

How the early Christians, as portrayed in the Book of Acts, fulfilled this calling of Jesus

It has been argued above that although the two metaphors are related, they are nonetheless distinct; being salt and engaging in prophetic action is a necessary condition for being light and vice versa. This distinction is maintained in the Book of Acts in relation to the proclamatory, evangelistic work of the apostles and the communal life of the Christian believers. This dichotomy also has bearing on the question as to whether it can be legitimately claimed that the church qua church actually has a 'mission'?

Blue [34] has shown that a clear differentiation of activities occurs in Acts between those which took place within the confines of a private domestic residence (the house church) and those which required a more open, public setting. He writes:

> Luke consistently pairs the public and private activities of the early church. On the one hand, the Temple precincts, synagogues, lecture halls, etc. served as platforms from which to preach the gospel. On the other, the converted hearers formed a community centred in the houses which were placed at the communities' disposal by affluent Christians.[35]

In Acts 5:42, he argues that the chiastic construction suggests the activity of the house churches was distinct from the public proclamation which took place in the Temple precincts: 'Every day in the temple courts and from house to house they did not cease teaching and proclaiming Jesus as Christ.' A parallel construction, and so a similar distinction, is found in Acts 20:20.[36]

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34 Brad Blue, 'The Influence of Jewish Worship on Luke's Presentation of the Early Church', in *Witness to the Gospel, The Theology of Acts,* I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson, eds, (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1998).

35 Blue, 'Influence of Jewish Worship', 482

36 The reference in Acts 5:21 to the apostles having entered the Temple courts 'began to teach the people' is no exception. This is just another way of saying they proclaimed the Gospel since the command of the angel in verse 20 who released them from prison, was to 'Stand in the Temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life' which, as Marshall points out, is similar to 'the message of salvation' (13:26; in Syriac 'life' and 'salvation' are rendered by the same word). Marshall goes on to say: 'The use of *this* word is odd (cf. 22:4), but is perhaps a Lucan trick of style.' I. H. Marshall, Acts (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 118.

This interpretation[37] could be applied to unravel the summary description of the activities of the early Christians in Acts 2:46:

Day after day	
They steadfastly met together on the temple *Place* (public)	In their houses breaking bread *Place* (private)
Sharing food with glad a generous hearts. *Main clause*: characteristic of private gatherings	
Praising God *Place* (private)	Having goodwill towards all the people (*Echontes charin pros holon ton laon*) *Place* (public)
The Lord added to their number those being saved *Main clause*: results of the public activity	
Day after day	

Blue concludes:

> If we have rightly understood the Lukan presentation of early Christianity, both in Palestine and the Graeco-Roman world, the gospel was first proclaimed in the publicly acceptable places. Subsequently, those who had responded were drawn together into house gatherings. Luke never even suggests that during these private meetings of believers the gospel message was preached for the purpose of converting the hearers. On the contrary, for Luke, these private house meetings were for the benefit of the Christian community alone.[38]

37 Originally proposed by Klauck and cited by Blue, 'Influence of Jewish Worship', 486.
38 Blue, 'Influence of Jewish Worship', 486.

Here it is being proposed that this pattern of public proclamation and private gathering parallels the two functions of being salt and light.

There is the ministry of the word in evangelism. On the day of Pentecost the redeemed community is gathered in an upper room (Acts 1:13). With the pouring out of the Holy Spirit the scene shifts as the group spills out into the public arena, the most natural setting being the Temple precincts, which at that time of day would have been busy. It is here that Jesus is declared Lord and Christ, fulfilling the promise of Scripture (2:32). In response to the preaching of Peter, the people are called to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus. The setting is Jerusalem – Mount Zion. The people are being called to a renewed covenant relation with God as evidenced by the giving of the Spirit (Joel 2:28 following; Ezekiel 36:24 following). The gathering in of God's people to Zion has started from the *Diaspora* as represented by the different language groups present (2:9 following). This continued on a daily basis (2:47; 3:1; 5:12 on). The everlasting covenant made to David is fulfilled in Jesus and offered to the people (3:24–26).

Not surprisingly, given Jesus' warning in Matthew 5:11, such 'salt activity' is soon met with opposition from the ruling authorities (Acts 4:1 onwards; 5:17–40).[39] It was for 'acts of righteousness' that they suffer and, accordingly, they take Jesus' injunction literally when, having foretold of persecution because of him, they are to 'rejoice and be glad' (Acts 5:41).[40]

The prophetic activity was also directed inwards to the redeemed community, the 'city on a hill'. This comes out most clearly in the Ananias and Sapphira episode (Acts 5:1–11). Their lying to the Holy Spirit was met with swift and deadly judgement such that 'a great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about such events' (5:11). The words of Peter are reminiscent of the words of the Old Testament prophets to Israel.[41] Such

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39 Whilst the occasion for the harassment and arrest of the apostles in Acts 4 is the healing of the crippled beggar, the focus of concern for the Sanhedrin was the 'name' by which the miracle took place. As Peterson has shown, this represents the divine authority and continued blessings of Jesus in salvation. Accordingly it is the content of the Gospel proclaimed which is the underlying issue and cause of contention rather than the 'act of kindness' itself (4:9) which Peter well understands and forms the basis of his defence (4:10ff.). This view is also borne out by the subsequent arrest and miraculous release recorded in chapter 5 when the apostles are forbidden to teach 'in this name', (5:28). See D. Peterson, 'Worship in the New Community' in *Witness to the Gospel*, 381.

40 The most striking example in Acts of the exercise of prophetic ministry of which Jesus speaks and the consequent opposition is met by Stephen in Acts 6 and 7. Note how in true prophetic style he recalls the history of Israel, the peoples' habitual covenant breaking and the persecution of the prophets of which the rejection of Jesus forms the climax (7:51–53).

41 See Is. 66:2b-4

behaviour was a denial of the new covenant and the renewed life which flows from it and as such threatened its future existence.

All of this is matched by the 'light' motif. As the redeemed community, new values and generous lifestyles were to be adopted and expressed. For Luke it is the formation of a community of property which most markedly reflects these things as indicated by its repetition in his first two summaries: Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32, 34. The statement of the last verse that, 'there were no needy (*endees*) among them', suggests the fulfilling of the Mosaic law of Deuteronomy 15:4.[42] Although the language may be verging on the overstatement, Capper provides some insight into the significance of what Luke records when he writes:

> Luke's intent is salvation-historical as well as ethical. As a salvation-historical reference, his account draws out the momentous significance of God's new act of the creation of the Church. God's Spirit of love, poured out on the community of his Messiah, brings a new ethical creation characterised by the *koinonia* which the first uncorrupted human beings shared. That a new phase of history has begun is symbolised by the momentary return of a paradisal state of the first human beings. Since the eschatological hope is hope for a return to paradise, Luke's description is also a glimpse of the eschatological future. The story of the Church's beginnings reveals its true essence as the vehicle of eschatological salvation through which all creation will be renewed.'[43]

More modestly what are envisaged are a reversal of the corrupt Zion which Isaiah condemned and the inauguration of the eschatological community that he foresaw. Instead of 'adding house to house and field to field' in greed (Isaiah 5:8) houses and fields were sold in order to meet need (Acts 4:34). Whereas in former Jerusalem the cause of the widows was neglected (Isaiah 1:23), in God's new Zion it is met (Acts 6:1 following).[44]

The public and private activities of the early church can be distinguished, but the distinction is not a hard and fast one. It is highly unlikely that others in Jerusalem were unaware of the activities of the church in caring and

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42 Deut. 15:4: 'However, there should be no poor among you', the LXX uses endees.

43 Brian Capper, 'Reciprocity and the Ethic of Acts' in *Witness to the Gospel*, 511.

44 Capper argues that: 'Although Luke describes the community of goods of Acts 2–6 with remarkable enthusiasm, the later chapters of Acts do not suggest that he wished his readers to institute formal property sharing arrangements. Rather, his model becomes almsgiving', 'Reciprocity and the Ethic of Acts', 499.

sharing. The word ministry of the apostles to the people was accompanied by a ministry of healing miracles (Acts 5:12–16). Both would clearly constitute the 'good works' spoken of by Jesus, and mirror the pattern of his own ministry (Matthew 4:23 onwards).

In the debate on the relation between evangelism and social action, both are often bracketed together as at least being different, but complementary, aspects of the Church's 'mission'. In recent years the suitability of this phrase has been brought into question. Peter Bolt writes: 'The concept of the "mission of the church" ought to be laid to rest. Acts does not present "the Church" as an institution which is sent. A particular church may send individuals to do a particular work (cf.13:1–4), but the church itself is not sent.'[45] Similarly John Woodhouse comments:

> The New Testament does not contain this concept. The apostles are 'sent'. And one may suppose that evangelists are 'sent'. Perhaps in some sense all Christians are 'sent' (John 20:21). But the 'church' as the church is not 'sent'. Individuals are given *to* the church, 'sent' to the church if you like (Ephesians 4:11) and the church sends individuals (Acts 13:3). But we do not find the *church* with a mission. This is because the New Testament concept of 'church' is not of an institution. All the 'sending' has the gathering of God's people by the gospel as its goal. The gathering, the 'church', is not the means to some other goal.[46]

This is very much in accord with what has already been seen in Acts. The public proclamation of the gospel has as its *goal* the addition of people to the gathering/church (Acts 2:47). That is where they receive the apostles teaching and experience fellowship as the redeemed community, thus bringing about in some measure the Zion of the last days, spoken of by Isaiah, with 'nations coming to your light' (Isaiah 60:3) and being 'taught his ways' (Isaiah 2:3). Individuals or groups of individuals are sent out (as were the disciples in Matthew 10) but with a view to 'gathering in' (Acts 5:12–14). The priority of Word ministry is asserted by the apostles in Acts 6:2 in response to the pending crisis amongst the Grecian Jewish widows that, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables'. Practical steps, however, are taken so as not to neglect the needy provision of widows which would have undermined the ministry in a different way, for by denying the proper expression of the new covenant the salt would be in danger of losing its saltiness.

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45 Peter Bolt, 'Mission and Witness' in *Witness to the Gospel*, 211.
46 'Evangelism and Social responsibility', 22.

Being salt and light and the transformation of a society

The effect of the prophetic testifying to God's truth from which flow the good deeds of light amongst Christians in the first four centuries has been documented carefully by Rodney Stark.[47]

He shows how:

> Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world. ... [That it] revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.[48]

The latter example of nursing is a good one to start with when In 260 AD, during what was probably a massive measles epidemic, Dionysius Bishop of Alexandria wrote:

> Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless

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47 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity. A sociologist reconsiders history*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

48 Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 161. Following Stark, Alan Kreider puts forward the case that the remarkable growth of Christianity up to AD 300 at a rate of 40% per decade, was in large measure due to the impressive nature of the distinctive Christian lifestyles. He writes: 'How did these conversions take place? Not as a result of attractive worship services ... Christian worship was for the Christians themselves; their services were occasions to worship God, not to attract outsiders', (Alan Kreider, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom*, Alcuin/Grow, Joint Liturgical Studies 32, Cambridge: Grove Books). Nor did conversions happen as a result of the Christians' public witness: 'Christianity was an illegal *superstitio*; its adherents could not speak in the public forum. To be sure, the early Christians produced some apologists, who gave account of the faith and practice of the Christian communities, for the edification of the members of those communities and if possible as a means of communicating to interested outsiders. The Christians

of the danger; they took charge of the sick, attending every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains.[49]

Contrast that description with his account of the pagans:

The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the suffers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease.

That this was not the hyperbolic license of a preacher, casting the 'opposition' in a bad light, is substantiated by a similar description of the activity of non-Christians in Athens by Thucydides in 431 BC.[50]

What motivated such self-sacrificial action amongst Christians? Cyprian's instruction to his congregation at Carthage helps to give the answer:

The people being assembled together; he first of all urges upon them the benefits of mercy ... Then he proceeds to add that there is nothing remarkable in cherishing merely our own people with the due attentions of love, but that one might become perfect who should do something more than heathen men or publicans, one who, overcoming evil with good, and practicing a merciful kindness like that of God, should love his enemies as well ... Thus the good was done to all men, not merely to the household of faith.[51]

This is pure Sermon on the Mount – the salt ensuring that the community is light.[52]

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also spoke of their faith quietly, privately ... And people listened to them because Christians lived in ways that were distinctive and attractive. As Minucius Felix put it: "We do not preach distinctive things; we live them!"', A. Kreider, 'Conversion and Christendom an Anabaptist Perspective', www.c3.hu/~bocs/rcmenno.htm. Allowing for Felix's use of hyperbole, it is significant that even Kreider notes that they 'spoke of their faith' and what gave their speech credibility was their lives.

49 *Festival Letters*, Quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.22, (1965 ed.).
50 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (London: Penguin, 1954), 51–53.
51 Quoted by Stark in *The Rise of Christianity*, 87.
52 In his remarkable book, *The Real Heroes of the Inner City – It can be Done* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2000), Sir Fredrick Catherwood gives many examples in

Conclusion

At the Mount of Matthew 5 the heralding Servant is seen gathering his nascent servant community to himself, thus beginning to realize the great act of salvation prophesied in Isaiah 40–66. The proclamatory prophetic ministry of the disciples which entails suffering is to the fore, acting as the salt of the covenant. But this cannot be separated from the new way of life created by the Good News which in turn testifies to that gospel. This prophetic ministry is one which not only calls people into a living covenantal relationship with God through Christ, but also seeks to uphold its integrity by calling the redeemed people to act righteously and so shine like the city on a hill – Zion – as it was meant to be.

In his teaching, Jesus presents 'being salt' and 'being light' as two different, but intrinsic and integrally related, aspects of what it means to be members of his covenant community. While it may legitimately be argued that theologically evangelism has priority for the church (for it is only the evangel which saves and brings people into the new covenant way of life), operationally, social action, as an expression of the community's 'light', cannot be neglected without bringing into question the church community's covenantal integrity, its saltiness.

The implications of this for Christians living in a postmodern setting have been powerfully presented by David Wells.[53] He writes:

> The postmodern reaction against Enlightenment dogma will not be met successfully simply by Christian proclamation. Of that we can be sure. That proclamation must arise within a context of *authenticity*. It is only as the evangelical Church begins to put its own house in order, its members begin to disentangle themselves from all those cultural habits which militate against a belief in truth, and begin to embody that truth in the way that the Church actually lives, that postmodern scepticism might begin to be overcome. Postmoderns want to see as well as hear, to find authenticity in relationship as the precursor to hearing what is said. This is a valid and biblical demand. Faith, after all, is dead without works, and few sins are dealt with as harshly by Jesus as hypocrisy. What postmoderns want to see, and are entitled

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the UK where churches have followed this example in social action, leading not only to people being helped and communities transformed, but lives surrendered to Christ.

53 David F. Wells, *Above all earthly Pow'rs – Christ in the Post Modern World*. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006).

Preaching Advice from the 'Sermon' to the Hebrews

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My pastoral library includes an entire section of books on preaching. Most of these books were written either to help teach seminary students how to preach or to assist seasoned pastors improve their preaching. I must confess: there is no part of my pastoral library I have found less useful than these 'how-to' guides on preaching. The weakness of these books is the fact that they take a preaching methodology which works for one individual preacher and attempt to universalize it by offering it as *the* methodology for all preachers. It is, however, very difficult to universalize one's own preaching methodology. I have witnessed too many pastors make the mistake of attempting to force young men into their particular mould of preaching. Nevertheless, I fully comprehend the desire expressed by young men, entering the ministry, to find some helpful guidance regarding how to preach. Therefore, I began to search the only truly universal source of information, the Scriptures, to see if it yielded principles regarding preaching. My search was richly rewarded, although I was surprised at where I found this information. When I first thought about searching the Scriptures for principles on preaching I considered looking in the Pastoral Epistles and Acts. There is much helpful material in these books, but what my study revealed is that the most illuminating book in the New Testament regarding how to preach is the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Why is the Epistle to the Hebrews so helpful to modern preachers? It is because this epistle is really not an epistle at all, but rather, it is an expository sermon, or a collection of expository sermons. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to refer to this epistle as a sermon and its author as a preacher. While there is some scholarly disagreement regarding the literary genre of Hebrews, most evangelical scholars agree that

Hebrews is sermonic in nature. For example, William Lane writes: 'Hebrews is a sermon rooted in actual life. It is addressed to a local gathering of men and women'.[1] Similarly, R. T. France writes: 'There is, however, one book of the New Testament which seems to offer a closer analogy to modern expository preaching than the rest; that is, the Letter to the Hebrews.'[2] In addition to scholarly opinion, we also have the author's own testimony regarding the nature of his correspondence. For instance, in Hebrews 13:22 the author refers to his letter as a 'word of exhortation' (λόγου της παρακλήσεως). Evidence that this phrase refers to a sermon is the fact that a similar phrase (λόγος παρακλήσεως) is used by Paul to describe his sermon at the Synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:15). This epistle, therefore, is really an inspired sermon.

However, what makes Hebrews uniquely helpful in instructing modern pastors about preaching is not only the fact that it is a sermon, but that it is the *only* sermon in the New Testament which is preached to an established congregation. Hebrews was preached to second generation believers (see Hebrews 2:1–4) who were at risk of relinquishing their faith in Christ. It is not an evangelistic sermon, like the sermons in Acts, but rather a sermon to saints. Because Hebrews is the only inspired example of preaching to an established church it is particularly useful in instructing modern preachers regarding how to preach in the context of today's established congregations. So what type of advice does the sermon to the Hebrews yield regarding preaching? I gleaned the following seven principles on preaching from the sermon to the Hebrews.

1: Biblical preaching is expository

This may seem so obvious that it does not warrant mentioning. One of the unfortunate characteristics, however, of much of modern evangelical preaching is the tendency among some preachers to replace the centrality of the Word of God with the centrality of the felt needs of the hearers. In other words, much modern preaching exegetes the human rather than the divine. The preacher to the Hebrews does not engage in this error. The preacher to the Hebrews is devoted to expositing the Word of God.

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1 William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47A (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991), xlvii.

2 R. T. France, 'The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor', *Tyndale Bulletin* 47:2 (1996), 246.

His commitment to expositing the Word is evidenced by the fact that his entire sermon is based on a main biblical text. As many scholars have noted, the entire epistle may be considered as an exposition of Psalm 110, particularly Psalm 110:4; for example, this psalm is alluded to or explicitly referred to in nearly every chapter of this book. In addition to his exposition of Psalm 110, the author also exposits a major Old Testament text in each of the major subsections of his sermon (e.g. 1:4–2:8 = Psalm 8:5–7; 3:1–4:14 = Psalm 95:7–11; 4:14 – 7:28 = Psalm 110:4; 8:1 – 10:31 = Jeremiah 31:31–34; 10:32 – 12:3 = Habakkuk 2:3c – 4; 12:4–13 = Proverbs 3:11–12; 12:18–29 = Exodus 19–20).[3] Clearly, this preacher exposits the word; his entire sermon is grounded in and supported by the text of Holy Scripture. R. T. France comments as follows on the deep exegetical commitment of the preacher to the Hebrews:

> It seems to be the instinct of this writer to have recourse to Scripture as the basis for each succeeding phase of his writing, whether its tone is primarily doctrinal or primarily hortatory. With the notable exception of the first chapter, the texts which form the basis of the letter are not merely quoted as proofs for an argument set up on other grounds, but are examined often at some length both in terms of their relevance as a whole to the new situation to which he is now applying them and in some cases with regard to the significance of individual words and phrases which can be explored to fill out and sharpen that application.[4]

The preacher to the Hebrews is concerned about grounding his theological arguments and practical applications in the exposition of the Word of God. Modern preachers would benefit from following his example.

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3   Richard N. Longenecker notes that Hebrews contains a total of thirty-eight references to the Old Testament, with twenty-seven different passages being quoted in the letter. Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, (2nd Ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 147.

4   R. T. France, 'The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor', 272–73.

2: Biblical preaching requires application

The writer to the Hebrews is not delivering a speech or a theological lecture. His purpose is to move the minds and wills of his congregation by means of a 'word of exhortation', (Hebrews 13:22). He is attempting to persuade them into taking action. Therefore, while the preacher engages in deep redemptive-historical theological reflection, he also applies the Word of God directly to the lives of his hearers. He displays his commitment to applying the Word of God in two ways.

First: his commitment to application is revealed by the fact that his application is not slapped haphazardly on to the end of his sermon. It is interspersed at significant moments throughout his discourse. It is woven carefully and purposefully into the very fabric of his message, for example, there is a hortatory emphasis following every major exegetical section of the sermon (e.g. 2:1–4, 3:7 – 4:13, 5:11 – 6:12, 10:19–31, 12:1–3, 12:25–29, and 13:1–17). This preacher sees no conflict between exegesis and application, but rather he sees them as inherently interrelated. The imperatives contained in these hortatory sections flow directly from the indicative exposited in the sections which immediately precede them. In other words, the application is related to the exegesis.

Second: the preacher also indicates the importance of application in preaching by employing Old Testament saints as both positive and negative examples. He displays no qualms about using Old Testament saints in an exemplary fashion. For instance, in Hebrews 3–4 the author uses the generation which died in the wilderness as a negative example for the congregation. Similarly, in Hebrews 12:16, he employs Esau as a negative example, 'See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.' On the positive side, in Hebrews 11, the author lists a series of Old Testament saints who exhibit the type of persevering faith that he desires his congregation to emulate. These Old Testament saints become part of the great cloud of witnesses which the author refers to in Hebrews 12:1.

Given the emphasis this preacher places on application, it is somewhat mind boggling that many preachers in the modern Reformed church blatantly deny the place of application in preaching. What is even more mind-boggling is that these preachers use the great Reformed biblical theologian, Geerhardus Vos, to support their views. This use of Vos seems somewhat ironic given what Vos himself stated about the epistle to the Hebrews in a sermon on Hebrews 12: 'There is perhaps no other book in the New Testament in which the two elements of theological exposition

and practical application are so clearly distinguishable and yet so organically united as in this epistle'.[5] The preacher to the Hebrews provides a much needed reminder to modern preachers regarding the necessity of making relevant application of the Word of God to the hearts of their people.

3: Biblical preaching has a main point

While I have not received a great deal of helpful counsel regarding preaching, I do recall an incredibly helpful piece of advice given to me by a homiletics professor. He told me that if I was unable to articulate what my sermon was about then my congregation would certainly be unable to do so. This professor also told me that if my wife were to ask me, 'What's your sermon about?' I should be able to answer her question in one sentence. My professor's point was that good preaching has point! This is good advice. However, it is amazing the number of preachers who don't comprehend this simple rule of preaching. There is nothing more unhelpful than listening to a preacher who has no idea what his main point is. The preacher to the Hebrews does not suffer from this malady; he knows his main point and he states it clearly in Hebrews 8:1: 'Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens'.[6] The preacher not only knows what his point is, but he communicates it clearly to his congregation. He doesn't leave them wondering. The preacher knows what his sermon is about, he knows his point, he knows where he is going, he is able to articulate it in one sentence and he communicates it to his listeners. Modern preachers would be wise to do the same.

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5   Geerhardus Vos, *Grace and Glory* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, reprinted 1994), 124.

6   It should be noted that the preacher alludes to his main point in the opening verses of his sermon. For example, in Hebrews 1:3c the preacher notes that, after making purification for our sins, Jesus, 'sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high', (Hebrews 1:3c). This language is nearly identical to the language employed in Hebrews 8:1. Modern preachers could learn something from this technique because congregations find it helpful when the preacher gives some indication of the point of his sermon in his introduction.

4: Biblical preaching is an oral event

The idea that preaching is an oral event seems to be obvious, but unfortunately many preachers do not comprehend this reality. While they realize that preaching involves speaking to people, they approach preaching as a literary event. In essence, many preachers give little attention to crafting a sermon that is to be heard. Instead, they treat their sermons as something to be read. The preacher to the Hebrews does not display this fault. He is conscious that his sermon will be heard and he crafts it accordingly. He refers to the delivery of his correspondence as 'speaking' rather than 'writing' and to his audience as 'hearers' (or 'listeners') as opposed to 'readers' (see 2:5; 5:11; 6:9; 8:1; 9:15; and 11:32).[7] William Lane comments as follows on the preacher's oral consciousness:

> Hebrews was prepared for oral delivery to a specific community … Hebrews is a sermon prepared to be read aloud to a group of auditors who will receive its message not primarily through reading and leisured reflection but orally. Reading the document aloud entails oral performance, providing oral clues to those who listen to the public reading of the sermon … Hebrews was crafted to communicate its point as much aurally as logically.[8]

The aural awareness of the preacher to the Hebrews is revealed through his employment of a variety of oral devices which are meant to aid the hearer. For example, consider the following five oral devices employed in his sermon.

First: the preacher makes use of alliteration. For example, in the opening verse of the sermon the preacher chooses a series of five Greek words which share the 'p' ('π') sound: Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεος λαλήσας τοῖς πατράοιν εν τοῖς προφήταις.[9]

Second: he uses word-plays involving phonetically similar words. For example, note the word-play in Hebrews 5:8 καιπερ ὼν υἱός, ἔμαθεν ('learned') ἀφ' ὧν ἔπαθεν ('suffered') τὴν ὑπακοήν. This word-play was particularly effective because his hearers were probably familiar with it as

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7   Hywel R. Jones, *Let's Study Hebrews* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2002), xvii.

8   Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, lxxv.

9   The first four verses of Hebrews contain other rhetorical devices. See David A. DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 37–38.

it was commonly employed in Greek literature and culture.[10]

Third: he makes frequent use of *inclusio* to provide oral boundaries to the subsections of his sermon. He repeats words and phrases at the beginning and at the end of particular sections to give his hearers a cue that a topic has ended and a new one is about to begin (e.g. 'angels' in 2:5 and 2:16; and 'Melchizedek' in 5:10 and 6:20).

Fourth: he repeats key terms as a means of emphasizing his point. For example, one of the main emphases of the preacher is the superiority of Christ, his sacrifice, the new covenant and the heavenly tabernacle. Therefore, he makes frequent use of the word 'better' (κρείττων) in his sermon (Hebrews 1:4; 6:9; 7:19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:4, 16, 35, 40; and 12:24). Another example of his effective use of repetition is found in Hebrews 11 where he repeats the phrase 'By faith' (Πίστει) as he refers to the list of faithful saints from the Old Testament. He repeats 'By faith' a total of eighteen times in this chapter. His repetitive use of this phrase is like a drumbeat calling his people to persevere. The preacher to the Hebrews is a master at the art of using repetition for emphasis.

Fifth: he employs effective rhetorical tools such as the lesser to greater argument. For example, after displaying Jesus' superiority to the angels in chapter one, the preacher makes a lesser to greater argument in Hebrews 2:2–3. This involves comparing the punishment of those who rejected the message of the angels to those who reject the message of Christ: 'For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard.' He increases the effectiveness of this form of argumentation by employing it at several other points in the sermon (e.g. Heb 9:13–14; 10:28–29; and 12:25).

The preacher to the Hebrews cared about orally communicating to people. His goal was to help them listen and he used rhetorical devices to achieve this end. William Lane writes, '[Rhetorical] devices … are present in Hebrews because of the need to provide oral assistance to the listeners … the written text was not crafted for the eye but for the ear, to convey a sense of structure and development.'[11] Modern preachers would be well-served by following the example of the preacher to the Hebrews by crafting their sermons for the ear.

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10 Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, 121.
11 Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, lxxvi.

5: Biblical preaching balances challenge and comfort

Good preaching is balanced preaching, but unfortunately many preachers, especially the inexperienced ones, are out of balance when it comes to their sermons. Generally, when preachers go awry in this area they do so by displaying one of the two following forms of imbalance. Some preachers, in an effort to establish their authority in the pulpit, make the mistake of overloading their sermons with harsh application. In effect, they browbeat their people week after week in their sermons. On the other end of the spectrum are the preachers who, out of a desire not to offend, utterly eviscerate their sermons of all poignancy and obligation. Both of these commonly made errors are equally deadly to a congregation. The first error leaves the congregation in despair, while the second lulls them into complacency and false assurance. The preacher to the Hebrews adeptly avoids these two common mistakes. His sermon displays a remarkable equilibrium. He balances challenge and comfort in his sermon.

The sermon to the Hebrews contains some of the most fearful admonishments and challenges of the entire Bible. This preacher is not afraid to challenge his people. For example, in Hebrews 3–4 the preacher compares the congregation to the generation which died in the wilderness due to their unfaithfulness. He effectively places his congregation in the shoes of that Old Testament generation and warns them that they are close to repeating the same deadly error: 'Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering his rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it', (Hebrews 4:1). However, after putting the fear of God in them for fourteen verses, after making them think they are on the precipice of apostasy, the preacher comforts them by reminding them that they have a Great High Priest: 'For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need,' (Hebrews 4:15–16). He balances his challenge with comfort.

Likewise, in Hebrews 6, the preacher warns the congregation once again regarding the threat of apostasy and goes so far as to tell them that it is impossible to recover from such apostasy (Hebrews 6:6). However, after giving this stern warning the preacher balances his challenge with these comforting words: 'But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way', (Hebrews 6:9).

The preacher to the Hebrews is neither a blustering legalist nor a facile man-pleaser. Instead, the preacher powerfully drives home the full force of his warnings while never allowing his people to fall into despair. He calls them to persevere, but he always reminds them that they can only do so by following Christ. He reminds them that God will never leave them nor forsake them (Hebrews 13:5). Modern preachers should take a cue from the preacher to the Hebrews by adopting his pattern of balancing challenge with comfort in their sermons.

6: Biblical preaching is congregationally contextualized

Many pastors make the mistake of disconnecting their preaching from the lives of the people in their congregations. They tend to conceive of preaching as something which occurs in vacuum. They devise and deliver their sermons with no regard for the specific context in which they are called to serve. In addition, I have also noted that some pastors, in an effort to exalt preaching, begin to neglect the lives of their people. They tend to view traditional shepherding tasks as inferior to the high calling of the pulpit. This mindset often means they become unaware of the spiritual needs and abilities of their people. The preacher to the Hebrews avoids this error. Even though he was geographically distant from his people when he crafted his sermon, he was not spiritually distant from their lives and struggles. He preached to people he knew and loved. He displays his understanding of his people and his connection to them in a variety of ways throughout his sermon.

First: he reveals that he knew his people by referring explicitly to their history in the sermon. He understood what his people had already sacrificed on account of their faith in Christ. For example, note how the preacher refers to the history of his people (their 'former days') in Hebrews 10:32–34:

> But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one.

The preacher to the Hebrews uses his understanding of his congregation's history to both challenge and comfort them. His knowledge of his people contributed to the effectiveness and pertinence of his preaching.

Second: in addition to understanding their history, the preacher also understood the level of his congregation's spiritual maturity. For example, in Hebrews 5, after commencing a discourse on the relationship between Christ's priesthood and the priesthood of Melchizedek, he is aware that they are not ready to handle this material at this point in the sermon. Note how he refers to their lack of maturity in Hebrews 5:11–12:

> Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

The preacher understood the spiritual maturity level of his people and he crafted his discourse accordingly.

Third: the preacher also understood the basic physical limitations of his hearers. One of the mistakes made by many preachers is to regurgitate everything they know about a given text or subject, even if it obscures their main point and reduces the effectiveness of the main thrust of their sermon. The preacher to the Hebrews does not make this mistake. For example, in Hebrews 9 he begins to describe the tabernacle and its contents, but after a brief description of its contents he pauses and states, 'but of these things we cannot now speak in detail', (Hebrews 9:5). The preacher was well acquainted with the tabernacle and could have impressed his congregation with the extent of his knowledge by entering into an elongated discourse on this topic, but this was not his point. His point was to show them the superiority of the heavenly tabernacle. Therefore, he simply laid a sufficient foundation regarding the old covenant tabernacle and moved on to his main point. The preacher does a similar thing in Hebrews 11.

In Hebrews 11, after citing numerous examples of persevering faith in the lives of various Old Testament saints, the preacher realizes that his time is short and that he has made his point so he quickly enumerates a few more names without adding comment: 'And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets', (Hebrews 11:32). The preacher to the Hebrews knew when he had made his point. He knew the extent of his time constraints and the extent of

his congregation's attention span. He gave his people a 'brief' word of exhortation (Hebrews 13:22). He understood what one of my seminary professors understood and continually reminded me of: the head can only comprehend what the seat of the pants can endure!

Fourth: the preacher to the Hebrews also displays his awareness of the needs of his people by identifying himself with them. The preacher to the Hebrews was not one of those preachers who points his finger at his people and refers to them exclusively as 'you'.[12] Instead, he identified with his congregation by employing the pronoun 'we'. The author uses 'we' fifty-three times in this epistle. He includes himself in both the applications and the encouragements of his sermon. He informs his people that he is with them in their struggles, that he also faces similar challenges and that he too requires grace. For example, in Hebrews 2:1 he uses the pronoun 'we' to include himself as one who is also at risk of apostasy, 'For this reason *we* must pay much closer attention to what *we* have heard, lest *we* drift away from it.' In Hebrews 10:10 the preacher uses 'we' to demonstrate that he also required the salvific work of Christ, 'By this will *we* have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.'

In addition to using 'we' the preacher also identifies with his congregation by using the term 'brethren' (ἀδελφοί). He employs this word four times in his sermon to demonstrate his familial relationship with his people (3:1; 3:12; 10:19; and 13:22). Although some writers in the New Testament refer to their congregation as 'children', and properly so, the preacher to the Hebrews prefers to refer to them as 'brothers'. This preacher clearly identified with and loved the people to whom he preached. In fact, at the point of his most penetrating application in Hebrews 6, he makes use of a term of deep endearment to comfort his brothers. He refers to his congregation as 'beloved' (ἀγαπητοί), 'But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way', (Hebrews 6:9). This is the only use of this word in the entire sermon. It is as if he recognized that this term needed to be reserved for what he knew would be the most difficult word for them to hear. The preacher treated his congregation as 'we', and not 'you'.

The preacher to the Hebrews knew his people. He had been in their lives. He knew their sacrifices and struggles. He didn't treat his people as a mere audience, but rather as his brothers. He made certain to use his knowledge of his people to sculpt the content of his sermon. His preaching was intentionally aimed at intersecting with the real lives of real people. He was not giving them

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12 There is certainly an appropriate role for the second person plural 'you' in preaching, but Scripture does not require that it be used exclusively.

an irrelevant abstract discourse, but rather he was preaching to *his* people. As R. T. France put it, 'Hebrews is not an abstract treatise, but a sustained piece of pastoral trouble-shooting, deliberately targeted at a congregation with a particular problem.'[13] Biblical preaching is preaching which is congregationally contextualized. Modern preachers should emulate the preacher to the Hebrews by tailoring their preaching to the context of their congregation.

7: Biblical preaching is christocentric

Many modern scholars have spilled a great deal of ink over the exegetical method of the preacher to the Hebrews, particularly with regard to how he interprets the Old Testament. While scholars disagree regarding many of the fine points of his hermeneutical method, what is abundantly clear is that the preacher was concerned with interpreting the Old Testament in a Christocentric manner. For example, R. T. France comments as follows on the preacher's Christocentric hermeneutic:

> Fundamental to his expositions is the conviction, so memorably set out at the opening of the letter, that in Jesus God has spoken his last and perfect word, and that all that was written in the Old Testament is to be understood in relation to its fulfillment in the Son. That being so, it is his duty and pleasure to search the Old Testament scriptures for indications of the fulfillment which was to come, and to draw out from those same scriptures in a varied and creative way for his readers how they should now think and live in the light of the coming of the Son.[14]

The preacher is unashamedly Christ-centred in his preaching. This preacher is not concerned with interpreting the Old Testament solely on the basis of an antecedent Hebrew understanding, but rather he is consumed with preaching the Old Testament entirely in light of Christ and the New Covenant. R. T. France notes that for the preacher to the Hebrews the significance of the Old Testament 'is found only with Christian hindsight'.[15] The sermon to the Hebrews exhorts the church to hear the Word of Christ, trust in the person and work of Christ, hold fast to the confession of Christ and its culminating exhortation is for the church to fix

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13 France, 'The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor', 249.
14 France, 'The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor', 268.
15 France, 'The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor', 274.

her eyes upon Christ. The preacher to the Hebrews calls his congregation to imitate the first martyr, Stephen. He urges them to look up into heaven, in the midst of their affliction, and behold Jesus at the right hand of God. Modern preachers should call their congregations to do the same by adopting and applying a similar Christocentric hermeneutic.

Summary and conclusion

In this paper we have seen that the sermon to the Hebrews reveals that biblical preaching is expository, includes application, has a main point, is an oral event, balances challenge and comfort, is congregationally contextualized, and is unapologetically Christocentric. The sermon to the Hebrews is of inestimable value for guiding today's preachers because it allows them to step back two thousand years and peer into the study of a pastor inspired by the Holy Spirit. R. T. France summarizes well the unique value of the sermon to the Hebrews to modern preachers:

What we have in Hebrews is a glimpse into the workshop of early Christian biblical interpretation, where those who came to the Jewish scriptures with a new christological perspective, while not turning away from their ancestral Jewish manner of arguing from Scripture, were learning and developing new interpretative approaches, Among these innovative but faithful Christian interpreters of Scripture, the writer of Hebrews, with his extended christological expositions of chosen Old Testament texts, stands out as one of the most effective, and one who, because of the form in which he has written his pastoral appeal, allows us a fuller insight into the hermeneutical workshop than any other. We may not feel that at every point we can preach just as he preached, but it will be a sadly defective form of Christian proclamation and exhortation which cannot incarnate appropriately for our day the hermeneutical principles and the expository insights which he has bequeathed to us.[16]

My advice to young ministers and seasoned pastors alike is to benefit from the pastoral legacy bequeathed to them by the preacher to the Hebrews.

16 France, 'The Writer of Hebrews as a Biblical Expositor', 275–76.

The Last Word:
Second Temple Evangelicalism

Robbie F. Castleman

Have you ever overheard, or participated in, a conversation that goes something like this?

Joe: "Hey, Jane, we missed you in church yesterday! Where were you? Did you go home this weekend to see your folks?"

Jane: "No, I was here, but I went over to Community Fellowship Bible Church to hear Bobby Rayburn preach. He is really into John Piper's stuff and I like Piper and wanted to hear him."

Joe: "Oh, cool. Was he good?"

Jane: "Yeah. He really goes right along with Piper, so I liked it and he was a really good speaker."

Joe: "Next time let me know about it and I'll go with you. I am really getting into some of Ortberg's stuff lately and he's terrific. I also like some of Dallas Willard, too. Larry, who do you like?"

Larry: "Well, right now I'm a bit bogged down in N. T. Wright and I like his stuff, but have you read Don Carson? I really like the pastoral edge in what he writes."

Jane: "I like Carson pretty much. But, Piper is really strong on grace. I loved the point yesterday about the need for grace before you can even have faith."

Larry: "Yes! That is so important. Piper says that, too."

Joe: "Ortberg, too."

Jane: "Larry, whose church do you go to?"

Larry: "Oh, I grew up in a church my dad helped start, and I still go there. It's huge now. It's just called God's House, but you've heard of the pastor, Justin Fide."

Joe and Jane together: "Oh, yeah!"

Joe: "I heard a tape of his once. Really solid. I didn't know you went to his church."

Larry: "Yeah. My dad was one of the people that broke away from another church to help him start the church. And now it's huge."

Jane: "Joe and I go to Alvin Brown's church. He's really good, too. I figure as long as the pastor preaches the cross and the forgiveness of sin, it's good."

Larry: "I agree. Have you guys heard this new song by Michael W. Smith? It's got a line that goes, 'I am crucified with Christ, yet I live, yet I live.' Awesome idea, huh?"

Even if you substitute Max Lucado, Rick Warren and C. S. Lewis for Piper, Wright and Carson, conversations like this are fairly common among evangelicals. I've begun to think that this conversation is similar to those Jesus may have heard in the first century. Contemporary evangelicalism may have more in common with Second Temple Judaism than we would like to admit.

Jews in the first century had a tendency to identify with a favourite rabbi or rabbinical school. I am of Hillel! I am of Shammai! This, of course carried over into the early church. Paul's mocking comment in 1 Corinthians makes the point. I am of Apollos! I am of Cephas! Twenty centuries later, believers are strongly identifying with certain teachers and the way they think and write. Jesus faced the deep root of this pattern when the Jews defended their status as God's people by saying, 'We are sons of Abraham!' Paul noted that this led to divisions in the church and was a mark of spiritual pride. In the same way it is not unusual for Christians today to identify their faith by favourite authors or speakers or whose church they attend. Like the Corinthians, Christians would certainly affirm, 'I am of Christ', but this

was and is simply a prideful nod to orthodoxy. This often-divisive habit is closely paralleled to another first and twenty-first century problem.

Like Second Temple Judaism, the evangelical church has strong Talmudic tendencies. Scholars, clergy and laity read commentaries, books, monographs, and essays and quote those who write them more than the Scripture itself. We may chuckle when a Christian like Larry thinks Michael W. Smith wrote Galatians 2:19–20, but too many believers actually think the formulation of the *idea* itself is new as well! Communities of faith too often dismiss the creeds, find no use for Patristic theology, and substitute a Philip Yancey film series for the Bible Jesus really did know. Contemporary evangelicals too often settle for theology that is grounded in song lyrics, favourite quotes and Scripture sound-bites only fit for T-shirts, bracelets and wall-hangings. The pulpit personality, the messenger, becomes more important than the message. And Joe and Jane end up going to Alvin Brown's church instead of the Church of Jesus Christ and never see the implications of how this shift in language becomes a part of their identity. Evangelical academics can be guilty of the same tendencies even if the people we quote use polysyllabic words and have impressive footnotes.

Finally, Second Temple Judaism got embroiled in these divisive detours because the major threat to their spiritual lives, sin, was already taken care of through the sacrificial system. Believers could bifurcate over penultimate preferences and think little of it because there was a system in place for taking care of the sin problem. Jewish confidence in the sacrificial system was well grounded in God's word, and they believed it. Sin was covered. Temple sacrifice was the John 3:16 of the first century. Believing God's word, first century Jews essentially said, 'Been there, done that', and rested in their own sense of righteousness. Contemporary evangelicals sometimes speak of the cross of Jesus with similar cause-and-effect confidence. The cross as reduced to a 'sacrificial system' that takes care of sin contributes to the dualistic wedge between salvation and sanctification that is increasingly manifest in evangelical faith and life. Jesus described the theologically correct and ethically bankrupt of his day as 'white-washed tombs'.

First century Pharisees boasted of their genealogical link to Abraham, identification with a favourite rabbinical school and were confident their sins had been dealt with. They were also blind to the Messiah in their midst and deaf to his rebuke.

The more understanding I have of Second Temple Judaism, the better I see some parallel dynamics in contemporary evangelicalism. My eschatology may be a bit less radically realized, but Wright's contextualizing

of the first century hits close to home, twenty centuries later. Evangelicals today are proud of our links to particular theological ancestors (whether John Calvin or John Stott). Too many of us are students of sound-bite schools we love to quote, from song lyrics to best-selling marquee conference speakers. And a hallmark of evangelicalism is our confidence that our sin problem has been dealt with. But, how clearly do we see our Messiah and can we hear the New Testament Jesus speak? Will we repent if we hear him call us white-washed tombs?

How Pastoral is Open Theism?
A Critique from the Writings of George Swinnock and Stephen Charnock

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Introduction

According to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 'There is but one only, living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute.'[1] This understanding of God has provided comfort to countless Christians in the midst of suffering. God is sovereign; therefore, his control is absolute. God is immutable; therefore, his will is certain. God is mighty; therefore, his power is limitless. God is most wise; therefore, his plan is perfect. God is incomprehensible; therefore, his providence is inscrutable.[2] With this God before them, Christians – whilst not always understanding

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1   *Westminster Confession of Faith*, (WCF), II:I.
2   Derek Thomas points to the 'God's incomprehensibility' as Calvin's interpretive key for understanding God's providence, *Proclaiming the Incomprehensible God: Calvin's Teaching on Job* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2004), 17. For Calvin, see *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in *The Library of Christian Classics: Vol. XX–XXI*, ed. J. T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I:V:1, I:XIII:21.

his ways – are certain he 'causes all things to work together for good.'[3] Recently, open theism has emerged to challenge this view of God and his providence, suggesting it is pastorally deficient.[4] Bruce Ware, a critic of open theism, summarizes the movement's disapproval of the traditional view as follows:

> If any version of the traditional view is true, argues the open theist, then two things follow: (1) the future with its 'foreknown' suffering cannot be avoided, since God knows in advance exactly what will happen and his knowledge (including his foreknowledge), by definition, cannot be mistaken; and (2) God intentionally brings it about that every single horrific instance of suffering that he knows in advance will occur, *does occur*.[5]

To summarize – all that God foreknows must certainly occur, since it is impossible for anyone to choose anything other than what God foreknows. This makes God alone responsible for human suffering. For this reason, proponents of open theism affirm that it is necessary to modify the traditional view. In short, God is not absolutely sovereign; he is not immutable; he is not infinite in power and knowledge. On the contrary, he is limited. Among other things, this means God does not know the future, but reacts as events unfold. For open theists, this paradigm provides a more plausible explanation for the relationship between God and human suffering and, therefore, greater comfort in the midst of suffering.

The purpose of this article is to respond to open theism's critique of the traditional view and to evaluate its claim to be more pastoral. To do this, we will turn to the writings of two seventeenth-century English Puritans: George Swinnock and Stephen Charnock.[6]

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3   Rom. 8:28.

4   For full treatment of open theism, see Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000); William Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994); and John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998).

5   Bruce Ware, *Their God is Too Small: Open Theism and the Understanding of Confidence in God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003), 59–60, his italics.

6   See *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. S. Lee (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1909).

Open theism

Before doing so, we must look in greater detail at the impetus behind open theism. Clark Pinnock, one of the movement's chief proponents, provides the following summary:

> Our understanding of the Scriptures leads us to depict God, the sovereign Creator, as voluntarily bringing into existence a world with significantly free personal agents in it, agents who can respond positively to God or reject his plans for them ... God rules in such a way as to uphold the created structures and, because he gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed, and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static. We believe that the Bible presents an open view of God as living and active, involved in history, relating to us and changing in relation to us. We see the universe as a context in which there are real choices, alternatives and surprises. God's openness means that God is open to the changing realities of history, that God cares about us and lets what we do impact him.[7]

Pinnock's assertion that God is open 'to the changing realities of history' rests upon three premises. (1) Human freedom only exists if the future is completely open. (2) The future is not completely open if God knows it. Why? People lack the freedom to do anything other than what God knows. (3) God cannot know the future. Why? It is contingent upon choices, which do not exist until they occur.[8] As John Sanders indicates, 'Though God's knowledge is coextensive with reality in that God knows all

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7 Pinnock, *The Openness of God*, 103–104. Similarly, Hasker remarks: 'God is not remote, closed off and self-contained. Rather, God is open to us his creatures, to the world he has made, and to the future. We in turn need to be open toward God and toward the future he is creating for us. These are the central themes of "open theism"', *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 97.

8 In other words, genuine freedom is libertarian freedom – 'freedom such that the agent who makes a choice is really able, under exactly the same circumstances, to choose something different than the thing that is in fact chosen. The choices in question, then, are not causally determined to occur as they do; libertarian freedom is inherently indeterministic', Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 125–26. For a further definition of libertarian freedom, see Bruce Reichenbach, 'God Limits His Power' in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, eds D. Basinger and R. Basinger (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), 102–104.

that can be known, the future actions of free creatures are not yet reality, and so there is nothing to be known.'[9] Gregory Boyd agrees, 'If God does not foreknow future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It's because there is, in this view, *nothing definite there for God to know!*'[10] William Hasker elucidates this philosophical argument as follows:

If God knows already what will happen in the future, then God's knowing this is part of the past and is now fixed, impossible to change. And since God is infallible, it is completely impossible that things will turn out differently than God expects them to. But this means that the future event God knows is also fixed and unalterable, and it cannot be true of any human being that they are both able to perform a certain action and able not to perform that action. If God knows they are going to perform it, then it is impossible that they fail to perform it – so, they do not have a free choice whether or not to perform it … What this argument shows is that it is logically impossible that God should have foreknowledge of a genuinely free action. It follows from this that if there are actions, which are free in the libertarian sense, it is logically impossible for God to know in advance how such actions will turn out.[11]

To prove that God's foreknowledge is limited, open theists turn to the Bible.[12] Their proof texts fall into two broad categories. (1) They maintain that the Bible teaches that God learns. By way of example, Sanders appeals to the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22. God wants to know if

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9   Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 198.

10 Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 16, his italics.

11 Hasker, *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*, 103–104. This conviction is at the root of open theism's theodicy. John Feinberg provides a good overview of the main theodicies. As for open theism, he states: 'God has gifted some of his creatures with libertarian free will, and God's decisions concerning how he will respond to his creatures at each stage of the temporal process are based on what has occurred up until that stage of the process and not on knowledge of free choices which will occur subsequently', *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 117.

12 Calvin anticipates many of the proof texts put forward by open theists. In terms of those passages in which God repents, he responds: 'We ought not to understand anything else under the word "repentance" than change of action … neither God's plan nor his will is reversed, nor his volition altered; but what he had from eternity foreseen, approved, and decreed, he pursues in uninterrupted tenor, however sudden the variation may appear in men's eyes.' *Institutes*, I:XVII:13. In

Abraham fears him, so he commands Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. According to Sanders, 'God needs to know if Abraham is the sort of person on whom God can count for collaboration toward the fulfilment of the divine project. Will he be faithful? Or must God find someone else through whom to achieve his purpose?'[13] Abraham demonstrates his faithfulness. In response, God declares, 'Now I know that you fear God'.[14] For Sanders, this sort of 'divine' learning experience occurs throughout Scripture, thus proving that God has no foreknowledge of human decisions. (2) They maintain that the Bible teaches that God repents.[15] Sanders points his readers to the example of the flood. When God created humanity, he had no idea people were going to sin so grievously. When he saw what had happened, he was 'sorry that he had made man on the earth'.[16] Consequently, he was forced to make the best of a situation that he never foresaw. Sanders remarks, 'It may be the case that although human evil caused God great pain, the destruction of what he had made caused him

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other words, God never views his decisions as mistakes that he would change if he had known what was going to happen. Rather, he foreknows the results of his decisions. When they are sorrowful, he grieves over them. Stephen Charnock views the idea of God's repentance as repugnant, because, 'all repentance of a fact is grounded upon a mistake in the event which was not foreseen, or upon an after knowledge of the evil of the thing which was acted by the person repenting', *Discourses Upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1853; rpt, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), I:341. He adds: 'Repentance in God is only a change of his outward conduct, according to his infallible foresight and immutable will. He changes the way of his providential proceeding according to the carriage of the creature, without changing his will, which is the rule of his providence', *Institutes*, I:341–42. For a contemporary response to open theism's proof texts, in line with Calvin and Charnock, see Bruce Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000).

13 Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 52–53: also see Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 63–66.

14 Gen. 22:12.

15 By way of support, Boyd appeals to the example of Saul in 1 Sam. 13:13 and 15:11, 35; *God of the Possible*, 56. In the first text, Samuel declares: 'The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.' God had a plan for Saul. By his conduct, Saul changed that plan. This means God has plans, but there is no guarantee that they will come to fruition. Why? God never knows what he will do next, because he never knows what we will do next. In the second text, we read that God 'regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel'. God made a decision, based upon the information available to him at the time. He did not know what Saul was going to do. If he could go back and do it again, he would not have made Saul king. This means God does things, based upon his knowledge of the present. Yet, he does not know how these decisions are going to turn out. Often times, he ends up regretting what he has done.

16 Gen. 6:6.

even greater suffering. Although his judgment was righteous, God decides to try different courses of action in the future.'[17] For Sanders, this happens all the time, because God is not privy to what people are going to do until they decide to do it.

As far as open theists are concerned, this biblical evidence supports their contention that God's foreknowledge is limited. The future depends upon human choices. Consequently, there is nothing definite for God to know until those choices are made. They consider this to be a reasonable explanation for the relationship between God and human suffering. If the traditional view is true, then God's foreknowledge means suffering necessarily occurs and, therefore, God is responsible for it. God's openness frees him from this charge. He has no control over human suffering, because he is as much a part of unfolding events as we are. For open theists, this realization supposedly provides comfort in the midst of suffering.

George Swinnock and Stephen Charnock

Is an open God a greater source of comfort in the midst of suffering than a sovereign God? Is open theism more pastorally adequate? Is open theism's critique of the traditional view of God and his providence valid? For answers to these questions, we turn to George Swinnock and Stephen Charnock. According to Swinnock, 'life is a mixture of mercies and miseries … a house of mourning or mirth'.[18] Simply put, it is marked by prosperity and adversity. The first is 'the fruition of outward good things, as health, strength, friends, riches, honours, and the like'[19] whereas the second is 'the want of outward good things, and presence of outward evil things, as sickness, disgrace, poverty, imprisonment, and the like'.[20]

Swinnock believes adversity has four causes. The efficient is God.[21] The meritorious is sin.[22] The formal is the 'absence of something necessary' or the 'presence of something troublesome'.[23] The final is 'either to prove or

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17 Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 50.

18 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling; or, A treatise of making religion ones business in The Works of George Swinnock*, ed. J. Nichol (London, 1868; rpt., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), II:46.

19 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:47.

20 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:82.

21 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*

22 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:83.

23 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*.

purify'.[24] Charnock also points to God as the 'efficient cause' of adversity. From this, he concludes, 'If it be "good for us to be afflicted", for which we have the psalmist's vote (Psalm 119:71), then goodness in God is the principal cause and orderer of the afflictions'.[25] God's goodness is seen in the fact that by adversity he 'snaps asunder those chains which fettered us', 'quells those passions which ravaged us', 'sharpens our faith', and 'quickens our prayers'.[26] With that in view, Charnock asks, 'What can we fear from the conduct of Infinite Goodness?'[27] Swinnock also wants his readers to see God's hand in adversity so that they might submit to his will, wait for his deliverance, rejoice in him, and contemplate his purpose[28] – the last being 'the first and chiefest of all'.[29]

Contemplation of God's purpose in adversity raises a popular Puritan motif – the mystery of God's providence. For Swinnock, God is 'incomparable' in his providence, namely, in his works of 'preservation' and 'gubernation' (governance).[30] Swinnock's understanding of the latter rests upon his concept of Christ's kingdom. There is his 'spiritual' kingdom 'whereby he ruleth by his Spirit and word in the hearts of his people. In this respect he is called King of saints.' There, too, is his 'providential' kingdom 'whereby he ruleth in the world, disposing of all things therein; in this respect he is called King of nations'.[31] As for the link between the two, Christ 'ordereth his providential kingdom for the advancement of his spiritual kingdom … as may be most for the welfare of his people'.[32] Similarly, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* states: 'As the providence of

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24 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works.*

25 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:309; also see II:451–52.

26 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:310.

27 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:342.

28 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:92–111.

29 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:111.

30 Swinnock, *Treatise of the incomparableness of God in his being, attributes, works and word: opened and applied, Works*, IV:427–28.

31 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:133.

32 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:134. At times, this concept of providence leads people to view history as part of God's special revelation. Gerrit Berkouwer warns: 'It is often forgotten that we have not been given a norm for explaining the facts of history, and that in the absence of a norm only an untrustworthy plausibility remains. Otherwise one must take refuge in religious intuition or divination, which, it has been claimed, is capable of discerning God's finger in the panorama of history. This would introduce a second source of Divine information', *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 171–72. Ronald VanderMolen considers this tendency among the Puritans in 'Providence as Mystery, Providence as Revelation: Puritan and Anglican Modifications of John Calvin's Doctrine of Providence', *Church History* 47 (1978), 27–47.

God doth, in general, reach to all creatures, so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of his Church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.'[33] Two major tenets emerge from this view of God's providence.

1. God controls all things

The first is this: Christ's 'kingdom ... ruleth over all'. This means there is nothing that falls outside the parameters of his control.[34] Christ confirms this in Matthew 10:29–30, asking, '"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?" And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.' Based on these words, Swinnock remarks: 'Sparrows seem to fly at liberty, and to fall casually; but even their flight is directed by God, and their fall ordered by him: they neither fly nor fall accidentally, but providentially.'[35] This all-encompassing view of providence normally produces three objections.

a. It makes God the author of sin

If nothing falls outside the parameters of God's control, then he must be responsible for sin and suffering. Swinnock's answer to this charge is the doctrine of concurrence. As Charles Hodge explains, two theories of providence were popular among the Reformers. The first is 'Entire Dependence'.[36] Proponents maintain that God, as an absolute and infinite being, is the only efficient cause. Therefore, second causes are without efficiency. The second is 'Concursus'.[37] Adherents propose that in the

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33 WCF, V:VI. This is also reminiscent of Calvin. *Institutes*, I:XVII:1.

34 Swinnock, *Incomparableness of God, Works*, IV: 428–37.

35 Swinnock, *Incomparableness of God, Works*, IV: 429.

36 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), I:592–93.

37 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I:593–605. Berkouwer believes the doctrine of concurrence provides a defence against pantheism whereby 'second causes are identified with God' and deism whereby 'the second cause is divorced from the first cause, that is, God', *The Providence of God*, 125. Don Carson also argues that the 'concept of second causes cannot simply be abandoned, because the resulting model would be either pantheistic, in which case God becomes part of the causal system; or mechanistic, with God a sovereign puppeteer', *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 211. There is some difference of opinion, however, as to the mechanics of concurrence. Hodge dislikes any suggestion that the creature is incapable of originating action because, 'this is an inference from the assumed nature of the dependence of the creature upon the Creator'. Furthermore, 'It attempts to explain

production of every effect there is an efficiency of two causes: first and second.[38] According to Paul Helm, Zwingli is representative of the first theory whereas Calvin is representative of the second. Helm writes:

> This difference can be starkly illustrated from the perspective attitudes of Calvin and Zwingli to the distinction between primary and secondary causes … Calvin (with the aid of the scholastics) strives to preserve that distinction because it is the way in which the biblical testimony that God is both holy and the author of sinful actions can be preserved. In Zwingli's case, God's power is, for a priori reasons, so supreme that the idea of there being any distinct causal agency apart from God disappears.[39]

The Westminster divines adopt the doctrine of concurrence, stating: 'Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.'[40] Swinnock stands in this tradition, affirming: 'It is impossible for the creation, or any part of it, to bear up a moment, if God should forget it, and deny his actual concurrence to it … God is to the world as the soul to the body, which alone can actuate and move it, without which it cannot stir at all, but is as a dead corpse.'[41] Swinnock affirms the free acts of second causes while insisting that God actuates and moves them to act. This is God's 'over-ruling providence'.[42] God decrees all that comes to pass, including evil. However, he is not responsible for evil, because he actuates and moves second causes to act in accordance with their desires.

Swinnock provides no defence for this position; however, Charnock does.[43] He argues that people are dependent upon God for their 'creation' and 'action'.[44] As for the latter, there is a distinction between 'substance' and 'viciousness'. Simply put, 'No act, in regard of the substance of it, is

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agents by his power and controls the use they make of their ability, *Systematic Theology*, 614.

38 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I:600.
39 Paul Helm, 'Calvin (and Zwingli), on Divine Providence,' *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), 404.
40 WCF, V:II.
41 Swinnock, *Incomparableness of God, Works*, IV:428.
42 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:85.
43 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:139–71.
44 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:156.

evil', because it is merely 'the efficacy of the faculty, extending itself to some outward object'.[45] It only becomes evil when it 'consists in a privation of that comeliness and righteousness which ought to be in an action'.[46] Thus, Charnock concludes that an action's substance and viciousness 'have two distinct causes … Though the action be from God as a concurrent cause, yet the ill quality of the action is solely from the creature with whom God concurs'.[47] This is the case, because: 'God doth no more when he leaves a man to sin … but leave him to his natural inclination'.[48] This 'is not an action, but a denial of action, and therefore cannot be the cause of the evil actions of men'.[49] In brief, God simply permits evil.[50] William Perkins is helpful on this point, distinguishing between God's 'permission' and 'operative permission'.[51] By the first, God effectually produces all good things. By the second, God willingly permits evil things. Charnock agrees: 'This act of permission is not a mere and naked permission, but such an one as is attended with a certainty of the event.'[52]

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45 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:157.

46 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:158.

47 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:159.

48 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:168.

49 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:147.

50 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:150. Berkouwer rejects the idea of divine permission, because it: 'suggests that God allows the sinner to decide in freedom against God's command. God is, then, in His Providence, a balcony observer of a context whose outcome is never certain', *The Providence of God*, 137. Hodge, on the other hand, sees no problem with divine permission, writing: 'All events embraced in the purpose of God are equally certain, whether He has determined to bring them to pass by His own power, or simply to permit their occurrence through the agency of His creatures … He effects good, He permits evil.' Again, 'Whatever He does, He certainly purposed to do. Whatever He permits to occur, He certainly purposed to permit', *Systematic Theology*, I:540–43. The Bible abounds with examples of this. God used the Assyrian invasion (Is. 10:12–16), Joseph's enslavement (Gen. 45:5–8; 50:20), Samson's sin (Judg. 14:4), the Babylonian invasion (Hab. 3:17–19), Judas's betrayal (Matt. 27:15–26), and Christ's crucifixion (Acts 2:23–24) to accomplish his will. In each instance, he permitted second causes (free agents) to act according to their desires. For Charnock's use of these examples, see *Existence and Attributes of God*, I:447, II:145–46,161,167–68.

51 William Perkins, *Armilla Aurea (A Golden Chaine; or, The Description of Theologie Containing the Order and the Causes of Salvation and Damnation, According to Gods Word) in The Works of William Perkins* (London, 1608), I:15.

52 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:149.

b. It destroys human liberty

Second, if nothing falls outside the parameters of God's control, then there is no such thing as freewill. Swinnock affirms that God commands people's 'hearts' and 'hands',[53] furthermore, 'No man is master of himself, so much as of his thoughts.'[54] Such statements seem irreconcilable with human liberty. By way of a solution, it is important to note that Swinnock does not believe that the will is free to act contrary to all motives. Rather, it is determined by whatever the understanding and affections (rightly or wrongly) view as good. This does not undermine self-determination, because it maintains a difference between 'constraining' and 'non-constraining' causes. Simply put, people are free when their choices are their own. Swinnock's position does, however, undermine the notion that the will itself possesses self-determination (or arbitrary power).

Broadly speaking, there are two main schools of thought on this issue: indeterminism[55] and determinism. The first (the position of open theists) maintains that the will is free from internal motives and desires. In other words, it is free from the mind's thoughts and the heart's affections. It possesses arbitrary power. This means we do not know why the will chooses what it chooses. The second maintains that the will is not free from internal motives and desires. In other words, it is not free from the mind's thoughts and the heart's affections. It does not possess arbitrary power. This means we do know why the will chooses what it chooses. Swinnock believes people are free in the choices they make, because they

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53 Swinnock, *Incomparableness of God, Works*, IV:428.

54 Swinnock, *Incomparableness of God, Works*, IV:429.

55 Indeterminism is the notion that choices are free if they are not causally determined. John Feinberg explains: 'Despite the direction in which the causes appear to incline the agent's will, he or she can still choose contrary to those causes, since they do not decisively incline the agent in one direction or another', 'God Ordains All Things' in *Predestination and Free Will*, 21. In other words, choices are uncertain, because the will is free to act contrary to all motives (external and internal). In a similar vein, Bruce Reichenbach affirms: 'Freedom is not the absence of influences, either external or internal … Rather, to be free means that the causal influences do not determine my choice or action', 'God Limits His Power' in *Predestination and Free Will*, 103. This view is also known as 'the liberty of indifference' or 'the power of contrary choice' or 'contra-causal freedom' or 'the self-determining power of the will'. Indeterminism is essentially Pelagianism. It insists that liberty is the power to choose between good and evil without any inclination either way. If people are born with a corrupt nature by which they are inclined to sin, then they do not possess this liberty.

possess understanding, affections, and will. He also believes these faculties are corrupt, and the will – without any external constraint – chooses accordingly.

Augustine anticipates open theism's main objection to this paradigm, stating: 'If God foreknows that man will sin, then you will say that he must sin, and if this has to happen, there is no freedom of the will in the act of sinning, but rather an inevitable and unbending necessity.'[56] He calls such reasoning 'sheer folly',[57] adding:

> Since God has foreknowledge of our will, its future will be such as He foreknows it. It will be a will precisely because He foreknows it as a will, and it could not be a will if it were not in our power. Hence God also has foreknowledge of our power over it. The power, then, is not taken from me because of His foreknowledge, since this power will be mine all the more certainly because of the infallible foreknowledge of Him who foreknew that I would have it.[58]

Perkins agrees: 'Gods foreknowledge in it selfe, is not a cause why things are, but as it is conjoyned with his decree. For things do not therefore come to passe, because that God did foreknow them; but because he decreed and willed them, therefore they come to passe.'[59] Charnock also adopts Augustine's position, affirming: 'God's foreknowledge of man's voluntary actions doth not necessitate the will of man.'[60] This is so, because there is a distinction between a necessity of compulsion and a necessity of immutability (or infallibility). The former takes away free will whereas the latter does not.[61] Charnock acknowledges: 'The will cannot be compelled, for then it would cease to be the will.'[62] The point is: God's foreknowledge does not compel. It is not 'the cause of anything'.[63] Charnock affirms:, 'Though the foreknowledge of God be infallible, yet it doth not necessitate the creature in acting ... they voluntarily run into such courses, not by any impulsion'.[64] By way of

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56 Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will in The Fathers of the Church*, ed. R.J. Deferrari (Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 1968), Vol. LIX, 170 (III:III).

57 Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will*, 172 (III:III).

58 Augustine, *The Free Choice of the Will*, 173 (III:III).

59 Perkins, *Golden Chain, Works*, I:15.

60 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, I:446.

61 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, I:446.

62 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, I:447.

63 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, I:448.

64 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:145.

example, Charnock appeals to Christ's death as described in Acts 4:27–28,[65] stating: 'God did not only foreknow, but determined the suffering of Christ … It did infallibly secure the event, but did not annihilate the liberty of the action, either in Christ's willingness to suffer, or the crime of the Jews that made him suffer.'[66]

c. It makes God in favour of evil

Finally, if nothing falls outside the parameters of God's control, then he necessarily wills sin. Swinnock dispels this notion by upholding the distinction between God's secret and revealed wills.[67] The first refers to the rule of God's actions (decrees), whereas the second refers to the rule of man's actions (precepts).[68] Scripture appears to support such a distinction. Joseph's brothers sinned when they sold him as a slave. This was not God's revealed will (disposition). However, it was his secret will (decree), for Joseph says to his brothers: 'It was not you who sent me here, but God.'[69] The Jews sinned when they crucified Christ. Again, this was not God's revealed will (disposition). However, it was his secret will (decree), for the

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65 'For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.'

66 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:146.

67 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, I:79. For Charnock, see *Essence and Attributes of God*, II:147–55.

68 According to Hodge: 'The decretive will of God concerns his purposes, and relates to the futurition of events. The perceptive will relates to the rule of duty for his rational creatures. He decrees whatever He purposes to effect or permit. He prescribes, according to his own will, what his creatures should do, or abstain from doing. The decretive and perceptive will of God can never be in conflict. God never decrees to do, or to cause others to do, what He forbids. He may, as we see He does, decree to permit what He forbids', *Systematic Theology*, I:403–404. Carson challenges the merits of this distinction, because: 'it is inadequate as a total explanation of the relation between the divine will and reality, because in too many instances the hidden will appears to make a mockery of the revealed will. Since the hidden will is always effective, it appears to be the actual will of God; while the revealed will is little more than precept. In that case, man does not know anything of God's actual will, except by what actually happens; and conversely, everything that happens is exactly what God really wills to happen', *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 213–14. Nevertheless, Carson immediately qualifies his opposition, acknowledging, 'We cannot do without some distinctions concerning the "will(s)" of God.' He proceeds to distinguish between God's 'disposition' and 'decree.'

69 Gen. 45:5–8; 50:20.

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apostle Peter declares: 'This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death'.[70]

Calvin recognizes such a distinction, writing: 'Moses proclaims that the will of God is to be sought not far off in the clouds or in the abyss, because it has been set forth familiarly in the law (Deut. 30:11–14), it follows that he has another hidden will which may be compared to a deep abyss.'[71] Calvin anticipates an objection to this dichotomy, namely: 'There are in him two contrary wills, because by his secret plan he decrees what he has openly forbidden by his law.'[72] He responds: 'But even though his will is one and simple in him, it appears manifold to us because, on account of our mental incapacity, we do not grasp how in divers ways it wills and does not will something to take place … For it would not be done if he did not permit it; yet he does not unwillingly permit it, but willingly.'[73] Charnock builds on this: 'To say God doth will sin as he doth other things, is to deny his holiness; to say it entered without anything of his will, is to deny his omnipotence.'[74] By way of solution, he affirms: 'God wills good by a positive decree, because he hath decreed to effect it. He wills evil by a private decree, because he hath decreed not to give that grace which would certainly prevent it,'[75] adding: 'That which is permitted by him, is in itself, and in regard of the evil of it, hateful to him: but as the prospect of that good which he aims at in the permission of it is pleasing to him, so that act of his will, whereby he permits it, is ushered in by an approving act of his understanding.'[76] By an act of his will, therefore, God effects good and permits evil. This is his secret will (decree). When he willingly permits evil, he does not contradict his revealed will (i.e., his disposition toward evil), for he does not approve of it, but approves of 'that good which he aims at in the permission of it'.

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70 Acts 2:23.

71 Calvin, *Institutes*, I:XVII:2. Calvin refers to this 'hidden will' as God's 'secret plan', 'secret providence', 'secret judgments', 'incomprehensible plans', 'secret command', and 'secret direction' *Institutes*, I:XVI:2,3,6,9, I:XVII:1,2, I:XVIII:1,2,4. It is 'a certain and deliberate will', *Institutes*, I:XVI:3.

72 *Institutes*, I:XVIII:3.

73 *Institutes*, at times, it appears Calvin rejects the notion of God's permissive will – 'They babble and talk absurdly who, in place of God's providence, substitute bare permission – as if God sat in a watchtower awaiting chance events, and his judgments thus depended upon human will', *Institutes*, I:XVIII:1, III:XXIII:8. However, he is here referring to 'unwilling' permission as opposed to 'willing' permission. For Calvin, the former implies that whatever is happening is not in full accord with God's will.

74 Charnock, *Existence and Attributes of God*, II:148.

75 *Institutes*.

76 *Institutes*, II:149.

2. God controls all things for the good of his people

The second major tenet in Swinnock's understanding of God's providence is this: Christ's 'kingdom, which ruleth over all, shall be disposed as may be most for the welfare of his people'.[77] Swinnock sees a clear difference between 'the punishments God inflicts on sinners' and 'the afflictions he brings on saints'.[78] First, they differ in 'manner'.[79] God punishes his enemies with joy whereas he afflicts his children with compassion. Second, they differ in 'measure'.[80] God punishes his enemies with no regard for what they can endure whereas he afflicts his children according to what they are able to suffer. Third, they differ in 'end'.[81] God punishes his enemies to satisfy his offended judgement whereas he afflicts his children to sanctify their polluted hearts. In a word, God governs all things (including suffering) for the welfare of his people.

For support, Swinnock gravitates to the apostle Paul's words in Romans 8:28: 'And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.'[82] This means they are never in the grip of blind forces. Rather, everything that happens to them is divinely planned. As Calvin puts it, the Christian's 'solace is to know his Heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by his authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it'.[83] According to Swinnock, this includes 'all things, not only thy comforts, but also thy crosses; not only the love of God, but also the hatred of the world, and the malice of hell'.[84] God causes all of these things to work together for the Christian's good. For Swinnock and Charnock, the good in view is not material ease and prosperity, but God's purpose to conform his people to the likeness of his Son.[85] The Christian's awareness of God's purpose provides comfort and produces contentment in the midst of suffering.

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77 For excellent treatments of this subject, see Thomas Watson, *All Things for Good; or, A Divine Cordial* (1663; rpt., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994); and John Flavel, *Divine Conduct; or, The Mystery of Providence: A Treatise upon Psalm 57:2* in *The Works of John Flavel* (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1820; rpt, London: Banner of Truth, 1968), IV:339–497.

78 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:127.

79 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works.*

80 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:128.

81 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:129.

82 For Bruce Ware's exposition of this verse, see *God's Lesser Glory*, 192–93.

83 Calvin, *Institutes*, I:XVII:11. Also see I:XVI:3.

84 Swinnock, *Christian Man's Calling, Works*, II:122.

85 Rom. 8:29

Conclusion

Open theism provides no such encouragement. In relation to Romans 8:28, John Sanders remarks: 'God is working to accomplish good in all things', yet 'the purposes of God meet with resistance, and even God does not always get what he wants.'[86] Ironically, this makes open theism weakest where it claims to be strongest – pastorally. As Bruce Ware asks:

How pastorally, spiritually, and existentially adequate is the counsel offered by openness proponents? At the heart of the pastoral counsel offered to suffering people by open theists is this claim: God did not bring about your suffering, so don't blame God for it; instead, be encouraged because he feels as badly about the suffering you are enduring as you do.[87]

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86 Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 127–28.
87 Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 207.

Mission in the Bible:
Non-existent in the Old Testament but ubiquitous in the New?

A review article by **Craig Blomberg** who is the distinguished New Testament lecturer at Denver Theological Seminary in Colorado.

Eckhard J. Schnabel

Early Christian Mission

2 volumes, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; Leicester: Apollos, 2004, $90.00, xliii + 1928 pages

Not since Adolf von Harnack, at the end of the nineteenth century, has so monumental a survey of the data bearing on the history of the missionary enterprise during the time spanned by both testaments, even been attempted, much less executed with such a high level of expertise. There might be no one else in the world today so qualified for the task than Eckhard Schnabel, who teaches New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. Prior to coming to the Chicago area he had taught at the Asian Theological Seminary in Manila, the Philippines, and the Freie Theologische Akademie in Giessen, Germany. Flawlessly bilingual in German and English, Schnabel has canvassed primary sources, along with secondary literature in both languages (with a smattering of French, Spanish, Italian and Dutch thrown in) that occupies a 147 page bibliography (and footnotes occasionally include more 'minor' sources that do not even qualify for the bibliography)! In fact, Schnabel first wrote this work in German (*Urchristliche Mission* [Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2002]) and then translated it *himself* into English.

Schnabel's definition of mission(s) proves crucial:

the activity of a community of faith that distinguishes itself from its environment in terms of both religious belief (theology) and social behavior (ethics), that is convinced of the truth claims of its faith, and that actively works to win other people to the content of faith and to the way of life of whose truth and necessity the members of that community are convinced (11).

Given this definition, Schnabel's thesis, though nowhere stated in so many words, amounts to the consistent conclusion that *Old Testament Israelites, like intertestamental Jews, did not engage in missions per se, but that early Christians did so everywhere*. The absence in pre-Christian times of similar ventures makes the authenticity of the New Testament portrait of the pervasiveness of Christian missions that much more probable. This theme further demonstrates this fledgling religion, like its distinctive Scriptures, to have been missional at its core. The missionary mandate remains as incumbent as ever on believers today, despite (or perhaps especially because of) the rampant pluralism that so frequently calls for a moratorium on formal evangelism or proselytizing efforts.

Doubtless the most controversial portion of Schnabel's tome is his unrelenting rejection of studies that find missionary efforts in the Old Testament or in Second Temple Judaism. Of course, Yahweh as monotheistic creator of the heavens and the earth has a universal scope to all his plans. Certainly, Genesis 12:1–3 remains programmatic for those plans. But:

the blessing for the nations is a promise, not a command. Abraham does not receive an assignment to carry Yнwн's blessing to the nations; rather, the nations are promised divine blessing if and when they see Abraham's faith in Yнwн and if and when they establish contact with his descendants (cf. Gen. 22:16–18), (p. 63).

Exodus 19 does not form Israel's 'great commission'; the election of the nation created a kingdom of priests uniquely close to God. Nowhere do the Laws of the Torah stipulate that the Israelites must evangelize the nations, even as those nations on their own interact with Israel. Of course, Gentiles are welcome to join Israel or become Jews (witness, for example, Rahab and Ruth, the Gibeonites and Uriah the Hittite). Solomon prays for the foreigners who come to the temple to be able to see the uniqueness of Yahweh, while Elijah and Elisha occasionally work miracles for Gentiles. The

Ninevites do repent when Jonah preaches to them, but he had been sent merely to announce their coming judgement.

In a similar way evidence of the Psalms, Schnabel argues, does not add up to any formal concept of missions. Like the recurring motif in the prophets of a coming, eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Israel, the Wisdom literature does envision a future, divinely initiated desire by many individuals from many people groups to worship Yahweh, but not because of any necessarily Jewish mission explicitly targeting them, then or later. To the extent that this steady stream of new believers in the Lord flows from the mission of the suffering servant, one can recognize the foreshadowing of the *Christian* missionary mandate (see esp. Isaiah 66:19), but not a distinctively Jewish, pre-Christian pattern of proselytizing. In the pseudepigrapha, 1 Enoch 90:38 situates salvation for the nations explicitly in the context of the Messiah's ministry. The testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs contain numerous similar texts, if not with direct reference to a Messiah, then at least in the context of a new, eschatological age to come.

To the extent that intertestamental literature frequently reflected a narrowing of Jewish horizons, one expects and finds even less explicit evangelism than in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Dead Sea Scrolls represent the zenith of this sectarian nationalism. But even in the wealth of later rabbinic literature, frequent attempts to define Judaism for the outsider still do not add up to a 'great commission'. 'The question is not whether non-Jews can join Israel, but whether Jews believe they have been given the assignment to prompt non-Jews, through active propaganda for their faith and for the way of life, to join the Jewish commonwealth' (120). Much more aggressive were the Judaizers that Paul had to combat on several occasions, but these were professing Jewish *Christians*, so their activity in no way changes the picture of ordinary Jewish practice that has otherwise been building up. By the third and fourth centuries of the Common Era, rabbinic literature discloses more assertive attitudes to missions, which Martin Goodman explains as the result of the growing success of Christianity. This literature, however, cannot easily be read back into first-century times.

There is no doubt that an older era of missiological works exaggerated the amount of formal missionary activity that occurred in Old Testament and intertestamental times. Scot McKnight's *A Light to the Nations* has convincingly shown that Jesus' reference to Pharisees and scribes travelling over land and sea to make a single convert (Matthew 23:15) incorporates a metaphor based on the extent to which some Jews went to encourage God-fearing Gentiles, already worshipping in the synagogues, to become

full-fledged proselytes, rather than proving the existence of a broadly based evangelistic strategy to pagans uninterested in or hostile to Judaism. But it is telling that, after listing six reasons why many have seen an implicit mandate for missions in the Psalms:

(1) the nations are called on to praise, serve and fear the Lord;

(2) the worship of Yahweh by the nations is expected in the present as well as promised for the future;

(3) Israelites worship God among the nations;

(4) Israel is challenged to proclaim the Lord's mighty acts among the nations;

(5) the nations are said to belong to the Lord in the future; and

(6) Yahweh will one day judge all the peoples of the world

All Schnabel does by way of reply is to look briefly at four psalms that present certain ambiguities (Psalms 47, 102, 96, 98), even while he acknowledges in his footnotes numerous additional Psalms that cut against the grain of his thesis. A large portion of Schnabel's rejection of pre-Christian Jewish missions stems directly from his terminology. If missionary activity must be as explicit as his definition makes it, then there is very little sign of this before the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, though even then it would appear that Schnabel has exaggerated its paucity a little. But if one may speak of an *implicit* missionary mandate, then a considerably larger body of Jewish texts may prove relevant. Moreover, if Old Testament models were exclusively centripetal, then from where did the idea even come to Jesus and the apostles of an exclusively centrifugal mission?

In the second major part of this *magnum opus*, Schnabel turns to first-century verities and remains there for the bulk of his work. A lengthy, opening chapter surveys 'historical and social realities in Palestine', presenting a vast array of information about geography, population, economics, politics, religion, communication, languages, education, travel and domestic space. (A similar survey will later extend to the entire Roman empire.) Next comes a study of the gospels with reference to Jesus' mission to Israel. Key, overarching themes that are unpacked include the kingdom of God, Son of man, the One sent by his Father, healing and salvation,

authority to forgive sins, controversies with the Jewish rulers, the incident in the temple, and Jesus' suffering and death in fulfillment of the Scriptures. More explicitly setting the stage for a missionary mandate are Jesus' calls for faith, his appointment of his disciples as followers, and his own itinerant ministry, not least during the period often dubbed his 'withdrawal from Galilee' (when he sojourns within Gentile territory). Setting the stage even more directly for the Great Commission are the sendings of the twelve and the seventy(-two). Here Schnabel struggles valiantly, though not always persuasively, with which portions of the instructions to these groups remain timeless advice and which were situation-specific.

Schnabel moves on to survey all the various texts that bring Jesus into contact with Gentiles, even within Israel. He deals with parabolic material with implications for a Gentile ministry, too, helpfully debunking the view that Matthew 25:31–46 uses 'the least of these my brothers' to refer to all the poor of the world. Instead, Jesus had needy Christians in view, in a culture in which accepting the messenger implied acceptance of the message. He further highlights how the 'beginning of birth-pangs' in Mark 13:7, also known as the great tribulation, referred to the entire inter-advent period. Finally, Schnabel scrutinizes the Great Commission, in the closing verses of Matthew. He highlights how every segment of these verses coalesces to stress the universality of God's Lordship in Christ, the need for salvation and the imperative to take the gospel to everyone everywhere. By definition this universality makes the claims of the gospel exclusive: if all need to accept it, then other alternatives must be inadequate. In the context of exegeting the Commission appears an outstanding excursus on the need for believers' baptism, particularly in light of those who would condemn the practice for those already sprinkled with water as infants as 'rebaptism' (in parts of Germany sufficient to lead to clergy defrocking!). Unfortunately, Schnabel largely passes by the issue of the meaning of Mark 13:10 and parallels, at least with respect to those who claim it is equivalent to the Great Commission itself.

Parts Three through Six all treat the post-resurrection ministries of the apostles and their co-workers. Two parts thoroughly dissect the ministries of the Twelve, and their companions, first in Jerusalem and eventually 'to the ends of the earth'. Two more analyze everything one could possibly think of to say about Paul and missions, followed by the theology of missions of the remaining New Testament authors. Space precludes continuing our already highly selective summaries with even the amount of detail thus far included. But we may at least list a number of significant findings.

(1) 'The popular view is unfounded that claims that Jesus' disciples and the Jerusalem church needed to be forced to engage in missionary outreach, which took place only after and as the result of the persecution that followed the death of Stephen' (395).

(2) Koinōnia ('fellowship'), especially in Acts 2–4 includes both unity and the communal sharing of resources, especially material ones, flowing from the intimacy that was possible only among gatherings no larger than the house churches.

(3) Each apostle exemplified 'a missionary who explores new territory without any existing models, who is ready to value co-workers more than self, who is prepared to carry the cross daily', and who thus represents far more than 'the "head of a department" or an "office boss"' (429).

(4) The use of twelve leaders from the first day of the church's inception, subsequently supplemented by seven more (the 'deacons' of Acts 6), makes it highly unlikely that this church could have ever acknowledged as legitimate the restriction of leadership to a single spiritual leader with more authority than anyone else.

(5) The Christian notion of conversion proved unique among the Greaco-Roman religions of the ancient world, in which one typically just added new beliefs or deities to an existing pantheon. Thus the expansive Christian missionary work and zeal would have shocked many pagans.

(6) 'There is very little archaeological evidence for Greek cults of a 'personal' god who was interested in or connected with the individual person' (615). Christianity would have remained equally striking in claiming precisely this for God in Christ.

(7) Despite common, considerably lower estimates of literacy in the empire, figures of 20–30% of the inhabitants of Hellenized cities who could read and write appear more realistic, with those percentages increasing among the Jewish populations, particularly in Egypt and Judea.

(8) Of the post-New Testament traditions about the missions of Jesus' followers not highlighted in Acts, those with the strongest claims to accuracy include Thomas going to India, Matthew to Egypt and Ethiopia, Mark to Egypt, Philip to Achaia and Macedonia, Elchasai to Mesopotamia, Thaddeus to Edessa, and perhaps Peter, John and Philip to Parthia.

(9) After the year 41–42, elders replace the apostles as leaders in Jerusalem, which, combining with traditions like those just noted, suggests that the rest of the apostles' lives were spent primarily in mission.

Turning to the pre-Christian Saul of Tarsus, Schnabel positions him neither on the theological left or right wings but in the centre (N. T. Wright may be a little more convincing in seeing him on the far right like a modern day ultra-Zionist terrorist). As a Christian, Paul's approach of being all things to all people (1 Corinthians 9:19–23) was more than a strategy but the natural consequence of the gospel. 'Paul goes to people wherever they are "at home" in terms of space, language or history' (954). But this is cultural relevance, not cultural relativism. 'Effectiveness in missionary work and in church ministry does not depend on people or on programs, nor on rhetorical techniques or elaborate methods, but is the result of God's activity' (981). But that does not mean that Paul has any right to 'take it easy'; as God's 'slave' he works as hard as he can for as long as he can (982).

The hidden years between Saul's conversion and the missionary travels described in Acts are best understood as occupied in ministry, beginning in Arabia–Nabatea and moving to Syria and Cilicia, including the regions most immediately in and around Damascus, Tarsus and (Syrian) Antioch. An inscription discovered at the site of Paphos in Cyprus as recently as 2000, though fragmentary, may well attest to the presence of Paul the apostle there. If so, it would be the first secure extra-biblical documentation of Christians on that island prior to the fourth century. So, too, an inscription discovered in 1965, but published only in 1994, attests to Jews in Thessalonica in the third century, the first known reference to Jews in that city, apart from Acts 17, from ancient times. When the Areopagus called Paul to explain his new teaching, believing that he was promoting foreign deities, it probably expected that he would donate money for a festival, and buy property for a shrine, to worship these new gods, which it would have to approve in order for them to be added to the

Greek pantheon. Paul's speech would then have been written as a declamation and circulated among the citizens, suggesting that Luke may well have relied on a written source for his summary of Paul's sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17. If we understand 'Scythians' to refer to slaves, as we probably should, then the eight elements of Colossians 3:11 are neatly balanced in two ABBA structures. Paul's three topics of discussion with Felix may correspond to three stages in communicating the gospel: affirming divine standards of righteousness or justice; showing human failure to meet them particularly with respect to self-control, and highlighting the need for a solution to this plight in light of the coming Day of Judgement. Paul's two-year house arrest with which the book of Acts ends probably culminated with his release, given the moderating effect Seneca (and others) had on Nero until AD 64, given the much more sombre tone of 2 Timothy that suggests it was written during a later and more severe imprisonment, and given the early Christian testimony to Paul's subsequent travels to Spain. But this additional missionary work cannot have lasted much longer than a year, to allow time for his return to the eastern half of the empire, re-arrest and execution. Perhaps his age, of about 60 years, by this time prohibited him from anything more prolonged and arduous.

A lengthy chapter on 'Missionary Tactics and Communication' concludes the analysis of Paul's pioneer outreach work. Schnabel demonstrates how Paul struck a balance between following some master strategic plan on the one hand and simply asking the Spirit for daily guidance on the other. As he tried to move ever further afield, particularly to the west of Syrian Antioch, circumstances usually dictated how short or long he stayed at a given place (or whether he stopped at all). In looking for an audience in a given community, he sought out the accepted places of communicating messages like his in the Jewish and Greaco-Roman worlds – the synagogue, the private philosophical school, the public lecture hall, the private villa of a wealthy citizen, or the agora where religious and philosophical teachers regularly presented their beliefs. (The modern Western equivalents, therefore, are not normally a city centre or a shopping mall, but newspapers, radio, television, and the internet.) While Paul unleashes some forceful rhetoric and harsh polemics against pagan idolatry, he differentiates between the damning ideologies and the individuals enslaved to them. More personal attacks are saved for insiders: Christian leaders who abandon the heart of the faith and lead others astray despite knowing better.

Of the three main elements for good rhetoricians to consider (*logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*), Paul focuses almost exclusively on the *logos* – the

contents and logic of his message. He does not appeal to his own moral character very often, except as it impinges on his suffering, and equally rarely milks others' emotions to the extent that his Corinthian rivals, the Sophists, loved to do. Given their abuse in Hellenistic philosophy, Paul seems almost anti-*ethos* and anti-*pathos*. A particularly helpful segment of Schnabel's treatment of Paul's discourses divides them into six categories with illustrations of each discussed:

(1) for Jews he started with God and the Scriptures and interpreted them in light of Jesus;

(2) for pagans he had to begin by explaining who God himself was;

(3) in some cases he highly contextualizes his message in light of the specific situation;

(4) in others he is confrontational as he proclaims Jesus as Messiah and Lord;

(5) at times he uses apologetics to defend the truth of the gospel; and

(6) in still other Christian contexts he presents more pastoral encouragement.

In every instance, with Paul Bowers, 'there is no restless rushing from one new opening to another but rather a methodical progress concerned both with initiating work in new areas and at the same time with bringing emergent groups in those areas to stable maturity' (1418). An excellent, detailed description of Paul's unusual emphasis on utilizing co-workers is followed by an analysis of when and why Paul did not accept funding from others (both so as not to burden or mislead those he was just in the process of evangelizing and to avoid the vitiating 'strings attached' in an age of highly entrenched expectations between patrons and their clients).

A much shorter closing chapter deals, remarkably briefly in light of the length of all the other topics of these volumes, with the individual missionary theologies of New Testament authors not already treated. Identifying virtually every one of these remaining books as missions-centered at heart, as Schnabel does, may exaggerate the matter and overlook key distinctive purposes for each. As a corrective to the usually

understated role of the entire New Testament as a collection of missionary documents, however, it offers a welcome perspective.

Most of Schnabel's several final summary chapters reorganize, but rehearse, key points already well treated. Five emphases jumped out at me.

(1) Missionary work was and is not 'fun'! It is physically gruelling, emotionally taxing, spiritually difficult work. But that is precisely what a 'slave' of Jesus should expect.

(2) What makes it all worthwhile is that people are won for eternal life with God. That central goal permeated Paul's life; does it ours?

(3) Effective missionary service occurs most often when those communicating the gospel take their listeners seriously, understand their social, cultural, and religious backgrounds; and move them from where they are to where they need to go.

(4) The need today is far too great for the church to sit back and debate how 'attractive' or 'open' it is to others; it must rather 'engage in robust evangelistic outreach among the agnostic and the apathetic, among atheists and neo-pagans, seeking to win them to faith in Jesus Christ, who alone liberates from guilt and sin and grants true and lasting meaning of life' (1574).

This message is exclusive with respect to Jesus as the only one who has atoned for the sins of humanity; it is inclusive as it seeks to embrace people from every race, tribe, tongue and nation.

There is precious little I find myself disagreeing with in the more than 1000 pages on New Testament material. Part encyclopedia, part *Forschungsbericht*, part fresh analysis, there are huge portions where few reviewers could ever even know if errors had been made, short of checking every primary and secondary source reference. This includes a number that are available at only a handful of libraries in the world (Schnabel did a fair amount of his research at the University of Marburg, he told me, though the ghost of Bultmann does not appear to have skewed his research in any respect!). Reviewers feel obligated to quibble about something, though, so I suppose I could note that I do not think Schnabel has interacted with the strongest of J. D. G. Dunn's arguments for seeing the Samaritans in Acts 8 as unconverted until Peter and John came from Jerusalem to see what was

happening with Philip's evangelism. I might suggest that some of the dates for events in the 40s and 50s seem too early – for example, Paul in Arabia in 32/33 and on his first missionary 'journey' from 45–47 – plus we really lack enough data to date the conversion of Cornelius precisely at all. Why should the one 'troubling' the believers in Galatia be a specific individual, rather than generic (Galatians 5:10), especially when Paul goes on to add, 'whoever that may be'? Why does Galatians 2:15–21 read better as the continuation of the conversation between Paul and Peter rather than Paul's subsequent theological reflection and thesis statement for the entire epistle? Might the case for a link with idolatry make more sense of all four prohibitions in the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 than the somewhat tenuous links needed to tie them in with prohibitions that the sojourning foreigner in Israel must obey, according to Leviticus 17–18?

When I was touring the excavations of the site of Pisidian Antioch in the spring of 1999, the curator of the archaeological museum there, himself a (Muslim) New Testament PhD(!), pointed us to the foundations of what was believed to be the Jewish synagogue (although Schnabel says this site has not yet been located). In explaining Paul's annoyance with the demon-possessed girl in Philippi, Schnabel points to several pagan gods there that were sometimes called 'most high gods', so that the girl's testimony need not have been referring to Yahweh at all. But he does not interact with Graham Twelftree's detailed arguments that knowing the name of an opposing deity, demon or spirit often provided the key to gaining mastery over it, so that it seems more likely that the woman was referring to the God Paul served in the hope of warding him off!

In dealing with Romans 11:26, Schnabel appears to endorse an N. T. Wright-like doctrine of supersessionism. He properly rejects the two-covenants theory that finds Jesus as Messiah unnecessary for Jews faithful to the Mosaic covenant and any *Sonderweg* that has Jews saved mysteriously and directly by God's power at the last minute, before his return. He, however, does not discuss the common, evangelical conviction that there will be a large outpouring of faith in Jesus as Messiah among those ethnically Jewish shortly before the *Parousia*, even if this does not necessitate every last Jew in the final days believing nor any Jews *having* to live in a restored state of Israel. Schnabel likewise quite rightly eschews every approach to interfaith dialogue that rejects ultimate truth, that finds salvific efficacy in other religions, or that encourages Christians to converse with adherents of other religions to learn truths lacking in Christianity (even if non-salvific). But again, he seems to overreact in rejecting 'dialogue' altogether, when he proclaims that 'Paul, as a missionary, does

not engage in a dialogue with pagans about religious convictions, sentiments and practices' (1342–43). Acts 17:17 would suggest that was exactly what he did as he 'reasoned … in the marketplace day by day' with philosophers and laypeople alike. The verb in this clause comes from *dialegomai*, which means to converse, discuss, instruct, debate, argue. It was, in short, to engage in a verbal give-and-take over elements central to Paul's vision of true and false religion. In light of the frequent use of this verb in Acts, particularly in chapter 17, one can easily imagine dialogue as one of Paul's most common modes of operation, especially while he made tents and conversed with customers. Opportunities for formal sermons or discourses opened up periodically; conversing about Christ with convicted civility probably dominated the rest of his interactions with people.

Interspersed within the exegesis of texts, evaluations of interpretations, and presentations of relevant historical information, there appears a wealth of material not strictly necessary for Schnabel's overall case, but immensely valuable nevertheless. Among these digressions are a detailed, possible chronology of key events from 4 BC to AD 111, countless segments ranging from a short paragraph to pages on end of information – geographical, political, religious – that can be compiled about every city Jesus or the apostles ever entered, travelled near or possibly travelled near. In addition, there is everything we can know about the apostles and other named followers of Jesus at every location in which they appear in Scripture or more reliable early church tradition. Discussions of the historicity of countless texts punctuate these narrative asides. Many of these excursuses appear in small print, interrupting the overall narrative flow and visual presentation of the text. Many more such excursuses deal with the views of individual scholars on a particular topic, often from a perspective that Schnabel rejects (and itemizes his reasons for rejecting). Occasionally, the fine print presents scholars' arguments that bolster Schnabel's conclusions and occasionally, too, the identical kind of interaction with individual scholars' approaches to the issue at hand blends right in with the main text, leaving the reader to wonder why this material was not chosen for smaller fonts. Also, on a number of exegetical controversies, one wonders which view Schnabel favours when he merely lists options and then resumes the 'big print'.

One is not surprised to find the occasional grammatical or typographical mistake whenever an author writes in a second language. It is more surprising when so many fail to catch the editors' eyes: 'It is this love and care … that *is* motivated' (70); 'Cooch argued similarly when he suggests.' (147); 'immanent retribution' (200); 'he is singled out as powerful and

influential preacher' (428); 'the lowers classes in the Greek and Roman cities' (648); 'consequences for the temple and for the cultic practiced in the temple' (668); the growing number of Gentiles Christians' (764); 'Luke reports this event Acts 11:19–26' (786); 'concordate' (999); 'as new discoveries has shown' (1075); 'whether it is subversive of not' (1086); 'might by supported' (1088); .'missioaries' (1111); 'wants to asserts' (1148); 'perhaps can explained' (1177); 'the legal basis for his governorship were' (1193); '[ET 198]' (1194, n. 564); and 'the hypothetical speculation about the redactional motives of Luke *are* more problematic' (1200). In addition, the enumeration of points on page 673 skips from (5) to (7); a crucial 'not' appears to be missing on page 1296 from the sentence, 'This does mean, however, that he saw himself as the only missionary in the northern regions of the Mediterranean'; and the word 'time' seems absent on page 1420 – 'At the same he does not understand his mission'. And I read rapidly enough that I am sure I have missed some other mistakes.

Any one interested in the mission of the early church, however, will remain indebted for a long time to Schnabel for this treasure trove of information. What it lacks in exciting narrative flow is more than compensated for by its encyclopedic usefulness. Many, many thanks, Eckhard, for a labour of love that to me appears to have been just about as gruelling as the missionary labours of fledgling Christianity themselves!

The Last Word:
Second Temple
Evangelicalism

Robbie F. Castleman

Have you ever overheard, or participated in, a conversation that goes something like this?

Joe: "Hey, Jane, we missed you in church yesterday! Where were you? Did you go home this weekend to see your folks?"

Jane: "No, I was here, but I went over to Community Fellowship Bible Church to hear Bobby Rayburn preach. He is really into John Piper's stuff and I like Piper and wanted to hear him."

Joe: "Oh, cool. Was he good?"

Jane: "Yeah. He really goes right along with Piper, so I liked it and he was a really good speaker."

Joe: "Next time let me know about it and I'll go with you. I am really getting into some of Ortberg's stuff lately and he's terrific. I also like some of Dallas Willard, too. Larry, who do you like?"

Larry: "Well, right now I'm a bit bogged down in N. T. Wright and I like his stuff, but have you read Don Carson? I really like the pastoral edge in what he writes."

Jane: "I like Carson pretty much. But, Piper is really strong on grace. I loved the point yesterday about the need for grace before you can even have faith."

Larry: "Yes! That is so important. Piper says that, too."

Joe: "Ortberg, too."

Jane: "Larry, whose church do you go to?"

Larry: "Oh, I grew up in a church my dad helped start, and I still go there. It's huge now. It's just called God's House, but you've heard of the pastor, Justin Fide."

Joe and Jane together: "Oh, yeah!"

Joe: "I heard a tape of his once. Really solid. I didn't know you went to his church."

Larry: "Yeah. My dad was one of the people that broke away from another church to help him start the church. And now it's huge."

Jane: "Joe and I go to Alvin Brown's church. He's really good, too. I figure as long as the pastor preaches the cross and the forgiveness of sin, it's good."

Larry: "I agree. Have you guys heard this new song by Michael W. Smith? It's got a line that goes, 'I am crucified with Christ, yet I live, yet I live.' Awesome idea, huh?"

Even if you substitute Max Lucado, Rick Warren and C. S. Lewis for Piper, Wright and Carson, conversations like this are fairly common among evangelicals. I've begun to think that this conversation is similar to those Jesus may have heard in the first century. Contemporary evangelicalism may have more in common with Second Temple Judaism than we would like to admit.

Jews in the first century had a tendency to identify with a favourite rabbi or rabbinical school. I am of Hillel! I am of Shammai! This, of course carried over into the early church. Paul's mocking comment in 1 Corinthians makes the point. I am of Apollos! I am of Cephas! Twenty centuries later, believers are strongly identifying with certain teachers and the way they think and write. Jesus faced the deep root of this pattern when the Jews defended their status as God's people by saying, 'We are sons of Abraham!' Paul noted that this led to divisions in the church and was a mark of spiritual pride. In the same way it is not unusual for Christians today to identify their faith by favourite authors or speakers or whose church they attend. Like the Corinthians, Christians would certainly affirm, 'I am of Christ', but this

was and is simply a prideful nod to orthodoxy. This often-divisive habit is closely paralleled to another first and twenty-first century problem.

Like Second Temple Judaism, the evangelical church has strong Talmudic tendencies. Scholars, clergy and laity read commentaries, books, monographs, and essays and quote those who write them more than the Scripture itself. We may chuckle when a Christian like Larry thinks Michael W. Smith wrote Galatians 2:19–20, but too many believers actually think the formulation of the *idea* itself is new as well! Communities of faith too often dismiss the creeds, find no use for Patristic theology, and substitute a Philip Yancey film series for the Bible Jesus really did know. Contemporary evangelicals too often settle for theology that is grounded in song lyrics, favourite quotes and Scripture sound-bites only fit for T-shirts, bracelets and wall-hangings. The pulpit personality, the messenger, becomes more important than the message. And Joe and Jane end up going to Alvin Brown's church instead of the Church of Jesus Christ and never see the implications of how this shift in language becomes a part of their identity. Evangelical academics can be guilty of the same tendencies even if the people we quote use polysyllabic words and have impressive footnotes.

Finally, Second Temple Judaism got embroiled in these divisive detours because the major threat to their spiritual lives, sin, was already taken care of through the sacrificial system. Believers could bifurcate over penultimate preferences and think little of it because there was a system in place for taking care of the sin problem. Jewish confidence in the sacrificial system was well grounded in God's word, and they believed it. Sin was covered. Temple sacrifice was the John 3:16 of the first century. Believing God's word, first century Jews essentially said, 'Been there, done that', and rested in their own sense of righteousness. Contemporary evangelicals sometimes speak of the cross of Jesus with similar cause-and-effect confidence. The cross as reduced to a 'sacrificial system' that takes care of sin contributes to the dualistic wedge between salvation and sanctification that is increasingly manifest in evangelical faith and life. Jesus described the theologically correct and ethically bankrupt of his day as 'white-washed tombs'.

First century Pharisees boasted of their genealogical link to Abraham, identification with a favourite rabbinical school and were confident their sins had been dealt with. They were also blind to the Messiah in their midst and deaf to his rebuke.

The more understanding I have of Second Temple Judaism, the better I see some parallel dynamics in contemporary evangelicalism. My eschatology may be a bit less radically realized, but Wright's contextualizing

of the first century hits close to home, twenty centuries later. Evangelicals today are proud of our links to particular theological ancestors (whether John Calvin or John Stott). Too many of us are students of sound-bite schools we love to quote, from song lyrics to best-selling marquee conference speakers. And a hallmark of evangelicalism is our confidence that our sin problem has been dealt with. But, how clearly do we see our Messiah and can we hear the New Testament Jesus speak? Will we repent if we hear him call us white-washed tombs?