

REFORMATION TODAY



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193

Editorial comment

Following the exposition by Spencer Cunnah on the rôle of the pastor which appeared in the last issue (RT 192), Robert Strivens shows that theology is the driving force in the pastor's life and how important it is that every pastor be a theologian. But it is not all study. The pastor needs to relate to his people and be with them by way of hospitality or by visitation. That subject is addressed in the article on visitation. The degree to which writing on visitation has been neglected is illustrated by the fact that there is only one entry for it the new 2003 The FINDER (Banner of Truth 1955-2002, RT 1970-2002, Westminster Conference 1955-2002).

The above emphasis on the pastor as theologian should not detract from the fact that every Christian is a theologian, not in the sense of being a specialist but certainly in the sense of knowing God and being proficient in Christian truth.

Contributors to this issue

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Front cover *Pastor Chen (see article on China) visiting ethnic minority Christians who are scattered in high mountains.*

Editorial

At the time of writing we as a nation are at war. This demands faithfulness and support of those who risk their lives to achieve the objectives deemed necessary, not only for our safety, but for the safety of the world. In a war every citizen is involved. I have been reading about the civil war which took place in the 1640s in England. Civil war is the worst kind of war. Evangelical believers perished on both sides of that war in England. Likewise the American civil war which waged from 1861 to 1865 was appallingly tragic. Brother killed brother.

There is another war which is no less real than the recent one unfolding in Iraq. It is a spiritual war in which every Christian is involved. There is no such thing as a Christian who is not a soldier. It is impossible not to be engaged in this war. If as a believer you do not wage war against sin and Satan, you will be overcome and destroyed. Moreover every believer is a full-time professional soldier for the simple reason that the enemy does not confine his attacks to some days of the week and not other days.

Every believer is a soldier and every believer is provided with 'military' equipment. The armour is described in Ephesians 6:10-18. There are six parts of armour which represent defence of the whole body except the back, plus a piece of aggressive equipment, a sword.

The battle is spiritual. Training includes knowledge of the Scriptures and a knowledge of Church history. Every soldier needs to know the record of past battles in order to assess the current situation in our war. Then every soldier needs to know that he is involved in a conquest to win the whole world for Christ. The risen Jesus is Commander-in-Chief of his army and he has given instructions that we are not to rest until the whole world, including every nation and every people group, is won for Christ. That involves a massive spiritual war as the resistance to such conquest is as sinister as it is great. How to overcome fortified, well-defended walled cities in previous epochs was a principal problem and strategy in warfare.

This is a spiritual war. It is not by military might, nor by economic power but by the Holy Spirit that we advance.

Today there are many professing Christians who are lazy soldiers. It is not as though they are cowardly. It is just that they want a quiet way to heaven without getting too involved in the great war that is being waged. These lazy Christians are TV watchers. They do not study and they do not read. They do not own, still less read, OPERATION WORLD, which is the best blueprint of the battleground and layout of territories still to be won. These soldiers are reluctant fighters. The whole armour of God described by Paul is all connected to the business of prayer so well declared in Ephesians 6:18, 'Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere' (New Living Translation, Tyndale, Ill. USA 1996).

So these lazy soldiers are reluctant to attend prayer meetings especially if there are attractive recreations that clash with that time. This is sad because the reality is that the best soldiers are praying soldiers. We see this best in the example of our Field Marshall the Lord Jesus Christ, who through prayer and courage won a mighty battle for us through the cross.

Paul uses the image of the soldier in writing to Timothy. 'No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs - he wants to please his Commanding Officer' (2 Tim 2:3). Roman soldiers were a model of discipline and it was by this discipline that they conquered the world. When that discipline decayed the Roman empire declined and eventually fell. But the main point driven home by Paul is commitment to the Commanding Officer. Christ is our Leader and we live and die for him. Apart from officers all Roman soldiers were competent in a wide variety of vocations and when they were not in combat were employed to their utmost capacity in building and engineering projects. The emphasis to avoid entanglements is a reference to avoid time-wasting and profitless enterprises which take up energy and time which can be better used.

To be a good soldier is to maintain a clear and holy witness for Christ wherever you are. Let us search our own hearts. We are embattled. We are all soldiers. We constantly need to encourage each other. We have the whole armour of God. Are we using it as we should?

The Pastor as Theologian

Robert Strivens

Part 1

Every pastor should be a theologian.

Perhaps this seems a startling statement in the current anti-intellectual and anti-theological environment. However, I believe that both Scripture and history demonstrate it to be true. Every pastor should have a sound grasp of theology. More than that he should be a continual student of theology throughout his ministry. He must be a pastor-theologian. Yet this emphasis is sadly lacking today. In ministerial training, and in the actual work of the pastorate itself, serious theological study seems often to be denied the vital place which Scripture and history give to it. If we contemplate the causes of evangelical downgrade today, this must surely be a significant factor. I shall therefore seek in this article to demonstrate our urgent need today for pastor-theologians.

Let us start with Scripture. How does Scripture describe the pastor or minister? What words and phrases does it use? The pastor is, of course, a *shepherd*, willingly serving the flock under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, as an example, and not as an overlord (1 Peter 5:2-4). He is also an *overseer*. He is to watch - over himself first of all and then also over the congregation to which he is called. He is to see that they are fed nourishing spiritual food so that they grow in the faith and he is to protect them from destructive error which will otherwise overtake them (Acts 20:20, 28-31). Then the pastor is a *teacher* and *preacher*. He is to *teach* the truth - to convey sound doctrine, according to the Scriptures. He is to *preach* the truth - to mix his teaching with fervent and well-reasoned exhortation and encouragement, to urge his hearers actually to believe what he is teaching and to obey it (Eph 4:11ff.; 1 Tim 4; 2 Tim 4:1-5). He is also to be an *evangelist* or at least to do the work of one. He is to take the good news of Jesus Christ to those who have not heard it and seek to persuade them of it and so seek to bring them to saving repentance and faith in Christ (2 Tim 4:5). He is to be an *example* to the flock in his manner of life (1 Tim 4:12). He is to be a *leader*, taking the congregation on in the things of God (Heb 13:7,17).

No doubt there are other descriptions we could mention. Yet I want to argue that underlying all of these descriptions is that of theologian. If the pastor is to fulfil his ministry adequately, he must be a theologian. He has an absolute need of a sound theological foundation, which gives direction, depth, solidity, coherence and shape to every aspect of his ministry as pastor.

What is theology?

Definition

First we must set out some definitions. What precisely do we mean by a theologian? A theologian, of course, is one who studies theology. So what is theology? There is much confusion, understandably, at this point, and here lies the reason for the distrust that so many evangelicals today feel for theology.

Much of what has passed for theology over the last 150 to 200 years has been disastrous for biblical faith. This is for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, scholars sit in judgment on God's Word. They deny that Scripture is the inerrant, infallible Word of God. Instead, they presume to weigh Scripture in their own balances, and find it wanting. They build their ideas simply on their own reasonings, rather than on the truth that God has made known. Secondly, there is little sense amongst such theologians of anything approaching objective truth. All is subjective - a matter simply of human feelings and beliefs. They study and discuss one another's beliefs and ideas, producing treatises that are innovative and attention-seeking, which for a short time become the centre of scholarly debate, before being forgotten and passing into oblivion. There is no interest in the study of God's objective, revealed truth. What true Christian would want to have anything to do with this kind of theology? If this is theology, it is no wonder that so much of evangelicalism today wants to avoid it at all costs.

But this is *not* true theology. True theology is nothing other than the study of God. How then can man study God? There are two difficulties here - difficulties which much theology over the past two centuries has utterly ignored.

Revelation

The first difficulty is that man has no way of finding out anything about God, unless God first makes himself known to man. Only if and to the extent that

God has revealed himself to man, can man say anything at all about God? Our knowledge of God is limited absolutely to what God has revealed to us. Beyond that we can go no further.

True theology, then, is concerned with revelation, not speculation. And God has revealed himself, generally through creation, but specially in the Scriptures. More specifically, then, theology is the study of the revelation that God has given to mankind, in particular his special revelation in the Scriptures. So Calvin reminds us:

And let us not take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word.¹

If we are to study theology, we must take this to heart, as our first and guiding principle.

Illumination

The second difficulty is man's sinfulness. The fall of man in Eden has affected every part of us, including our minds. Our ability to understand and grasp anything that God does tell us about himself is severely restricted by our sin. Unless this difficulty is dealt with, we again have no way of learning anything about God; indeed, we will have no desire to do so. We will simply suppress the truth, preferring the ungodly speculations of our own minds.

Therefore, the study of God's revelation must not be carried out in our own strength, relying merely upon our own intellect, but with the constant aid and under the illumination of the Spirit of God. We must constantly pray for ourselves as Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better ... that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe (Eph 1:17-19).

It is in precisely these two areas - revelation and illumination - that so much theology over the past two centuries has gone so badly wrong. Man, instead of seeking to understand God's revelation of himself, has indulged in sinful

speculation about him, apart from God's revelation to man. And he has done so without seeking the aid of God's Spirit. The result of these two fatal deficiencies is what passes for theology in so many institutions and churches today, but in fact is nothing other than the hollow and deceptive philosophy, against which the apostle Paul warned, which depends upon human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Col 2:8).

True theology, then, is the study, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, of the revelation that God has made in Christ, to man, in Scripture. I want now to look a little more deeply at the nature of theological study, in order to demonstrate that pastors are admirably suited for this work, and that it naturally forms part - a necessary part - of their ministry. What, then, is true theological study?

The nature of theological study

Our tendency, in considering this topic, is to think first of all about the content of theological study. But Scripture makes plain that, just as significant, is the question of how we study.

How theology is to be studied

The fact that theology concerns the study of God dictates our approach to this study. It must be a *humble* and *reverent* approach. We must be conscious that, like Moses, we stand on holy ground, and that, like the Levites, we handle holy things. We are seeking to understand truth which God himself has revealed to us, about himself and about us. We depend utterly upon God in this. We must approach our study accordingly. There must be a constant sense of submission before the great and holy God, and a constant acknowledgement that we depend entirely upon his grace and mercy. Without this, theological study is impossible. Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no reverence or piety, says Calvin.²

But this reverence, or piety, must be joined with faith and love for God. We must recognise that this God is our creator and sustainer, and that he is our saviour. He has been pleased to reveal himself to us, and in so doing he has shown us mercy and grace.

I call piety that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces. For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him - they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him.³

The process is circular. The more we study theology, the more we see of God, and the more we are forced to our knees in humble adoration and worship. And so we are stimulated to come to know this God better, through further study.

For how can the thought of God penetrate your mind without your realizing immediately that, since you are his handiwork, you have been made over and bound to his command by right of creation, that you owe your life to him? - that whatever you undertake, whatever you do, ought to be ascribed to him? If this be so, it now assuredly follows that your life is wickedly corrupt unless it be disposed to his service, seeing that his will ought for us to be the law by which we live.⁴

These elements - reverence, piety, love, faith - are profoundly missing from so much that calls itself theology today. Modern theology often appears to be no more than yet another academic discipline, to be studied in the same way as any other discipline. Objectivity, neutrality, the suspending of judgment, above all the supremacy of the material over the spiritual, characterises much theological study. This adds up to an unbearable arrogance and man-centredness which is most offensive to God. It is no wonder that the results of much theology today are hateful to true believers. True theological study eschews all such means.

Yet there is more that needs to be said. Can theology successfully be studied by an unbeliever? The biblical witness says not, because of the destructive workings of sin. Man is blinded by his sin to the truth of God. Paul makes quite clear in the first three chapters of his first letter to the Corinthians that worldly wisdom and God's wisdom are two entirely different things, and that only the believer, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, can attain the latter. The unbeliever, the man without the Spirit, cannot understand spiritual things,

for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.⁵ It is only the believer, who has the eyes of his heart enlightened by the Holy Spirit⁶, who is able to grasp these things. Accordingly, only he is able truly to study theology. John Owen was of this view:

Evangelical theology is a spiritual gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit on the minds of believers, and believers are, by definition, those born again by the grace of God. Believers are thus made wise, prudent, and capable of understanding the mystery of holiness, of God and his will as revealed in Christ through the gospel.⁷

By contrast, unbelievers are incapable of engaging in true theological study. They may excel in the biblical languages, in the study of biblical and church history, even, in an intellectual sense, in the study of theological truth. In all these ways they may be of some use to the Church. But they cannot grasp true theology, because they do not know God.

We are left, then, with a study that is open only to believers, and that is to be approached with a due humility and reverence of heart, with faith and love for God. What is the aim of this study? It is the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. God has revealed himself only in Christ. Only through Christ may man approach God. Christ is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.⁸ He who has seen Christ has seen God.⁹ And the glorious aim of God's self-revelation in Christ is the glory of God in Christ. Though the study of theology will bring many benefits to man, its ultimate objective is the glory of God.

In the next issue of RT we shall consider in more detail what is to form the content of the pastor's theological study, and draw out some practical lessons.

End Notes

1 Calvin, Institutes, I xiii 21.

2 Institutes, Iii 1.

3 Ibid.

4 I ii 2.

5 1 Cor 2:14.

6 Eph 1:18.

7 J Owen, Biblical Theology (Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), p 640.

8 Heb 1:3.

9 John 14:9.

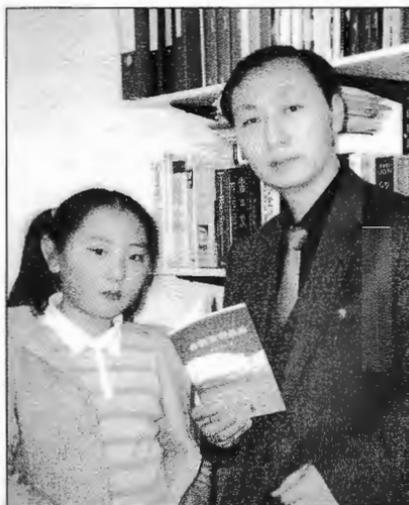
China

A report from Roger Weil

What follows consists of three parts. First is an explanation of how my book came to be written, second a brief sketch of pastor Chen's life and labours, and third a letter from one of pastor Chen's recently graduated workers from the field in mainland China.

In 1993 having taken early retirement I felt a strong desire to do something to help Russian Christians whom I had been visiting for over twenty years. So I spent a year writing a concise but densely compact summary of twenty-one Reformed Bible Doctrines in a non-technical style, easily referenced with numerous numbered short paragraphs. This has the title *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Chinese edition). It was written specifically to help young pastors and Bible Class leaders both understand and teach the fundamentals of our faith. For seventy years Russia had been deprived of any Christian literature and there were very few full-time pastors; as a consequence Bible-teaching was almost non-existent. With the help of numerous Russian Christians it was translated and printed in Minsk in 1996.

About three years ago I met a Chinese Christian who had been converted



Missionary Li Yuan is working among Chinese students in Britain. He is seen here holding a copy of the book "Foundations of the Christian Faith" With him is his daughter Tian Yi.

while studying in London and was now working as a missionary among Chinese students. Recent estimates put the total number of Chinese students in Britain at almost one hundred thousand! On a recent visit to his parents in China he had visited several house church meetings. While very glad to meet with those of like precious faith as himself he was concerned at the poor quality of preaching. He shared his concerns with me on his return to London. He felt that an 'easy to read' book on basic Christian doctrines would be really helpful and, much to my surprise, chose my book to meet this

need. After one or two false starts we eventually found a good translator and later on some well-educated Chinese Christians to check the final text.

It was decided to make the book small enough to fit into one's pocket; the English version exceeded 400 pages, so it would have to be published in two parts. But who would publish it for us as, due to the problem of border controls, it ought to be done inside China? We sent copies to several pastors inside China and two of them who were keen to help us replied, providing we could supply the necessary funds to cover the cost of printing and distribution. With God's help 5,000 copies of 'Book One' were printed in the northern province of Jilin and a further 25,000 in the central province of Henan - referred to by the Communists as 'the Jesus nest' because of the huge number of Christians there! Out of a population of 91 million in Henan there are an estimated 5 million Christians in registered churches and 3 million or more in house churches. Tony Lambert in his important book, 'China's Christian Millions', estimates there could be as many as 50 million believers nationwide, a church growth statistic, post Chairman Mao, unprecedented in the annals of Church history! Official seminaries cannot cope with the large number of applicants wanting to enter the Christian ministry; consequently there are simply not enough pastors to go round. The twin threat of a

proliferation of cults at grass-roots level and liberal theology from the official Three Self Patriotic Church leadership makes this an opportune time to publish our book inside China. But what are 30,000 copies among 50 million believers? May the LORD move hearts and hands to help us print more copies of 'Book One', also the publication of 'Book Two', the translation of which should be ready this summer. Pastor Chen, who organised the publication in Henan, has provided the following 'thumb nail' sketch of his life and ministry inside today's China.

Pastor Chen's Ministry

'I was born in Shanghai in 1932 and converted to God at the age of seventeen. While studying at Shanghai University I experienced God's calling to full-time service. In 1952 at the age of twenty I left university and spent a year studying in a Bible School. My calling from the Lord was not to serve him in Shanghai but among poor people in the villages. I became an active evangelist in the Church in China on account of which I was arrested in 1960. I was tried and sentenced to eighteen years in prison and a 'Reform-through-labour' camp; God preserved my life in spite of all kinds of privations and I was released in 1978. This was because, following the death of Chairman Mao, the policy towards ministers of religion changed. After my release I became an itinerant evangelist and minister-at-large, and in that capacity I have



Students at prayer in the seminary in Henan Province

been serving God until now. In 1981 the Shanghai Municipal Court exonerated me and agreed I was not guilty of the charges laid against me in 1960. Now I spend much time training evangelists and leaders. I also work among the major ethnic minorities in China helping the indigenous churches which are growing rapidly. I emphasise the importance of Bible School and Training Seminars. Here is a letter from one of our graduates that shows the acute need for more workers and good spiritual literature.'

Dear Pastor Chen,

I have been called by God to come to Dun County, Ho Tse region, to be in charge of a Training Project for the whole county. Already I have seen how hungry the Christians are and how diligent the co-workers and

volunteers in pursuing biblical truth and knowledge. My heart is filled with praise and thanksgiving. The LORD will use his servants at this time in Dun County. He will also care for the 50,000 Christians living here. But the sheep are far more than the labourers so up until now they are not all fed. Therefore false teachers and heresies have come in and are causing trouble in this poverty-stricken area. Pray, if the Lord will, that a Training Centre could be prepared for the county in the nearby township. I am now a servant of all my brothers and sisters in our Father's house in this county. How good it would be if overseas Christians, for Jesus' sake, could support the planting of a Training Centre here to evangelise the whole region. Pray that the Lord will have mercy on the Dun church.

I apologise for my late reply to your

letter, which encouraged weak little me to stand up and be strong! I have been four months in Ho Tse and have experienced many difficulties. After living in a large modern city to come all of a sudden to live in poor villages is hard. I am unaccustomed to hard manual labour but now I am toiling in the fields and sometimes I am weary and exhausted and in pain; even my hands are blistered. I confess to complaining at such a hard life. But the farmers suffer so much and each year after the harvest they have no spare grain and are short for months. No wonder the church is so poor and cannot afford a full-time pastor! Although I have been here four months the church cannot afford to give me anything, so I have to work in the fields and then preach the gospel. So I feel both physically and spiritually exhausted. The village churches of this county are often far from each other so I have to cycle miles and miles to preach to them. If God would provide me with a motorcycle I would not get so tired. I have to confess that several times I wept and thought of returning to my home-town, Shanghai. Then I remembered the more than 50,000 Christians in this county, like sheep without a shepherd, and cannot stop worrying about them. So I pray to God to strengthen me and give me faith to march forward on this road. The Lord is with me all the time and comforts me with this scripture,

‘For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of

glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.’

I look up to the Lord Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and eventually I overcome, even though I know that my future paths are filled with difficulty.

Many of the churches here are not properly organised, even the main county church has no visitation group. Consequently some Christians are weak both in body and soul; no one pays any attention to them. I went to a believer’s home to pray for his mother who has lain ill in bed several months. She told me no one had been to visit her. The church here is not only very poor in material things but also spiritually, so it is no wonder that heresies can take hold and disturb the life of believers in Dun County.

I know you are very busy in work and in journeyings so it will not be practical for you to visit us. For the ministry of his gospel let us pray and see how he leads us. Please give my warmest greetings to all co-workers so that together we may extend and prosper his gospel!

S L Tian

For more information, please write to:

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The Importance of Pastoral Visitation

Erroll Hulse

There are different forms of visiting. For example there is special visiting to prepare for baptism, for a marriage or for a funeral. There is evangelistic house to house visiting - I have practised that since becoming a pastor in 1962 and continue to find it the very best way of evangelising any area. During 2002 I asked several whom I visited in this way if this was a 'first'. A number testified that they had never before been visited by a Christian minister.

However in this article I will concentrate on the pastoral visitation of church members and regular attendees. This kind of visitation is often either overrated or underrated by pastors. To some it is their chief means of building a church and they spend more hours on it than on all other pastoral duties put together. Others go to the opposite extreme and neglect it to the point where their people feel they are out of touch with their pastor and that he doesn't care about them personally and only values their support for the ministry.

I must stress that the last thing that I desire is for this article to create problems for pastors. There are some who have organised their churches so well by inter-membership visiting that that there is little possibility of

neglect. Some rarely visit because they practise hospitality and that is excellent. Yet other pastors have been almost burned out by demands made on them which are unreasonable. And a few are tormented by self-centred individuals noted for grumbling and complaining about neglect. This paragraph needs to be noted by any one in that mould.

Whether by hospitality or by visiting, effort and time is involved in the work of showing concern and care. There are some who do not wish to be visited. There are others who need to be visited and for them there is no better place than their own native environment which is their home. It is ideal when pastor (or elder) and wife visit together. In this way there is a more lasting impact made by the sensitivity which is demonstrated by each to the domestic scene. A child is grieving over the death of the family pet, another child is struggling at school; the head of the home is battling to keep his job; grandma has moved in and is needing more and more care. The reality of domestic stress is best seen first-hand in the home environment

Visitation is biblical

'Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their

affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world' (RSV James 1:27).¹ Of course this is not a complete description of pure religion but it is a very important part of it. The importance of visitation is confirmed by the solemn description of the Great Judgment when the righteous will be approved and commended with the words, 'I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me' (Matt 25:36). Again visiting is not everything in the orbit of the active lives of the righteous, but forms an important part of it. These references suggest special need. Widows and orphans are needy. To be sick or in prison sends out the signal of special need. Recently there was reported in the mass media the case of an evangelical Christian missionary, Ian Stillman, who was unjustly arrested and imprisoned. It was not possible for all who cared about him to visit him in prison but thousands of believers round the world showed their concern by praying and organising a campaign to call for his release. This was successful and after fifteen months he was released from gaol.

We read of Ezekiel, 'I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Abib near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days - overwhelmed!' We simply cannot exaggerate the importance of visiting those who are in distress. For example the Puritan Thomas Vincent attended the sick and dying in the Great Plague of

London in 1665 when 67,000 died in that one year. Visitation of the very poor is enormously appreciated. Visits I will never forget include a slum in the city of Manila, Philippines, and another in the city of Douala, Cameroon.

The size of the church

In churches with small memberships, home visitation by the pastor to a handful of families and individuals is straightforward enough. In small churches there tends to be a great emphasis on evangelism and reaching out so that the church might grow. When numbers increase home visitation is increasingly difficult to manage and has to be shared out. Very often church elders are overstretched in their secular work and have little time to spare for pastoral visitation. A further problem for them is the preference most church members have to be visited by 'their pastor'. It is not easy for elders to visit meaningfully when, restricted for time, they can do little pastoral visiting and seldom if ever have time to prepare for a teaching or preaching ministry in the church. This is not just a contemporary problem. Presbyterian denominations have always struggled with this difficulty which is accentuated by ministers who are highly educated in theology and are regarded as reverend clerics and all others as laymen. Hence the members easily have the latter in low esteem. 1 Thessalonians 5:12 is relevant, 'Now we ask you, brothers,

to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.’

Personality

There can never be successful visitation without trust and esteem. There must be an appreciation of the spiritual bonds that tie the leaders of a church together with the church members, like ligaments in the human body. In this way the body builds itself up in love (Eph 4:16).

Pastors vary in their ability to relate to different kinds of people. There are some pastors who are outstanding students and who prepare thoroughly for preaching and therefore have only limited time which they devote to crisis situations such as severe illness, bereavement or to marriage counselling. In some Reformed churches, the members are grateful for preaching which is of a high standard and can only be sustained by lengthy preparation time and they are prepared to forego the privilege of pastoral visitation.

But a note of warning must be sounded. Preaching consists of more than the conveying of doctrine and the reality of eternity. True preaching addresses individuals in the totality of their being: intellect, affections, conscience and will. A preacher needs to spend time with his people. A shepherd should know his sheep by name (John 10) and make it his business to be aware of all their needs (physical, emotional, spiritual,

domestic, etc.) He can only acquire this knowledge by visiting them, preferably for at least an hour at a time and at least once a year. Of course some people require more visits than that!

The place of hospitality and visitation

Hospitality is one of the qualifications for eldership. The elder must be hospitable (Titus 1:8). My wife and I learned the value of this at the beginning of our ministry way back in 1962. Sunday is an ideal time to invite families, students, or visitors to the midday meal. To enjoy fellowship in the relaxed atmosphere of the home establishes trust and paves the way for helpful discussion.

Then there is the question of the personality of the members and regular attendees. There are some who are especially shy and others who are easily intimidated and who, as stated above, quite firmly do not wish to be visited. Some in this category may have heard horror stories of authoritarian elders who have gone round like the Gestapo to interrogate members, browbeat them into submission, search their homes for incriminating evidence of over-indulgence, cross-question them about their spending habits and examine them with regard to correspondence with perceived enemies.

This shows the need for exposition either from the pulpit or in writing of material on the importance and value of genuine visiting. Don Whitney, at

the Carey Ministers' Conference in 2003, provided a high quality practical exposition of the meaning of *koinonia* and its priority in the churches. Of course there is wholeness in our lives concerning the practical matters of daily living, including recreation. But we should never be content to move always in the orbit of the here and now but should strive to move into the searchlight of the spiritual and the eternal. Central to this is the place of spiritual fellowship. The aim should be to share in matters which relate to our perseverance to eternal life.

The agenda for pastoral visiting

There are many subjects that can be shared in a pastoral visit of an hour or more. There is the well-being of the family, the unity of the church, the use of gifts in the church, sharing the gospel with neighbours, the best use of available books, magazines, cassettes or CDs, how best to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, the vital place of prayer, the catechising of children, the avoidance of evil influences, the protection of children and ourselves from the ungodliness and depravity of the world.

Home visits should include a Bible reading and if appropriate, prayer. This should not be forced. Before prayer it is helpful to summarise matters of gratitude to God and

matters of special anxiety or concern.

The misuse of visiting

Brian Russell, a South African-born minister who now pastors a church in Virginia, USA, has helped me at several vital points in this article. He writes from the USA as follows, 'In America the vast majority of pastors pay social visits and engage in small or worldly talk. They do not go to impart spiritual help by reading and briefly commenting on God's Word or by counselling those they visit from God's Word and praying for specific needs, especially their growth in grace. Sadly social visits only serve to build public relations which, in America today, is the be-all and end-all of everything. It is now common for Southern Baptist ministers and those in other denominations to spend a whole day with the family at a hospital when a loved one is having surgery. For 17 years in the country church I previously served, I had to travel 70 miles one way once or twice every week to see people who went to hospital in the nearest big city. A phone call after surgery was not regarded as sufficient for a follow-up visit. Public relations by and large have taken the place of faithful preaching and the careful preparation it requires.'

A further important consideration is the expectation in a church where there are many retirees and frail,

elderly members. If they are to be visited regularly, say weekly, this can be done by elders and experienced church members as it is not possible for a busy pastor to do everything.

The relationship of preaching to visiting

Shepherding and teaching should not be separated. Visiting enhances our preaching and helps us to appreciate how our fellow-believers think through and tackle their problems and temptations.

All need the care of the pastor or elders. There are always those who are prone to backslide, some who mind their own interests and ignore those of others. There are those who have come to assimilate and promote erroneous views. Others suffer affliction or are prone to depression. There are those who agonise because of family members who are in one form of distress or another. The pastor and elders must watch over all, as those who will give account to the Chief Shepherd of the flock (Heb 13:17; 1 Peter 5:4). This cannot be properly achieved by short conversations before or after services. Visiting is essential.

The most difficult part of pastoring is when correction of erring members is required. This will be facilitated if a good relationship has been established through visiting. A further problem is the danger of false

teaching which can come through various channels, television, films or books.

On the basis of Ezekiel Chapter 34, the Strasbourg Reformer, Martin Bucer defined the pastoral task as:

1. To draw to Christ those who are alienated.
2. To lead back those who have been drawn away.
3. To secure amendment of life for those who fall into sin.
4. To strengthen weak Christians.
5. To preserve Christians who are whole and strong and urge them forward to the good.²

In other words, on the model of the divine Shepherd, the pastor's responsibilities are evangelism, restoration, teaching, encouraging and feeding.³ While it is self-evident that these responsibilities overlap to a certain extent with the pastoral rôle of teacher, this model of the pastor as shepherd is necessary to counter the assertion that is often made today that a pastor can quite adequately carry out his duties through his pulpit ministry alone.

Inspiration from the past

Visiting is all about people, their homes and families, their joys and their sorrows. Visiting requires a great deal of prayer and spiritual energy. We can benefit from the example of others. The most famous

of all examples is that of the 17th-century Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter, whom God used to transform the town of Kidderminster. The method: preaching and visitation. Baxter employed catechising in this work. It is difficult to imagine that catechising is viable in Western society today. But as large numbers of Muslims come to faith, that method may be found to be the most suitable for them to become grounded in basic Christian doctrine.

Baxter used to devote Mondays and Tuesdays to catechising families in his parish. Since he was not in the

best of health, he often arranged for them to come and see him regularly. This way he saw about fifteen or sixteen families a week, and covered his whole parish annually.⁴

Conclusion

Regular pastoral visitation should be the norm for all church leaders. Careful planning, followed by mutual agreed implementation can benefit all. This area of church life should always be ongoing and it is an area which must always be reviewed with improvement as the aim.

End notes

¹ The word used by James for 'to visit' *episkeptesthai* is a present infinitive pointing to something that is always on the agenda. We do not cease to care for each other and that caring finds practical expression in visiting. The root of this word is *skep* which with its prefix *epi* denotes the activity of caring. The basic meaning is to pay attention to.

A closely related word is *episkopos* which means overseer which word we translate as elder and which also means bishop, a word we use with caution since it is associated with episcopalian church government. Also there is *episkopeo* which means to take care of, oversee and care for.

In the LXX this word group is mostly used for the variants of the Hebrew *paqad* which means to take care of. A further meaning emerges in the LXX. *episkeptomai* is used for God's loving watching solicitous care for his people (Zeph 2:7; Psalm 80:14 - 'watch over and care for this vine' NLT).

From this word study we can make two conclusions. 1. Visitation which, according to James constitutes pure religion, consists of loving care, not at a distance but closely in the home, and 2. Visitation of the saints by the saints must be at the human level. Correction may be involved but it is correction by love which constrains wanderers back. We visit not as policemen come to inspect at close quarters looking for any incriminating evidence. We visit as members of the same loving, caring family. And if we visit as elders we know that we must never abuse our spiritual authority.

² Martin Bucer, *Opera Omnia Series 1* : Deutsche Schriften VII, pages 67 - 245.

³ Spencer Cunnah suggests five areas for the pastor's role: teacher, shepherd, example, overseer, equipper. cf RT 192

⁴ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, first published 1656, reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, pages 172 - 256

News



Robert Strivens

Benin

Robert Strivens writes: The annual conference for students on the preachers' French language correspondence course, run by Europresse, was held in Bohicon, Benin, in February. Benin lies to the west of Nigeria, and is one of a number of French-speaking countries in West Africa. The conference was attended by nearly 40 students, most of whom were from Benin and neighbouring Togo, with a few from Burkina Faso and Cameroon. Many of these men had benefited greatly from the ministry of the late Bill Clark, on his frequent visits to West Africa, and through his ministry were brought to a clearer understanding of the doctrines of grace.

The conference forms an integral part of the correspondence course, which is designed to help preachers deepen

their understanding of the central biblical truths of the gospel of grace. The course takes students through the letters of Romans, I Corinthians and Hebrews. It aims to demonstrate the centrality of Christ in all the Scriptures, and the sovereign grace of God in salvation. These emphases are much needed in our day, both in Africa and in the West.

Many of the students come from difficult situations and it was a great encouragement to see them gathering to hear the preaching and lecturing from the Scriptures. A number of students were invited to preach during the conference, and it was a joy to hear scriptural truths being expounded with vigour and earnestness. Lectures were given on the topics of election, justification by faith, the will of man, the work of the ministry and corporate worship.

Please pray for these men, as they seek to labour for the Saviour in the preaching of his Word in West Africa.

Afghanistan

Sergei Popov is an experienced Russian evangelist and church planter who has worked extensively in Chechnya and Kazakhstan. OPERATION WORLD states that there are about 48,000 mosques in Afghanistan and no Christian churches. If churches are successfully planted in Afghanistan it will be the first time in modern history. The Russians fought an unsuccessful war in Afghanistan (1979-1989) and then withdrew (see article 'The Tragedy of Afghanistan' in RT 2001).

Sergei writes:

'My dear friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, I send you my greetings and first of all want to say how very grateful I am to all of you in the church for your prayers for me and for my ministry. In this way you share in my work and thus in the rewards the Lord gives. God has so far kept me safe in all my travels, partly because of your prayers.

'I always find it difficult when asked to write about my work. First of all, it could seem as if I am boasting about it and, secondly, there is much that I am involved in that I am unable to disclose because of the nature of the actual ministry and the risk of danger to my fellow workers. This risk is increased, of course, if facts are divulged in an open letter such as this.

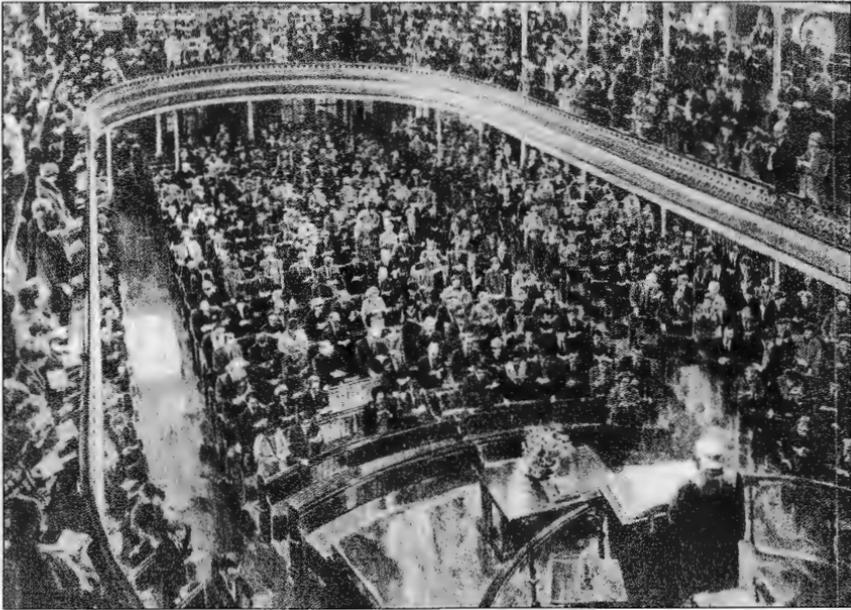
'When praying for my ministry, please pray especially for the spiritual work in Afghanistan. You will all know something about the position

there. On one hand it is as the apostle Paul said about the situation in Ephesus, "A wide door is open before me," but, on the other, "there are many adversaries," and it is like that there. I visited this country in January, as we are beginning a work for the Lord there, and I plan to return in April. For me it really was a culture shock. People are still cultivating the land with bullocks and wooden ploughs and most of them go about just with rubber shoes on their feet summer and winter. Most of the population is uneducated especially the women, most of whom wear veils that completely cover their faces. There are practically no medical facilities especially in the mountains and villages and in many places, including towns, there is no electricity. There are many problems over finding drinking water and the economic situation is worse than in most African countries. I really think it is one of the poorest countries in the world.

'But more horrifying than this is the spiritual poverty. The people are ignorant and enslaved by false religion, "sitting in darkness" as the biblical prophets describe it, and they need to see "the great light of the gospel". For this reason a detailed plan over many years is necessary and many will be needed in God's vineyard there. I thank the Lord that he has called me into this field and, dear friends, I greatly need your prayer support for this.

'From 1-10 March there will be a conference that, by God's grace, I hope to attend along with other workers in these regions to discuss and plan God's work there.'

Westminster Chapel - What Happened?



A Review Article by Conrad Mbewe

In Pursuit of His Glory -

My 25 Years at Westminster Chapel,
by R T Kendall.

Hodder Christian Books.

My interest in R T Kendall's *In Pursuit of His Glory* was fuelled by my burning desire to know what really went wrong at Westminster Chapel. I have often wondered, especially after reading a book of sermons by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, how a church so well nourished on such rich and solid expository preaching could flip over and allow in its midst all that goes with the latest charismatic fads. It always bothered

me because I would love to retire from my own church pastorate with the assurance that the foundation I have laid will stand the test of time.

It was during this search for answers that someone placed the book under review on my lap. The title told me that my search was to finally reach its goal - and I was right. If anyone wants to know why Westminster Chapel is where it is today, all he needs is to read this book. Dr Kendall must be commended for a very sincere record of his life and ministry while he was pastor of Westminster Chapel. It is obvious that he was not trying to please anyone but simply 'telling it like it is'. Yet, in not trying to please

anyone he did not go to the extreme of unclothing his detractors in public. He graciously put a veil over the actions of those he thought meant to harm his ministry. That much must be granted to him.

In Pursuit of His Glory is divided into five parts (or sections). The first deals with the early years of Kendall's ministry at Westminster Chapel. During most of this period, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones was still alive and worked closely but discreetly with Dr Kendall. The second part deals with the period soon after the death of Dr Lloyd-Jones when Dr Kendall invited such men as Arthur Blessitt, Billy Graham, Paul Cain and Rodney Howard-Browne to minister at Westminster Chapel. It was during this time that he also started the Pilot Lights ministry, which was an organised personal evangelism effort just outside the doors of Westminster Chapel. Also introduced during this post-Lloyd-Jones era were altar calls, an innovation that Lloyd-Jones could never have tolerated. Dr Kendall also alludes to the efforts made by some, especially in the diaconate, to remove him from office due to the innovations he was introducing in the church. It is clear that it was a most trying time.

In the third and fourth parts Dr Kendall takes the reader into a scenic view of the underlying motives and beliefs that moulded his ministry. He showed his understanding of preaching, what he longed to see realised at Westminster Chapel, and some of the most blessed moments he ever experienced in the Chapel. He

also outlined some of the theological and practical principles that undergirded his ministry. Finally, Kendall ends his autobiography with some reflections that betray a heart that had not found what he had set out to find when he commenced his trip down the charismatic path.

Like a good American who feels that September 11, 2001, changed the course of history, Kendall adds a short section on how to interpret that cataclysmic attack on New York and Washington by the terrorists. In my view, the book would have been better off without that last section. Apart from its introduction, it added nothing to my understanding of Kendall's 25 years at Westminster Chapel. Yet, knowing the American psyche as I do now, I can well understand why that section was added to the book.

I came away from reading *In Pursuit of His Glory* convinced that the Achilles' heel in the ministry of 'the doctor' at Westminster Chapel was not in the preaching but in the absence of an eldership. This book convinced me of the importance of elders in the church. A gaping void appeared in the government of the church at Westminster when Dr Lloyd-Jones retired, which a biblically qualified and biblically functioning eldership would have filled. The absence of such an eldership resulted in issues being left out of the process of Kendall's call into the pastorate of Westminster Chapel. It also meant that Kendall did not have the multitude of counsellors that ensures safety as his own

ministry developed at Westminster Chapel.

In a sense he tried to bring the twelve deacons into that rôle (p.167), but the very fact that their terms of reference as deacons did not include that rôle meant that it was not properly carried out. It was more of a privilege to counsel with Dr Kendall when he asked them to, rather than a regular God-given responsibility.

The absence of a biblically functioning eldership is obvious when you read such statements as, 'Dr Lloyd-Jones never inquired of my own ecclesiological views, neither did any of the deacons bring this sort of thing up when they interviewed me. All knew I was utterly devoted to the Doctor, and that, no doubt, was enough' (p.40). Thus they failed to see and interpret the importance of the fact that between 1955 and 1967, before he came to England, Dr Kendall had pastored four churches that were poles apart doctrinally - a Church of the Nazarene, a Presbyterian Church, a Church of God and a Southern Baptist Church! Similarly, the absence of an induction service at the commencement of his ministry at Westminster Chapel (p.13) meant that there was no public occasion at which he was made to commit himself to uphold the church's historic position - doctrinally and in church order. Hence, he did not need to justify any innovations he was bringing in later.

I do not need to state that Kendall's views on a number of major doctrinal issues explain why he was uneasy

with Reformed brethren in the UK and why they were uneasy with him. For instance, his views on the person and work of the Holy Spirit were charismatic resulting in all the innovations that took place at the Chapel, all the way to the Toronto Blessing which is even beyond what some charismatics tolerate. His biography brings these issues out very clearly. Somewhere in the book, Kendall refers to himself as a four-and-a-half point Calvinist. His book, however, betrays soteriological views that are far from Calvinistic. Again and again, as he referred to the work of the Pilot Lights, he spoke of individuals 'giving their lives to Christ' and almost in the same breath added the fact that he did not know whether they became Christians or not. The very first reference to this says it all. He wrote, 'I remember the first person I spoke to... I was so full of joy that she listened. When I asked her to pray to receive the Lord, she did! Was she saved? I don't know' (p.69). These are the kind of doctrinal issues a biblically functioning eldership would have wanted to ascertain at the commencement of Kendall's ministry.

One of the major advantages in a pastor working within a body of elders over the years of his ministry is that they have a stabilising effect upon him. The church is saved from epoch-making decisions taking place while he is bathing or lying on his bed. Such important issues should be processed by a body of biblically qualified counsellors before they reach the ears of the flock. Kendall desperately needed such ballast. In

his autobiography he betrays a very impulsive personality. That is how he ended up with Paul Cain in his church! He wrote, 'Once I met him and looked into his eyes I knew that this man was certainly not occultic. Within an hour I felt he was a genuine man of God. By five o'clock, four hours later, I felt I was singularly blessed to be in his company - as if I had met Samuel or Elijah' (p.101). This is closer to physiognomy than Christianity! On the next page he records rather confusingly, 'Before I knew what I was doing - that is, in a sense, because I knew exactly what I was doing - I asked him to speak at Westminster Chapel the following Friday straight after our regular Bible study. The next day, however, I couldn't believe what I had done.' It was Paul Cain in 2001 who told the Chapel never to go back to the way in which it was under the ministry of Dr Lloyd-Jones (p.112). A very sad statement, in my view.

It is clear from *In Pursuit of His Glory* that Kendall was a very sincere man who lacked the necessary theological anchor during his years at Westminster Chapel that would have prevented him from drifting with each succeeding year into extreme charismatism. When he called Rodney Howard-Browne, he finally jumped from the frying pan into the fire and Westminster Chapel went with him. I cannot blame the twenty members who resigned after seeing full-blown extreme charismatic confusion in the Chapel. I would have done the same. It is not laughing that God wants, but salvation and sanctification. A good eldership in

the Chapel would have provided Kendall with stabilising ballast and, possibly, the Chapel would have been spared this disaster.

I think that Kendall's book is a timely warning to all of us who are working towards reformation in our churches today. However gifted we might be, let us not go it alone. As pastors, we need biblically qualified and biblically functioning elders to work with us and to carry on the work of oversight after we leave. It is not without reason that Paul pleaded with the Ephesian elders saying, 'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears' (Acts 20:28-31). We need elders!

Editorial comment. The services at Westminster Chapel today (minister Greg Haslam) are completely charismatic in format. Observers have noted that the centrality of 'The Dove and Us' has replaced the centrality of the Cross. The numbers that attend are a shadow of what is shown in the artist's impression which is extracted from the front cover of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Romans Chapter Nine, a volume which is highly commended.

The Old Testament Roots of Baptism

Richard Gibson



Richard Gibson (on the right) with Shai who is a new believer

A fundamental principle in theology is that every Christian doctrine and practice has its roots in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament. For example, we would not seek the roots of the Communion service in the Old Testament Feast of Tabernacles. Instead, we look to the festival of Passover to provide the proper context for the Lord's Supper and the keys to interpret the symbolism behind the words and actions of the Lord Jesus.

So, too, when considering the origins of the Christian ritual of baptism, we must look for its proper Old Testament antecedent. A number of scholars have assumed that baptism is the New Testament equivalent of circumcision. The purpose of this article is to question that assumption and to show that there is a more appropriate Old Testament practice from which Christian baptism has sprung.

Where in the Old Testament can we find the origins of New Testament baptism? It is my contention that we should look to the Old Testament ritual, still practised today, called the *mikvah*. Many people who are familiar with the modern ritual imagine the *mikvah* is used solely by Jewish women for ceremonial cleansing after the completion of their menstrual cycle. The *mikvah*, however, is also widely used by Orthodox Jewish men. Before his wedding, a Jewish groom ritually immerses himself in the *mikvah*; many Jewish men immerse themselves before the Day of Atonement; ultra-Orthodox men baptise themselves before each Sabbath and holy day, while the extremely observant baptise themselves before prayers each day. The waters of *mikvah* are called the *mayim hayim*- ‘Waters of Life’ -as the *mikvah* is seen as a rebirth.

The *mikvah* is so important that Jewish law states that a community is permitted to sell its Torah Scrolls and even the Synagogue in order to finance the building of a *mikvah*.

Throughout the Old Testament ritual purification was vitally important. The *mikvah*, as it was later called, was part of the purification ceremony to make a person ritually *kosher*, fit for the worship of God in the Temple. Leviticus 15 is an important chapter with regard to ritual purification. The chapter contains detailed instructions as to who should undergo the ritual *mikvah*. Three Hebrew words are used in this chapter for ritual washing: *rahatz*, *shataf* and *kabas*.

First: *Rahatz* means to wash or bathe and is used only in reference to people.

Second: *Shataf* means to wash, rinse, overflow, engulf, rinse or wash off. The word is used once, in verse 11 of Leviticus 15, in relation to the washing of hands.

Third: *Kabas* means to wash, or to be washed out. *Kabas* is used only of things, clothes etc. When this ritual is over the person is declared to be *tahor*, ceremonially pure.

Ceremonial purification by means of immersion or baptism was a very important part of Israelite life in Tabernacle and Temple times. People, hands, ritual implements and clothing all had to undergo baptism (see Leviticus 11:25; 14:8, 9, 47; 16:26, 28; 17:15, Numbers 19:10).

The word *mikvah* literally means collection. In the discussion of the laws of ritual purity and impurity, the Torah states, 'But a fountain or pit, with a collection (*mikvah*) of water shall be clean [*tahor* - pure].' (Lev 11:36). Isaiah 22:11 renders *mikvah* as a 'reservoir'. So the word *mikvah* came to be used to describe an accumulation of water in which a person was ritually immersed.

It should be evident that the roots of New Testament baptism are to be found in the Old Testament for it seems forced logic to conclude that the background for New Testament baptism is to be found in the ceremony in which the foreskin of an eight day old boy is surgically removed. If baptism existed in the Old Testament, why do we need to look elsewhere for the origin of New Testament baptism?

Mikvah: Old Testament Baptism

In the Old Testament and New Testament period, baptism was common. One of the few cities in the world where five thousand men could be baptised in one day was Jerusalem. Archaeology has revealed many *mikvot* (ritual baptismal pools) all over Jerusalem, enough to baptise several thousand people in a single day. We could reasonably ask if there was, during Temple times, a day in ancient Jerusalem when multitudes were not being baptised for one reason or another?

If baptism had been a new ritual, we would expect the religious authorities to have challenged John the Baptist as to his authority for introducing such an element. The introduction of repentance into Converts to Judaism underwent baptism but John was baptising those who were already Jewish.

John's baptism undoubtedly had its origin in the many types of Old Testament baptism. In Matthew 3:7 we read John's scathing rebuke of the Pharisees and Sadducees: 'Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' It would appear the Pharisees and Sadducees were trying to gain credibility by associating themselves with John's exciting new take on the *mikvah*. In Luke 3:7 we read that John says this to the crowd who came to be baptised by him. From this we can even suggest that the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming to receive John's baptism as well! John the Baptist was not only well within the tradition of the Jewish prophets, administering a well established Jewish rite, but also he was practising it in the most orthodox way possible. Jewish authorities state that the best place for a *mikvah* is in a river with flowing water - *mayim hayim*. John the Baptist was as *kosher* as they come!

The Christian faith is the fulfilment and continuation of Old Testament Judaism. Can you imagine zealous, genuine and observant Jewish men and women, submitting to a novel religious practice with no questions asked? When thousands of first-century Jewish people were baptised they did not feel they were taking part in something alien. They had been baptised in the *mikvah* many times before. The new element in John's baptism was its purpose: 'John came baptising in the wilderness and proclaiming the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins' (Mark 1:4).

No one in Israel was automatically saved because of their ancestry; they needed to exercise personal faith. Despite being circumcised, many rebellious Israelites died under God's judgments recorded in the Old Testament. Even the sons of Aaron were killed in the tabernacle for offering 'strange fire'. There is no such thing as hereditary salvation.

The New Testament explanation of baptism is in terms of death and resurrection. Immersion in water represents being buried in a grave. Rising from the water is being raised to life, a new person, pure and cleansed from sin. The same basic idea lies behind Old Testament *mikvah*; the waters of baptism are *mayim hayim*, waters of life.

Baptism in the New Testament is a symbol of death and resurrection. That is why we read of Moses and the children of Israel being 'baptised' in the Red Sea: 'I do not want you to be ignorant that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea. And all were baptised to Moses in the cloud and in the sea' (1 Cor 10:1-2). At the Red Sea, Israel went down into death and came up the other side to a new life. Egypt and bondage were left on the other side of the sea, while the waters closed over the pursuing Egyptian army and consumed them. This is a picture of the old life of domination by sin being destroyed.

Jesus' Old Testament Baptism

Jesus underwent baptism. 'And it happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan' (Mark 1:9). Jesus was a Jew among Jews. He underwent redemption of the firstborn son (*Pidyon HaBen*), Circumcision (*Brit Milah*) and attended synagogue each Shabbat, as was his custom. It should not seem strange then that He also underwent a public *mikvah* as He commenced his public ministry (Matt 3:1-17). At his ritual immersion in the Jordan, Jesus was fulfilling all righteousness. As the perfect Jew, the perfect human, he complied with all God's Law. He was about to enter his ministry as the Great High Priest and therefore fulfilled the legal requirement of priesthood before taking up office. He was not submitting to John's baptism of repentance; John knew that Jesus had no need to repent, hence he was unworthy to loosen his sandals. Jesus' baptism was 'the *Mikvah* of Priestly Service'.

Jesus was about thirty years old when he was baptised (Luke 3:23). This was the age at which the Levites began their Temple ministry. Our Great High Priest was baptised in order 'to fulfil all righteousness'. This is to say that the Son of God willingly submitted himself to God the Father's law code for priestly service. Here we see the humility of Jesus, that humility which is a mark of

citizens of the kingdom of heaven, about which John the Baptist preached. John also bore this mark of humility as he recognised himself as unworthy to officiate at the *mikvah* of the Messiah. By receiving the *mikvah* ceremony from John Jesus placed His seal of approval on John's message and affirmed John's reclaiming of repentance of sin as the central, but forgotten significance of Old Testament baptism. Numbers 19:7-8 shows the importance of the *mikvah* ritual in priestly service. In Leviticus 16:4 Aaron, the High Priest had to undergo *mikvah* before he could wear the sacred clothing and enter the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. In the *Mishnah* (which records traditions and practices at the time of Christ) it is recorded that the *mikvah* was compulsory for all Levites serving in the Temple.

As Jesus prayed at the completion of his *mikvah* at the Jordan, the heavens opened and God declared, 'You are My Son, the Beloved; I am delighted in You' (Luke 3:22). This divine affirmation served Jesus well during his forty days in the wilderness and the temptation that followed. This heavenly voice was a full declaration in the words of Psalm 2 that Jesus was the divine Messiah. John the Baptist understood the significance of the event and testified to it in John 1:33-34: 'And I did not know him, but he who sent me to baptise with water, that One said to me, upon whom you shall see the Spirit descending, and remaining upon him, he is the One who baptises with the Holy Spirit. And I saw and bore record that this is the Son of God.'

We see the humility of Jesus as he does God's will. True baptism is a sign of humility as we submit to the will of God, leave the old rebellious life behind and rise to a new life in Messiah Jesus. We have been bought with a price; so let us proudly bear the mark of our owner and live for him.

(Bible version used: Modern KJV)

Book Reviews

Bill James

The Message of Heaven and Hell

(BST series)

Bruce Milne

IVP, 2002. 351pp, pb.

This is a very fine book, dealing with the subjects of heaven, hell and final judgment. Bruce Milne traces the themes right through the Bible, beginning with Creation and the Fall, and ending with the climactic passages of the book of Revelation. The opening section on Creation wonderfully sets the scene - reminding us that our lives are lived in the presence of an awesome, all-powerful and holy God who calls us to account. In the Fall we see that judgment is now both real and inevitable. The author then considers the glimpses of afterlife to be found in Pss.16 and 72, and in Daniel 7 and 12.

Milne notes that ever since the Fall, the devil tempts us to believe that there will be no final judgment. He reflects:

The fact of hell is highly unpalatable to our human sensitivities and its proclaimed eternal duration a heavy cross to our intellect, but its dismissal is far more problematic. It means the rejection of God's word, and hence the dismissal of his revealed character. It is nothing less than a

repetition of the primal sin - a rejection of God himself (p.64).

The second section is devoted to the teaching of the Gospels. Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom of God, of judgment in the parables, and of heaven and hell is surveyed. The arguments for conditional immortality are considered, but firmly rejected. The cross is described as hell on earth, and the resurrection of Jesus as the dawn of heaven. In Acts 17 the announcement of judgment to the world is described. We are reminded of the urgency of the task of gospel preaching to all nations:

...Paul does not see the obligation laid upon the pagans of Athens to repent of their sins as in any degree mitigated by their ignorance of the coming of Jesus. Indeed, Paul clearly sees this same obligation laid upon the consciences of all people everywhere - 'he commands all people everywhere to repent.' That 'all people' means what it so clearly says, and hence specifically includes all the followers of every other religious tradition on the face of the earth (p.208).

Finally, the teaching of the epistles is considered with focus on Romans 1 and 8, and relevant passages in 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 & 2 Peter, and of course the book of Revelation. There is much here not only for instruction

but also for inspiration. It is not an academic tome, but as with other volumes in the 'Bible Speaks Today' series, it is warm in tone and pointed in application. The challenge is made very plainly, that if we truly believe in the reality of judgment, heaven and hell, then we must live accordingly:

The acid test of any belief, as my philosophy professor taught me years ago, is the difference that belief makes to our values and choices. By that standard, belief in the afterlife is a very rare species. People of our time are patently primarily motivated by the drive to amass wealth and to experience the maximum of pleasure here and now... The 'treasures on earth' have almost totally eclipsed any concern for the 'treasures in heaven'.

This volume is dedicated to First Baptist Church Vancouver, where Bruce Milne was senior minister for seventeen years. He is a preacher sharing the fruits of his studies, and there is much here to help us in proclaiming the truths of eternity. There is a study guide included for group study if required.

Ten Questions to Diagnose your Spiritual Health

Donald S Whitney

NavPress 2001, 141pp, pb.

Readers of RT who are familiar with Don Whitney's earlier books (*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church*, and *How Can I be*

Sure I'm a Christian?) will welcome the publication of this new title. The author has a great gift for presenting spiritual truth in an accessible and popular way. He draws from the deep wells of Reformed and Puritan theology, but is able to apply Biblical teaching in a contemporary and arresting manner.

This book is something of a 'spiritual checkup' for the Christian believer. Whitney applies 10 diagnostic tests to assess our spiritual health. These include 'Do you thirst for God?' 'Are you more loving?' 'Do you still grieve over sin?' 'Are you a quicker forgiver?' and 'Do you yearn for heaven and to be with Jesus?' Each question is covered in brief compass, and well illustrated. They are suitable for private use or for group study, and provoke heart-searching as to the spiritual reality in our own souls. Most helpful of all, each chapter includes a section of application directing us towards spiritual growth in each area. For example at the end of the chapter 'Are you more sensitive to God's presence?' we are pointed towards the Bible as the place where God reveals himself, to seeking God in prayer, to congregational worship as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and to a reaffirmation of the omnipresence of God.

In these days of spiritual superficiality, this book is a great help in provoking and encouraging us to go on in our Christian walk. And in these days when so many believers read so little, we might hope that the brevity and simplicity of these pages will reach a wide audience.

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MAY-JUNE

CONTENTS

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------------|
| 1 | Editorial | |
| 3 | The Pastor as Theologian | Robert Strivens |
| 9 | China | Roger Weil |
| 13 | The Importance of Pastoral Visiting | Editor |
| 19 | News | |
| 21 | Westminster Chapel - What Happened? | Conrad Mbewe |
| 25 | The Old Testament Roots of Baptism | Richard Gibson |
| 31 | Book Reviews | Bill James |