

REFORMATION
TODAY

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- ▶ Life in God's family
- ▶ Leading a Believers' Church
- ▶ Salt and Light

The Believers' Church (Part 2)

Leading God's family to be salt and light in the world





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Editorial

KEES VAN KRALINGEN

THE BELIEVERS' CHURCH

LEADING GOD'S FAMILY TO BE SALT AND LIGHT IN THE WORLD

PART 2

This issue of *Reformation Today* continues the theme of the believers' church begun in *RT 284*. In that issue, the biblical basis and the historical development of the concept of the believers' church were addressed together with the notion of Christian liberty.

In this issue we continue to focus on what the church is, and then move on to look at the function the church has in God's purpose and at how the church should be led to fulfil its God-given task in the world.

The New Testament uses several metaphors to describe the believers' church. The most important one is the picture of the church as a family, in this case God's family. In this issue we receive the first of two parts of an extended treatment by Luke Jenner of this metaphor and the way it is used in the

New Testament with a number of practical applications for the church today.

The apostle Paul makes a most remarkable statement about the church in Ephesians 3:10. He states that 'through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places'. The church is to display this manifold wisdom of God in his plan of salvation in Christ. This must happen to such an extent that even the rulers and authorities in heavenly places will have to acknowledge God's wisdom. How is the church going to exercise this function? The Lord Jesus, the head of the church, explained this in terms of another set of metaphors, ie by being salt and light in this world. Bill James treats us to an exposition of these words of our Lord and what they mean for us now.

To fulfil this God-given role, the church needs leadership. We are all familiar with the offices that the Lord has instituted for this purpose in the church. But how is leadership to be practised in churches of different sizes and in different situations also in the 21st century? Ray Evans has addressed this topic in several books and now shares with us his insights on this topic based on many years' experience of leading a local church. Again, this is a vast topic, and we have in this issue the first of two articles addressing it. The contributions by Bill James and Ray Evans in this issue were first delivered as addresses during the 2018 Carey Ministers' Conference. As mentioned above, some of the material in this issue by Luke Jenner and Ray Evans will be completed in the next issue of *RT*.

We are also grateful for the report by Stephen Nowak of his remarkable trip full of ministry opportunities in Tanzania. The Lord is building his church throughout the world!

May the Lord bless us in reading and applying this material in the ministry of the gospel for the glory of Christ. ■

Correction

I want to apologise to Ian Hugh Clary for using an out-of-date biographical statement at the end of his article in the previous issue of *RT*. Ian Hugh Clary is now Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Colorado Christian University (Lakewood, Colorado).



People outside Sitosa with new Bibles
Please see page 42

PART 1

LUKE JENNER



EXPLORING THE NEW TESTAMENT'S PRIMARY METAPHOR FOR THE CHURCH

This is the first part of a series of two articles on this topic.

Introduction

a. *A metaphor among the metaphors.*

If a complete newcomer to the idea of 'church' became involved with your church for a few months, how do you think they would describe what 'church' is? Would it be about getting together once a week, or twice? Would they say it was like a club where everyone has a shared interest? Or something else?

What does the New Testament say? When the human authors of that inspired document searched for language adequate

to describe what the church of Jesus Christ is, they realised that they were dealing with a rich and multi-dimensional phenomenon. And so they plundered numerous spheres of human life to provide a whole host of metaphors that would only be up to the descriptive task when considered together. The worlds of agriculture, horticulture, architecture, construction, Israelite religion, human biology, and domestic life all found themselves pressed into service to furnish the apostles with the vocabulary they desired.¹

But if you stuck a pin into any randomly

¹ So we find the church variously pictured as a field, a building (1 Cor 3:9), an olive tree (Rom 11:17-24), the branches of a vine (John 15:1-7), a temple (Eph 2:21-22), a human body (Rom 12:4-5), a batch of dough (1 Cor 5:6-8), a bride (Eph 5:22-33), and so on.

chosen page of the New Testament, the descriptive metaphor you are most likely to come across for the church is that of a family. If you want to address another Christian, your default mode is the family metaphor (150x – I think that the simple ubiquity of the word ἀδελφός (adelphos ‘brother’) probably masks how striking a thing it is that the early Christians should use it in this way). If you want to address God, the primary New Testament way is ‘our Father’. Even if, on the grounds of God’s ‘ontological’ Fatherhood, you discount the scores and scores of times where God is referred to as ‘the Father’ in the New Testament, you are still left with about 45 times where he is made known to us or addressed as specifically ‘our Father’, which of course is not eternally true of him – not in the way the apostles mean it, anyhow. But in addition to these common terms of address there are, on my count, over 70 additional New Testament passages which employ explicit family or household language to describe our relationships as believers and our identity as the church of Christ. Add all these texts up and you’ll realise that the family metaphor is employed in at least 265 locations of the New Testament. We’re talking about spiritual brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, children; about the household of God, the family of God, sons and daughters of God; about brotherly love, brotherly kindness, brotherly restoration. So New Testament scholar Robert Banks says, ‘The comparison

of the Christian community with a “family” must be regarded as the most significant metaphorical usage of all.’²

Banks says that this metaphor reveals more about particularly Paul’s thinking about the church as a community than any other metaphor.

THE FAMILY METAPHOR IS EMPLOYED IN AT LEAST 265 LOCATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

b. A matching reality?

So that is where the New Testament is coming from. But what about the reality in our churches? Pastor and church planter Francis Chan tells the story of how he had to face up to reality about his church when a newly-converted former gang member started attending. Chan says he was ‘heavily tattooed and rough around the edges,’ but ‘he had a relationship with Jesus and seemed to get fairly involved.’

After a few months, however, he stopped coming. When Chan asked him why, this is what he said: ‘I had the wrong idea of what church was going to be like. When I joined the church, I thought it was going to be like joining a gang. You see, in the gangs we weren’t just nice to each other once a week – we were family.’ Chan says, ‘That killed me because I knew that what he expected is what the church is intended to be. It saddened me to think that a gang could paint a better picture of commitment, loyalty, and family than the local church body.’

That man said he had ‘the wrong idea’

of what church was going to be like. Of course, he didn’t. He had exactly the right idea. He had the New Testament idea. It was that local church in practice which was struggling to really be what the New Testament expects it to be. Chan says that ‘killed him’. I think it would probably kill me too. Would you like a converted gang member to join your church and evaluate it based on how well it matched up to his previous experience of an exceptionally close-knit community? That’s a searching question! – with no easy solutions.

One of the things it seems hardest for us to achieve in our Western, individualised culture is churches that really embody this primary metaphorical identity marker of the New Testament church. This article isn’t really going to have lots of answers or how-tos in terms of realigning them to that identity. It will take prayer and patient teaching and of course the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit to bring about lasting heart-change in this whole area, both for us and our people. But I want to try and lay down some of the biblical foundations, at least, for rooting our understanding in this matter, so as to be able at least to grasp where we should be aiming, even if we are not there yet. The church should be a family.

1. The historical-cultural context: family in the New Testament world

By ‘family’, the New Testament doesn’t mean dad, mum and two (or ten) kids, because the New Testament wasn’t written in the 21st century, but in the 1st ‘Family’ then meant a much wider community of people, centred around the *paterfamilias* (father) and all his dependants, including slaves and their children. Then in a broader use of the term, it extended to include a

much wider group of more distantly related people (just as we find in many of our Asian communities today). But the critical issue about 1st-century Greco-Roman family is not size, or personnel, but priorities. In that culture, the interests of this extended community always took priority over your own concerns as an individual. The family came first. Your job choice, where you lived, what you did with your money, whom you married, and other decisions that we call ‘personal’ were all submitted to what would be best for the whole group.

This is why screening the 1998 film *Titanic* in the 1st-century Roman world just would not work, even with Latin subtitles. In it the girl, Rose, is engaged to be married to a wealthy man that her family has chosen for her (portrayed as pretty unpleasant). She has been set up with him to secure her family’s future after the untimely death of her father. But when she meets the poor but dashing Jack and falls in love, she is faced with a choice: Marry the man she has no affection for, for the sake of her family, or ‘Follow your heart’ and run off with Jack. For everyone in the ancient world of the New Testament, it is a no-brainer: she must marry the rich guy. Cinema-goers would howl with disbelief to see Rose choose a risky and foolish fling with Jack instead of being willing to endure a life of emotional dissatisfaction to preserve the honour of her extended family. *Titanic* would have sunk without trace in the ancient world.

I’m not making any particular comment on romantic priorities, Rose’s choice, or that film in general. I’m using it simply as an example of the difference between our culture and the culture of the world into which the New Testament was written.

² Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting*, 1980.

Because, by and large, we minister to people who are embedded in a culture that prizes the individual at the expense of the group, it's crucial to understand what the *original* readers of the New Testament pictured when they heard the word 'family'. We mustn't take the family model of today and think that that's what the New Testament means when it describes the church in those terms. The family idea of that historical and cultural context is God's chosen descriptor of the church, not the family idea (even the *Christian* family idea) of our historical and cultural context.

So we need to do our homework on what it looked like. We need to realise that by using this terminology the apostles are not telling us that the church is a place where we cuddle up round the TV at Christmas, or where there are busy Saturday mornings as the members go off to football practice or music lessons, or any other such idea drawn from 21st-century family life (good as it may be). No; the apostles are telling us, fundamentally, that the church is a place where the group takes priority over the individual. If the church is a family in the 1st-century sense, then it is a place where money and belongings are not exclusively your own; it is a community where homes are shared, and lives are shared; where major life-decisions are made with the good of the *whole group* in mind; where loyalty to other members of the family is paramount; where freedom, security and happiness come through working at, and enjoying, strong relationships. That gives us the categories we need to understand passages like Acts 2:42-47, Acts 4:32-35, Ephesians 3:14-19, and so many more.

2. The systematic-theological starting point: adoption

The theological (systematic-theological, that is) starting-point for everything the New Testament says about the church as a family is the fact that God brings us into his family by *adoption*. Adoption (ὐιοθεσία, huiiothesia) as a term occurs only in five places in the New Testament (Rom 8:15; 8:23; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5; and Rom 9:4 – referring to Israel); but these are big texts. Ephesians 1:5, for example, states the amazing truth that adoption was the whole point of the plan, the focus of God's predestinating purpose. As J I Packer says, 'Our sonship to God is the apex of creation and the goal of redemption.' And of course it is not 'I' who was adopted, according to Paul, but 'we'. God's glorious idea in salvation is not to save millions of individuals who all relate to him separately, but to create a family who will only be able to *truly* know God when they do it *together*. God has chosen not simply to pick out individuals for salvation and leave them unconnected with each other; rather, he had it in mind to form the people he would save into a community – a family. No wonder the idea of the unity of the church is reinforced again and again in the book of Ephesians especially.

That's why the phrase 'personal relationship with God' or even 'personal Saviour' never occurs anywhere in the Bible. That's why Jesus is described just *once* as giving himself for 'me' (Gal 2:20), but every other time he's called a Saviour, it's of *all* his people – 'us'. That's why out of the 54 times Paul calls Jesus someone's Lord, he only once says, 'Jesus my Lord' (Phil 3:8), but 53 times '*our* Lord'. That's why

Paul Tripp says, 'Your walk with God is a community project' – and that so needs to be emphasised in our churches. When you personally come to Christ for salvation, you are not simply entering a new relationship with God; you are joining the family of God – the church. *Right then and there* you gain a whole new set of brothers and sisters too, who are there to provide the God-ordained context for your spiritual health and growth, just as you are for theirs, be it in terms of prayer life, holiness, 'personal' evangelism, parenting practices, monetary decisions, or anything else that the Bible commends as needing cultivation as a Christian. You are not meant to be doing it on your own! As Joseph Hellerman says in his book *When the church was a family*, 'Salvation is a community-creating event ... just as we are justified with respect to God, so also we are familified with respect to our brothers and sisters in Christ.'

Placing adoption in parallel with justification is an important step. It indicates that adoption is a forensic idea, just as justification (obviously) is. Having said that, they are to be kept in parallel, not conflated with one another, as Trevor Burke argues in his book *Adopted into God's Family*. Justification introduces the sinner into the society of the righteous; adoption introduces the sinner into the society of God's family.

Similarly, Burke says, there can be a tendency for some to confuse the ideas of *regeneration* and adoption because they both use 'sonship' language. But these two ideas also must be kept separate. Regeneration employs the metaphor of natural birth, emphasising that Christian

sonship is an act of *moral renewal*. But adoption is a forensic term, emphasising that God carries out a legal act of transfer in our salvation, from an alien family (cf 'sons of disobedience' Eph 2:2) into God's new, holy family (this is clear in texts like Gal 4:1-6, where Paul speaks of slaves, heirs and sons using adoption language). So Robert Peterson: 'Adoption is a legal action, taking place outside of us, whereby God the Father gives us a new status in his family. Regeneration is a renewal of our nature, occurring within us, in which the Father imparts spiritual life to us.'³

Thus texts like John 1:12-13 and 1 John 3:1-3 are not about adoption, but regeneration – and that's perfectly alright. We've got here two different ideas emphasising two different dimensions of what happens to us in salvation, even though they use some overlapping terminology. As a rule of thumb, adoption (the legal idea) is Paul's favourite way of talking; regeneration (the heart-change idea) John's – perhaps this isn't surprising! But it is important, because we'll become theologically muddy and imprecise if we don't have this worked out clearly. For our purposes the fundamental concept for the establishment of the church as a new *family* is that of (Pauline, legal) adoption, not (Johannine, moral-experiential) regeneration.

That is critical as a foundation for how 'church as family' works out in practice. Seeing adoption as a forensic act of transfer teaches us the vital truth that 'family' in God's eyes is not necessarily something biological. *There are different, but equally real ways of being family.*

¹ *Living in the Light of Inextinguishable Hope*, Iain Duguid, Matt Harmon, (P&R, 2013), p36.

³ *Adopted by God*, 109 – quoted by Burke.

'The fact that we always assume the family is biologically knit reveals our prejudice in favour of biological "seed" and our elevation of physical progeny. It is to miss the family of faith' (Jeanette Stevenson-Moessner).⁴

In other words, adoption says that you can be family without ever coming from the same womb, or being related to someone by blood, and that is not a second class of relationship. Adoption does not create a situation where the various relations are 'like' a family. That is to reveal 'our prejudice in favour of biological "seed"'. The sad truth is that in our churches biological connections can make us 'miss the family of faith'. But adoption makes our relationships with Christians as real and powerful a tie as any biological connection. That makes us ask whether our commitments to our Christian relatives ('the family of faith') are as strong or as non-negotiable as our allegiance to our biological relatives. Do we regard fellow-believers as *just as close* as our natural families?

A quick overview of the historical context into which the New Testament was written will again be helpful here. Adoption in our world is invariably a process by which generous parents provide a home and a new life for a child who is either unwanted, orphaned, or unable to be cared for by his 'real' parent/s. That is quite a distance from adoption in the Roman world.

And it is very much a *Roman* thing, rather than a Greek or Jewish one. There is no real process of adoption under OT law, for example. The term ὑιοθεσία (huiiothesia) is found nowhere in the Septuagint. There

is only sparse information about adoption in the Greek empire. It is a distinctively Roman phenomenon. And interestingly, Paul only uses the metaphor in letters written to churches in communities directly under the rule of Roman law – Ephesus, Galatia, and (naturally) Rome. In that world, adoption was normally applied not to young children but to full-grown adults. Heads of families who perhaps had failed to have a son would choose an adult male from another family to adopt, so as to carry on their line. Burke says, 'The chances of [family] survival were greater [if] the adopting father could see what he was getting as a son and heir.' Even a paterfamilias, the head of an entire household, could be adopted, in which case both he and all those in his family/under his authority became members of the family of the adopting person, passing entirely into their authority. This was therefore a serious business that was never carried out lightly, requiring a significant number of witnesses and governed by strict safeguards and regulations.

Adoption was crucial to the survival of the line of Roman emperors. Emperors who failed to have any biological sons chose and adopted other men who were no relation at all to carry on their line. So Julius Caesar adopted Octavian (who issued the decree of Luke 2:1). Octavian in turn adopted a man named Tiberius, who adopted Gaius Caligula. Gaius's uncle Claudius (the next emperor) adopted Nero, just four years before Paul wrote Romans. Thus *the reigning emperor* at the first reading of that great letter (including 8:15, 23) was himself adopted – not as a child;

not because he was orphaned or needy; but because he had been chosen to carry on the line of emperors. All three New Testament books that mention adoption were written at a time when this process had secured the very lineage of Rome's ruling family.

All this is important for us because of what adoption did in that context, and therefore what it means theologically. It made the adopted person utterly equal with any natural children in the family. You were no second-class family member: you had all the rights of a natural son, treated as if you were actually the flesh and blood of the family head who would have brought you into his household (cf Gal 4:5). So Nero faced a sticky problem, because he fancied his new father's daughter Octavia. They weren't related by blood in any way; but because he'd been adopted, any relationship between them would have been treated as incest. So Nero had to get a new law passed specially for him that enabled the emperor to marry his sister.

The Christian implications of this are twofold:

First, Roman adoption gave you a new and ultimate identity that was yours for ever. The Roman writer Gaius, in his *Institutes*⁵, writes, 'Adoptive sons in their adoptive family are in the same legal position as real sons.' So the Galatians, Ephesians and Romans knew that Paul was saying something radical about their new identity

in Christ when he utilised this concept in his letters to them. He was saying that this family of the church was their ultimate identity. They should get used to it. They were leaving behind the (essentially transitory) biological family they'd grown up with and had entered something new and *eternally* lasting. Here was a whole new

In the New Testament natural family ties are never completely lost, but your spiritual family becomes ultimately more important. This was a solace for those who had had to leave home, father, mother, brothers, sisters, children for the sake of Christ and the gospel (Mark 10:29-30).

set of brothers and sisters, and these were the ones that truly mattered. In the New Testament natural family ties are never completely lost, but your spiritual family becomes ultimately more important. This was a solace for those who had had to leave home, father, mother, brothers, sisters, children for the sake of Christ and the gospel (Mark 10:29-30).

Second, there is a *goal* in view for adoption. Just as in the Roman world it had a purpose *for the adopter*, not just the adopted, so it is in Christ. It is about the continuation of the family line, and the future representation of

the family name in the world. God's new sons and daughters are there not *just* to exist as (or benefit from being) part of a family, but to honour his name in the world, to function as its representatives. One of the most important ways we are to do this is through showing our commitment to unity as fellow members of this family.

That's something, then, of the systematic groundwork in the idea of adoption. I want now to move on to some biblical-theological threads that are important. ■

Luke Jenner is the Pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Halifax, UK.

⁴ *The Spirit of Adoption*, 99 – quoted by Burke.

⁵ Quoted by Burke, 63.



SALT & LIGHT

THIS ARTICLE WAS FIRST PRESENTED
AS A PAPER AT THE 2018 CAREY
MINISTERS CONFERENCE.

As we come to the end of the conference this year, I trust that we all leave with renewed confidence in the doctrine of the believers' church. We have seen the case made biblically, historically, theologically, and practically.

We can see clearly that this is the Lord's purpose for his church. We can order our church government, our ministry, and our fellowship according to his Word. But the greatest challenge is still before us.

How can our biblically ordered churches engage with an increasingly secular and hostile culture?

It is rather tempting to remain with the subject of ecclesiology, because the internal management of our churches is a relatively easy task. But the great question is this: what impact are our churches, our fellowships, our church members, making on a world which is lost, and under God's wrath? It is a great challenge. And perhaps

the challenge is even greater because of our Nonconformist identity. What do I mean by that?

Well, we peer over the fence at the Anglican church. There is a grouping which is wholeheartedly engaged with the world. They have no hesitation about social action. They have no inhibitions about getting involved in politics – indeed we see the bishops sitting in the House of Lords. And inwardly we think to ourselves – there you are, that is what engagement with the world looks like. Inevitably it involves compromise. But we are Nonconformists, altogether more 'spiritual' in our approach. We do not dirty our hands with social action, let alone politics. Rather, we confine ourselves to evangelism, and spiritual ministries.

I am drawing a caricature, of course, but we need to face the very real challenge. If the State Church, the established church is not only an unbiblical shape of church, but also an unbiblical way of engaging with the world, how are we to make an impact on society and yet remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Scriptures?

In particular, how are we to understand this well-known command of Jesus that we are to be salt and light in the world?

Salt: our distinctive testimony

Jesus uses these two pictures of salt and light to teach us two different aspects of Christian testimony.

The first picture of salt emphasises the distinctiveness of Christian testimony. Salt was used then as a preservative as well as flavouring for food. Without salt, meat may become rotten and unfit for use. But the point Jesus is making in particular in Matthew 5:13 is that to do any good the salt must retain its savour. It must be distinctive and clean. Apparently salt was often collected in Jesus' day from around

Just as the saltiness of salt is of its essence, its chemical composition, so a true believer is salty by his very nature, in his or her whole being.

the Dead Sea where there was a white residue. But that residue contained all sorts of other minerals, and muck. You would take the white residue and separate out the salt by washing with water. The salt would dissolve in the water, but then there was an insoluble white residue left behind which was worthless. You would toss that out onto the road. The white residue might look rather like salt, but it didn't taste, it didn't have the distinctive properties, and so it was worthy only to be dumped.

So Jesus is saying that members of his kingdom have to retain our distinctiveness, our flavour. It is no good just looking like a Christian. White powder might appear superficially to be salt, but is it sodium chloride? It is no good just going through the motions, and going to church, and making an empty profession. You might look like salt at first glance, but are you the real thing?

True spirituality is a matter of the heart. Just as the saltiness of salt is of its essence, its chemical composition, so a true believer is salty by his very nature, in his

or her whole being. It's not just a matter of avoiding outward acts like murder or adultery, but being concerned about anger and hatred and lust.

You see that in the Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. And our primary concern in all of those elements of Christian character is that we are seeking to please the Lord. That is the point of the Beatitudes. 'Blessed' doesn't just mean happy, it means living under God's smile. It means meeting with his approval. Everything is done for his glory. We are living before an audience of One.

And our desire to please the Lord means that there is a real difference in our lives. This is true in our relationships with other people, and especially within the context of our church families. Blessed are the peacemakers. It is characteristic of fallen sinful humanity to be engaged in strife, and conflict, and divisions, and hostilities. But by contrast the people of God are to be peacemakers, bringing together the warring factions, the parties in dispute, the offender and the offended. Christ himself made peace on the cross, primarily peace vertically between us and God, pacifying his wrath against us. But also Christ made peace horizontally, between Jew and Gentile.

Our fellowship as Christians, our church communities, are to be places of peace, where offences are dealt with. Apologies are made, grace is shown to the offender, reconciliation is enjoyed.

Blessed are the merciful. We are those who are compassionate to the needy, and merciful to the sinners, precisely because we have received mercy; we are objects of the Lord's compassion.

So, are we the real thing? And are our churches real churches, salty in character? All of this sits very comfortably with our convictions about a believers' church. The apostle Paul writes to the saints or the holy ones in Corinth, for example. That's what a church is, it is a community of those who are set apart to God. The very nature of church is that we provoke and encourage one another to love and good works. If someone falls into sin they must be restored. But if they are unrepentant they must be removed from the fellowship to ensure the purity of the body.

The fundamental problem with a State Church, which encompasses a locality, or a region, and which baptises infants who make no profession of repentance or faith, is that inevitably that distinctiveness is lost. You are identifying as Christians, as church members, those who show no evidence of being regenerate. You are mixing the world with the church. And because it is a State Church, there is also very often a failure of church discipline. The immoral and the wayward are never rebuked; the impenitent are never removed from the fellowship; no heresy is considered serious enough for excommunication. And so the testimony is lost.

If you think of faithful Bible-teaching Anglican churches in the UK with which we might have fellowship, the reality is that they are operating outside the

conventional structures of the Church of England. In order to be biblical they are essentially functioning as independent churches, or seeking alternative oversight of their own making.

Now, this whole emphasis on saltiness leads us to stress the importance of personal piety, personal godliness, and the distinctiveness of our church fellowship. Purity is the great priority.

The Benedict Option was a best-selling book last year.⁶ It is written by Rod Dreher, who writes for those whom he describes as the orthodox Christian tradition, that is Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy. The author protests that we have spent too much time campaigning in the world and seeking to be involved in politics. Remember that he is writing from an American perspective, where in some circles to vote Republican is a mark of Christian orthodoxy. He is weary of the church endorsing a party-political agenda in the generally futile hope that the party might promote some more socially conservative policies.

Rather, says Rod Dreher, the priority is to be church. He uses a striking illustration of the flood of social and moral change over the past generation, and he says very simply that we need to stop piling up sandbags to stop the flood. We need to stop trying, like King Canute, to turn back the tide. Rather we just need to let the world be the world. We need to build an ark and float on the waters above the turbulent deep.

So, we need to be a distinctive people and a distinctive community. He talks about building a thick Christian culture, where the regular disciplines of worship, prayer meetings and Christian service are insisted upon. He advocates worship services which are structured and reverent. There must be church discipline which is functioning properly. Our homes should be characterised by family worship, and Christian reading and generous hospitality. There must be a willingness to suffer, and make sacrifices for our faith, whether it be withdrawing our children from sports clubs which clash with church activities, or losing our job because of our faith commitment. Now there is much to commend that thesis. Too often the lifestyles of professing Christians, even evangelical Christians, have become indistinguishable from the world.

But if that is what is meant by being distinctive, what is the purpose of being salty in that way? Notice what Jesus says in Matthew 5:13 – you are the salt 'of the earth'. In other words, our saltiness, our distinctiveness, our difference is vital for the world. We are salty for the purpose of making an impact on the world.

To credit Rod Dreher, while he spends time celebrating monasticism, and particularly the Benedictine Order, he is not advocating complete withdrawal from everyday society. He recognises that our devotion to Christ is to build communities that are to be a model to wider society, and a blessing and benefit to wider society. But the focus of the book is much more on our distinctiveness, than on our impact on the world.

⁶ Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option* (Sentinel, 2017).

Jesus is saying that we are to be the salt of the earth. The church needs us to be salty, because the world needs to be salted with Christian influence. The end of Matthew 5:13 says literally, 'If the salt loses its saltiness, by what will it be salted?' It could be saying, 'How can the salt become salty again?' (and that is how it is generally translated). Or perhaps it means, how can the earth be salted? We are the salt of the world; if we fail in our function, who will take up that function in the earth? And that emphasis on influencing the world is taken up with Jesus' second image that we are to be light.

Light: our testimony to the world

Matthew 5:14: 'You are the light of the world.' Just pause and reflect how breathtaking this statement is. Surely it is Jesus who is the Light of the World. We are the smoking flaxes, the rather unworthy reflectors of his glory. But no, Jesus says, we are the light of the world.

Actually this is nothing new. The testimony of Israel in the Old Testament was expressed in these terms. For example, Isaiah 60:2-3:

*See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.
Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your
dawn (NIV).*

The light of God has an irresistible attraction for peoples from all nations (Deut 4:6). *Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these*

decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people' (NIV).

What this verse teaches us is that the purpose of their holiness and the law was to be an example, a light, an influence on the ungodly peoples and nations who lived around. Or think of Isaiah 2:2:

*In the last days
the mountain of the LORD's temple
will be established as the highest of the
mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it (NIV).*

Now Jesus is taking up those same pictures and applying them to his New Covenant people. But what does this look like in a New Covenant context? The people of God are no longer a nation state occupying a strip of land on the Mediterranean, set apart and separate from all the other nations of the world.

Rather, we are scattered through all the nations of the world. Think of Jesus' teaching of the kingdom in Matthew, of us being like yeast which permeates every area of the world, and every part of human society. We are mixed into the different cultures and places of the world. We are scattered into a variety of jobs and neighbourhoods and localities. And Jesus is saying that wherever we are, we are to bring our Christian influence to bear. We are to let our light shine.

It's interesting that in Paul's letters, his references to us being light are applied to individual believers being 'light in the Lord' (Eph 5:8), and 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked

generation.' Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky' (Phil 2:15 NIV).

Nevertheless, together as members of God's kingdom we have a corporate responsibility to be light. Jesus doesn't say be lights (plural) to the world. But you are the light (singular) of the world. So, what does that look like?

He points out that the whole point of having a light is to illuminate, and to expel the darkness. If it isn't lighting up its surroundings then why have a light at all? (Matt 5:15). So, the testimony of our Christian lives, and our church lives, is to be outward facing. Jesus is commanding us here that our religion must not be privatised. It must not be monastic. It must not be confined to the home or the church building. That is the pressure today; nobody minds if you are a Christian as long as you keep it to yourself. As long as you worship in private. As long as you keep your views within the circle of the church.

But Jesus says we are to let our light shine. Indeed, Matthew 5:16 makes very uncomfortable reading. Instinctively we react against the teaching of this verse. Even in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus condemns public piety. It is the Pharisees who pray on street corners to be seen and heard by others. It is the Pharisees who make sure everyone knows about their good deeds. Surely we are commanded to be meek and humble.

But here Jesus is commanding us to let our light shine. Here the purpose is not self-righteous boasting, but testimony to the world.

Now the balance between salt and light is vitally important. Jesus tells us that we are both salt and light, not one at the exclusion of the other. In the context of first-century Judaism, the Pharisees were meticulous about moral and ritual purity, but so much so that they held sinners,

and Gentiles, in contempt. In Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite were so concerned with the priority of ritual purity that they passed by on the other side, rather than meeting the needs of the man in the ditch.

Then there are those on the other hand who are so concerned to engage with the world, to be light, that they make easy compromises in the attempt to be relevant and to appeal to wider society. Their determination to be light means in reality

that their light does not shine very brightly at all.

At risk of caricature, parallels could be drawn here between the priorities of the State Church, and the believers' church. At an EMA Conference many years ago, I remember an Anglican speaker describing his communion as so concerned to get out and fish that their boat was full of holes and in danger of capsizing. But he then described free churches as sometimes so

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concerned for the integrity of their boats that they never came near the water.

It's a caricature, but you get the point.

So what testimony are we to give? What are these good deeds Jesus is talking about? Is he talking about evangelism? That doesn't seem to be his point here. Is he talking about a Christian's personal integrity: look at me, I don't cheat on my expenses; I don't cheat on my wife; I look out for my elderly relatives? Or is he talking about our church family life: look at us, how we love one another, how we forgive one another, how we care for one another?

Or is he talking about social action? Or political action? How are we to understand this?

Perhaps the best way of understanding Jesus' meaning in these verses is to think eschatologically.

The testimony of the kingdom

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking of his kingdom; namely those who freely and willingly submit to him as King. In this present age the kingdom of Christ is in the midst of the kingdom of this world, which is in rebellion against God. The New Testament speaks of us as aliens and strangers; we are citizens of heaven. In this life we expect persecution from those in authority who may have little sympathy with the message of the gospel, and that is the context of preceding verses.

But ultimately we look forward to the day when the kingdom of Christ will be universally seen and known and

acknowledged. When every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord. On that day justice will be done, and the people of Christ's kingdom will be vindicated.

We groan and strain towards that day. Members of the kingdom are characterised by impatient waiting. We long for his appearance. Like the persistent widow we cry out to God for that final vindication. Only when that day arrives will we be truly home.

But now think of what will happen on the last Great Day. There are various images of what the Second Coming of Christ will look like. It will be sudden and dramatic; so much so that the apostle Peter speaks of the world being consumed by fire. So many of the structures of this present world order will be swept away.

But the dominant image of the Second Coming is that it will be the transformation of this world into a new creation, a new heavens and earth, which fulfils God's original creation purpose.

When Christ returns, it will not be the incineration of the present creation and its replacement with something altogether different, but rather the transformation of this present world to become what it was always intended to be.

Think of that imagery of groaning of Romans 8. Think of the simple reality that when Christ returns, he will be returning to this earth (1 Thess 4). Think of Colossians 1 – the reconciliation of all things to Christ. Think of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body – surely that

speaks of continuity between the present creation and the new creation. Think of the beatitudes; the meek will inherit the earth – which is surely more than a pile of ash.

In the words of Russ Moore: 'The goal of the kingdom of God is the merger of heaven and earth, when the dwelling place of God transforms creation and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ...' Now, what will that consummated kingdom look like? Listen to Russ Moore again: 'The kingdom to come includes not just worship but righteousness (ethics), communion (society), authority (politics), and the 'glory and honour of the nations (culture).'

All of those things are priorities of the King for his kingdom. We see that in the prophets, that the mission of King Jesus is to bring justice to the nations. The mission of Jesus is described in Isaiah 61:1:

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners (NIV).

His mission is to bring peace and reconciliation, where swords will be made into ploughshares, where the effects of the Fall are rolled back and the lion lies down with the lamb.

Now the church in this present age is like

an outpost, an embassy, of the kingdom of God. What is seen in the church is a foretaste, an anticipation of what is to come. We embody those priorities in our present age.

So that in our churches, there is to be peace and reconciliation between

NOW THE CHURCH IN THIS PRESENT AGE IS LIKE AN OUTPOST, AN EMBASSY, OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

different classes, and tribal groups and factions who naturally speaking would be at loggerheads, but have found unity in Christ. In our churches there is care and concern for the poor and needy, as exemplified in Acts 6, or Acts 2 where no-one was in need. In our churches there is no Jew or Gentile or slave or free or male or female. In other words, our importance depends not on our social status but we are all equal before the Lord. Those

with prominent gifts do not consider themselves more important than those with humble gifts, because every part of the body is needed.

That is a picture of what the believers' church should look like. An outpost of the kingdom of God. But then we are also concerned for these issues in the world around. The light of the kingdom is to shine and inform and influence the world around us.

When we see injustice or exploitation, or families broken by a culture of sexual immorality, or infants being slaughtered in the womb, or children abused and confused by the lie of transgenderism, we

⁷ Russell Moore, *Onward* (B&H, 2015), p.54.

do not simply shrug our shoulders and say: 'ah well, that is the world, it is going to hell in a handcart.' We are not to be self-righteous in our purity like the priest and Levite and pass by on the other side. No, our light is to shine, because we can see the vision of the way the world should be, the way the world will be after Christ returns. We want to live according to the priorities of the King now.

Perhaps the best example I can give of living in the light of our vision of the coming kingdom is that famous speech by Martin Luther King:

'I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

'I have a dream that one day ... little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

'I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.'⁸

There is a very obvious use of biblical

prophetic imagery. He is saying that at the last Great Day, there will be no racism, or ethnic hatred, or unjust discrimination. So he longs for a world now which is like that. Martin Luther King's political agenda for the world is in harmony with King Jesus' agenda for the world both in time and eternity.

Our light is to shine, because we can see the vision of the way the world should be, the way the world will be after Christ returns. We want to live according to the priorities of the King now.

Now of course there is a worry that all of this concern for social issues will distract us from the Gospel. To which I would answer: what is the Gospel?

Surely the message of the Sermon on the Mount is that Jesus is the King and we are his kingdom. He has absolute authority. Indeed, our mandate for mission, the Great Commission, starts with precisely that premise: that all authority in heaven and

earth has been given to the Lord Jesus Christ. And in light of that we are to make disciples.

But what is a disciple? A disciple is a follower of King Jesus who obeys his commands, and adopts his priorities, and is concerned to pursue his agenda in all of life. So, if as churches we are making disciples, that means followers of Jesus Christ in every area of life.

It means that our church members, when they go into work each day, have an inspiring vision that they are doing so as Christians, fulfilling the Creation Mandate

– ruling over the world and subduing it for God's glory. Their Christian faith will affect not only their integrity, in terms of honesty and diligence, but also their attitudes towards other employees, and their staff, and their boss. Whatever their work might be, they will understand it within the framework of loving God and loving their neighbour. They are doing a valuable job in fulfilment of the creation mandate in obedience to the original purpose of their King.

And when they come home from work, their Christian faith will govern their family life. as they seek to be husbands and wives and children and parents. Their Christian faith will govern their conduct with others who live on their street and their community. They will be concerned with their community, because Christ the King is concerned about their community. They will watch the world news through Christian eyes and be concerned about the issues of what is going on in the world, the rise and fall of empires, and the issues of the day. Because King Jesus is concerned about justice and righteousness and mercy and compassion.

All of those things are part of Christian discipleship. To be a Christian does not only consist of our personal devotions, and church on Sunday, prayer meetings, home groups, and engagement in church ministries. Rather, as church fellowships we reflect that holistic vision of the Christian life by coming together on Sunday for our worship services and praying for these things and giving thanks for these things. Whether it be the daily work of our church members, or our communities, or international events.

We are commanded, after all, to pray for rulers and authorities. We are commanded to pray for Jesus' kingdom to come. We are commanded to pray for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. You see, there is no dividing wall between the priorities of heaven and earth.

I hope that what I say doesn't sound too revolutionary. The truth is that it both biblical, and the historic position of our constituency.

An holistic testimony

A shining example of such holistic discipleship is William Carey, after whom this conference is named.

Consider his influence in India. He celebrated the glory of God revealed in the created order and applied that to botany and agriculture. He introduced the Linnaean system to gardening; he introduced new species of plants, and he published the first works on science and natural history in India. He established India's Agri-Horticultural Society 30 years before the Royal Agricultural Society was established in England. He surveyed agricultural methods and campaigned for reform, including condemnation of the system of indigo cultivation. (All this because he was horrified that such a populous country, so full of good land had been allowed to decay in jungle, wild beasts and serpents.) He wrote essays on forestry and forest conservation.

He introduced the study of astronomy to India because he saw the destructive influence of mindless superstitions like astrology. He also wanted to enable the people to organise and manage time. He

⁸ Martin Luther King speech, 28 August 1963.

introduced the steam engine to India and encouraged local engineers to make copies using local materials and skills. He advanced print technology, building the largest printing press in the country, developed fonts in the local languages, and produced the first ever newspaper in an oriental language. Because he saw that Christianity seeks free discussion. His English language journal 'Friend of India' gave birth to the social reform movement in India in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was the first to make indigenous paper for the printing industry.

He wanted to promote education, and promoted the Indian languages; indeed it is said of Carey that he transformed Bengali into the foremost literary language of India, whereas formerly it had been considered to be a language fit only for demons and women. He introduced the idea of lending libraries to the country.

He campaigned for women's rights in the areas of sati, female infanticide, forced illiteracy, polygamy and child marriage. These were untouched by British authorities because regarded as intrinsic to the religious culture of the Indian people. (Even today it is estimated that there are 50M missing women in India alone because 3-5 million girls are aborted in India each year; many more infanticide.) He opened schools for girls. He opposed the infanticide of pushing infants onto the mud banks of the Hoogly river as an offering for sins (where they would be drowned or eaten by crocodiles). He was the first to campaign for the humane treatment of

leprosy patients, who until that time were sometimes burned or buried alive to purify them for their future healthy incarnation.

So Carey had a tremendous influence on Indian life and culture. Teaching at Fort William College, he trained a whole generation of civil servants for the future.

What motivated and drove all of this was Carey's Christian faith. First of all, he understood biblical principles about the world, and about humanity, and applied them to everyday life. But more than that, he did so not with the indifference of an imperialist tyrant. No, he didn't regard India as a foreign country at all, but as God's country, to be loved and helped and developed for the sake of the people and for God's glory.

Now of course all of that is quite unique and remarkable. In the providence of God, Carey was able to exercise a quite extraordinary influence on Indian society. Perhaps we find that account to be so overwhelming that it is almost intimidating. But still I think it is worth considering because it gives us a bigger vision of what Christian influence can achieve in society as a whole. That as Christian believers we have been providentially scattered into different neighbourhoods. We have a whole variety of different jobs and occupations. We have our own little sphere of influence.

And all are called to let our light shine. To be full of good works. This point is made again and again in the New Testament.

Romans 13 speaks of the government authorities of this present age. We are told that we must not do wrong; if we do we can expect punishment. But that is not the only thing that is being said in Romans 13. Paul also says in 13:3, *Then do what is right and you will be commended.* (NIV)

This is a reference to the Romans' acknowledgement of benefactors. If there was need in the city, and a rich man donated a store of grain to feed the people, his generosity would be publicly commended.

It is unlikely that the Roman church would have had the resources to finance major projects, but the principle is the same. Paul is encouraging the believers to make a positive testimony to the authorities about their commitment to the nation by doing good deeds.

A similar point is made in 1 Peter 2:12, *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* (NIV)

Now perhaps we feel a little less uncomfortable about Jesus' command to let our light shine in Matthew 5:16. The motivation is not self-righteous boasting. Rather, it is faithfulness to the Lord, and commitment to those around us living in darkness. It is motivated by loving the Lord and loving our neighbour.

The Lord has providentially placed us and our church members in locations, and situations, and positions in employment and in the community to

bring light in the darkness.

Titus 2:9-10: *Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted.* (NIV)

Or 1 Peter 2:13: *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.* (NIV)

The early Christians faced overwhelming pressure to conform to cultural expectations, whether it be to go back to Judaism, or to worship at the pagan shrine, or to conform to social expectations. But Peter says, set apart Christ as Lord. And that is precisely the context of the Sermon on the Mount. It is the testimony that Christ is our King. We are members of his kingdom, not the kingdom of this world. We will do what he commands, and we will let that light shine before the world.

Now of course, none of that was easy in the first century. Nor is it easy today in the 21st century. We all know the pressures on Christians as they seek to live out lives of integrity in a climate increasingly hostile to biblical morality. Today the pressure point is especially in the area of gay marriage, and transgender rights.

Like the MacArthur family in Asher's bakery, do you make a cake celebrating gay marriage, or do you act according to your Christian conscience? Do you accept

that invitation to a gay wedding? Do you acknowledge a transgender person in their new identity with their new name?

The decisions we make in these areas may cost us our reputations, and even our jobs. Our church members are on the front line.

Rod Dreher draws a parallel with the experience of Czech dissidents living under the Communist regime. He quotes from Vaclav Havel, the playwright and political prisoner, who speaks of the importance of 'living in truth.' The dissidents were convinced that the communist regime was ultimately unsustainable and would finally collapse. Their role was to testify to that truth.

'Consider,' says Havel, 'the greengrocer living under Communism who puts a sign in his shop window saying "Workers of the world unite!" He does it not because he believes it, necessarily. He simply doesn't want trouble. And if he doesn't really believe it, he hides the humiliation of his coercion by telling himself "What's wrong with the workers of the world uniting?" Fear allows the official ideology to retain power – and eventually changes the greengrocer's beliefs.' Those who 'live within a lie', says Havel, 'collaborate with the system and compromise their full humanity.'

'What if the greengrocer stops putting the sign up in his window? His revolt is an attempt to live within the truth – and it's

going to cost him plenty. He will lose his job and position in society. His kids may not be allowed to go to the college they want to, or to any college at all. People will bully or ostracize him. But, by bearing witness to the truth, he has accomplished something potentially powerful.

WITHOUT SUCH INPUT OF SALT AND LIGHT, ON WHATEVER THE ISSUE OF THE DAY MIGHT BE, SOCIETY MAY SLIDE INTO TERMINAL DECAY AND DECLINE.

'He has said that the emperor is naked. And because the emperor is in fact naked, something extremely dangerous has happened: by his action, the greengrocer has addressed the world' (Benedict Option, p92).

Don't underestimate the cost of that. But someone has to stand up and say that the emperor has no clothes. Without such input of salt and light, on whatever the issue of the day might be, society may slide into terminal decay and decline.

An attractive testimony

Just as we conclude, I want us to see again how positive is the vision presented in Matthew 5:14. It is a lovely picture of the testimony of the church.

The whole arena of social action and social influence can have a bad name because we think of the bearpit which is politics, and that doesn't seem to be an attractive place, not even a desirable place for Christians to be. Or we think of social action, and we think of being sucked into a humanist agenda, rather than a Christian agenda.

There are two important priorities we

need to maintain. The first is that our testimony must be full of grace. This point is made over and over again in the New Testament. 1 Peter 3:16: *But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

Or 1 Peter 2:17: *Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.*

Or Colossians 4:5-6: *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

The emphasis there is on winsome, even witty speech in the face of hostility. Think of the winsome testimony of Daniel in Babylon. The example given by Peter to those who were suffering opposition was that of Christ who humbly and meekly went to the Cross.

So that even in the 'bearpit' of politics we are to maintain a gracious spirit.

The second priority is hope. We are shining the light of Christian and church testimony, and saying to the world is: this is the way life should be lived. This is the good life! This is the way life was always intended to be lived. We are testifying of God's original creation purpose. But more than that. This is a glimpse of what the new heavens and earth will be like. This is a showcase of the New Creation. Our priorities are the priorities of the King. Our church life is lived under his authority.

The conclusion of it all is that while some will respond negatively, or with hostility, or with persecution, there will be some who will glorify God through us (Matt 5:16).

The testimony we give of salt and light is not: look at us! But rather it is look and see our King displayed through his kingdom. That is our place in the world. Our lives personally, and as churches, are to point people to Jesus Christ. They are to savour of his person and his character. Remember Titus 2:10 shows that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.

And we speak of the hope that soon the King will be seen by all, and soon will be established his universal kingdom of righteousness.

It's no accident in 1 Peter 3 that the response to our lives as we set apart Christ as Lord, is that Peter says people will ask us for the reason for the hope that is in us.

And it is that hope which sustains us as we testify of the King. Through the challenges and opposition. Through the discouragement of the way this world is.

That we serve and worship the King of Kings. Soon we will see him. And soon his kingdom of righteousness will be established. ■

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A TOOLKIT FOR CONFESSIONS. SYMBOLICS 101.

Helps for the Study of English Puritan Confessions of Faith

Author: James M Renihan
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This book is the third publication in the series *Recovering our Confessional Heritage*, edited by James M Renihan, and managed by Richard C Barcellos. According to the preface of this book, the goal of this series is to aid those considering the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (denoted as 2LCF in the book), as well as those already committed to it, in order to produce or maintain an informed and vigorous Baptist confessionalism. This book is precisely what it says in the title: a most useful toolkit to help us to study and understand Puritan Confessions of Faith, and in this case the 2LCF in particular. The book is true to its more general title as it discusses the 2LCF in relation to the *Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)* and the *Savoy Declaration of Faith and Platform of Polity (Savoy)*.

The *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*, or as it is also often referred to as the 1689 Confession, is well known among us as the doctrinal basis for our churches and also of the *Reformation Today* Trust. But are we really familiar with it and to what extent have we studied its contents? Although we love the Confession, we may still struggle with some of the contents as it is a document now over 300 years old that has been written in a particular historical context. This toolkit is therefore a most helpful and necessary resource to remedy these issues. In providing us with an introduction to the historical background, context, purpose, structure, language and doctrinal emphases of the Confession, it helps us to gain a significantly better understanding of this important document.



Recovering our Confessional Heritage series

In his introduction the author admits that, however important and useful the Confession is, it remains a product dating from a period several centuries ago, after the Reformation, but before the Enlightenment. Although it contains the fruit of centuries of Bible study and theological formulation, it is a human product. The author therefore states: 'For this reason, it must be approached cautiously. If the perspicuous Word of God requires careful contextual study and interpretation, how much more so a document of human formulation?'

The author offers this toolkit to help us in this study. He discusses the text of the Confession emphasising the need to understand and interpret the words and language in their historical and theological context (chapters 1, 3 and 4). He covers the historical and theological background of the confession, and its relationship to the other Puritan Confessions written during the 17th

century including a survey of the points of difference (chapters 5, 9). He also offers a guide to other historical and contemporary literature to assist us further in the study of the Confession (see chapters 2, 6, 10, and the extensive bibliography).

Chapter 7 offers a fascinating treatment of the structure of the Confession which was apparently the well thought out result of theological convictions. Chapters 1-6 of the Confession contain what the author calls 'First Principles'; they cover the Scriptures, the doctrines of God and of Creation.

The second major part of the Confession is found in chapters 7-20 and is given the heading 'The Covenant'. This part is further subdivided in 4 units: The Covenant Defined (chapter 7); The Covenant Servant: Christ the Mediator (Chapter 8); The Covenantal Setting: Free Will (Man's will as created; fallen — in need of covenantal grace; renewed —



New Books

The following books have been published recently and are recommended for your attention:

exercising covenantal grace; and perfected) (Chapter 9); The Covenant Blessings (God's Acts) (Chapters 10-13); The Covenant Graces (Man's Acts) (Chapters 14-18); The Means of Receiving the Covenant (Chapters 19-20). This particular structure of the second part explains why justification is treated in chapter 11, to be followed by a discussion of saving faith not until chapter 14. This also implies that the order does not follow a specific version of what is called the *ordo salutis*, the order of salvation. I would add that this structure also fits well with the view of the *ordo salutis* as expressed by Sinclair Ferguson in his book *The Holy Spirit*, in which he states that the first and primary blessing is the unity with Christ which the Holy Spirit effects in the believer, and from which follow all other blessings that we have in Christ.⁹

The third part covers God-centred Living: Freedom and Boundaries (chapters 21-30), and includes the basis: Liberty of Conscience, which is then developed in a set of principles covering the worship of God, civil government, marriage, and the church. Obviously the chapter on the church is crucial in this Baptist Confession which, according to the author, is the reason why the related text from the appendix in the Savoy Declaration has been included as a chapter in the main body of the 2LCF.

The final part covers The World to Come (chapters 31-32) with its treatment of the Intermediate and Resurrection States, and the Last Judgment.

Chapter 8 of the book is devoted to a summary of the main theological emphases in the Confession. The author presents this as 6 points:

1. Catholic;
2. Gospel-centred;
3. Covenantal (and hence, denying what would later be called dispensationalism);
4. Reformed/Calvinistic/Predestinarian;
5. Puritan (covering the 5 sola statements); and
6. Baptist/Congregational/Independent. Obviously, the first five also apply to the WCF and the Savoy Declaration with point 6 being the most important distinctive of the 2LCF compared to these other confessions.

This book offers a wealth of information and insights which are absolutely of vital importance for studying and using the Confession. The author notes with gratitude the multiplication of churches who identify the 2LCF as their confessional standard. This is, however, a very good incentive to study the Confession in more detail to uncover its rich, biblical content for the churches and for believers in the 21st century and as such 'to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude v3).

This well-written small book is a real gem, and is a must-read for all who take their interest in, and their commitment to the Confession really seriously! ■

Reformation Heritage Books is developing a documentary on the Puritans. It is entitled: PURITAN: All of Life to the Glory of God. It is due to be released in mid-2019. A trailer can be watched at: www.puritandocumentary.com

- Ian Hamilton, *The Gospel-Shaped Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth), 176 pages, ISBN 978-1-84871-721-3.
- Sinclair B Ferguson, *Let's Study James* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2018), 160 pages, ISBN 978-1-84871-846-3.
- D M Lloyd-Jones, *Saved by Grace Alone: Sermons on Ezekiel 36:16-36* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2018), 248 pages, ISBN 978-1-84871-828-9.
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- Gerald M Bilkes, *How Can I Stop Worrying?* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 32 pages, ISBN 978-1-60178-642-5.
- Michael P V Barrett, *How Can We Live Our Faith from the Inside Out?* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 24 pages, ISBN 978-1-60178-641-8.

⁹ Sinclair B Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 100-113.

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LEADING A BELIEVERS' CHURCH

In this article, I will address this topic starting in sections 1 and 2 with some principles, and then in sections 3-5 I will explore some practical matters.

1) Acts 2 and the marks of a believers' church

Acts 2:40-42 is a key passage. It describes the church in its formation, and it shows what a true church ought to look like. If we ask as leaders, 'What are we leading?', this is what we are leading!

The Reformers discussed the great 'marks' of a church. Calvin for example in the

Institutes, Book 4, chapter 1, section 10 describes the preaching of the Word and the sharing of the Ordinances. He talked about faithful *proclamation*, and faithful *observation*. But further on in chapter 12 he talks about the discipline of the church: the people of God being seen to be the people of God. Of course there can be a conflict between the holiness of the observable people of God and the 'messed-up lives' of those same people. That third mark of the church, the discipline of the people of God, became part of the standard three marks the Reformers and the Puritans utilised.

Since that time there have been all kinds of other descriptions. A contemporary one is the Nine Marks Movement. Mark Dever and his colleagues have done a tremendous amount of work on this. They ask, 'What is a healthy church?' For them, by way of example, Mark 1 is expositional preaching. In this passage I think there are nine, but not the nine marks of the Nine Marks Movement!

1) First comes the *gospel*: the message of salvation. Acts 2:40, 'With many other words he warned and pleaded with them' and his message is the message of the gospel.

2) Then you have *belief*; 'acceptance' is not a mere assent, but a heart-felt acceptance of Christ as Saviour and Lord.

3) Then *baptism*.

4) Then you find in v42 the next mark – *devotion*, life. Real spiritual life.

5) Then *leadership* – apostles.

6) Then *teaching*. There are over 30 words in the Greek of the New Testament to describe all the ways one can verbally communicate.

7) Then you've *fellowship*; the sharing of life.

8) Then you have *food*, including the Lord's Supper as part of the sharing of food with one another.

9) Finally you have *prayer*. Nine marks of a believers' church.

We are not mere organisers of people. We are not the people who 'make it happen'. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to be in the hearts of all those we are seeking to lead. It is crucial that he leads them in their devotion to Christ for then they want to work out what New Testament Christianity should look like.

Bill Hybels and Tim Chester are perhaps an unusual duo, given their different ministry emphases. One was a mega-church pastor, the other could almost be described as arguing for a 'micro-church' approach. Both have been hugely influential in shaping movements that have gone around the world. Yet both emphasise the importance of Acts 2 as the seminal passage in their thinking about the church. They both argue that we want to establish 'an Acts 2 church', free from the clutter

and accumulations of centuries of other practices.

So both historically, and in the contemporary church scene, Acts 2 is a massively significant passage.

What I want to emphasise from Acts 2 is the importance of 'organic' or personal spirituality. What we see are people who personally believe the gospel, and immediately are committed to living that life out. We need to emphasise that, because sometimes church becomes about systems and processes and organisation, we lose the first note. The first note? Gospel, baptism, *LIFE*. 'They devoted themselves to...' We are not mere organisers of people. We are not the people who 'make it happen'. We

need the power of the Holy Spirit to be in the hearts of all those we are seeking to lead. It is crucial that he leads them in their devotion to Christ for then they want to work out what New Testament Christianity should look like. Without that ministry of the Holy Spirit, without an individual *wanting* to follow – well you know the saying that you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. It is often a malaise at this point that causes such difficulties in church life. Church is happening, but there isn't so much of that inward personal devotion to Christ. If people look to the church to be their Saviour, there will be disappointment. If you look to the church to make sure your children are converted, or to give you a sense of significance in your life, or for the church to 'be there for me when I need it', I think you're using the church as a means to your own ends rather than as an expression of your love to Jesus.

People need to have a 'want to serve'; and that can only come as we keep this Acts 2 ordering – the organic, the personal desire, the personal ownership comes first.

A secular book selling over 25,000,000 copies is Stephen Covey's *Seven Marks of a Highly Effective Person*. The seventh mark is 'continuous learning'; so at least by reading this article you qualify with at least one mark in your life! The other marks are set out in two groups of three. The second group is about how to work with other people interdependently. But the first three are all about moving from dependency to personal accountability. A secular author nevertheless recognises that it starts with a person saying, 'I want to do this'. We must move from one of the

deep problems in our culture where we say in effect, 'I'm a celebrity, church get me out of here,' to where we develop a sense of personal responsibility. Acts 2 makes that emphasis.

I want to stress that we don't just read it, tick the box, and move on. This is hugely important for us in leadership: individual Christians respond to Christ as Lord and Saviour and so live lives where they commit to the people of God *because they love* the Lord of the church. We really need to see people who are engaging with the Lord Jesus and full of the Holy Spirit.

2) Acts 6 and the marks of a growing believers' church

A prominent Christian leader pointed out to me that there are men in every generation, and through the blessing of God, who bring Christians back to Acts 2. They start movements to help us all get back to Acts 2. But Acts doesn't stop in chapter 2. Act 6 is a really important passage that many of the 'Acts 2 guys' don't emphasise. For it is easy to read it and think, 'We have deacons so we have mastered Acts 6.' So we just move on from Acts 6. But we miss its significance. Acts 6 gives us another nine marks, but a different nine. So what are the marks you see?

- 1) First you see *growth*.
- 2) And then *grumbles*! We don't see that coming for all of us think, 'If the church grows, everybody will be happy.' But Acts 6 tells us that the church can grow and you can find things going wrong.
- 3) Third, *leadership*. The leaders brilliantly don't misdiagnose the problem. What do I

mean? Acts 5 has presented to us a severe case of church discipline. Acts 6 then starts off with a *grumbling* church. That word is quite significant for it was used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) to describe the people of God complaining about food way back at the Exodus. The leaders could easily be forgiven for saying, 'You have just witnessed the Lord judging people for sinning; now you had better stop moaning, for the people back then were judged for moaning about daily bread.' They could even have got the Bible out to present the case. It's very interesting for, though this time *it looks like the same thing*, the leadership understand that it is not. This is not a sinful moan against God. This is a growing organisation not coping, because of what's happening to it.

In Acts 2 the church was feeding everybody, but somehow now it's failing. It was marvellous, but now it's not going right. The leadership understand this. They don't castigate people. They don't preach a sermon on contentment, nor call for a prayer meeting for bread miraculously to be on the table tomorrow morning.

They don't do what I have done when I have been moaned at! I can get quite defensive. Some of us take it into ourselves and say, 'I'm a useless leader', while others of us come out with, 'Right I'm going to show them who is in charge.' Neither tactic helps! This leadership team leads the way through the problem.

- 4) Another mark is the *membership*. 'They gathered all the disciples together.' Now membership here is partly embryonic. They have a sense that they are believers

in the risen Lord Jesus and now there are thousands of them.

- 5) *Leadership initiative*. The leaders don't ignore the 'members' and together they came up with a solution along the lines of: 'There is a way of organising this and we haven't been organising it very well. We have had too many things to do. We have to organise differently. We need word and deed.'

Sometimes in the literature you can read that Acts 6 is all about the Word not being held up. When you first read, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the Word of God in order to wait on tables' (v2), it looks like what's called, 'a no-brainer.' Preachers must not be drawn into things like 'the Xerox machine has broken down. Mr Preacher, can you get it fixed because you are the only person who is not working during the day!' The argument goes that the preacher must not get dragged into practical problems. In a sense that is right, but it can be too simplistically employed. How do we know that? For John, one of those very leaders, wrote that if you see your brother in need and you do not practically care for him, 'How can the love of God be in you?' (1 John 3:17). If there is a hungry widow, and we don't feed her, we deny the faith. So when they organise they are not saying, 'Word is supreme, deed is irrelevant.' They don't set it up as word or deed. It is word and deed as an organisation, but within the organisation's duties some have a particular priority, a particular responsibility for Word. But they also must make sure that deed is organised.

- 6) *Team formation*. Here we probably have

'proto-deacons'. It is suggestive of the way forward, but I don't think it sets out to be prescriptive. The exact way they did it, how many men they appointed, and so on, can't be used as if it is the only blueprint. That the leaders organised teams is an important part of the overall leading of a church.

Then you see the other marks about
7) how a team is *empowered*,
8) *priorities* are set, and
9) finally there is 'a *results summary*'. Luke gives us both a 'quantity' and a 'quality' report: the number of disciples increased rapidly and a large number of even the priests were saved.

Acts 6, if one also sees the structure of Acts, is more significant than many realise. For it comes in the section John Stott called the three great counter-attacks of the devil. Acts 4 is external persecution, then Acts 5 is internal corruption, and Acts 6 is organisational complexity. To an Acts 2 church, led by great leaders, you have to add in the organisational *nous* of Acts 6, if the church is to overcome the challenges it faces.

Acts 6 is an amazing picture of this other side of church life.

Size dynamics and complexity

Leaders need to understand that as the church grows it gets complicated. I have written about this in more detail in *Ready, Steady, Grow*.

There you can see some of the numbers dynamics which show just how 'busy' it can become as a thing gets bigger. None of us leads a church remotely the size of the church in Jerusalem. But even when

you go from 20 to 50 people, things change significantly. If a church goes from 50 to 400 (8 x larger), it can be more than 60x more complicated in the networks that develop. This is what people are experiencing when they grapple with things like, 'I don't know who is here and I don't know what is going on.' Each of the different sizes of church (small, medium, awkward and large) have weaknesses and strengths. But these change with different sizes. If you don't know what they are, you can be taken aback when you face new issues as the church changes. What worked well when the church was 20 does not work now that it is 160. They understood some of those size dynamics and what they did was to bring in some systems.

Corporate and 'organised' spirituality

They didn't rely just on personal spirituality, but on 'group spirituality'. 1 Timothy 5 illustrates this. Paul was writing to a church telling it to put widows on a list. He had criteria for this list too. Why did they have a list of widows? We might think, 'We only have two in our church and everybody knows who they are.' But if it is a larger church, there may be 35, 28 of whom might get personally looked after by family or kind Christian friends 'down the road'. Organisation does not replace personal ownership. He has just said that if a man has a widow in his family and doesn't look after her, he is worse than a pagan (vv4, 8). A Christian should help the widow down his road. But some widows don't live down anybody's road or aren't in any believer's family. They are to be looked after nevertheless. The point of the organisational solution (the list) is not to replace the 'organic'. The organisational aspect is like the safety

net underneath. The widow not so well-connected still gets cared for. It is 'organic and organised'.

Now the question is, 'What are your equivalents?' You don't have neglected Greek-speaking widows as your presenting problem. But you have equivalent problems which are hindering the progress of the gospel. There may be things which you as an organisation are not doing very well.

Many of us who are church leaders are not trained in this area. We are trained in the Acts 2 'skills' – preaching, baptising, teaching, encouraging spiritual life, nurturing new converts – and often we are trained in these well. But Acts 6 is alien territory. It is alien not because we haven't got deacons, but because we wouldn't know the process of solving problems like this. We are not helped to do it; we are not even thinking like that. If we begin to address it, we fear that we are beginning to treat the church like a machine and we are becoming a technician. But they were seamless – Acts 2 and Acts 6 both show the Apostles in action. Organising things in Acts 6 is part of their spiritual calling. They realise that if they don't deal with this, the church could be split right down the middle. So it's a fascinating passage.

The importance of teams

What else can you draw out of it? They set up a proto-team. They empower the group of seven, they bring them to the church,

they set them apart, and everybody's pleased with the proposal. Many of us haven't had much training in running teams of any kind. Partly because many of us are in small churches, even tiny ones, where you just try to encourage everyone to do everything that needs to be done. And you do a bit of everything too, because you have to; otherwise it won't get done. Most churches in Britain, and

indeed in the USA, are small or medium-sized where this 'hands-on out of necessity' is what most church leaders experience. We have little experience just running one team, let alone running multiple teams as in Acts 6.

We find Paul setting up many teams. We know he worked with others, because he notes it as an unusual, and indeed an uncomfortable thing to be on his own (see Acts 17:15). As he works with others his weaknesses are covered by

their strengths, and vice versa. We have often studied Paul theologically in the letters and perhaps have neglected how he operates as a leader in Acts. When we do look at this element we tend to go to the personal aspects because of our view of leadership which generally is 'the man with the gifts'. Christian biography is often like this too – just a concentration on an individual.

About 40 or 50 years ago in English history writing there was a movement called prosopography. Instead of just looking at the individual, it studied that person in context with others. It asked,

ACTS 2 AND ACTS 6 BOTH SHOW THE APOSTLES IN ACTION. ORGANISING THINGS IN ACTS 6 IS PART OF THEIR SPIRITUAL CALLING.

'Who else did they work with? Who made them look good?' At home I have a book about Rembrandt and his paintings. But it takes a different tack from usual. It looks at his various customers and what they paid him to do. In his context and through interaction with others, a different Rembrandt and his paintings emerged. So with leadership; we can get so overwhelmed by 'the big leader syndrome' that we forget that all leaders work with others in teams.

Teams and organisation

Let's now turn to Jethro in Exodus 18 for some wisdom about organisation. It is a remarkable passage. This comes in a section where the Lord, in the Law, is going to stipulate so much. Schaeffer used to comment about the prescription of the colour of the pomegranates on the High Priest's robes, to highlight the level of detail and artistry that God wanted. But here it is as if God says, 'I'm not going to prescribe all details; I am going to prescribe a place for wisdom.' And Jethro is a surprising source of wisdom. He is a priest of Midian. I am not sure what that means, except he is God-fearing but significantly not a member of the covenant community.

He appears on the stage of history and what did he see amongst the people of God? Organisational mess. The people were not getting justice, and Moses was getting seriously worn down. Pastoral burn-out is not a new phenomenon! What was his prescription? Get organised. You need leaders of 10s. This is the primary unit of care. You need someone looking after each small group, so that you have what the American church leadership

writer, Ed Stetzer describes as '10 workers and 1 leader of workers'. After that you have units of 50, with '45 workers and 5 leaders of workers and 1 leader of leaders', and so on.

What Jethro was saying then, and Stetzer is now, is break things down into manageable groups where people have face-to-face contact with someone who loves them, cares for them, and looks after them. If a problem comes up that is beyond that leader, they pass it to someone who is more experienced. That small group understanding has not changed in 3,500 years. The British Army works on that principle, the smallest group being the squad depending upon the skills of corporals and sergeants. Teams of around 8 to 10 people give enough face-to-face contact so that you can get something done.

Like Moses (!), I didn't underrate this issue of organisational dynamics at all. Wisdom from an external source gave Moses, and the people of God, their lives back. We can't just take it and import it simplistically to where we are. But there is a great principle at play here. Wisdom, even wisdom about organisational things, can be learned and we can become better at our calling in this area.

What else can we learn about leadership 'out there'?

3) Don't settle for 'either/or' when you can have 'both/and'

Jim Collins' most famous book is *From Good to Great*. In it he describes five levels of leadership. He particularly highlights his now famous 'level 5' leader. He

wanted to call them 'servant-leaders' as the very best leaders of the very best organisations in the world are this. But for a secular book, it was a bit too close to what the Bible described, so he changed the parlance. But he acknowledges that what he was describing the Christians had seen in Christ a long time before. He also wrote *Built to Last*. There is a key chapter entitled 'Don't settle for the tyranny of either/or when you can have the genius of both/and.' It is wonderfully insightful.

Let me give an example from the book *The Trellis and the Vine*. This is a really good book and there is so much to learn from it. But I think it falls down with a lot of 'either/or' thinking. So it sometimes sets it up as either growth or health. It sets up either programmes or Christians taking responsibility for their own discipleship. So that structuring just worries me a little bit. The book describes going from running programmes to building people, from running events to training people, from using people to growing people, from filling gaps to training new workers, from solving problems to helping people make progress, and from clinging to ordained ministry to developing team leadership. That list has tremendous rhetorical power with every church leadership team, for we all feel failures and want to see the church go forward.

In books on church life I have found there is a tremendous amount of 'either/or' analysis and description. You will often find a false dualism such that it is either organised or people are owning their personal responsibility. But is it really 'either/or'? Can't it be both? Acts 2 and Acts 6 gives us both. Both organic and organised.

The second thing about this particular book is that it is so dependent on the metaphor of its. Ask any Bible-believing Christian whether they should work on the trellis or cultivate the vine, and the answer? It's got to be the vine! But you need to recall it is written by Anglicans and they can get involved in a tremendous amount of trellis work. In that context it makes a great deal of good sense.

But if we use a different metaphor, we would have a very different result. If, as the controlling metaphor, we said, 'Do you want the blood supply or a skeleton?' I think the response would be 'Both please!' The trellis metaphor lends itself to the thought, 'I do the minimum amount of organising work that I have to do to get by. It's not my zone.'

If we bring that understanding into Acts 6, we may misread it. We may conclude, 'Don't worry me about the widows being fed. That's trellis work.' So in our days we may think, when the sound system doesn't work, 'Please don't distract me from gospel proclamation; the sound system is trellis work.' But a broken or poor sound system will damage your gospel proclamation almost more than anything else can in your building. You may not end up fixing it, but you want to make sure that it is fixed.

Don't say, 'I am the preacher, don't distract me with these issues. I am a vine worker!' Yes, you are a vine worker, and in Acts 6 vine workers made sure the widows were fed by a good organisational system. Though my priority is 'praying and preaching' (note the order!), it doesn't absolve me of all other responsibilities.

We have already seen a leadership team in action solving a complicated problem which they had never come across before and which they could have got so badly wrong. That puts a different perspective on it.

Two other things to touch on:

Time

First, there is 'the tyranny of time'. It is a really strange aspect of the church size dynamic issue. As a church grows from a small group to a small church, then to a medium church, a plateau can develop. It can last a long time. What happens over 20 years? You're all 20 years older. Women will be beyond childbearing and children will grow up and likely leave. The church ages and becomes less diverse and often less attractive. Simply time alone changes things. 75 people is a lovely church size as it brings so many advantages. Relational 'glue' is strong as everyone knows everyone; it can afford to pay a pastor; there will be a diversity of gifts, etc. But the challenge is what happens over time as it becomes an ageing 75 people. Some who write about church planting hardly mention time at all. They only talk about size. But the issue is size and time. That is the challenge a leader of a medium-sized church faces. You'll be facing new challenges even if numbers stay about the same. So how can we help the church to take gospel-driven initiatives that help the church go forward?

Power

Secondly I just worry about the matter of power and leadership. As some begin to get their head around leadership, they get into micromanagement. It is the temptation of power.

The three great temptations of the world? In Acts 5 it is *dodgy money*; not so much

money itself, but what money can provide for me. The end of Acts 4 shows us Joseph, who through his generosity earned a nick-name – Barnabas, the son of encouragement. Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira wanted a reputation like that, a bit more of that kind of recognition. But they wanted it 'on the cheap' and morally compromised to gain it. Before we assume that we haven't that problem, how many of us have a need to be significant and use our gifts in church to achieve that? The

second issue is *dodgy sex* and we all know of how much brokenness that brings in its wake. But the third area in church life is *dodgy power*. One finds people holding onto roles, not letting other people get involved, not empowering others, doing it 'my way or no way'. This is all too common.

We as leaders are not immune. The Apostle John wrote about a man, Diotrephes, who was an orthodox Christian church leader. He had stopped listening even to John. That is scary as John was the closest human being on earth to Jesus, and he is not listening to him. Why? Because, 'he loves to be

first' and he's also spreading malicious nonsense about John. He refuses to welcome other believers and even puts people out of the church (3 John 10). Power problems like that didn't stop back then. As we become more competent, the great temptation is micromanagement.

But Acts 6 shows us a fascinating example where they could have announced everything to the whole church, 'We have already identified just the right men, we have empowered them, and it's already working. Aren't you grateful that God is giving you leaders like us?' (!) But they get everybody together. They describe what they think the problem is, announce a possible solution and seek that involvement of all. One of the greatest challenges is how do you keep 'ownership' as the church grows, because it's harder to gain consent. The decisions you make are more serious as they affect more people and then the danger is that leaders become very conservative and protective of the power they have.

William Cunningham at the start of his *Historical Theology* has a brilliant chapter on the Council of Jerusalem. He says this: 'The consent and concurrence of the ordinary members of the church is necessary and indispensable in the appointment of their office bearers' but then goes on to say that not every decision has to be brought to the whole church for its formal approval. But he goes on, even as a very committed Presbyterian, to say, 'In important questions affecting the welfare and peace of the church, *the people should be consulted, their consent and concurrence should, if possible, be secured by fair use*

of scriptural arguments addressed to their understanding' (emphasis added). What is he saying? That you are not boss; they are not your workers; you're not in command and control; you are servant leader.

And who rules the church? The King through his Word. You have the immense privilege of ministering the Word. It is the Word that helps the church go forward and the Word is open to all. You have the privilege of being the authorised teachers of the Word and leadership is not about the force of your personality. So many men who joined elderships have been sucked into a power-grab trap. That has caused much pain.

It doesn't mean you don't lead. But you lead wisely and carefully. A good marriage is all about trust and it's all about servant-heartedness. Occasionally, as C S Lewis said, 'In a democracy of two, somebody has to have a casting vote.' But how often do you do that? How often do you have to put your foot down as a leadership team? In 35 years in my church the answer is, 'Very rarely.' You just work hard at listening, listening, listening, and gaining consent so we go forward together. Leadership is not about announcements from the Holy See, called 'your eldership team'.

4) Leaders and Members *Kingly leaders*

The theologian John Frame often uses three ideas in tension in a 'triangle' diagram, three elements which are happening at the same time. I found a development of this approach on leadership extremely helpful. I had been trained to teach and pastor. But a diagram introduces this other element – kingly

SO HOW CAN WE HELP THE CHURCH TO TAKE GOSPEL-DRIVEN INITIATIVES THAT HELP THE CHURCH GO FORWARD?

leadership. This is a different grid from the dualism 'pastor-teacher': this is one in which there are the three great roles mirroring the, 'prophet, priest and king' of Christ's threefold role. I had to ask, 'Where was the king part in my life?' 'Where is the leadership aspect?' I had to say, 'It's hardly there!'

If in some ways you are to reflect Christ as prophet, priest and king, and something is missing, then you have to get learning. Sadly 'kingly skills' are missing in our training. If you go to college you get a lot of 'prophetic' or word help. This is often good. And you get a lot of 'priestly/pastoral' aid. But there is very little 'kingly' help. We have to ask, 'Is there a balance between those three as I serve in the church?' That's not often how we define local church leaders, and so we miss out on reflecting Christ in his three-fold office. I just put it out there for your consideration.

Members' meetings

How do you feel about members' meetings? They can be really hard when people go sideways with their problems and members' meetings become places of conflict. We need to ask, 'How can we do these things better?' For some the only training in taking these is the advice, 'You had better take some minutes.' Sometimes we joke and say that AOB stands for 'Any Other Bombs'. But too often it is like that and a pastor spends ages visiting all the people who are hurt. The tendency is to become ever more withdrawn under stress. As the conflict

level goes up we just pull back either into our eldership or into ourselves. At other times members' meetings are long series of announcements and people are so bored.

We need help because these meetings really matter. Cunningham shows that Acts 15 was where some complicated and serious matters got sorted out amongst the people of God. We need to 'go towards the pain' and learn to lead these things

If in some ways you are to reflect Christ as prophet, priest and king, and something is missing, then you have to get learning. Sadly 'kingly skills' are missing in our training.

better, because if these meetings go well the church goes out of the building on fire for God. But if they don't, the church is on fire with anger... and is being destroyed. So often that happens in members' meetings.

Service teams and their leaders

We need to learn to train service team leaders how to lead their teams well. In *Ready, Steady, Grow* pages 135-8 are worth their weight in gold. I

had no real idea how to lead teams but I came across Walter Wright's *Relational Leadership*, and he just had this little acronym C.A.R.E., which I summarise. Great leaders don't need that acronym. But we aren't great leaders, just ordinary leaders who want to serve the Lord well. Note where he starts: always get the team to talk about the mission first. What's the mission of, say, the sound team? 'We want people to hear about Jesus as well as they can. So I'm going to do the sound as best as I possibly can.' If you lose a sense of 'the mission', the sound team, as any other team, will think over time, 'How can

we get away with doing it as quickly and easily as possible?'

5) Staff and members

Some very large churches have an enormous staff. For example, All Souls, Langham Place, London has a staff of 50 or so in different departments. We may react to that negatively because that is so different from most of us. Few of us have had any training in helping staff. So just a few points:

FTCW

First, we are all, as Mark Greene from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity says, FTCWs – Full-time Christian Workers. It's just that some of us happen to be paid for by other Christians. But we are all full-time Christian workers. We need to say that because what happens over a while is the staff become a bit more in the centre of everything, and can be regarded as a little bit more important because they are running the church. Everybody else is just earning the money, but they are serving the Lord! Mark Greene, quite healthily and quite brilliantly, brought a degree of biblical sanity back to that misunderstanding. That clergy/laity and sacred/secular divide can be really unhelpful and the resources from LICC help counter that.

Money

Second, when money is tight, choices are hard. In 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul talks of leaders who are worthy of 'double honour' ie material support. But if money is tight, what do you do? How do you make a choice? You make a choice around giftedness, 'especially those whose work is preaching and teaching'. 'Labouring in word and

doctrine' will look different depending on who else is in the church and what other preachers are around. Assessment is not an exact science and it will be changing as gifts mature. Philip started as a deacon, but later his preaching developed (Acts 6:5; 8:6). Gifts develop and mature. They don't stay static but flower and flourish. We need to be wise marshalling the financial resources very carefully.

Wisdom

Can you have other kinds of staff? Wisdom should enlighten your decision. There may be a time when the next best appointment may not be another full-time elder but it might be two part-time women workers. Single mums, divorcees, women with non-Christian spouses, and widows need a lot of pastoral care. But if that takes 15 to 20 hours a week, then it is beyond what a volunteer could do. Staff would help enormously. Or it might be an administration blockage you need to overcome through an appointment, or a need for someone with financial expertise. When is the right time? There is no right time, but just what is wise or unwise. It may be that the church down the road has some people with particular gifts and has an opportunity to employ some. But you don't have such and you can't therefore do the same. But that is the overruling providence of the Lord. We need wisdom for our own circumstances.

Work

What do staff do? Good staff do not do the work for the church but they enable the church to do the work. So when you appoint staff you are looking for leaders of workers. If you appoint a worker, or even several workers, after a while the church thinks,

‘The staff are doing the work for us.’ Leaders of workers should empower and release a whole load of volunteers. This is key, for as a church grows the number of volunteers needed goes up, but you, as pastor, don’t have the capacity to really help them to succeed in what they do. You can’t invest the time needed for their training. You just ask how they are doing and move on too quickly to really listen. But a staff worker can help develop a functioning group of 10 where workers are helped by a leader. So the staff helps the whole church to achieve what the Lord wants in his mission.

Conclusion

Many of us had little training in these things. We need to be talking about them together more often so that we don’t just plough on until it all goes badly wrong.

Rather we want to be leaders of churches which are *both* well-organised *and* releasing people into personal ‘organic’ ministry. ■

Ray Evans is the pastor of Grace Community Church, Bedford, UK.

STEPHEN NOWAK

TANZANIA 2018 VISIT REPORT



Stephen Nowak has sent us the following newsletter reporting on his 2018 visit to Tanzania:

I have just arrived back (9 October) from another month in Tanzania. This was my 8th trip to the south-west Province of Mbeya. The city of Mbeya is the second most Christianised city in Africa after Lagos, Nigeria. Estimates are that about 70% of the four million inhabitants attend a church regularly or semi-regularly and identify themselves as Christians. The number that are actually born again and saved by grace is much smaller but there is still much evidence of the revival

that took place there in the 50s and 60s. Although there is one moderately sized Islamic mosque near the city centre and a few very small ones in the suburbs of the city, the number of Muslims is very small. There is virtually no evidence of any Islamic presence in all the surrounding towns and villages. African traditional religion with all its witchcraft, superstitions and occultism isn’t visibly evident to the first-time traveller, but the longer you stay and the more you



Stephen Nowak at Utungule College

get to understand the spiritual climate of the region, the more you realise how embedded it is in the culture. Many self-professed Christians who know nothing of the power and presence of Christ are actively involved in pagan practices. Even some denominational and congregational leaders are regularly involved in paganism.

The main goal of my four-week trip was to teach for five days in Utungule Moravian Bible College. They have 75 students on the three-year course and it has been my joy to teach at the college for a week every year since 2009. Principal Amos Mwampanga is a very good friend of mine and he is very enthusiastic about me teaching all the students from 8am till 5pm for a week every year. All classes are cancelled for the week and all the teachers and students are together as I give three lectures lasting 90 minutes and then lead a half-hour discussion with questions on the subject matter. We studied the uniqueness of Jesus, the doctrines of grace, the destructiveness of the false teachers in Africa and the need of pastors to have a close personal walk with the Lord and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The lively questions and answers at the end of each lecture were so encouraging. All the students received a set of five distinctly reformed and evangelical books in their native language of Swahili that they will have to read and write a

book review on before they graduate.

Other parts of the four weeks involved teaching pastors, church planters, evangelists and elders for one or two days, recording five sermons in a studio that will be aired on two radio stations at prime time with an audience of anywhere from 20-50 thousand listeners and preaching five live sermons, selling two thousand Bibles at subsidised prices, preaching to a crowd of over six hundred at a funeral service, preaching about twenty-five sermons in different churches we visited to sell Bibles, and preaching at five secondary school assemblies. All crammed into twenty-six days of intense ministry. The organisers and translators did a marvellous job making all this happen in one of the poorest countries in the world where organising anything is significantly harder than doing so in the developed world. We also sent 21 boxes of English books that I had to friends in Lusaka, Zambia. These were Banner of Truth, Evangelical Press and Day One books I was generously given in the UK and shipped to Tanzania a few years ago.

I visited about 20 different congregations in Mbeya city, surrounding towns and rural villages, preaching to a number of pastors, church planters and elders through the day who had travelled to the location most easily accessible. In the evenings the church

members joined us to buy Bibles and hear the Word of God. The services often went on for hours with lively singing and no one complained when the sermons were over two hours long.

We buy Bibles from the Tanzanian Bible Society at heavily discounted prices for about £5.20 and sell them for 10,000 Tanzanian shillings which is about £3.60 making them accessible to the poor subsistence farmers. Many churches will only have a few Bibles among them and many elders and deacons do not own a Bible. This is something we are working hard to resolve and by the grace of God we were able to subsidise the sale of 2000 Bibles. Although we rejoice in the provision of 2000 Bibles for needy Christians we realise that this is only scratching the surface of the need and many more need to be provided. There are 600,000 Moravians alone in this province.

We had planned a day of teaching pastors and elders in Msangano but when we arrived the wife of one the elders was to be buried that day; she had gone to be with Christ in the early hours of the morning and it is their custom to bury their dead on the same day. Our plans were changed and I only had time to teach the pastors for an hour. In the providence of God our plans were changed but I was given the honour of preaching at the open-air funeral as we were gathered around the grave. Over 600 listened as I preached from Romans 6:23. I pleaded with them to come to Christ and to prepare for death and judgment.

Preaching on the radio is a great way to reach 20-50 thousand with the truth of God's Word. I recorded five sermons to be aired at prime-time slots on the doctrines

of grace as there are very few who understand what the Bible teaches about salvation. I also preached another five sermons live after I finished teaching at Utungule Bible College, as the radio station is only a 30-minute drive away from the college. These were evangelistic messages.

Getting good books into the hands of pastors is one of our major objectives and we had many days of teaching pastors, church planters, evangelists and elders. We spent the day looking at various topics like sermon preparation, false teaching, the need to have a balance between doctrine, experience and practice. They all received five books at the end of the day. We gave over 200 sets of books away to pastors and preachers.

Plans for next year are already under way. Willey Mwasille, the Vice Chairman of the Moravian Provincial Board does all the organising and most of the translating. We have no books left for the pastors, so a large reprint needs to be done and we are praying that we will be able to provide 5,000 Bibles next year. I am planning to be in Indonesia again in May 2019 and will need to raise the funds for these two trips. If you feel led by the Lord to support financially after you have prayed, please make cheques out to 'Stowmarket Baptist Church' and send them to Stephen Nowak, 25 Finborough Road, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 1PN, UK.

For any more information or electronic bank transfer details please contact me at stephennowak@btinternet.com

With sincere Christian love.
Pastor Stephen Nowak.
Sola Scriptura, Solo Christo, Sola Fide, Sola Gratia, Soli Deo Gloria, Romans 11:33-12:2. ■



African Pastors' Conference News

The table gives an overview of recent conferences held in October 2018 in South Africa, and the number of books distributed.

COUNTRY	LOCATION	DELEGATES	BOOKS Sold & Free
South Africa	Bloemfontein	15	212
	Botshabelo	20	131
	Queenstown	44	236
	King William's Town	70	588
	Chatsworth	52	937
	Soshanguve	21	243

The total distributed since the start of APC in 2006 now stands at 136,887.

These conferences often meet all kinds of challenges to organise, but they do address real needs as can be shown by some extracts from the report of these conferences by Nico van Zyl, the conference manager:

One of the main speakers for these conferences, Elly Olare from Kenya, could not get his visa in time. Nico writes: 'With only one or two weeks' notice we managed to contact four different South African pastors to fill in for Elly ... We praise God that these speakers could come at such short notice and we hope to use them again in the coming year on conferences.

'We started our new theme in October,

called "The defining features of a biblical Church". Our theme is based on Mark Dever's book *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. At each conference every Bible teacher received a free copy of the book with a copy of *Taking God at His Word* by Kevin DeYoung.'

The need for these conferences is especially clear from some of the questions asked by delegates. Nico gives a number of examples:

'How should biblical prosperity be understood in the biblical church in the light of biblical texts like 3 John 2, John 10:10 and Genesis 13:2? What should be the relationship between elders and



📷 Delegates at book table

pastors in the local church? Should the pastor have authority over the elders? Can a disciple forsake all his sins? If he can, does it mean he is now perfect? How can we reproduce ourselves as disciples if we struggle with sins in our own lives?’

The conferences have been much appreciated by the delegates as Nico gives some examples of their feedback:

‘After this conference I know now that I must preach Christ and him only at my church!’

‘The session on leadership challenged me to be disciplined and focus on the Word of God.’

‘All the sessions were good because they help you grow spiritually and help you to preach the gospel without fear.’

‘The sessions on worship, the gospel and preaching have ignited in me the zeal of the Word of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. They have prompted me to surrender all to Christ.’

‘Sipho’s talk on the ancestors was very good. We need to learn more how to deal with it. Don’t ever stop with APC.’

Nico ends his report as follows: ‘We praise God for all who worked behind the scenes and all those who laboured hard in the Word of God. We thank the sponsors and the publishers who made the books we sold available ... May God continue to revive and help his faithful ones in South Africa. May the books that the delegates bought, the free books that were given and the audio sermons they received work towards the establishing of God’s kingdom in Africa!

Soli Deo Gloria!



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Further Details

Further details about individual APC conferences are available from Phil Roberts (phil@tentmaker.org.uk) or Frederick Hodgson (frederick.hodgson@gmail.com)

GOSPEL MINISTRY AND BIBLE DISTRIBUTION IN TANZANIA



Please see request for support in the report by Stephen Nowak.

See inside (p42)



Next Issue

▶ **Life in God's Family** (part 2)

▶ **Leading a Believers' Church** (part 2)