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The Minister's Role

1. The illumination of the inner eye

For me, the promise and the responsibility of the Ministry is not the passing on of lifeless information about other people's, or even one's own, experiences of God, as if one were running a cramming school for some ultimate exam.

It is trying to get people, individually or collectively, to share the excitement of discovering for themselves this tremendous Something, that starts my blood racing, my mind boggling, and my heart thumping.

It is to do with that moment which we describe as "letting the penny drop". Or that condition or period that we call 'enlightened'.

The 18th Century was termed the Age of Enlightenment because it marked a leap forward in man's realisation of the importance of reason. It led to a critical reappraisal of existing ideas and social institutions.

That it also led to a divide between religion and reason is a judgement, not on reason but on religion, in that it forgot for a time that its God was one who said "come now let us reason together", and that the conversion experience involved a seeing of the familiar in a new light that is totally if upsettingly reasonable.

And it is interesting how often we try to express this occurrence by using the idea of light.

On the Damascus Road, Paul's enlightenment came through an experience that illuminated and blinded at one and the same time. Because so great is the shock of the reasonable and emotional pull of re-orientation, that it leaves one temporarily in a kind of no man's land that is neither darkness nor light.

It is interesting that in the Narrative in Genesis 1 (1-5), light is represented as the first creation. It is as if it were saying that without light there can be no life, no order. Light is therefore created before even the sun, because this is not a scientific treatise, but a great affirmation about what it all means.

So when we go into retreat or share in a Conference, or whatever is the phrase of the moment, we are rendering ourselves open to enlightenment as we put up for a night or two on this journey for a soul that is life.

It is the illumination of the inner eye that we are after, and whenever we are dazzled by light, we are dazzled by Christ, because when Jesus said 'I am the Light of the World' it is implied that where there is light, there is Christ.

2. Dividing lines, converging lines

I think that one of the chief difficulties of the Minister's life is to do with the drawing of lines. Our people expect us to draw lines; to set standards; to mark our boundaries. Strangely enough, so do those outside the Church. Sometimes indeed they are the more vociferous. It is I suppose all a part of the search for order amid the tendency to chaos. They want to know what the map should look like, even if they don't intend to keep religiously to the tracks. We ourselves also feel we should draw lines. Because the consequence of enlightenment is choice. And there can be no choice if the lines are not clearly drawn.

At the same time, though, we seem to be picking up from Jesus a strong tendency against drawing lines, there is equally strongly not an easy going "live and let live" attitude. Because by refusing to draw lines, in a sense, he makes the choice more stark, and more critical.

And there is our dilemma. Augustine said 'Love God and do as you like'. We know what he meant. We know that's what it's all about. But it's such a foreign notion to most people that it landed him in a lot of trouble.

Paul had the same trouble. Hence his defence of himself over sin the more abounding. Paul had trouble, but then, so I believe, had Jesus.

To be wary of drawing lines is to recognise that these lines we draw often miss the point. They give us a security that can be false. They make us feel safe because we conform to one set of limits when we may be broaching so many others and, therefore, far from safe. Dividing lines can be self defeating.

And yet we must have them in some form, however temporary, otherwise we cannot survive. We are not yet ready to do without them entirely.

Let them be lightly drawn then, and let us see that the right lines for one may be different for another. As Jesus said to Peter when he wanted to know about John's lines: "What is that to you? You feed my sheep". Maybe too we feel that there are some of these lines that man has drawn that will divide us for ever. Yet there is a form of Christian conversation that Pope Paul VI described as 'convergence towards Christ'; where you start on opposite sides of a line, and where your pursuit of Christ leads you to find the divide giving way to a convergence. And if light is the sign of hope in the creation narrative, so is water the sign of chaos. The second act of creation is, therefore, seen as the dividing of chaos so that life may exist. (Genesis 1:6-8)

However much we may feel temperamentally averse to dividing lines we must recognise that sometimes there would be no life without them.

And however temperamentally susceptible to drawing lines we may be we must recognise equally that they can in the mystery of redemption still converge towards Christ.

For as the lines were first drawn to give life, so too were the lines later removed that there might be neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither North nor South, neither Baptist nor Roman, but we are all one in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. A pocketful of earth, a packetful of seed

I sometimes think that as Ministers we are not as good as we should be at listening to the stories of other people's lives. Maybe it is because we are trying to prove something to ourselves, or trying to live up to what we believe is expected of us.

But these stories that they bring to our door, however unreal or grotesque, are part of the soil of their past, and it is a great privilege to be let into their secrets. Like Naaman they have traipsed through life lugging their little sacks or pocketfuls of earth, powerful with memories that hold them to a past experience that was either wonderful or frightening, and which now prevent them from living in the present, and from seeing that the soil they stand on is the one worth cultivating.

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And we do not always help because we do not allow ourselves to get the feel of that old earth, and to see how it could have come to be parcelled up and preserved. Perhaps, too, it is because we are afraid we might become contaminated, turning it over in our hands and letting it sieve through our fingers.

When I was at Chester Road in Sutton Coldfield we ran a telephone ministry. And the most important thing for our callers was not the advice we gave but how we reacted to the stories they brought. Did we have the humanity to understand how these things could have happened to them? Because that was what they needed initially. Not advice, or blame, or confirmation, but acceptance.

And the other surprising thing, about the stories people tell, is that, however dead the weight of the earthiness of their past experience, there is somewhere on their person also a packetful of seed.

The seed which Jesus describes his disciples scattering is, I believe, not some new element strange to man's being. All of us carry it within us; we each have the capacity for germination and growth, and our job as Pastors is to help folk to find their own packet of divine seed, and to let them scatter it on the soil they are standing on. For Jesus said the Kingdom of God is within you.

So on the third day, the creation of the organised universe is advanced another step, with its emphasis on seed, on the reproductive activity of nature, that is also a parable of the re-creative nature of man when he discovers what it means to be accepted by God. (Genesis 1: 9-13)

4. Timelessness and the passing of time

Time is a problem generally today. But it is particularly so, I think, for those of us in the Ministry. Making time for people, and its converse, making time for what Simone Weil called *Waiting on God*, is becoming more and more difficult. We have become victims to the Martha Syndrome.

Nothing would upset me more in the pastorate than folk up to their ears in lonely struggle, telling me they hadn't wanted to bother me earlier because I always seemed so busy! It was as if the reserving of specific times each week for what I called 'Talk Over' simply added to the sense of my business and separateness rather than reinforcing my total availability.

And yet somehow in our role as Pastors we have to bridge this gulf in our own minds as well as that of our people between time with all its deadlines and necessary administration, and that timelessness that has spaces for people and space for God.

A phrase of Monica Furlong's that has long stuck in my memory is one that expresses her yearning for ministers to be 'pools of serenity'.

Perhaps we find time such a problem these days because we are denying certain basic rhythms that are necessary for our well being. Maybe if we gave in to time more often we should find ourselves with more time free.

So it is that the fourth act of creation marks out the structures imposed by time — the lights in the vault of heaven that are there not to illuminate — for light has existence independent of the sun — but to determine when day shall give way to night, and to trace the passage of time through the four seasons and the years. (Genesis 1: 14-19)

In his book *The Christian Witness in an Industrial Society* Horst Symanowski reflects on the price we pay for abandoning this natural rhythm. "The 'night life' of our big cities leaves a bad taste in the mouths of many churchgoers," he says. "Why isn't it the same for the 'night work' of thousands of men?"

So the Minister must know both "Timelessness and the Passing of Time" in his role as Pastor. He must understand the peculiar pressures of people whose lives are regulated by the pace of the passing of time in a post-industrial society, and its effects, particularly on the jobless. At the same time he must have some direct intimation of the timelessness that is to do with eternity and which puts the present into a distant and more tranquil perspective.

5. Of fathoms and altitudes

When people ask us to pray for them they are recognising our special role as intercessors.

Of all the forms of prayer intercession is, I think, the most difficult to understand.

In his book *The Use of Praying*, J. Neville Ward describes it simply as "desiring other people's good."

"The Christian idea of intercession", he says, "is that it is not a means we employ to persuade God to act in a situation he has presumably overlooked or into which he needs to be summoned, but a means God employs to summon *our* help through our membership in the Body of Christ." It is to do with heights and depths, altitudes and fathoms.

So the fifth act of creation describes the powers of the water and of the air. (Genesis 1: 20-23).

There was always a menace about the waters for the ancients. Indeed the waters were seen as the remaining vestige of chaos. The abode of great sea monsters. On the other hand, man has always yearned to reach for the sky and envied the flight of the birds, from the time of the harrassed Psalmist, who longed for the wings of a dove, through Daedalus and the ill fated Icarus to Sir Freddy Laker today!

As Intercessors we are, therefore, entering into the depths of human experience and entering into it so as to raise it to the heights. As well as bringing the heights to bear upon the depths so as to quell the storm and the fear of the big bad sea.

To refer to Neville Ward again:-

"Accordingly, when we pray for someone who is in great trouble, it is quite legitimate to ask for him to be delivered from the evil in his situation. We are expressing our natural desire that he should be given a 'happy issue' out of all his afflictions, but we are not trying to persuade God to do anything about the situation other than bring in his Kingdom there (and this he does not need to be persuaded to do). We are expressing the natural desires of natural human love within the context of our faith in God. Faith means that we are prepared for things to go any way, better or worse as we understand these terms, and that in either case we wish that this person will continue to serve God and that we ourselves shall too, and that we believe that all of us whether we live or die are the Lord's."

As Intercessors we have to know about fathoms as well as altitudes.

6. “The Glory, Jest and Riddle of The World”

The American novelist and one-time Preacher, Frederick Bucher, describes what he calls “the magic moment” when the Preacher steps into the pulpit. “Everybody knows the kind of things he has told them before, and not told them, but who knows what this time, out of the silence, he will tell them?”

So the writer tries to capture the mystery of the Minister as Preacher, and it is finally as Preachers that we are thought of most and most think of ourselves, even if our gifts lie primarily in other aspects of ministry that might in the end have greater impact and be remembered longer.

There is something about preaching that strikes at the very heart of what we are about as Ministers. Who knows what this time, out of the silence, we will tell them about God; about Man, the final act of creation (Genesis 1:24 seq.) — “the glory, jest and riddle of the world!” in Pope’s *Essay on Man*; and about Faith? And tell them about it in such a way that it might show them the power of the Gospel to make sense of the riddle and to dare to see visions and dream dreams.

Visions that are not a figment of our febrile imagination, but ones that glimpse the underlying reality that enables men to see the glory of man beyond the jest. Dreams that enable him to believe again that it is possible to reorganise the tangled web of his memories and experiences, and in such a way that despair and sorrow, pointlessness and disappointment, give way to hope and laughter, purpose and achievement.

Because that is what we are about as preachers — to help people to see the light beyond the shadows, in this world, not just the next.

Plato, the Greek contemporary of the last of the Old Testament prophets, had his own vivid description of this human plight in his imagery of The Cave. “And what do they see?” he asked concerning his subterranean dwellers. “With their backs to the light, what do they see on the wall of the cave in front of them. Just a performance in silhouette.”

There is something about that Greek parable that is disturbingly contemporary for an age that gets its experience of reality in two dimensions from a cathode-ray tube.

But suppose, he says, that one of them should be set free. That he should turn around and face the light. That there should be someone to drag him forcibly up the steep and rugged ascent and not let him go until he had hauled him into the sunlight?

The writer to the Hebrews, drawing on the same Greek thinking about the tension between the shadow and the real, put it squarely in terms of Faith. Faith that makes us certain of realities we do not see.

And that is what we are about as Preachers. Sharing certainties about realities; painting pictures in words that show that Faith is not hoping against hope that tomorrow will be better. It is a vision of today as it can be, of a God who, in Christ, has come down into our Cave and will not let us go until he has hauled us out into the light of the first creation.

And so they also come to hear us preach week by week. Everybody knows the kind of things we have told them before, and not told them, but who knows what this time, out of the silence, we will tell them?

“And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

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I believe in the Minister

This title would be especially provocative if printed upon the cover of a book in the current "I believe" series published by Hodder & Stoughton. It would look distinctly odd! Provocative insofar as it would carry with it an unfashionable, almost reactionary flavour opposing the anti-clericalism of our times and mocking the general feeling summed up in the unforgettable: "'ere e comes, the 'oly 'umbug, 'umming 'is 'oly 'ymn! 'ow I 'ate 'im!" It would look odd in the context of the current emphasis on the ministry as being the supreme activity of the church in general, rather than the preserve of particular people officially called ministers. Nevertheless I believe in the minister and would like to say why.

1. Firstly, I believe in the minister because I believe in the word. He who came as the Incarnation of the Word of God also came as a servant of that word: "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak thus as My Father taught Me" (John 7 v.28). He who came supremely to serve God in the sacrificial service of man also comes as One Who, as the embodiment of the divine Word serves its purpose, fulfilling its saving and creative function. Jesus Christ gives us a pattern of service to the Word which requires the concentration of a lifetime on the part of some. Therefore, the church needs to concentrate the expression of that word through those whom it identifies as the bearers of that word. Thank God that the ministry of the word is shared by many gifted people who are not ordained by the church exclusively to serve that word, but great damage is done to the church's life by a denial that there are some who are set aside by its Head recognisably to be ministers of the word.

Daniel Jenkins' *The Gift of Ministry* (although written some 35 years ago, it would do very well if it were brought out in a new edition under this article's title) reminds us: "The ministry in the New Testament is first and last that of the word of God and the clearest guidance the New Testament gives about its form is that it must always be that which most perfectly expresses the reign of the Word of God in the Church". The *raison d'être* of the apostles was to declare the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ as "that which we have seen and heard declare ... unto you", as eye witnesses of the Lord's resurrection.

To think of oneself as a minister of the word is to acknowledge that all the activities pertaining to one's ministry have the word as their reference and base. Observe how that principle is employed in our description of the office of the minister. We may think of him (from now on think of "him" as embracing "her") as a minister of God. There was a time when that phrase was more commonly used than now. I remember the late Dr. Sangster's words: "One thing that a man expects of a minister of God is that he be a minster of God!" The term 'minister of Christ' is sometimes used and one may still come across the term 'minister of the word and sacraments'. It goes very hard with one when confronted with the official description: 'minister of religion'. This last epithet just will not do! It is much too vague, but as for others, God reveals Himself as God through His word, Jesus Christ is the Word and the sacraments depend wholly for their efficacy upon the disclosed mind, will and being of the Redeemer, that is to say, the Word.

Lest I should be guilty of “a clamorous presentation of the obvious” against which the saintly Dr. Cawley warned his students so unforgettably, let me spell out some of the areas in which the ministry of the Word has a special relevance in 1982.

(a) Today the word is an apocalyptic word.

The possibility of a universal holocaust has been with us now for over a quarter of a century but what is new is an ever-spreading expectancy of sudden global annihilation. For the days when they will say: “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck, when they begin to say to the mountains ‘Fall on us’ and to the hills ‘Cover us’ ” are not just coming, they are already visible. There is a need for prophetic detachment from the subjective experience of the pressures of impending catastrophe as well as the need for identification with the fearful and guilt-ridden. This function needs the structure of an ordained ministry for its fulfillment.

(b) Today the word is a reconciling word.

It always was, of course, but there is unique urgency for this ministry now. We live in a world that faces the realisation of dreams, nightmares even, previously envisaged as merely entertaining ingredients in scientific fantasy. Genetic engineering is now with us. Global proximity is a fact of life. The speed of social change and custom accelerates every year. In these circumstances the older generations are more disorientated than even the young. In our churches the expectation that the changeless Gospel should be characterised by changeless forms both of worship and fellowship is natural, but symptomatic of a wrongly focussed need for permanence. The bewilderment requires the word that is changeless in its essence: that is where old and young may meet. The older Christian is understandably confused when receiving the broken Body of our Lord conveyed by a deacon adorned in a polo-neck sweater and leather jerkin. The younger generation’s familiarity with televisual presentation and the empirical atmosphere pervading general education has contributed to the prevalent feeling that truth is something that has to be seen to be believed. It is inevitable that so much of the Gospel has to lose its seemingly abstract character and clothe itself in words and actions, rhythm and dance, music and colour. The minister serves the eternal Word which, because it is eternal, is able to be presented in a form both intelligible and immediate to the present generation. Years ago the great W.M. McGregor said in *The Making of a Preacher*: “The Gospel can only successfully be defended as it is continually rediscovered”. The minister who serves all ages is in a privileged position to invite and encourage the guardians of the past to the exhilaration of rediscovery in the contemporary world while at the same time providing youth with the spiritual stability of contact with the wisdom of the ages.

(c) Today the word is an enabling word.

God is doing many a new thing in our day and in so doing reveals more tasks for the church. We would surely not question the role of the ministry as one that enables a church to recognise the gifts of the Spirit for that church. By

the very nature of his calling, the minister is devoid of favouritism and bias. He receives the faculty of identifying spiritual gifts within individual members of the Body and gives confidence to the nurturing, development and deployment of these gifts. The enabling word inevitably breaks the stranglehold which mechanical agendas exert upon the development of a church's life and mission. The enabling word calls the bluff of those who find refuge in the so-called long term solutions which are never allowed truly to germinate. Such a word also discloses the fallacy of believing that there has been action when only discussion has taken place, or believing the Kingdom has come because a hymn has been sung heartily. The call to preach the Gospel and heal the sick has within it the very power to equip those responding to it. Much of the relevance of today's ministry is to be found here: the equipping of the saints, the building up of the Body of Christ is an essential correlation of the ministry of the word.

II. I believe in the minister because I believe in the personal. No doubt it is a sign of returning health to the church that the present could more accurately be described as the day of ministry rather than that of the minister. It is significant, however, that Eph. 4 talks about the gifts to His church from the ascended Christ as personal. His gifts were that "some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists," etc. It could have said his gifts were apostleship, prophecy and evangelism. The enumeration of the gifts of the Spirit in I Cor. 12 concludes in the statement that the gifts are only employed as God appoints in the church "first: apostles, second: prophets, third: teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues." In these days of charismatic renewal we hear much of prophecy, gifts of discernment, healing, etc. but not so much of prophets, discerners and healers. Of course, we need to avoid like the plague any lip service to the cult of personality but we need to do this without jettisoning the reality and the immediacy of the personal. By all means let there be two or three ministers in an individual church but let them be known as ministers and let their office be valued insofar as it embodies the gift of the church's ministry.

Above all the freshness and excitement created by the rediscovery of the gifts of the Spirit there stands the more intensely personal and "still more excellent way". Love simply does not exist in the abstract and one of the most insidious weaknesses which can afflict the church is to believe that it does. The love of Christ for His church, the love of the church for the world is made concrete through the members of the Body sharing in it. It is the loving expression of the sacrificial care of the Great Shepherd that under-shepherds are appointed to feed the flock of God. We have cause to emphasise the personal nature of the authority of the Head of the church: the impersonal nature of the bureaucracy of our time is the cause of great distress, social disease and much individual bitterness. The minister's is the personal authority of Him Who lays down His life for the sheep. In effect He says: I give up my life for you. One hesitates to speak of renunciation yet it is an unavoidable component of the life of the minister. His relationship to his members demands the expenditure of his concern and activity which transcends the boundaries of a neatly constructed timetable. This involves

inevitable renunciation of many legitimate interests and experiences (I have always promised myself a visit to Wagner's *Ring* but four nights on the trot and an expenditure of £80 — assuming I am content to go on my own — makes that particular renunciation inevitable! Yes, I know it is on BBC2 but how can I get home by 8.15 p.m. on a Sunday night?)

We are in danger of losing the sense of renunciation once we ignore the process of "setting aside" a person who is called to the ministry of word and sacrament. How is the authority of the Lord made personal in the minister? When seen from a hierarchical point of view this question may be so divisive as to cause new churches and denominations to spring up! When viewed from the sacrificial all kinds of pastoral opportunities present themselves in answer.

The minister presides over the administration of the sacraments as a pastor. The flock are brought to "the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3 v.5) and fed upon the life released by the broken Body and outpoured Blood of our Saviour. Furthermore, he exercises his pastoral ministry as minister of the word and sacrament. As pastor he dispenses the sacraments and as pastor he preaches the word. The converse is also true: that he brings the authority of the word and sacrament into the pastoral situation even while engaged in non-directive counselling. Ironically this kind of counselling can become quite impersonal. The need for the counsellor not to be manipulated by the counselled often tempts him into silent non-cooperation. The minister of word and sacrament brings the authority of divine acceptance — a personification of the "I lay down my life for the sheep" principle. This aspect of the ministerial office was certainly never meant to be confined to individual cases. John Calvin, writing on "The Power of the Keys" says: "When the whole church stands, as it were, at the bar of God, confesses her guilt and finds her only refuge in the divine mercy, it is no common or light solace to have an ambassador of Christ present, invested with a mandate of reconciliation, by whom she may hear her absolution pronounced".

The minister of the word and sacraments brings into every pastoral situation the dimension of the eternity of the One whom he represents. What is so often needed in our church life is space in which to make decisions or to grow in personality. Take, for example, an emergency which is suddenly foisted upon a church. It is no exaggeration to say that to represent the Eternal at such a time gives a breathing space for the spirit to rise above the noise created by the demands of the immediate. The cultivation of quietness and the poise of the unhurried may be communicated simply by the minister being there. In this connection it is not presumptuous of a minister to refuse to be moulded by a church into a particular type consistent with its own self-image. After all, he personalises the universal church. He is called to a ministry which is not to be restricted locally. The Master's call to go into all the world is acutely to be heard through the exercise of his vocation, and this leads me on to say:

III. I believe in the minister because I believe in the Call. It is the glory of the ministry that the call, an implicit agreement in a covenant relationship between God and His people, is localised and individualised towards a particular servant and in a particular context. It is not presumption to describe the offering of oneself for the Christian ministry as responding to that same divine

drawing power as was manifested in the call of the great saints of God. Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul, may be giants upon the scene of personal summons to divine service, but the minister stands in the same tradition. He has the knowledge that he can ultimately do no other than offer himself in this way; for him to do otherwise would be to turn away from pressing on "toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus". He has to recognize that to do otherwise would be flagrant disobedience. It is possible that readers of these words may be reminded of their own uniquely agonising, fearful hiatus. While acutely conscious of personal unworthiness and unfitness and a sense of outrageous presumption, they began to follow what just remotely might be the call of God, because to turn away would have been an even greater blasphemy.

The fathers may remember the presidential address given at the Baptist Union Assembly in London on Monday, 23rd April, 1923; the brethren certainly won't! It was given by the then Principal of Rawdon College, Dr. W.E. Blomfield and very hard-hitting it was, too! He said we need more ministers and especially more well-equipped ministers. The churches had to get a worthier conception of the ministerial office. In their justifiable repudiation of sacerdotalism they had swung to another extreme. The ministry was often thought of as a mere profession. In some cases, the minister was regarded as a hired servant of the people. "The minister was primarily God's elect — a prophet commissioned from above. It was impossible to think too highly of such a vocation. Every true minister was the object of God's choice, neither a mere volunteer nor the servant of a congregation". (I know some of us would want to quarrel with the 'servant' bit, but the good Doctor probably had in mind an 'Upstairs/Downstairs' relationship). "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you". Why these words when applied to the ministry should ever be thought to induce smugness is beyond me, particularly if they were spoken on the night on which our Lord was betrayed.

His calling is a striking example of His *agape* love in action. We have every right to re-phrase Charles Wesley's words: "He hath chosen, He hath chosen us because He would choose". It is right that a church should seek also to listen to the echoes of God's call to an individual. The evident gifts of a church member might focus the attention of the church upon the ministry as a possible sphere for the use of those gifts, but those gifts can only be the equipping of one already divinely nominated for the work of the ministry. "But when He Who had set me apart before I was born and had called me through His grace was pleased to reveal His Son to me in order that I might preach Him" (Gal. 1 v. 15, 16).

It ought to be stressed though, that the call to the ministry is not the call to the absorption into and the preservation of the status quo of a privileged establishment. The holy ministry is not a sanitized one. It is created in order that God may still confront men with the fact of Christ. Daniel Jenkins likens the call to being: "... denied the blessedness, the happy fortune of those who have not seen the wounds of Christ, and yet have the grace to believe". He goes on to say: "He must see and believe, that he may testify to others. He must see in His hands the print of the nails, and put his fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into His side; that is to say, he must know something of the depth and the agony and the infinite burden of the cosmic wounds of Christ by

which we are healed, that he may proclaim with conviction to his brethren that He is indeed his Lord and his God and that there is no other who can speak God's word of redeeming peace but He". However, there is a blessedness of seeing and it is given for the purpose of continually summoning the church to confidence in the Lord of glory. It seems to me that the church growth movement should never be divorced from the theology of hope — or let James Stewart put it in another way: "True Gospel comfort never plays down to natural weakness; it lifts up to supernatural strength ... there is no comfort short of victory." The one upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests is the one who has been appointed to preach good news to the poor, release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind.

While leaving at the end of a performance of *Gerontius* a friend said to me, apropos Dame Janet Baker's 'Angel': "It would be worth a fiver just to hear her sing 'Alleluia' ". In the same spirit I would declare that it would be worth travelling 400 miles and back again just to hear a Taizé brother say "Seigneur" — breathless adoration, deepest affection, intimate knowledge and profound experience all lie behind the way in which the word is uttered. To me it epitomises the nature of the relationship between the called and the Caller.

But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
At every word,
Me thoughts I heard one calling, Childe:
And I reply'd, My Lord.

Not for one minute am I denying that new forms of Christian ministry are coming into being at the behest of the Lord of the church, nor would I question that it is given to people other than ordained ministers to share in a prominent way in the church's ministry but I do want to re-affirm my believe that above all the strategic, psychological and practical values that may or may not pertain to the office of the minister, there remains the fact that God has given to the church the gift of the minister in order to communicate, personalise and obey the word of a caring God to a needy world.

Keith Sobey

HOW I PRACTISE MY MINISTRY

I THE NATURE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The church is a fellowship of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. In its local expression it consists of a company of people who are committed to God and to each other in seeing the Kingdom of God established in their locality.

The mission of the church is:

- to do everything to God's glory and in accordance with his will as it is earnestly sought in prayer
- to bring men and women under the rule of Christ and into the committed membership of his church



WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

York House, 409 Barking Road,
Plaistow, E13 8AL

Dear Fellow Ministers,

"If you can meet with triumph and disaster"

(Rudyard Kipling)

I write this letter during a week we shall never forget! For months we had been planning for an occasion which, if not exactly a *triumph*, promised to be a colourful and exciting celebration, during which The Queen Mother was to open our new headquarters, YORK HOUSE. What in fact took place was not really a *disaster*, but nonetheless a bitter disappointment to so many people who had looked forward to 24th November. Our plans had been carefully laid — every detail had been considered and provided for — *except* a fishy incident at Windsor which meant that the Queen Mother was rushed to hospital for surgery — and, for the first time in over thirty years — had to cancel an engagement. Talk about the "best laid schemes of mice and men ..." etc!!! And if you don't mind, $\iota\chi\theta\upsilon\varsigma$ is a word I should rather not hear for a week or two!!

Of course, the real work of the West Ham Central Mission continued uninterrupted!! We went on caring for the old and the sick — the ministry of rehabilitation and healing at Greenwoods and The Parsonage carried on — we still tried to minister to those whom the Lord sent to us and entrusted to our care. Buildings may come and go — our schemes and plans may be frustrated, but by the Grace of God we try to keep faith with our residents, our supporters and Our Lord. Please pray for us as we embark upon another year's service.

By the way, The Queen Mother has expressed a wish that she might come and open York House sometime in the Spring. Please pray that she may be able to do so, and that the occasion will be even more wonderful for having been delayed.

Yours in His Service,

Trevor W. Davis,
Superintendent Minister

- to nurture new Christians and also those older in their faith so that all may share their faith, win others for Christ and his church, and demonstrate by their words and actions the love of God as shown in Jesus (see Matthew 28. 18-20)

This is to be done:

- by the way believers live their lives - both as individuals and together with other Christians
- by the way they share their lives in supporting and caring for one another and by responding to each other's joys and sorrows
- by the work they do in giving their time and financial resources for the good of the local church
- by acts of social service they perform, not only for the fellowship but also in the community, both local and widespread
- by their teaching and pastoral care within the fellowship
- by their evangelism amongst those attending church and by going out into the neighbourhood
- by the quality of their worship

II MY CALL TO THE MINISTRY

"Woe to me if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9. 16). This experience of the Apostle Paul has also been my experience. From childhood I have known an unshakeable conviction that God would have me preach "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3. 7f). My call to the ministry does not lie in one particular encounter with the Lord, but in an ongoing conviction that he would have me be his "herald".. With Martin Luther I say "Here I stand, I can do no other!".

After theological training at Cambridge, Manchester and Zurich, I taught New Testament and Greek in the Protestant Theological Faculty National University of Zaire in Kisangani. However, at that stage I did not feel my call fulfilled in training men for the ministry, and so returned to England, where since 1973 I have been the pastor of Altrincham Baptist Church, Cheshire.

III THE BIBLICAL ROLE AND AUTHORITY OF THE PASTOR

Because of the very nature of my call, preaching stands high on my list of priorities as a pastor. However, a pastor is far more than simply a preacher. My understanding of the Biblical role of the pastor is rooted in Paul's listing of Christ's gifts for ministry in Ephesians 4. 11-12:

"And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

i) the teacher

A pastor is by definition a teacher. Just as the chief duty of a shepherd is to feed his flock by ensuring they have pasture, so a chief duty of a pastor is to feed his flock by teaching them from the Word of God. This is made clear in Ephesians 4, where one definite article covers

both words - the pastor is the teacher. As a pastor I have been set aside to devote myself to "Prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6.4).

ii) the equipper

A pastor is called "to equip the saints for the work of ministry". Far from monopolizing ministry, he is called to multiply ministry. God has given gifts to his church - the pastor's task is to encourage the use of these gifts, both within and without the church. In the words of Hans Ruedi Weber: "The laity are not helpers of the clergy so that the clergy can do their job, but the clergy are helpers of the whole people of God, so that the laity can do their job". Indeed Paul's language in Ephesians 4.12 suggests that where the members of the body are not exercising their ministry, then the church's mission is crippled and its outreach is as effective as a fisherman seeking to catch fish with gaping holes in his nets (NB *katartize* in the context of surgery could be applied to the setting of broken bones; while in Matthew 4.21 it is applied to the mending of nets.)

iii) the overseer

the pastor acts as a "bishop" (episkopos/"overseer"), who oversees the flock, whose task it is to "care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son" (Acts 20.28). Ezekiel's job description of the Good Shepherd is relevant: "I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over" (Ezekiel 34.16).

This overseeing will inevitably involve counselling and visiting. However, while it is the pastor's task to see that all the members of the fellowship are "covered", it is not necessary for him to constantly visit them all. For there are others who may and should share in the pastoral work.

iv) the evangelist

Paul in Ephesians 4. 11 distinguishes between the evangelist and the pastor-teacher. However, although there are men and women who have particular evangelistic gifts, and whose gifts should be clearly recognised in the church (why do so many evangelists operate in para-church organisations?), no pastor worth his salt can be unconcerned for the lost. Like the Great Shepherd of the sheep, he will seek "the other sheep" who belong to the fold (John 10.16). Following the injunction of Paul to Timothy, he will endeavour to "do the work of an evangelist", and so "fulfill" his "ministry" (2 Timothy 4.5). Of course he will not be alone in this task - he will seek to encourage the evangelists within his church to exercise their ministry.

v) the leader

Last but not least, the pastor is the leader. Indeed the very metaphor suggests leadership. It is no accident that in the ancient world the term "shepherd" was used as a title for kings and rulers. Just as a shepherd leads his flock, so the pastor should lead his people. This

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To the Readers of the Fraternal

Dear Friends,

“Malicious Persons”

Most of our Churches have deemed it wise to extend their fire policies to cover damage by malicious persons. This cover is only available if the risk of riot and civil commotion is also insured. This latter used to cause some amusement a few years ago, but unhappily public disorder and widespread property damage have become familiar to many at first hand and to the rest of us in the our newspapers and on our T.V. screens.

However, for almost every church malicious damage, or as it is familiarly known, vandalism is a daily risk. We are dealing with a steady stream of claims for damage to churches by stone throwing and other wanton acts of destruction. One slightly technical point deserves mention. Damage by theft, e.g. breaking a window to gain entry and steal is not covered as malicious damage; this is covered by Theft insurance. On the other hand if a thief whilst on the premises indulges in wanton damage entirely unconnected with his “trade” as a thief this is quite sensibly treated as malicious damage.

The devil has never been a respecter of churches and he finds many idle hands today to do his work. Insurance can provide the means of repair, but cannot remove the distress caused by desecration. It behoves all who have the care of property to make the surroundings as secure as possible and clear of ammunition such as builder’s rubble and old bricks. A few minutes work by “malicious persons” can result in hundreds of pounds worth of damage!

Yours sincerely,

M.E. Purver
General Manager

leadership aspect of the pastoral ministry receives explicit recognition in several of the New Testament letters: e.g. Paul speaks of elders "ruling" (1 Timothy 5.17); their leadership is to be "respected" (1 Thessalonians 5. 12,13) and indeed followed (Hebrews 13.17: "obey your leaders and submit to them"). The service (ministry) a pastor gives to his church is to lead.

However, leadership does not involve spiritual dictatorship. Three aspects of such leadership should be carefully noted. In the New Testament leadership is always

- **shared.** The "Monarchical episcopate" enjoyed by many Baptist churches receives no justification in Scripture. In the New Testament church there was a plurality of leadership: e.g. Acts 15.23; 20.28; Philippians 1.1.
- **non-coercive.** Pastoral leadership is always a servant ministry, which leaves people free to accept or not accept its direction. See 1 Peter 5. 2,3: "Tend the flock of God that is in your charge... do not dominate".
- **accountable,** in the first place to God (Hebrews 13.17), but also to the church. Thus Matthew 18. 15-20 suggests that ultimate authority rests in the meeting together of the church's members. This is confirmed by Luke's account of the Council of Jerusalem, where a decision of major importance was made by the apostles and elders, but ratified by the church (Acts 15. 2,22,28). Such accountability, however, does not rob the pastoral office of authority. Rightly understood, the church is appointing its leaders, has delegated to them authority, authority which the leaders are free to exercise until the church withdraws its recognition of them.

IV MY FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS PASTOR

i) **as leader**

As pastor God has called me to lead my people in fulfilling the Great Commission of Matthew 28. As a church we are in the business of making disciples - it is my task to ensure that we are not only winning people for Christ and his church, but also giving them the kind of teaching that will enable them to grow in their faith, discover and develop their gifts, and then go out and win others.

Leadership involves vision. True, as pastor I can claim no monopoly of inspiration - a sign of the new age of the Spirit is that young men shall see visions and old men dream dreams. (Acts 2. 17)!

Nevertheless, I have been set aside to lead. This involves making time to think and pray and discern God's direction, and then share it with the church at large. On an annual basis I seek to set goals - against which later achievements can be measured. Leadership must be shared. In part I share the leadership with my Pastoral Associate. In part I share the leadership with my deacons. In our church the deacons combine the function of a diaconate with that of an

eldership: i.e. as well as assuming responsibility for the overall finance, fabric and administration of the church, they provide general pastoral oversight of the church, which involves supplying the dimensions of vision and leadership. At this point an element of tension is introduced. For the leadership of pastor and deacons is subject to the Church Meeting, which in human terms is the final decision-making body of the church. In fact in Altrincham we have a monthly mid-week Church Meeting, in which members seek "to submit ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and stand under the judgment of God, that they may know what is the mind of Christ". However, in this process of discovery the voices of those who are the acknowledged leaders of the church carry particular weight. There would thus have to be strong and compelling reasons for a deacons' recommendation to be overturned.

But to return to my own personal leadership: in administrative terms this is exercised as I chair the monthly deacons' meetings and church meetings, for each of which I have the ultimate say in the shape of the agenda. It is also exercised during the week through the church office, which is responsible for translating many of my ideas into action.

Even more importantly spiritual leadership is exercised through my pulpit ministry on a Sunday. Thus through my very attitude as well as through my exhortation my people - for good or ill! - are being led along a particular pathway of faith. A different kind of leadership is exercised in the conducting of worship. As a pastor, I and not another (e.g. a minister of music) - am responsible for leading my people in celebrating the great acts of God. True, members are encouraged to participate in music, Scripture reading, praying, sharing of testimonies and the like, but the ultimate responsibility for the liturgical structure is mine. The structure of the Sunday morning service tends to be comparatively formal and traditional, whereas the evening service is contemporary and youthful in spirit: however, in both I seek to make the worship of God pre-eminent.

Finally, leadership involves delegation. This aspect, however, is best dealt with under my role as "equipper".

ii) **as teacher**

Much of my time is given to the preparation of the Sunday sermons. With a morning and evening service I normally have two sermons a week to prepare. The morning service in particular is a teaching service, when I will often preach my way Sunday by Sunday through a particular book of the Bible. By and large we deal with the Old Testament in the autumn, the Gospels in the spring and the Epistles in the summer. The evening service tends to have more the outsider in mind (it is in fact the better attended service). Yet even then there is a substantial body of teaching. I believe very firmly that we are called to love the Lord our God not just with our hearts, but also with our minds (Luke 10.27). To aid the teaching process, almost always I use an over-head projector for my sermons. Midweek most of the teaching is

done in small groups. Here I am responsible for either writing the material or for supplying it. The only small group of which I regularly take charge is the Sunday afternoon baptismal class; this gives me an opportunity to get to know in depth the baptismal candidates who attend for a certain period of time (ten to fifteen weeks) before and after their baptism.

A limited amount of teaching also takes place in the deacons and church meetings. Thus from time to time I produce discussion papers: e.g. on authority, on the link between baptism and church membership, on the role of deacons, on the ministry of healing.

iii) **as equipper**

As pastor I have sought to equip my people for ministry through the setting up of five task-orientated ministry teams. In this way people's gifts for leadership have been released, and through them the mission of the church fulfilled.

- 1) the **Social Action Team** identifies and meets areas of social need within the community.
- 2) the **Evangelism Team's** task is to encourage the church to 'by all means save some'.
- 3) the **Nurturing Team** is responsible for all the small group activity in the church and through these groups seeks to encourage not simply a better understanding of the faith, but also deeper relationships with one another and a greater openness to God himself.
- 4) the **Development Team** seeks to draw out people's natural and spiritual gifts, so that they can be used to greatest effect within the Body.
- 5) the **Pastoral Team** co-ordinates the wider work of visiting and shares with me the workload of counselling and general pastoring.

In terms of structure these teams are

- directly responsible to the diaconate and through the diaconate to the church meeting.
- headed by a deacon, whose task it is to take the initiative in drawing up the agenda and seeing that decisions are carried out. As pastor I am merely an ex-officio member of each team.
- compact in size. The teams are responsible for thinking and praying through possible courses for action, and not necessarily for the doing of the work themselves.

A considerable amount of my time is spent sitting on these committees. At times I would much prefer to be 'out and about' on my own. And yet through this team-work I enable many more to be involved in ministry, and thus the mission of the church is more effectively forwarded.

iv) as "overseer"

Reference has already been made to the pastoral team - currently composed of a deacon and his wife, my Pastoral Associate, my wife and myself. On a regular basis we come together to review the pastoral caseload.

Pastoral care, however, is not limited to the pastoral team. Pastoral care is exercised through the many small groups, as well as through the sectional activity groups of the church. Needless to say, problems are referred back to me!

Although much of my counselling takes place in my office and in my home, I make it a priority to meet with people where they are. On as many afternoons and evenings as possible I will seek to visit people in their homes. In particular I will visit those going through various of life's crises (birth, death, marriage etc!); "new" people who have just begun to attend our church; parents of young people requesting baptism (many of our young people come from non-Christian homes); church leaders (I believe I need to cultivate a particular relationship with those with whom I share my ministry). In addition, of course, there is the visiting of the hospitalised and the housebound, and the 'general' visiting. However, much of this can be shared. As far as church discipline is concerned, formally this is exercised through the diaconate and the Church Meeting. Thus the roll is carefully revised every year by the diaconate, who if necessary will appoint visitors to meet with those for whom we are concerned. In most cases we are dealing with those who have begun to lapse in their attendance. However, on occasions, as a Church Meeting we have had to strike off the membership those who have committed some grave moral error and remain impenitent.

Discipline is also exercised informally. At times this may take place in the small group or in some of the sectional activities of the church (e.g. amongst the young people). At other times discipline is exercised through the Pastoral Team, who long before names will have reached the diaconate or the Church Meeting will have sought to deal with the matter.

v) as evangelist

Although I do not see myself primarily gifted as an evangelist, nonetheless I seek to engage in an evangelistic ministry through my visiting, through my involvement in the Evangelism Team, and in particular through my preaching. In my experience baptismal services offer the greatest opportunity for presenting the Gospel, for on such occasions we find that many non-Christian relatives and friends are present.

V TENSIONS IN MY MINISTRY

As can be imagined, all kinds of tensions arise as I seek to exercise the kind of pastoral ministry described above:-

- with the kind of structure we have developed there is the tension between efficient management and being 'open' to the leading of God's spirit
 - with the demands that arise from the management of a large corporate structure there is the tension between time-consuming administration and the necessary preparation for the ministry of the Word. The creation of a church office does not ease the burdens of administration - it multiplies them!
 - with the natural desire to develop the institution of the church, there is the tension between going for growth and making disciples. But to go for growth *per se* is to confuse transfer growth with conversion growth, and indeed runs perilously near to making an idol of growth.
 - there is the tension between numerical growth, spiritual growth, and indeed incarnational growth. Or to put it another way, there is the tension between growing up in Christian maturity, growing together in love, growing out in service to the community, and growing more in adding new Christians to the fellowship.
 - there is the tension between business and fruitfulness. Constantly one needs to re-assess one's priorities
 - with the emphasis on every-member-ministry there is the tension in the church generally between over-activity and family life.
 - with all the demands of pastoral care, organisation and preparation there is the tension between one's responsibilities to one's family and to the church. Although the appointment of a Pastoral Associate was made to ease the load, in many cases it simply increased the load, in the sense that the work just expands and multiplies.
- In addition to the tensions within local ministry, there is also the tension between local and "trans-local ministry". In my own case there are constant calls to sit on regional and national committees, writing assignments on a one-off and regular basis, invitations to preach which if all accepted would scarcely leave a Sunday at home... I like to believe that God is calling me to a wider ministry than my own local church, and yet if my church is to know continued growth then in the end it must receive priority!

Paul Beasley-Murray

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Holidays 1983

The Surrey & North East Hampshire Baptist Assn. (formerly Home Counties Baptist Assn.) has a fully equipped seven-berth 31 foot caravan on a pleasant orchard site on the outskirts of Bognor Regis. Preference is given to Ministers, for whom the charges range from £21 to £48 per week according to season. Further details from Mrs E.M. Price, 'Grassendale', Ricksons Lane, West Horsley, Leatherhead, Surrey. KT24 6HU.

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Old and new friends welcome. Please write as soon as possible as many were disappointed for their dates in 1982. Further details can be secured from Sydney Clark, 73, The Street, Adisham, Canterbury, Kent CT3 3JN. Requests for firm bookings with dates, and alternatives if possible, can be made from now on. Please include stamped addressed envelope. Please state number in family, and leaving the choice of bungalow to me has worked satisfactorily over the past two years.

Preaching Genesis I-XI

I asked some of my preacher friends what they would like to find in an article on Preaching Genesis I-XI (it's a real tea-time conversation stopper!). Some said they wouldn't bother to read such an article; which was honest and in itself revealing. Others raised a number of issues which they felt prevented them from dealing with the passage except in a 'devotional' way. But many made helpful and constructive suggestions about how they had tackled these chapters and about some of the basic questions underlying their exegesis. As a Christian 'scientist' I hope this article makes some small contribution to restoring our confidence in preaching these vital chapters and perhaps in sparking some enthusiasm to examine them afresh. It is not always easy to wade through the welter of semi-scientific books which gush from the press on this subject so I have spent some time on foundational issues before giving any preaching suggestions. These are some of the issues we will be looking at:

1. Why bother with Genesis I-XI?
2. On what basis do we interpret these chapters? — Hermeneutics.
3. This raises some unavoidable problems which we may only touch upon:
 - i) Creation ex nihilo?
 - ii) Adam & Eve?
 - ii) Evolution?
 - iv) A Universal Flood?
4. What is the present state of play? Has the Booksellers Association got a vested interest in the debate? Where is the lunatic fringe and am I part of it?
5. Some seed-thoughts for preaching and teaching.

If these are not the sort of things that you are looking for, then read no further.

Beginnings Matter

In an age when man in the West is increasingly oblivious of his Creator, there is a real need again to assert the Christian teaching regarding origins — of the Universe, Man and the Flaw in the system. To assert it confidently, yet humbly (Ps.8.3,4; Job 42.1-6); being certain where the Bible is unmistakably clear, and hesitating to make dogma of what the Scriptures leave in mystery (Is.55.8,9).

The last century has seen developments in anthropology and a burgeoning of the behavioural sciences which have in their turn given rise to various sinister 'world outlooks' such as Marxism and Nazism. Wise men still build their houses on rocks and it is the responsibility of the church in every age to uncover the shaky foundations of a secular world and its conclusions. Not that we are to fall into anti-science, anti-intellectual, self-righteous bigotry. Rather in humility our task is to point out the consequences and responsibilities of living in a God-governed cosmos — consequences for

every area of knowledge; for there can be no independence even for the physical sciences if the world is held in being by the One God. The worms in the cheese may not discuss the nature of cheese while saying that the arguments about the existence of cows are quite a separate issue!

Then there are of course more specifically theological reasons why these opening chapters of the Bible are so important. But let us at this point simply summarise the answers to 'Why bother with Genesis I-XI':

1. To see the beginning of God's plan of salvation for mankind and the universe. (Rom.8.19ff)
2. To provide a proper basis for world history and purpose.
3. To establish some important principles of Biblical interpretation.
4. To understand the relation between science and the Bible.
5. To counterbalance the subtly anti-faith theories of creation popularly taught as fact.

Know your Presuppositions

There can be no such thing as an entirely objective view of Scripture. We all bring certain baggage with us whenever we travel in the land of hermeneutics — ideas that we have picked up through our training, the media, our schooling, our experience of God, and so on. In certain areas of Biblical interpretation these presuppositions which we bring with us become decisive in our understanding of the text. It is annoying that God should let Genesis I-XI be one of those passages which even conservative evangelicals have come to approach in different ways. Perhaps it's to keep us humble? It is certainly no new thing for Christians to be at odds with the world and often with each other over these chapters: whether it was Galileo or Copernicus versus the Church and Aristotelianism, or Augustine fighting neo-Platonism, or Paul taking the Gnostics to task. What are the main methods of approach?

1. Ignore the last 300 years. (very popular amongst...no I had better not say.)
2. Ignore Genesis I-XI! (Equally popular amongst..)
3. Myth/Poetry — theological truths in a poetic framework. (cf Ps.33)
4. Literal/History — the opening 11 chapters are as historical as the rest of Genesis.
5. True-myth — similar to miracles which are enacted parables — seen supremely in the Resurrection. (See Note 2.)

The real debate is between 3 and 4/5, and even then it is not so much a theological or even hermeneutical debate as a clash of methodologies. (I have moved reluctantly from 3 to 4/5 over the past 15 years — my bias will show.) There is the 'Complementary' approach to Scripture — "the Bible tells us how to go to heaven and not how the heaven goes!" or 'Science tells us 'How' and the Bible tells us 'Why'". This traditional evangelical approach still largely supported by the 'IVP' school has come under considerable fire

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of late, especially from the rising tide of 'Creationists' and supporters of 4/5. It is no longer easy to write these off as a lunatic fringe of hyper-fundamentalists. They have attacked the 'complementary' view on at least four fronts:

- a) Historical — the majority of the Church for the most part of the Christian Era has understood Genesis I-XI as true, although not exhaustive, history; scientifically accurate where it touches on such matters.
- b) Philosophical — the complementary approach is a form of dualism: there is the 'real' world of empirical science and the 'spiritual' world of religious experience. Biblical monism insists on a 'wholeness' in God's dealing with Man which warns that we ignore God and His world at our peril just as much in scientific pursuit as theological study. (See Note 1.)
- c) Theological — if the Bible is its own best commentary, then there is little doubt that other parts of Scripture refer to Genesis I-XI as historically factual. It is only anti-supernaturalism and pressure from the secular academic world which has led Christians to interpret these chapters in any other way.
- d) Experimental — if God is relegated to a Divine clock-maker who simply wound the system up and then retired, then this inhibits any expectant faith that God will intervene in any tangible way in our lives. (Pascal said he could never forgive Descartes for just such a mechanical view of God — it has been around for quite a long time.)

These arguments are all well marshalled in many of the books in the bibliography and in the relatively new but thriving Biblical Creation Magazine. (The Biblical Creation Society is British, thorough, at times aggressive but very helpful for any who wish to keep abreast of development and writing in this area — 16, Woodview Avenue, Chingford, London, E4 9SL.) All this is to say that the non-scientist need not feel intimidated into silence if his presuppositions and consequent interpretation of Scripture contradict the consensus of scientific opinion. Of course we must all beware of pontificating on subjects which we have mastered from the People's Handbook of Entire World Knowledge (Abridged, with Pictures), but we can claim a growing support from the Christian scientific community for a literal and historical treatment of Genesis I-XI if we so wish. Science has been wrong, or only partially right, for most of its history and even the edifice of Darwinian evolution is beginning to totter under new theories of punctuated equilibria coming from the secular world. The twentieth century science of origins may well be wrong. The creationist's detailed account of beginnings may well be wrong. But the Bible is right in whatever it asserts and however hard we polish the glass, we may never forget that we still see in a mirror dimly, for God constantly breathes upon it.

Preaching Points

It would be foolish to try to tackle all eleven chapters and so there follow some notes which I have preached from for the first three chapters. I have

avoided most of the critical questions which the commentaries discuss and many of which hinge around the presuppositions which you adopt.

CREATION — FACT OR FICTION

Intro — the importance of beginnings. (Helmut Thielicke's excellent sermons in **How the World Began (1964)** have good illustrative material on this).

- A Why bother with Genesis One?** — a popular form of the earlier part of this article.
- B What's in a Story?** — the Bible comprises different sorts of literature; poetry, prophecy, history etc. An imaginative romp through the myth/liturgy/science/theology/history categories when you will probably have to nail your own colours to the mast.
- C What's in a chapter?** — If you are planning a 48-week series, there's quite a lot here! — God had no beginning. The triune God was at work in creation (Gen.1.2,26;3.22; Is.6.8; Jn.1.1-3;17.5,24; I Cor.8.6; Eph.1.4; Col.1.15-20; II Tim.1.9; Heb.1.2,10; I Pet.1.20 etc.) Not that God 'needed' a created universe, for the Trinity eternally loved and found fulfilment in one another. Love and communication therefore re eternal and basic in 'being' and eternal life. God created nothing (!) and from it created (this unusual form of the Hebrew word usually indicates 'ex nihilo' — out of nothing) the universe (Gen.1.1), conscious life (1.21), and Man (1.27 and 5.2). From His Creation God separated ('let there be...') the different elements of the universe as we know it. God 'spoke' things into being (cf. Jn.1; Heb.11.3; II Pet.3.5), and they were 'very good' — like God. Even now God's Creation points to the Creator. (Rom.20)
- D Life on Earth** — television provides an endless stream of material for discussion and opening up the ideas of hypotheses and presuppositions. Is the earth four and a half thousand million years old? Did Adam have a navel? We may believe popular TV 'facts', but we do not have to. It is safe to say that no one knows for sure.
- E So What?** — Praise God for His marvellous creation. (Rom.1.21-22; Rev. 11 and countless Psalms) The Sun is a pretty third-rate star, only burning energy at the rate of 4 million tons every second! There are lots more far bigger 'suns' in God's universe. In fact, if you could count to three million every second and you kept counting for over a hundred million years, you would have counted the number of stars God spoke into being! And if you managed to travel at the speed of light (8 times round the world in one second) it would only take you 15,600 million years to cross the universe that we are aware of! "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me..." (Ps.139.6)

Trust God, for all history is going somewhere, even when it appears in chaos. God who created will dissolve (II Pet.3.3-7; Heb.12.27; Matt.24) His work and transform it, when finally, as at the beginning, all creation will glorify him. (Rev.5.3-14)

MAN — APE OR ADAM?

Intro — Desmond Morris's popular books like **The Naked Ape** are fascinating and well worth reading, but like much current literature and many TV documentaries they portray man as only a well developed animal — and he is not!

A The Nature of Man.

1) **The Image of God.** (Gen.1.26,27;5-2;9.6) The OT reminds us of the frailty of Man (Ps.8;90), likening him to a beast (Ecc.3.18-21) or a worm (Job 4.19-21;25.8). But still Psalm 8 dares to assert that “you made him a little less than God”. Man is different from the animals: he is a responsible (Gen.2.19), reasoning and communicative, loving being, with the unique potential for relationship with his Maker. The western concept of Man as mind, body, soul (and/or spirit) is part of our Greek heritage and the Jews saw Man as a complete unity; so there is not just a God-part of us, but we are in every respect in the image of God, a living being (Gen.2.7). Man is created to stand before God.

2) **From one stock.** If all men everywhere are descended from Adam and Eve then there is no room for racism. (The Theory of Evolution may be used, and has been, to support racial discrimination.)

3) **Sabbath Rest** — is part of the Maker's instructions for the good of the product. But the Christian Sunday does not necessarily equal Sabbath!

4) **Freedom, Love & Obedience** are closely intertwined throughout Scripture (cf. Jn.14.15,21,23;15.10), so there is nothing special about the tree — it is a simple test of obedience (Gen.2.16,17). Man is free to choose to obey and thus love God.

B The Dignity of Woman.

1) **The crown of Creation** with all of A of course true.

2) **Like Christ** in relation to his Father (Jn.8.29), woman's role is that of 'helper' to man. The balance has been grossly marred by sin, but the anthropology of much of the Women's Lib movement is wrong — even if we agree with some of their aims — Gen.2 supports the rest of Scripture, that man and woman were created for complementry and not identical roles.

3) **Marriage** is restoring the mystical union between man and woman (2.24) that was there in creation. Man & Woman are essentially one flesh as God is but One God.

C What about Evolution?

1) **What is it?** — in a nutshell — life emerged from the primeval soup and eventually all other life-forms evolved, often on a survival of the fittest basis.

2) Must we have it? — “Evolution is unproved and unprovable. We believe it because the only alternative is special creation which is unthinkable”. (Sir Arthur Keith in an introduction to Darwin’s “Origin of Species”.) It’s all a matter of presupposition again!

3) What is ‘special creation’? — the view that God created different species (or ‘kinds’ (Gen.1.24,25)) which then gave rise to all the variety within that species. (eg. ‘dogs’.)

4) What is Theistic Evolution? — the belief that God used the process of evolution to ‘create’ man whom he then ‘breathed into’ (Gen.2.7) to make different from the animals.

5) Danger! Whether evolution is right or wrong, the evil one will use it to pre-occupy Christians and mislead pagans.

D To Shout about:

1) Man is not a cosmic accident but a creature of God.

2) God cares about him and wants a relationship with him.

3) To ignore the Creator is dangerous and futile (Rom.1).

The Fall — Bane or Blessing?

There is only room for headings here, but digging in the commentaries will produce a wealth of material.

A Paradise Lost.

- 1) The Serpent
- 2) The Woman
- 3) The Judgement
- 4) The Results

a) Death — spiritual separation (3.23) and physical decomposition. (3.19)

b) Toil — not a curse on work (2.15) but hard labour for survival. (3.19)

c) Fear & Shame — symbolised in trying to conceal and deceive. (3.7,10)

d) Guilt — all men in Adam stand condemned before God. (Rom.5)

e) Discord — sin does not unite men before God but isolates. (3.12 and ch.11)

f) False Reasoning — Man blames God (3.12) and still does!

g) Government — true democracy is now impossible and society must be structured. (3.16)

B Paradise left standing. God at once accepts responsibility for Fallen Man (3.21) and the NT shows that we enjoy now more blessings than Adam lost. (Eph.1.3 etc)

Conclusions

“By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen were made out of things which do not appear.” (Heb.11.3) If true theology is still done upon our knees, then the story of Beginnings is primarily for the worshipper and we should not be surprised that this will at times produce clashes with a non-worshipping world. We have only to look out on our ‘civilised’ world to see that “claiming to be wise they became fools”. It is not so much that God obscures knowledge in our Fallen world, but His Word certainly teaches us that the truth in every area may only be grasped by faith — scientific truth as well as religious truth, for any basic separation of these is a false premise. (cf.Lk.10.21).

We should be taking hold of these chapters and proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ from them, seen in the eternal purposes of God. The eyes of faith can still see more of worth than the microscopes and telescopes of science, and it is up to the great company of preachers to point men and women back to their origins in order that they might understand their present and future.

NOTE 1

This dualism is not much more than a re-assertion of Kant’s distinction between phenomena and noumena and Francis Schaeffer’s books have done much to break down such distinctions in Christian thinking. Perhaps for too long now scientists and theologians have gone their separate ways and both have suffered in consequence. This divergence has led to the lack of overall purpose and direction in scientific studies (read Arthur Koestler’s **The Sleepwalkers** (1959) which in its turn has given rise to today’s scientific malaise. (See Professor Scorer **The Clever Moron** (1976)) The last twenty years or so have seen a healthy re-emphasis on the ‘wholeness’ of man’s knowledge and the dangers of ‘departmentalising’, which has sometimes been encouraged by a strictly utilitarian emphasis in many of our colleges and universities. (Wolfhart Pannenberg **Theology and Philosophy of Science** (1976) and T.F. Torrance **Theology in Reconciliation** (1975) amongst others have both made this point in different ways recently.)

NOTE 2

C.S. Lewis writing to his friend Greeves about his recent conversion: “What Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story I didn’t mind it at all: again, that if I met the idea of a god sacrificing himself to himself...I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it: again, that the idea of the dying and reviving god (Balder, Adonis, Bacchus) similarly moved me provided I met it anywhere except (*italics*) in the Gospels...Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the other, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened.”

Lewis develops this more in **Myth became Fact**, an essay in **God in the Dock** (1971). This concept partly answers the question why God chose to create in the way outlined in Genesis 1 if it is to be taken literally. This true-myth category is really only literalism with an extra added. The mythical elements in the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, which find their echoes in other Ancient Near Eastern myths as well as Norse legend and so on; these elements not only appeal to something mystical and innate in Man, but provide a vehicle for teaching and understanding. Men through all Ages have been able to grasp the truths of the opening chapters of the Bible when they have examined them in faith. God was able to create and work in the early stages of the cosmos in whatever way suited His purposes, and who is to say that a literal interpretation of Genesis I-XI is not consonant with God's great and eternal plan? Anyone want a PhD subject?

Books

Apart from those already mentioned in the course of the article, and as many commentaries as you can lay hands on, the following additional books are helpful (I have tried to choose a representative cross-section):
Emil Brunner, **The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption**, (1966)
Eichrodt, **Theology of the Old Testament**. (1978)
E. Enoch, **Evolution or Creation?** (1967)
F.A. Filby, **Creation Revealed**. (1977)
Frankfort et al, **The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man**. (1977)
James Houston, **I believe in the Creator**. (1979)
E.V. Pearce, **Who Was Adam?** (1976)
Francis Schaeffer, **Genesis in Space & Time**. (1973)
Thielicke, **Man in God's World**. (1967)
H.F. Vos, **Genesis & Archaeology**. (1963)
Claus Westermann, **Creation**. (1974)
Monty White, **What about Origins?** (1978)
Whitcomb & Morris, **The Genesis Flood**. (1974)

Two Important Items from the Committee

The Library will be sold! Following an earlier decision to close down our Library it has now been decided to sell the books and devote all of the profit to our members in Eastern Europe through EUROLIT. We have asked for a stand in the Exhibition Hall at the Nottingham Assembly, at which we hope to have all the books, as well as the April Fraternal. We are sure that all members will wish to help provide books for our European colleagues — so come and buy and help others!

The Benevolent Fund: At the Pastoral Session this year without giving advance notice we reverted to the former custom of taking up an offering for our Benevolent Fund. This produced a magnificent sum of £165.64, for

which we are most grateful. It so happens that there has been a large number of justified calls on that Fund this year so that we have also added to it from the General Reserve in order to be able to make a worthy response in this way on your behalf. The Committee has therefore decided once again to take up an offering at the Pastoral Session at Nottingham. We are giving advance notice of this so that those present may give even more generously.

Incidentally, we do, from time to time, receive donations for this Fund. The Treasurer is always happy to receive such earmarked gifts.

Of Interest To You

STUDENTS SETTLING

May our colleagues know His power resting upon their ministries.
Jonathan Edwards (Regents Park) to Southgate, Bury St. Edmunds
David Fort (Bristol) to Calne, Wilts
Tom Gillies (Bristol) to Pinchbeck, Spalding
Dennis Hallas (Bristol) to Broughton, Hants
Neil Riches, to Summerhill, Newport

RETIREMENT

We pray the Lord's blessing upon our brethren
Alan Kippax
Robert Fraser
Mark Musk
Ernest Madge

Charles Spooner
Horace Webb
Gordon Wylie
E.C. Gibson (Australia)

AUSTRALIA

The Union has lost one of its youngest ministers, Stephen White, pastor of the Moree church. Stephen was 34 years of age. For 18 months prior to his death he conducted a weekly Radio programme on the Moree Radio. Each talk was of a five minutes duration and many topical subjects were discussed with a direct Gospel message at the end.

Tony Cupit, General Superintendent of the Baptist Union of Victoria, (and one of our BMF members) was the lecturer at the 18th Annual lecture at the NSW Theological College.

Dr. E.G. Gibson, one of our members, has retired from the Principalship of the Queensland Theological College. We wish our brother every joy and blessing in his retirement.

Neil Cowling sends greetings to all. He has recently moved pastorates and is now serving at Corrimal, NSW.

Luis Palau recently led a Crusade in Newcastle (NSW) and a number of the Baptist churches shared in this project with much blessing.

TASMANIA

S.H. Bath, a member of BMF since 1961, has been called home.

Keith Applegate is now the Australian Director of One Step Forward. Pray for Keith in his many and varied ministries. Besides being Pastor of Launceston church he is the Editor of "Advance" and too, he keeps a watching brief on the interests of our BMF.