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Law as found in the Old Testament to a secondary position behind the ethics of the New Testament, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the apostolic exhortations.

Why should we not find a synthesis where both are represented: the ethics of the Reformation on the one hand, based as it is on the moral Law and on wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and on the other hand the ethics of the New Testament and the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Such a synthesis would lead not only to a reconciliation among different denominations, but also to regaining an integrated view of biblical teaching. We need, at least, to reverse the present-day division of our biblical inheritance.

‘Law and Spirit’—one could be tempted to call this a ‘pietistic’ solution. Seen historically, Pietism has always endeavoured to preserve intact the legacy handed down by the Reformers and the biblical insights of the Anabaptists. We could even go further. Perhaps this formula might even yield a working hypothesis for the reconciliation of Reformation orthodoxy and theological liberalism?

(Translated by Manfred W. Fleischmann)

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Paul—The Experience Within The Theology

Robert Banks

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Zadok Centre Series 2.*

The great lack among evangelical theologians, as many have remarked, is the lack of an evangelical way of doing theology. This article by Robert Banks is a fine attempt to bridge the gap created by the Enlightenment between knowing and doing. Taking Paul as a good example, Banks shows how one’s experience is integrally bound to one’s theologization. On this basis, the author also calls for new models of theological education along with a new definition of theology.

Editor

We hear conflicting voices today about the relationship between theology and experience. According to some, we must first get our theology right through Bible study, reading and reflection, and then our experience will follow the right channels. According to others, we must give first priority to our experience of God and allow that to shape our theology. Many Christians find themselves torn between these two or on the move from one to the other.

It is a pity that theology and experience have become polarized in these ways. Increasing familiarity with the Bible, and with the great Christian thinkers of the past, calls into question any sharp separation of the two or subordination of one to the other. In the biblical writings, and in the books and sermons of Augustine, Luther and Calvin, Wesley

and Kierkegaard, we find a close connection between theology and experience. The two are not confused but nor are they as strongly differentiated as they are today. The theological and experiential are found in dynamic interrelationship.

I would like to illustrate this from the writings of the apostle Paul. Paul is an excellent choice in this regard, partly because he is so often misinterpreted both as a thinker and as a man, and partly because what he said and did is normative for all who come after.

PAUL THE MAN AND THEOLOGIAN

The close integration of Paul's life and thought should make us wary of **P. 117** any attempt to discuss his thought in isolation from his life. It is impossible to abstract the content of Paul's writings from Paul the person. The two are inextricably entwined. Not as perfectly as in Jesus, who both proclaims and is the Word and invites people to follow him as well as obey his teaching. But Paul does see his life as in some sense an embodiment of the Gospel and also calls upon his readers to imitate him as well as put his teaching into practice.

I would not wish to be misunderstood here. I am not arguing that Paul's theology had its roots in human experience rather than in divine revelation. Instead I would insist that divine revelation characteristically comes through personal experience, sometimes as with Hosea, in a most devastating and painful way. I am not suggesting, therefore, that Paul's theology is subjective rather than objective. What I would say is that objective truth is not communicated apart from subjective experience of it, so that we must be careful not to set these categories over against each other in an unbiblical way. Nor am I implying that Paul's theologizing was a second-order affair and that experience was primary. As I see it, occurrences and their interpretation are interdependent and it is the combination of the two that forms the building-blocks of our theology. An emphasis on either one at the expense of the other leads to an imbalanced outlook. Only rarely do we experience an event without being granted some understanding of that event. Occasionally there may be a short interval between the two but generally they go together. So there should be a real intermingling and interaction of the two.

Paul was trained in the theological methods of his time and, in a distinctive way, employed these in his writings. In both his sermons and his writings Paul displayed considerable intellectual power. But, as Adolf Deissmann points out, he was

... far more a man of prayer, a witness, a confessor and a prophet, than a learned exegete and close thinking scholar.¹

Although, in my opinion, Deissmann underestimates the specifically theological dimension in Paul's writings and interpreted Paul too much in terms of a Romantic notion of personality, he placed his finger on a central weakness in many modern treatments of the apostle. By 'modern understanding' I do not mean only academic but also popular understandings of Paul. Both tend to view him too much in the light of **p. 118** the contemporary meaning of the word 'theologian'; i.e. as a systematic teacher and writer who was primarily interested in imposing his views on others; and to respond positively or negatively to this image of him.

Paul was more a theologian-evangelist and pastor than a theologian in the modern sense. Or, perhaps we could say, he was an evangelistic and pastoral theologian. But there

¹ A. Diessmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, New York, Harper and Row, 1957.

is something else about Paul. He invests far more of himself and his experience in his writing that we associate with most theological literature. As J. B. Lightfoot once said:

In the whole range of literature there is nothing like St. Paul's letters. Other correspondence may be more voluminous, more elaborate, more studiously demonstrative. But none is a more faithful mirror of the writer.²

It is unfortunate, therefore, that the letter least well served by commentaries on the New Testament is Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.³ All Paul's letters contain an autobiographical element, but 2 Corinthians is his most intimate and moving communication. Comparative neglect of this letter and of the autobiographical or experiential dimension in all Paul's writings has resulted in a one-sided understanding of his approach.

Nevertheless, to some extent his family upbringing left its mark on his teaching about parental nurture and household responsibilities. When we read these passages we can catch echoes of Paul's experiences as a child and youth. His pharisaic training continued to affect some of his methods of argument, use of scripture, metaphors and analogies as well as general concepts. While all of these have felt the touch of Christ and his Spirit, they are still present in some measure in his later writings. Paul's possession of Roman citizenship also shaped the course of his travels, audiences he reached and approach he adopted. In part, it also influenced his views on and manner of dealing with political authority. But his conversion and call was the most decisive experience of his formative years and therefore I would like to begin with them.

PAUL'S CONVERSION AND CALL

Paul's conversion and call obviously had a great influence on his life and work. It transformed him from a Pharisee into a Christian and his **P. 119** mission from the Jews to the Gentiles. But his conversion also had a major impact upon his theology. It began to do this from the very moment it took place. This is clear from the immediate effect it had upon his preaching and teaching: within a few days of his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road he had revised his understanding of Jewish religion as well as of Christ himself.

In the past, many writers have seen in Paul's conversion the genesis of a number of his most characteristic views.⁴ Recently a full-scale investigation of the connection between the two has demonstrated how close, both in time and in content, this was and how far-reaching were the theological effects of Paul's encounter with Christ. In the summary of the detailed exegetical arguments that make up the substance of his book on *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, the author Seyoon Kim lists the areas of Paul's thought that had their basis in the encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road.

a. It was there, in a first-hand way through the appearance of Christ to him and the commission he was given, that Paul received his first understanding of the gospel, the good news that Christ had triumphed over death and ushered in a new era in God's relations with mankind, and also received the revelation of the 'mystery', namely God's plan of salvation embodied in Christ for both the Jews and the Gentiles.

² Quoted from M. Muggeridge and A. Vidler, *Paul: Envoy Extraordinary*, London, Collins, 1972, 12.

³ A. Deissmann, op. cit., 128–130.

⁴ For example, by G. Bornkamm, J. A. T. Robinson, J. Dupont, et al.

b. It was there that Paul actually saw Jesus as the Lord exalted by God and enthroned at his right hand in fulfilment of [Psalm 110:1](#); this entailed a recognition on his part that Jesus was the Messiah who had long been promised by God and that he was also the Son of God, not just in the sense that this has been said of Israel's kings, but more profoundly in the sense of a being who stood in a unique relationship with God.

c. It was there that Paul began to realize that Jesus was the expression of God, a perception that led him ultimately to conceive Christ as the 'image' of God, and in this view of the Son who has restored the divine image and glory lost by Adam, lay the seeds of Paul's conception of believers being adopted sons of God, being transformed into Christ's image and being made a new creation.

d. It was there that Paul first glimpsed the fact that Christ had circumvented the law in establishing contact between God and mankind, that acceptance by God took place through Christ by God's grace alone and that forgiveness and reconciliation were available [p. 120](#) through him, convictions that became the foundation of some of his most characteristic teachings.⁵

Given the existence of these connections, it is no wonder that in his writings Paul regularly refers to what happened to him on the Damascus road. More than once he retold the story of his conversion (cf. [Acts 9](#) with [22](#) and [26](#)) and often he alludes to this event in his writings (as, for example, in [Gal. 1:13-17](#); [1 Cor. 15:8-11](#); [Romans 1:1](#); [Eph. 3:8-12](#); [Col. 1:25](#) and see [2 Tim. 1:11](#)).

We should not jump to the conclusion that Paul saw the full theological implications of his conversion experience only through deductive reflection on it. It is obvious from his letters how profound a part prayer played in Paul's life. In his prayers (cf. [Col. 1:9-11](#)) Paul also refers to the fact that wisdom and understanding come through and from relating to God in this way. It is clear that when he was meditating on the Scriptures, Paul was given charismatic interpretations of what certain passages meant in relation to Christ. These too were a fruitful source of theological understanding. So both praying and meditating, as well as reflecting, contributed to his developing theological as well as personal maturity.

It only remains to stress the objective nature of what was, for Paul, a deeply subjective experience and the fact that the experience itself already contained an interpretative or theological element. The fact that Paul began to preach the Gospel so soon after his conversion suggests that he quite quickly began to understand some of its theological implications, even if the developing nature of some of his ideas which we can trace in his letters (e.g. of the 'body of Christ') indicates that this was an ongoing process.

PAUL'S TASK AND SUFFERING

I would like to concentrate on the way Paul attempted to come to terms with the general thrust of his vocation. Although I will not examine the process by which this produced change in his self-understanding or the extent to which from time to time it continued to cause him perplexity, I would like to consider the fundamental effect it had upon a number of his views.

Despite the way it has often been interpreted, Paul's most celebrated letter, the letter to the Romans, is less a systematic treatise than a personal apology. It is Paul's account of how he, a Jew, came to terms with his commission to the Gentiles. According to Donald Robinson, [p. 121](#) the intimate and personal tone of the prologue and epilogue suggest that

⁵ S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1982, 330-332.

Paul cannot separate his own role from the operation of the gospel which he explains to his Gentile readers in Rome.⁶

This personal note, he says, is not present merely at the beginning and end of Romans: it pervades the whole letter. This means that the pathos with which Paul speaks of his compatriots' rejection of Christ in the central section of the letter ([Romans 9:1–2](#)) or the anguished cry, 'Who shall deliver me from this body of death?' ([Romans 7:24](#)), are not autobiographical intrusions but expressive of Paul's intention.⁷

If this is true of Romans, the most systematic of Paul's letters, what are the implications of similar personal statements elsewhere in Paul's letters?

a. In the first place, so far as Paul's central theme in Romans is concerned, Paul

is describing justification, and its results as he, an Israelite, had experienced it, this being his qualification to be the teacher to the Gentiles ...⁸ [Therefore] it is from his own experience of salvation as a member of the remnant of Israel according to the election of grace that Paul is able to speak with such assurance and joy, and is able to hold out the hope of glory to the Gentiles [and] the justification and glorification ... of the Israel that will be saved. (cf. [Romans 9–11](#))⁹

b. Mention of Paul's allusion to his own spiritual struggles in [Romans 7:24](#) brings to mind other passages, especially in Second Corinthians, where Paul draws on his own experiences to highlight the paradoxical nature of Christian existence. The autobiographical, and at times deeply moving, references throughout chapters [1](#), [2](#), [4](#), [6](#), [7](#), [11](#), [12](#) to his own weakness, anxiety, perplexity, inner tensions, outer pressures and suffering demonstrate how much Paul was aware of what was happening in and to him. These references also show how much Paul learned through these experiences and fashioned his teaching about the Christian life from them. The process is documented for us in his account of how his struggle with an ongoing physical ailment, his p. 122 'thorn in the flesh', led him through suffering, prayer, meditation and reflection to a more profound understanding of the necessary role of weakness in experiencing the power of the Spirit ([2 Cor. 12:7–10](#)).

c. Paul's experience of what he refers to as a kind of 'death' before death, also enabled him to see more deeply into the nature of Christian ministry. This 'death' was induced by both the 'fears within' and 'fightings without' ([2 Cor. 7:5](#)) that he encountered in himself and in his opponents as he went about preaching the gospel and caring for his communities. It is only as death becomes part and parcel of the believer's experience that the life of Jesus comes to visible expression. This is why Paul can take such a positive attitude towards inner and outer suffering, even going so far as to rejoice in it. This also explains why Paul is never satisfied with merely preaching the gospel of the suffering Christ but sees the need to embody that message in his own person. Unless this takes place only a theoretical statement about the gospel takes place, not a genuine imparting of it.

⁶ D. W. B. Robinson, 'The Priesthood of Paul in the Gospel of Hope', *Reconciliation and Hope: Essays in Honour of L. L. Morris*, ed. Robert Banks, Exeter, Paternoster, 1974, 232.

⁷ Cf. Robert Banks, 'Romans 7: 25a: An Eschatological Thanksgiving', *Australian Biblical Review*, 26, 1978, 34–42.

⁸ D. Robinson, *op.cit.*, 236.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, 235.

This was the lesson Paul learned when, on his first visit to Corinth, he had seen the gospel working powerfully, not despite but through his weakness ([1 Cor. 2:3ff](#)).¹⁰

d. It is interesting to note here that this experience helped Paul come to a deeper appreciation of what it meant to be incorporated 'in Christ', both in the present and in the future. The experience of Christ in the present, he saw, was as much the experience of death as of life ([Romans 6:5](#); [Galatians 2:19–20](#); [6:14](#)), and as such was nothing less than a sharing in and even extension of Christ's own suffering ([2 Cor. 1:5](#); [Col. 1:24](#)). His strong orientation towards the Last Day, as an experiential longing of the most intense kind not just as a doctrinal conviction, also sprang from the pain engendered by his ministry. He looks forward to the resurrection and transformation he will experience when the *parousia* comes ([Romans 7:24](#); [Phil. 3:10–14](#)).

e. There is also a strong likelihood, as Edwin Judge has suggested, that it was reflection on his own suffering which enabled Paul to enter into and understand the meaning of the atonement more profoundly than anyone else. In other words, it was not so much reflection on the Cross which enabled him to understand his experience of the suffering more profoundly so much as the other way round. Putting it another way, it was not primarily because he was more intellectually gifted than the other apostles that he had the most developed view of the atonement in the New Testament, but rather that, as he himself [p. 123](#) confessed, he suffered more than any of them and was forced to come to terms with that suffering.

The greater reversal of social status he suffered on becoming a Christian—he appears to have come from a relatively wealthy family and also possessed Roman citizenship—and the greater opposition he encountered as an apostle, led him into a sharper awareness of the pain of rejection, humiliation and affliction. Martin Luther's well-known response to the question, 'What is the chief qualification of a theologian?' was quite correct. He replied: 'suffering'.¹¹

So then, as Dunn says:

The role which Paul attributes to suffering and death in his soteriology is in no sense a matter of mere theory ... in all these passages Paul is talking in experiential terms: he actually experienced a new power of life and a dying of which his suffering were the most obvious manifestation; and he experienced both the life and the dying as Christ's—he was conscious of Christ in both the life and the death—they were both somehow his.¹²

This conclusion of Paul's, he says, was not simply a logical deduction but a consciousness of Christ in his suffering as well as his renewal. It does not matter, he suggests, whether we describe this process as 'mystical' or 'charismatic', so long as we are as clear as possible on the experience it describes.

PAUL'S CONTACTS AND TRAVELS

Let me focus on those aspects of Paul's itinerant lifestyle which reveal interesting links between his experience and his theology. These are the existential nature of the content of his letters; the parabolic character of some of his everyday activities; and the experiential dimension of a number of Paul's metaphors.

¹⁰ J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of the First Christians*, London, SCM, 1975, 327.

¹¹ Quoted in H. G. Haile, *Luther*, Sheldon, London, 1980, 304–305.

¹² Dunn 327, 333, 336.

a. Paul's theology is expressed in letters, some highly personal and quite brief, others more general and extensive. Most of these letters were occasioned by questions directed to him in writing or in person by members of various churches. Sometimes not. But the occasional character of Paul's writings indicates that his theology is largely a response to specific situations, not a systematic elaboration of his beliefs.

Paul himself tells us that the greatest burden he carried was the daily anxiety he felt for his converts ([2 Cor. 11:28](#)). He carried these people around in his heart. When he learned of their weakness he felt weak p. 124 himself; when he heard of their breakthroughs he celebrated with them. He bore their burdens as Christ had borne his. It was out of this Cross-like concern for and identification with his churches that his letters were written and theology formulated.

So then, Paul's theology was generated out of his prayerful and reflective encounter with real-life situations. Indeed, some of his most profound theological statements were occasioned by quite concrete, at times even mundane, issues. For example, it is in the context of a discussion of financial giving that he gives us the wonderful picture of Christ, though he was rich, becoming poor for our sakes, so that through his poverty we ourselves may become rich ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)). Echoes of Paul's yielding up of his own social and economic status—several times expressed in his writings—in accepting his commission as an apostle can be overheard in this remark. He, like Christ, had travelled this route as well and he no doubt spoke in a heartfelt way about it. One only has to think of the way he talks elsewhere about the fact that 'poor ourselves, we bring riches to many' ([2 Cor. 6:10](#)).

Another example of the close link between everyday situation, personal experience and theological conviction may be found in his discussion of the appropriateness of accepting dinner invitations of various kinds. It is in this context that he first enunciates his basic doctrine of Christian liberty and concern for the weaker brother ([1 Cor. 8:7-13, 10:27-33](#)). Whether Paul first came to an understanding of this outlook as a result of attending such meals and working through the implications of doing so, we do not know. He certainly refers to his own practice in the matter when he says that 'for my part I always try to meet people half-way, regarding not my own good but the good of many' ([1 Cor. 10:33](#)). But the discussion touches him deeply and calls forth from him one of his most heartfelt cries: 'Therefore, if food be the downfall of my brother, I will never eat meat any more' ([1 Cor. 8:13](#)).

But nowhere is the close link between actual situation, personal experience and theological conviction more movingly present than in his explanation to the Corinthians why he has written a painful letter to them and altered his plans to visit them. The troubles in the church there, its ambivalence towards him and the tension created by his letter, form the background to what he has to say in [2 Cor. 1:23-3:6](#). The convictions to which he gives expression include the idea of his being a co-worker with them and not being their leader, of his identifying with them and not viewing himself in some sense as separate from them, of the proper pastoral balance between discipline p. 125 and forgiveness, of the priesthood of all believers being exercised through corporate decision-making and of weakness in ministry being the channel through which Christ achieves success.

In between the actual situation and the formation of these convictions, as the crucible through which one becomes the other, are Paul's express feelings about all that is going on. He talks openly about his 'concern' ([1:23](#)), his 'distress', his 'anxiety', his 'many tears' ([2:4](#)) and his 'restlessness' ([2:13](#)). Without openly identifying them, he also reveals in this passage a wide range of other emotional responses, from confidence in them to feeling vulnerable himself, all of which show how closely intertwined and mutually instructive were Paul's emotional and cognitive interpretations of what was happening.

b. Not only his interactions with his churches but even the circumstances of his travels had an effect upon Paul's theology. This could be illustrated by reference to the opposition he encountered and the way he interpreted it. But let me suggest a more everyday example, one that has not yet been sufficiently appreciated even by experts in the field. The main metaphor Paul uses in talking about the Christian life is derived from 'walking'. In fact, he describes the life of believers as a walk more than thirty times in his writings. (Unfortunately, this is obscured in many of the modern translations which prefer more prosaic words like 'behave', 'conduct', etc.) Scholars have puzzled over the source of the metaphor. While it clearly has some connection with the Old Testament notion of the 'way' of Israel or occasional expressions like 'walking' according to God's statutes, it cannot be derived purely from such sources. The term Paul uses has a different derivation, he uses it far more often and he associates it with a whole range of other metaphors for which there is no earlier parallel.

This suggests that there is a strong case for Paul describing the Christian life so much as a 'walk' because he walked so much himself. In other words, the experience of walking itself suggested to him a comparison between physical and spiritual walking. His actual walking became a parable of his walking with God. This explains why although he can refer to the Christian's 'walk' in a quite general way, elsewhere he draws parallels between specific aspects of the process of walking and specific aspects of the Christian life.

For example, between 'learning to walk' and 'beginning the Christian life' ([1 Thess. 4:1](#)), 'putting shoes on your feet' and 'taking the gospel wherever you go' ([Eph. 6:15](#)), 'walking carefully' and 'walking discerningly' ([Eph. 5:15](#)), 'walking in the light' and 'living blamelessly' ([Romans 12:13](#)), 'walking a straight path' and 'conducting yourself honestly' ([Gah 2:14](#)), 'walking in another's footsteps' and [p. 126](#) 'imitating another Christian's example' ([2 Cor. 12:18](#)), 'walking slowly' and 'living idly' ([2 Thess. 3:6](#)).

Like the wise men of old, then, Paul found God speaking to him through experiences of the most ordinary kind. This reminds us that encounters with God that have theological consequences are not confined to so-called 'religious' experiences. Any of our activities or any aspect of life may become a prism through which God may reveal something of himself to us. For this reason it is a great pity that the original link between physical and spiritual walking in Paul's letters is obscured in modern translations of the Bible. This prevents the reader from realizing how Paul came to view the Christian life in this way and from following his own practical example in developing their theological understanding.

c. Another window on the role of experience in Paul's theology is provided by the wide range of metaphors he uses. I have just discussed one of these that up till now has been completely overlooked. There are many others in Paul's writings, as there were in Jesus' sayings before him. But, as E. W. Hunt notes, unlike Jesus, the countryman who went to rural scenes for his figures:

... Paul, the townsman drew most of his illustrations from the activities of urban society [and these] cover the whole range of human experience.¹³

The fact that they do this indicates how broad an experience Paul had, how little was locked into a 'religious' setting and how 'religiously' he was able to view the whole of life.

Paul is fond of using metaphors even for the central doctrinal and ethical convictions he is trying to convey. His understanding of the atonement, for example, is largely conveyed through picture-language, e.g., the language of sacrifice (from the cult), of

¹³ E.W. Hunt, *Portrait of Paul*, London, Mowbray, 223, 234.

justification (from the law-court), of redemption (from commercial practice), of reconciliation (from human relationships) and of adoption (from family life). His understanding of sanctification is also saturated with metaphors of various kinds. He talks about our being transferred from one form of slavery to another, from one kingdom to a new form of rule, from one married state to a second one, from bearing a certain kind of fruit to bearing a different kind of fruit. His understanding of the church is also permeated with metaphors drawn from family life; e.g., brothers, sisters, from household activities; e.g., stewards, servants, from inanimate life; e.g., the body, the field, from human activity; e.g., buildings, the temple. [p. 127](#)

Many of these metaphors are drawn from areas of life where Paul had first-hand experience. Others come more from observation or, on occasions, general knowledge. It is not always easy to discern how much they were triggered by experience of the actual condition to which the metaphor refers. How much, for example, did Paul's many appearances and acquittals before legal authorities, or earlier familiarity with the temple cult, encourage him to use the metaphors of justification and sacrifice at appropriate points in his writings? On the other hand, although Paul had never been literally enslaved or married to anyone he also uses these metaphors to explain his ideas.

What we can say is that the way Paul uses metaphors so often, at times piles metaphor upon metaphor, uses metaphors in different ways, or continues to develop metaphors is not accidental. The same may be said of the occasional lyrical, hymnic and celebratory flights in his writings where his spirit soars and gives eloquent expression to the deep stirrings of his heart. In both cases ordinary prose is not adequate to express the daring and moving character of God's ways with mankind: only the more imaginative and emotional language of poetry can begin to convey something of the depth and complexity of what he experiences.

CONCLUSION

I conclude with several important implications of what I have been saying.

1. In seeking to understand what Paul said and wrote, we should bring the connection—sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit—between his theology and his experience more into the foreground. This includes trying to discern the events that shaped his life, the emotions he felt and the metaphors he used as well as the thoughts he was expressing. In reading Paul we should be sensitive to what was happening inside him, what he was feeling and what images were governing him as well as paying attention to the principles he was advocating. This means that we should approach Paul as we would approach anyone. We should come desiring to get to know a person not just listen to a teacher. If we did this more, it would have a radical effect on our individual and corporate study of the Bible. But only so are we able to become imitators of Paul in the way he asks of us as Paul himself was an imitator of Christ.

2. How true is it to the spirit of Paul's writings to teach and learn theology in a way that does not encourage or allow time for people to enter into the experiences that are inextricably bound up with it? This [p. 128](#) cannot be done in a mere three years. Is this not a problem with a great deal of theological education today? Does this not account for so much of its ultimate irrelevance and powerlessness at the congregational level, even when it tries to remain true to the content of Paul's thought?

Should we not be discovering new models of theological education which yield a better balance between the experiential, practical and reflective aspects of learning? If we sought to do this, we would find ourselves moving away from the theological college model in the direction of the more informal and down-to-earth approach to theological education that

Paul was engaged in with people like Timothy and Titus? He did not teach theology in a formal setting to pupils who had to learn what he imparted so that they could repeat it to others. For him, theological education took place as a practical preparation for or response to an actual evangelistic and pastoral task by a group of people in close community with one another.

3. Our definition of theology needs to be broadened. As we have seen, Paul's theology had a decidedly practical orientation. It was not, like most theology these days, mainly a product of his own private interests or the interests of his theological peers. It was not formulated chiefly by study and reflection, which was the way any good Pharisee would have gone about it. No, it arose from his experiences as an apostle and his attempts to make sense of these by whatever means God placed at his disposal. This certainly included the scriptures, which for him rightly occupied a normative place. It also involved other, at times more direct, encounters with God, through prophecy for example. But it embraced a range of other experiences, such as everyday actions and observations. It arose from personal struggles and suffering. It entailed learning from colleagues on the road as well as from mutual ministry in the church. It came during times of prayer as he wrestled with a particular problem. All these should be drawn into the search to know God if there is to be a fully-rounded, personally appropriated and life-changing theology.

Only if we take these three matters seriously do we have much hope of bringing our experience and our theology more closely together. Paul is the supreme example of a person in which we see this taking place. That is why he continues to speak as personally and relevantly to us today as he did in his own times.

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The Major Trends Facing the Church

Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon

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This article is a summary of the authors' recent book, Foresight: Ten Major Trends That Will Dramatically Affect the Future of Christians and the Church. The study is based on an empirical survey, of interviews with knowledgeable church leaders, denominations, evangelists, educators, etc., most of whom are North Americans. All these trends are the result, as can be seen, of the revolutions of modern times—of secularization, technological revolution and the liberation of oppressed people. What is significant in the paper is that the ten key trends major on ethical issues rather than dogmatic questions. Since it represents the findings of denominational leaders, the summary can be a watershed in future church mission and theological planning.

Editor