

# Pulpit & People

**Essays in honour of William Still  
on his 75th birthday**

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# THE RECOVERY OF CHRISTIAN REALISM

*in the Scottish Expository Ministry Movement*

DOUGLAS F. KELLY

‘And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’ (John 17:3).

‘So then death worketh in us, but life in you’ (1 Cor. 4:12).

Christian theology holds that a finite human being can genuinely know the infinite God directly: this is the essence of what is meant by ‘realism’.<sup>1</sup> At first glance it might be objected: why does an article need to be written on this, since all orthodox Christian churches accept it? Do not the first four Ecumenical Councils of the undivided Catholic Church as well as the major Reformed Confessions all profess the realist position, which is, after all, the presupposition of the Holy Scriptures? One must answer, ‘Yes, but . . .’.

Our particular church may well claim a certain allegiance to a sound confession, not to mention the Holy Scriptures, but would an honest appraisal show us living in accordance with the truth we corporately confess? If, as Scripture so clearly teaches, we are indeed engaged in an unseen spiritual battle directed from the heavenlies (Ephesians 6), it should not surprise us that given the fallen nature of man outside of Christ, indwelling sin in the believer, plus the pull of a godless world system and the presence of a Satanic kingdom (‘the world, the flesh, and the devil’ according to 1 John), the church is constantly tempted to think and live on some basis other than ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’. Granted that true knowledge of God means nothing less than eternal life (John 17:3), should it surprise us that the enemy of men’s souls will mass all his power to keep the church from knowing in heart and action the Triune God whom she professes with her lips?

For much of its history (except perhaps during times of major revival), the church has been tempted to veer away from a real knowledge of God in Christ by going astray in either one of two different directions. We may, somewhat simplistically, call these two different directions ‘liberal’ idealism and ‘conservative’ nominalism. Let us illustrate from the experience of the one in whose honour this volume has been compiled.

1. It is not our purpose to discuss the theological and philosophical history of the complex question of realism. T. F. Torrance has written an important chapter on some aspects of this matter: ‘Theological Realism’ (chapter 10) in *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology: Essays Presented to D. M. MacKinnon*, eds. Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart Sutherland, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

In 1945, William Still, a young minister of the Church of Scotland, was called to a parish which was not in a thriving condition. Apart from the international problems of the war years and the local problems of Gilcomston South parish, Mr Still began his ministry in a time of notable spiritual decline. The venerable Church of Scotland, and most of her daughter Presbyterian churches throughout the world (not to mention Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and most others) had long since lost much (though certainly not all) of the original warmth and vitality of their evangelical witness to the grace of God in Christ.

The secularist Enlightenment of the eighteenth century (whose influence on Scottish Christianity has been briefly traced by John MacLeod in *Scottish Theology*, in chapters 7 & 8) and German/British Idealism of the nineteenth century had radically shaken the church's confidence that it could genuinely grasp, know, and offer the eternal Christ and his saving Gospel through the Scriptures to its own generation. In many a pulpit the ideals of the German liberal scholar, Adolph Harnack (famous for reducing Christianity to 'The Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the human soul'), were substituted for the Christian Gospel of salvation.<sup>2</sup> A vague sort of moralistic do-goodism, shorn of a direct apprehension of God in the Gospel, had emptied (or was in the process of emptying) countless churches in Scotland, England, America and elsewhere.

Behind this 'social gospel' do-goodism (which had lost the Gospel knowledge of God in Christ) lay an important Enlightenment ('liberal' or 'idealist') assumption: finite man cannot know the infinite God through the Scriptures. We cannot survey the historical, theological, and philosophical reasons for and ramifications of this assumption here.<sup>3</sup> Suffice it to say that the vacuum created by a removal of direct knowledge of Christ in the Holy Spirit was inevitably filled with substitutes of many varieties.

In the Protestant world, real union of the believer with Christ in the Holy Spirit tended to be replaced by the ideals, let us say, of German culture, English civilization, American material progress, or (today) by Third World political revolution ('liberation theology'). The common factor in these liberal or idealist variations is ultimately that some form of the human spirit is substituted for the Holy Spirit.

Thus the vitality of the Protestant churches of the western world in general, and much of the Church of Scotland in particular, in the mid 1940's was being sapped at its very roots by a de-supernaturalized, unnatural offspring of evangelical Christianity and secularist idealism. William Still began his ministry in Aberdeen by trumpeting with no uncertain sound the verities of the old, supernatural Gospel with

2. Notable Scottish divines of the late 19th and early 20th centuries such as James Denney and James Orr protested against this baneful situation and offered an evangelical alternative.

3. T. F. Torrance would seem to be correct in tracing the root problem to the assumption of a radical disjunction between the intelligible and sensible (or noumenal and phenomenal) worlds. See his article listed in footnote 1.

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solemn, yet joyous assurance that men can and must come to know him 'whom to know is life eternal'. He preached that there was no hope in the human spirit, for with all its culture, 'the carnal mind is enmity against God . . .' (Rom. 8:7) and 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . .' (1 Cor. 2:14). Regeneration by the Spirit of God is the individual's and the church's only hope: 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see . . . and enter . . . the kingdom of God' (John 3:3, 5). 'No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him . . .' (John 6:44).

But the Spirit of God can open eyes to see Christ (John 16:14). God the Father begets us (John 1:12, 13), adopts us (Rom. 8:14-16), implants us in Christ (John chapter 15) and puts Christ in us (Col. 1:27). And it is through 'the foolishness of preaching' (1 Cor. 1:18) by men who, in general, are not wise after the flesh, mighty, or noble (1 Cor. 1:26) that lost sinners come to a genuine saving knowledge of the living God.

Need it be said that for all the glorious results of such a powerful preaching and praying ministry, the realist insistence that through believing the Scriptures one can know the living God in the supernatural atmosphere of the Holy Spirit was — and still is — deeply resented by some both in and out of the Kirk? Why? Perhaps the Roman Catholic scholar, M. Gorce, makes up in clarity and brevity what he lacks in tact when he suggests that the liberal, idealist mind rejects Christian realism (and ultimately all types of realism) simply because it does not want to face squarely the dilemma: 'God or nothing.'<sup>4</sup>

But not only has the Christian church been drawn out of the straight path of knowledge of God by 'liberal' intellectualist idealism, it has also wandered down an equally deadening path of conservative nominalism. Not only would William Still's Aberdeen ministry (and the hundreds of ministries it has spawned) go in a different direction from liberal idealist Christianity, but perhaps surprisingly it has run in a direction quite contrary to some of the major emphases of various forms of conservative evangelicalism.

In his *Work of the Pastor*, Mr Still speaks of the 'conservative' opposition he received after a year and a half in Gilcomston South Church:

After eighteen months of aggressive evangelism, during which we drew large crowds, mostly of evangelistic folk from every sort of church, assembly, mission and sect, I turned the Word of God upon the Christians for the sake of the large nursery of babes we then had (many of them now grown up), and within a week, from one Sunday to another, you could not see that mission crowd for dust! And they have maligned me all these years for turning from the Gospel, and have even charged me with driving their mollycoddled young people into worldly pleasure halls because I ceased to

4. 'Realisme' by M. Gorce in *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique*. Tome 13c. 1e partie. A. Vacant et al. eds., Paris, Librairie Letouzey et Ane, 1936, p. 1875.

provide evangelistic entertainment for them when all I was doing was seeking to feed the lambs.<sup>5</sup>

While we might write off the distaste of the evangelistic enthusiasts for serious expository and prayer-based ministry as chiefly motivated by a desire for 'spiritual entertainment' (in the pre-television days of the '40's), this does not get to the heart of the matter. Not a few evangelicals in the '40's, and not a few today (whether of the Arminian fundamentalist or of Calvinist confessionalist persuasion) — in a sort of reversal of roles with liberal idealism — have used (probably unwittingly) the very Scriptures they strongly profess as an insulation to keep God out of their personal lives. Now we may expect liberals to avoid God (by such obvious tactics as rejecting the authority of Scripture), but how could one seriously suggest that conservatives can also avoid God by means of accepting the Scriptures? Surely, conservative evangelicals would be the greatest realists, for they hold that it is through the Scriptures (and in the Spirit) that one knows God in Christ.

'Yes, but . . . ' T. F. Torrance has suggested, with keen insight, that 'ultra-realism' passes over into a type of nominalism. That is, one can so stress the words of the text as being the ultimate truth that one fails to get through them to the living, disturbing Reality of the God who spoke them.<sup>6</sup> One can then re-arrange the words into a particular system of theology, and in so doing avoid some of the less desirable aspects of the truth in its wholeness.

Granted the reality of a devil who ever seeks to unbalance the church from its proper poise on the tightrope of truth, is it unreasonable to suggest that even certain conservatives can use (parts of) Scripture to avoid the uncomfortable Lordship of Christ in their lives? That is, can they not become — instead of strong realists — nominalists (who stress the importance of 'names' — *nomina* — or words, to the exclusion of a higher reality)? Could this, at least in part, explain some of the evangelistic revulsion from the expository, praying ministry established in Aberdeen in 1945?

William Still once commented on this strange phenomenon:

. . . the most fiendish persecutions have come from evangelistic people who wanted a perpetual preaching of that part of the Gospel which they thought (often wrongly) did not touch them, and who, when the Word of God in its fullness was unleashed upon them, went virtually mad with rage. There is nothing too vile for such people to do when their futile evangelistic round, with its patronage of the unconverted, has been ended, and the myth of their conceited superiority has been destroyed. It takes a man in these circumstances to preach the whole Word of God without fear or favour, whoever it hurts, himself, his loved ones, his friends, or his enemies.<sup>7</sup>

5. William Still, *The Work of the Pastor*, Aberdeen, s.d., — pp. 64, 65.

6. See T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Evangelical Theology*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1982, pp. 66, 95, 95.

7. W. Still, *ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.

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Partial truth will not transform human character until it shines and glows and flames (transfiguration): true truth as far as it goes, which allows carnal, fallen Adamic man of an alien spirit to apply a partial Christ to the old Adam (like giving an old photograph a new face, an old man a new pair of legs, or dressing up an old doll in new supposedly Christian clothes) will not do.<sup>8</sup>

There are two dangers, and we are attacked from two points of view. One, that of being so preoccupied with soundness in the truth, with doctrines, formulations, propositions, and principles, that we go all academic and dead. (Now, surely no one will think I am anti-academic. You come and see how hard I work at scholarship — although I will never be a scholar — and you will soon get that idea out of your head.) The other danger is that we go all activist, constantly running round in fruitless circles, constantly stirring the pot of emotionalism to boiling point, equating the presence and the working of the Spirit with noise, clatter, chatter, laughter and tears, clapping of hands and wringing of hands, etc. In practice it is impossible — I say impossible — for a man to preserve the perfect balance of soundness, and withal spiritual vitality essential to a living ministry, without the poise that comes from the Spirit alone. There is much soundness from which, alas, the Spirit has departed, and soundness soon then becomes rigor mortis. The Spirit departs because the Word must become flesh to confront and challenge and penetrate the minds and hearts, the consciences and wills of other flesh; and men will give any bribe to God to save them becoming power-houses of the Holy Ghost, which they become supremely in preaching. The Word comes alive in men: that's why a life can challenge sometimes without words (although the life that does challenge without words is never without judicious, timely, gracious and searching words).<sup>9</sup>

We must later return to specific ways in which the Gilcomston South ministry radically deviated from what we have termed evangelistic or conservative nominalism.

Facing the deadness of ecclesiastical liberal idealism on the one hand, and the emptiness of para-ecclesiastical conservative and evangelistic nominalism on the other, in the good providence of God, William Still was prepared to pay any price to go straight down the line of historic, supernatural Christian realism. By portraying the William Still-type, expository, praying ministry as a champion of theological realism, we are not of course implying a conscious awareness of the intellectual history of realism, as over against nominalism or idealism. If in 1945 — or 1985 for that matter — one tried to engage Mr Still in a heavy conversation on Platonic universals, Aristotelian class concepts, the Stoic *cataleptic phantasm*, the Alexandrian Patristic doctrine of faith and assent, Thomistic moderate realism, Okhamist nominalism, the Kantian synthetic *a priori*, or Hegelian absolutist idealism, one would stand a good chance of being given short shrift. For instead of worrying with such matters, he would be relentlessly pushing you out into the light of Christ. But if that is not the ultimate in Christian realism, what is?

Mr Still, and the Scottish expository school of ministers who have followed in his train, have devoted themselves to the exercise of a

8. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 93.

theologically realist ministry simply because this is the teaching of the Word of God written, and is the time-honoured faith of the true church. The Scriptures are of crucial importance as the inspired Word of God because they lead us up to him who is *The Word of God*:

And if it is by the written Word alone that we know the authentic, incarnate Word — Christ — then it will never be our duty, or our right, or our licence, to lift Him out of that Word and set Him up as an independent authority, according to our variable predilections. If we do, and separate Christ from His word, try as we may, we will not be able to fashion a Christ who is not in some particular made according to our imperfect image.<sup>10</sup>

Now consider what this means: the Word of God, the law of God, “the royal law according to the scriptures”, “the perfect law of liberty”, is a sort of rational, verbal, imprint, transcript, expression, or descriptive mould of the character of God, which character became incarnate and human in Jesus Christ. “He is,” says the writer to the Hebrews, “the character, the express image (the matrix, stamp, engraving) of the person or substance of God.” (Heb. 1.3). But this written Word, summed up in the incarnate Word, not only expresses what God is like, but is and becomes, by the operation of the Spirit of God, the food, the nourishment by which we become like Him also. To be a pastor of the sheep, a feeder of the Word to others, you must be fed yourself.

No man can make the Bible become the Word of God (I know that it is, I am not selling you Barth at his worst!) to feed the flock of God by simply passing on what it says. Food has to be assimilated and absorbed by digestion. An atheist could ‘teach’ the Bible. And some try to — in our schools! That won’t do. The Word became flesh, and it must become flesh again in you. It is godly character which is the real pastor — or is the basis of him. You have heard the saying that a man’s words could not be heard because what he was and did spoke so loudly. Well, it takes the whole Word of God, impartially received, but rightly divided, to make a rounded, full-orbed character, which every pastor within his God-given limitations must be.<sup>11</sup>

Much of the foundational strength of this growing school of Scottish (and Australian, American, etc.) expository ministry rests in its wholesale commitment to both the absolute authority and the full inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Its commitment to inspiration safeguards against tendencies toward liberal idealism on the one hand, and on the other hand, its refusal to isolate the words of Scripture from the presence and control of God helps avoid a conservative nominalism which substitutes a humanly manipulated system for the Lordship of Christ.

It is the belief of this writer that the foundational theological balance and the ministerial/sessional methodology and church life that have resulted from the Gilcomston ministry over the last forty years are one of the most important ecclesiastical phenomena of the twentieth century, and can offer substantial guidance and healing to churches which are determined to confront dying men with the eternal life of God in Jesus Christ. For this good reason we must take a look at the

10. W. Still, ‘A Charge to Students’, in *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin*, Spring, 1964, pp. 27, 28.

11. W. Still, *Work of the Pastor*, p. 9.



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ministerial methodology and corporate prayer of churches such as Gilcomston, which have been prepared to die many deaths to self if only the reality of Jesus Christ in his risen glory can be made known to others (2 Cor. 4:12).

In a word, the whole ministry of these churches is centred in the whole Christ, and to know the whole Christ we need the teaching of the whole Word:

... first, the whole Word, that is to say, the whole truth and nothing but the truth of the whole Bible fed to men in balanced diet. You must learn to be dieticians! I have spent hours discussing the balanced ministry of the Word with other ministers; e.g. what books of the Bible, Old Testament and/or New Testament should follow one another in balanced sequence. The second principle is that the whole Word must be saturated in the living, up-to-date grace of God by His Spirit. If you do not teach the whole Word to your people, both you and they will go astray commensurately to the extent and importance of your omissions; e.g. a Christian needs the book of Proverbs and the epistle of Philemon as well as Genesis, the Psalms, Isaiah, the Gospels, Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, etc.<sup>12</sup>

These words were addressed to newly licensed preachers of the Church of Scotland in Aberdeen in April, 1963 by William Still:

I charge, you, therefore: preach the Word. Preach the whole Word, however you do it. Whether you do it by following the Church Year . . . or whether you do as some do, preaching through the Bible book by book, chapter by chapter, judiciously alternating Old and New Testaments and different parts of each, the law, the prophets and the writings, the Gospels and Epistles, or whether you do it subject by subject following some scheme of Christian doctrine of the Creeds or Confessions of the church, whatever plan you adopt, preach the whole Word. Do not leave it to chance.<sup>13</sup>

With his realist, Biblical assumption that men can in fact know God directly through the Word in the power of the Spirit, Mr Still and younger colleagues have generally chosen to spend their time actually preaching that Word rather than arguing for the possibility of its being true. Speaking of the loss of Biblical authority in Britain during his lifetime, Mr Still said to a group of ministers at St. Andrews: 'And one has sought with all one's heart and strength to repair that, not so much by presenting strong apologetic arguments for the Bible as the Word of God — that is a field in itself, and this is where I may differ from some of my conservative brothers who have defended the faith ad infinitum rather than declared it, and who have perhaps sometimes unnecessarily antagonised by doing so.' (Church of Scotland In-Service Training Course, September, 1983, p.7). This is to stand with John Calvin, who quoting the great Church Father of the fourth century, Hilary, said: 'For He whom we can know through His own utterances is the best witness concerning Himself.' Those evangelicals who are spending their whole time debating endlessly among themselves the merits and demerits of evidential versus presuppositional apologetics might do

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 58.

13. W. Still, 'A Charge to Students', pp. 29, 30.

well to heed these words, and begin preaching the Gospel they defend to the lost whom they assert need it.

The determination to preach the whole Word in all of its parts with all of its demands and promises is simply a modern application of the old Puritan Regulative Principle.<sup>14</sup> And like Puritanism at its best, the modern Scottish expository ministry is interested in preaching of (and regulation by) the whole Word because that is the way the Spirit of Christ takes on flesh and blood in the lives of his people.

You must not live in the world of books, but in the world of men. Yet, all that is worth saying to men of lasting value comes from books. But it is all summed up in a Man; and the end is never propositions, theories, precepts, doctrines, but a certain kind of flesh and blood. The Word became Man to be man, in you and me, for ever. God will never cease to be Man. He is a Man for ever.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, my whole view of the Christian's responsibility for primary evangelism is founded upon the belief that the greatest evangelistic and pastoral agency in the world is the Holy Spirit dwelling naturally in God's children, so that Christ shines out of them all the time or nearly all the time, and is known to do so by those with whom they have anything more than casual contact — and even with them.<sup>16</sup>

Another strength of the Scottish expository ministry is the realistic — and hopeful — way it faces the high cost of letting the whole Christ through the whole Word loose in our whole lives.

One last word: the whole current of the divine electricity has to pass through you, His servant, and little though you may know what is going on in the hearts of your people at first, there is a great price to be paid for being the conductor of divine truth and power. Change the figure: this is dynamite, and you will have to die to explode its truth in human hearts, and will have to go down into a new death every time you bring forth God's living Word to the people (2 Cor. 4:12). You will have to die, not only to your own sin, but to self in many of its most seemingly innocent and legitimate aspects, for only then can the death and resurrection power of Jesus Christ be communicated to men, and you dare not do less for any people than this. If you do less, you will have to answer before God one day.<sup>17</sup>

If we are not prepared to suffer (and suffering is not fun and is not meant to be fun), we shall not reign. The two belong together, as Peter says over and over again in his first epistle. Hurt and fruit, death and life, sorrow and joy, they belong together, as manure belongs to a fruitful garden.<sup>18</sup>

To let the whole Word loose in our personalities, that is, to bow low to the universal lordship of Christ over us and over all that is ours, requires nothing less than radical surgery upon the self-life. And appropriate surgery can at times be absolutely essential to good health. In our opinion this kind of radical surgery must be performed on some segments of the evangelistic church today in order to restore it to

14. On the Regulative Principle, see Iain Murray, ed., *The Reformation of the Church*, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1965, pp. 37-50.

15. W. Still, *The Work of the Pastor*, p. 81.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 35,36.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

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soundness of health. To give a specific example, some groups of evangelistic Christians in the United States are caught up in a kind of magical nominalism which requires the cutting work of a realistic scapula upon it.

These evangelists, some of whom are well known on television and radio, emphasize *prosperity* in their teaching. They teach that if you exercise faith properly you will be at all times blessed with health and wealth. The key to gaining health and wealth is called 'naming and claiming'. That is, if you begin saying the words 'I am going to get a better paying job', those words (uttered in Christ's name, of course) will turn into physical reality. This is sheer nominalism, if not magic. The words (for instance, some promise of Scripture about material blessing for God's people) are cut off from their referent in the Person, purposes, and glory of God, and then are manipulated to accomplish the purposes and glory of man. The only hope is to attempt to stab these people awake from their materialist dream-world by pointing them to the excelling glory of co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ (Romans 6), 'by whom we are crucified to the world and the world to us' (Gal. 6:14), and with whom God 'hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 2:6). The theological realism of an expository, obedient, praying ministry is the only scapula that can accomplish such an operation.

The realist knife of the whole Word performed surgery not only upon the individual believer under the ministry of William Still, but upon the entire structure and procedure of the church. All sorts of extra meetings and ecclesiastical organizations were cut out in order to make room for the great realities which would render those lesser concerns unnecessary. With the Word being searchingly preached three times a week as well as the intercessory prayer meeting on Saturday nights, God was doing his work and various clubs and drives were no longer needed nor even appropriate in light of the glory that was excelling such things. In addition to this change, children were now expected to be brought into the regular preaching and prayer services so that separate youth activities (beyond Sunday School for the smallest children) were excised. The constant question put to all of these things was this: 'What is the end of our activities?' What can this meeting or organization do for the transformation of life to the glory of God that the preaching of the Word and praying could not do better?

The integration of children into the regular life of the church at worship was to have important implications for the ministry later in their lives. This meant the cutting out of panicky, evangelistic gimmicks in favour of a more realistic view of human psychology and spiritual development:

Every autumn I have a spate of letters from fond parents, teachers, guardians, and monitors, appealing to me to follow up such-and-such a

youngster who is away from home at College for the first time, and who has to be hunted, followed, shadowed, intercepted and driven to Christian meetings. I have scarcely ever known this desperate technique to work. I understand the panic of parents and guardians, but it is too late then to try high pressure tactics. Prayer, example, and precept, in that order, are the means of bringing children and young folk up in the faith; nor will high-pressure tactics and brain-washing techniques avail when young folk have gone off on their own. Some young folk, alas, will have their fling, and some sow their wild oats and come at last to heel sadly, like the prodigal son. It is where Christians pathetically put their trust in external techniques and artificial stratagems that young folk go astray. Nothing takes the place of the realism of holy living and secret wrestling before God in prayer for our youngsters. We must commit them to God so utterly that we dare not interfere or tamper with their precious souls.<sup>19</sup>

Another area where a tendency to gimmickry was purposely rejected to make room for a realistic relationship to God was in the matter of evangelism in the church. In the post-Finney and Moody Protestant evangelical world, the innovation of asking people to walk the aisle to register public acceptance of Christ as Lord and Saviour has at times (though certainly not always) tended to degenerate into another sort of nominalism, which has been termed by some 'decisional regeneration'. The implication is that if one goes through the public action of coming forward and saying the words then one is assured of regeneration. Though those who think this way have never heard the term, theirs is a kind of nominalism in which Biblical phrases and human responses can be cut off from the sovereign and mysterious power of the Living God, whose Spirit is like the wind: 'The wind bloweth where it wills, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit' (John 3:8).

In place of a constant pressure to respond to an invitation at the end of a service (with the implied promise that human response will guarantee divine regeneration), the Scottish expository ministry is pointing the way to a far more Biblical and healthy — that is, realistic — approach to soul winning and edification. The Revd James Philip has written on this matter as follows:

The Apostle's evangelism was teaching evangelism. It is misleading to identify 'preaching the Gospel' with 'preaching an evangelistic message'. All the evidence of the New Testament goes to show that the Apostle's evangelism was a teaching evangelism. All the character messages in Acts have the kerygma (proclamation about Christ) at their heart — it was doctrinal preaching all the time, based on the Scriptures, expounding and interpreting them. 'Paul, as his manner was, reasoned, or argued, with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging . . .' (Acts 17:2, 3). Rightly understood, apostolic evangelism is not a matter of exhorting and pressing men to come to Christ until there has been a proclamation of the mighty acts of God in Christ in reconciliation and redemption, and on the basis of this, the free offer of His Grace is made to all who will receive it.<sup>20</sup>

19. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

20. James Philip in *The Work of the Pastor* by W. Still, pp. 5,6.

Mr Still adds:

It follows therefore that the Church's evangelism ought to be one in which all the counsel of God is made known to men. We need a recovery of belief in the converting and sanctifying power of the living Word of God in the teaching of the pulpit, and its ability to transform the lives of men and produce in them the lineaments and fruits of mature Christian character.<sup>21</sup>

What this means methodologically is that evangelism is not best carried out by holding an annual series of meetings in which one preaches on certain Gospel texts and urges men to decision (although in particular times and places this may be entirely appropriate). On the contrary, the truest, deepest evangelism is carried out in the non-dramatic, regular course of preaching through the various books of Scripture in the week-by-week, consistent ministry of the local church — Sunday morning and evening, and Wednesday night: especially as this teaching is 'oiled' and 'set on fire' through the prayers of believers reaching the throne of God in both concerted and individual effort. This is precisely what Christian theological realism means when applied to the realm of practical methodology in the church.

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, the ultimate concern of Christian theological realism is that men come face to face with the Living God. Those who know God best are those who pray most. If B. B. Warfield of Princeton was right in defining Calvinism as 'religion on its knees before God in prayer', then nowhere is true Calvinism flourishing more than in the Gilcomston-inspired expository, praying ministries. From beginning to end, the Saturday night intercessory prayer meeting has been constantly stressed as absolutely essential to the accomplishment of the purposes of God in the life of the congregation and of the world at large. These prayer meetings have a way of keeping the people in a posture of dependence on God and self-abandonment. They will not allow one to stop short of anything less than coming into actual contact with the grace and glory of God. The multifarious forms of man-centred nominalism and gimmicky wither away, under the reality of the Triune God inspiring and then answering the prayers of his people.

We must mention one final result of the Christian realism of the Scottish expository ministry: its high view of the corporate church. Here again, it can serve as a healthy corrective to modern Protestant evangelical forms of the individualistic, atomistic nominalism that was so destructive to the Catholic synthesis in the late Medieval period. To put it simply, some strands in Medieval nominalism denied the reality of class concepts and corporate life, and put all emphasis on isolated individuals with a consequent denial of the reality and importance of relationship. A not dissimilar, post-Renaissance form of isolated individualism has plagued the Protestant churches for centuries, and

21. William Still, *The Work of the Pastor*, p. 6.

perhaps has been at its strongest among evangelicals.

In face of this separateness, William Still and others have re-emphasized the importance of corporate prayer, corporate worship, and the covenant concept of child rearing. Furthermore, they have perceived that numerous 19th and 20th century para-ecclesiastical organizations sprang up because the church was failing to do what it was supposed to do in ministering the Word and corporately praying. As the church once again lays lesser things aside in order to return to its true task, many of these organizations can gracefully fade into the background as the body of Christ is re-invigorated to perform its varied ministries in the world (which it lost by default to other organizations).

Not all evangelicals will agree with William Still's belief that one should remain within a theologically mixed denomination until one is put out,<sup>22</sup> but none can deny the value of his high view of the church as the living body of Christ in a lost and dying world. But owing to the Biblical balance of his Christian realist position, he does not put the church, nor its doctrinal confession (for all its value), between the needy soul and the God of grace. On the contrary, the Scottish expository ministry which he has in some measure inspired is a fresh and powerful witness that Word, sacraments, and confession are no more and no less than means of grace: open doors through which the God of all grace meets his people, transforms their lives, changes their culture, and glorifies his Son.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 99.