

FEED MY SHEEP

Preaching the Gospel in a Postmodern
New Zealand Society

John A Haverland

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Cover photograph

Pastoral scene from Canterbury, New Zealand

Cover & book design by Dafydd Hughes

DEDICATION

To my parents,
for your selfless love,
for your Christian example,
for your dedication to the church of the Lord.

To my wife, Harriet,
for all your help in this project,
for your loving companionship in marriage,
for your willing support in the ministry of the gospel.

To our children,
William, Joanna, Michael and Peter,
who will be part of the next generation;
may you live to see a reformation and revival
in this country brought about by the preaching of the Word.

John Bunyan's "GODLY PASTOR"

Now Interpreter led the pilgrim into a private room, and there he ordered his man to open a door. Then did Christian see the picture of a very grave [serious, important] person hanging against the wall, and its features were as follows. This man had his eyes directed up toward heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind his back; he stood as if he pleaded with men, and a crown of gold hung over his head.



CHRISTIAN: What then does this mean?

INTERPRETER: The man in the picture which you see is one in a thousand, who can beget children, travail in birth with children, and nurse them himself when they are born.

And just as you see him with his eyes looking up toward heaven, the best of books in his hand, and the law of truth written on his lips, this is to show you that his work is to know and unfold dark things to sinners. Similarly, just as you see him stand as if he pleaded with men, and also you notice that the world is cast behind him, and that a crown hangs over his head, this is to show you that, in slighting and despising the things of the present, on account of his love and devotion to his Master's service, he is sure to have glory for his reward in the world to come.

Now I have showed you this picture first, because the man who it portrays is the only man who the Lord of the Celestial City has authorized to be your guide in all of the difficult situations that you may encounter along the way. Therefore pay attention to what I have showed you, and carefully weigh in your mind what you have seen lest, in your journey, you meet with some that pretend to lead you along the right path, while in reality their way leads to death.

The picture above portrays John Bunyan as the godly pastor described by the Interpreter. Both the engraving and the text are taken from Barry Horner's revised edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

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PREFACE

This book is about communicating the eternal truth of the Bible in our present context. I have written it specifically for our New Zealand situation but the analysis and the principles will apply to other countries in our western world. My aim has been to write for fellow pastors who are also called to “Preach the Word” and who want to do that more effectively in this nation; yet I trust this book will be of interest and help to all Christians.

I want to acknowledge those who have contributed to this in some way. My thanks, first of all, to my dear wife, Harriet, who supported my desire to begin, bore the time apart without complaint and patiently encouraged me to persevere with it to completion. She has also provided much assistance with typing, proof-reading and the bibliography. She has been “a helper suitable” to me in every way.

I am grateful to my father, Gerard, and to my late mother, Johanna, who raised me in a Christian home, taught me the Bible and gave me a consistent example of Christian living as well as much encouragement.

While I was a pupil at Middleton Grange School, in Christchurch, Don Capill taught me to think carefully about the relationship between Christianity and the contemporary culture, and the importance of applying what we believe to the world in which we live.

For the past seventeen years I have served two congregations, one in Bucklands Beach, Auckland, and another in Bishopdale, Christchurch. The members of these two churches have stretched me in the ministry and have listened attentively as I have sought, with varying degrees of success, to put these ideas into practice in my sermons. Particular thanks are due to the elders and deacons of the Reformed Church of Bishopdale who supported my desire to take up this project and allowed me time to read and write.

This book was written as a thesis for a Doctor of Ministry degree through Westminster Theological Seminary in California. I am grateful

to Grace Stewart and her late husband, Tom, for financial assistance provided through their Student Aid Award - their generosity made it possible for me to enter the programme and pursue this study. My thanks to Dr. Joseph Pipa who helped me define the subject and who supervised the thesis.

In my research I conducted a number of interviews with Christian leaders in New Zealand and had many discussions with fellow pastors in the Minister's Association in the North West of Christchurch and with another smaller group of ministers in the city. I also had opportunity to present some of this material in lectures to fellow ministers in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand at a ministers' conference. Feedback and comment from all these forums helped guide my research and shaped and clarified my thinking. In 1996 I sat in on Kevin Ward's class on "The Gospel in a Post-Christian Society" at the Bible College in Christchurch and benefited from the lectures and the class discussion.

A special word of thanks to Paul and Sally Davey for their interest and support all the way, especially to Sally for reading the manuscript a number of times and for her invaluable help and guidance.

After it was all written Dafydd Hughes offered to help me publish this book through Grace and Truth Publications so that I can get it to you, the reader. My sincere thanks to him for his willing service and careful attention to detail.

Finally, my thanks to the Lord who has called me to be a believer in the Lord Jesus, a son in his family, a husband and a father, a servant of the gospel, a pastor of God's flock and a preacher of his Word.

This book is published with the hope and prayer that it may be useful to pastors, and indeed to all Christians who want to communicate the gospel of the Lord Jesus in our present context.

John A Haverland
Christchurch
August 2000

INTRODUCTION

Every Sunday in New Zealand the vast majority of this country's inhabitants will indulge in a variety of Sunday activities that range from sleeping off the effects of the previous night's party to a day out on the harbour or the sports field. A small percentage of the population will forgo these pastimes in order to attend church. This minority will gather in traditional church buildings, modern auditoriums or school halls. For part of the service they will listen to someone deliver a message from the Bible. This person – a minister, priest or lay-person – will probably have spent a good number of hours preparing their sermon.

I am one of these ministers. A major part of my responsibility is to preach the good news of the gospel, as it is of every preacher and pastor. After his resurrection Jesus commissioned Peter with the words; “Feed my sheep” – an apt phrase in the pastoral situation of first century Palestine, and an appropriate exhortation for our New Zealand setting. Yet many of us who do this work have some questions at times, even nagging doubts. What exactly are we doing each Sunday? How effective is the sermon as a means of communication? Can we really expect Christians, who live in a secular and pagan society like ours, to understand the message of the Bible? And will non-Christians, who might hear us preaching, understand anything of what we are saying?

This book seeks to answer some of these questions. It is a book about preaching. My aim in writing is to encourage pastors to see that God has ordained preaching as the primary means of communicating his Word, and that to preach effectively we must understand the Bible and apply it to the situation we are living in. We are called to preach in a day when we are *Moving Between Times*.¹ By this we mean that we are moving out of modernity and into postmodernity; out of a time dominated by reason, science, and technology, and into a time characterised by an emphasis on experience, the decline of truth, and

the promotion of pluralism. As pastors in New Zealand we are preaching to fellow New Zealanders in the unique situation of our nation. We want to preach so as to communicate the gospel in a way that people can understand it and apply it to their lives. This book then, is a plea for preaching – for sound, exegetical, expository preaching. It is also a plea for relevant preaching – for preaching that understands where we have come from and where we are and that applies the truth of God’s Word to the present situation.

To support this plea I want to establish the need for preaching, especially because so many object to this form of communication. Part One, then, raises various objections to preaching: That it is ineffective, that it carries no authority, and that it is irrelevant. In response I will argue that preaching is both commanded by God and is an effective means of communication; that expository preaching carries the authority of the Word of God itself; and that it is relevant because it deals with eternal issues and with the practical realities of people’s lives. Having said this, pastors need to show that God’s Word is relevant by applying it to our current situation. To do this well requires that we understand the culture and society we live in. Part Two, therefore, provides a brief overview of European history to help us see where we have come from. It then examines some key features of our history as a nation and raises the question as to whether we are, or ever have been, a ‘Christian’ country. We then go on to examine some primary characteristics of this ‘postmodern’ world, illustrating this with New Zealand examples. In Part Three I offer some guidance as to how we might apply God’s Word in our present context.

WHAT IS PREACHING?

It would be useful to begin with a definition of preaching. What are we talking about? Preaching is the explanation and exposition of a passage of the Scriptures, in the power of the Holy Spirit, applied in a manner that demonstrates its relevance to the life and situation of the

listeners. There are a number of parts to this definition, most of which we will take up in more detail later. Yet some explanation is in order here.

Preaching is the *explanation and exposition of a passage of the Scriptures*. True preaching must arise out of the Bible, not out of our own thoughts, nor out of current events in the world, nor out of other books. The preacher's task is to explain what the Bible meant to the people then, and what it means to hearers today. It is to "expose" the plain meaning of the passage being preached so that people understand it.

No one can understand or explain the Bible without the help of the Holy Spirit. Preaching, therefore, must be *in the power of the Holy Spirit*. The Third Person of the Trinity inspired the human authors of the Old and New Testament to write down exactly what he wanted them to write. This same Spirit, who inspired the Bible, will also illumine the mind of the prayerful preacher so that he can understand the passage he is studying and enable him to preach God's Word with authority, conviction and power. The Spirit of Christ will also soften the hearts and enlighten the minds of the people of God who are listening so that they understand what is preached. Only the Holy Spirit can accomplish this receptivity.

Yet the preacher must do all he can to make the Word of God clear and to *apply it in a manner that demonstrates its relevance to the life and situation of the listeners*. The words of the Bible were addressed to people in different places and in diverse situations. God spoke to Abraham in Ur 4000 years ago. David wrote his psalms while king over Israel 3000 years ago. Jeremiah prophesied to the people of Judah in the days leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies in 587 BC. Ezekiel addressed the people of God as they lived in exile in Babylon. Haggai and Zechariah and the writer of Chronicles encouraged those who returned from the exile and struggled to rebuild the temple and re-establish themselves in the land. Jesus lived, taught, suffered, died, and rose again in first century Palestine under Roman occupation. All these people lived in a world quite different from our

own. Yet the Word of the Lord addressed to these people is also addressed to us. God was at work in their lives, encouraging them in their trials, punishing them for their sins, strengthening them in their weakness, fulfilling his purposes in them and through them. In all of this he was guiding history towards the coming of his One and Only Son who was the fulfilment of his plan. Good preaching takes the Word of God addressed to the people then, in their context, and applies it to the lives of the people today so that they can see its relevance to their situation.

Is this what is being preached on Sunday mornings from pulpits throughout New Zealand? If you go into a local church on the Lord's Day will you hear this type of preaching? What is the state of preaching in New Zealand at this time?

PART I

THE NECESSITY OF
PREACHING

Chapter 1

THE STATE OF PREACHING

THE STATE OF PREACHING IN NEW ZEALAND

One summer my family and I were holidaying in Te Anau. On Sunday we went along to the church we had located the previous day. As we drove up a sign outside announced the presence of a “Live Band”, obviously a novelty in this holiday resort. Sure enough, occupying the entire front of this little building was a three piece band comprised of an electric guitar, electronic drumset and a keyboard. After a brief welcome from a local church member the band took over. The leader announced that they hadn’t prepared anything and didn’t really know what was going on but would take it as it came. After twenty minutes of singing we were told to put our Bibles away under our seats (maybe he noticed me clutching mine in anticipation of our first reading) as we would not be needing them for a while. I dutifully put my Bible away. No further reference was made to the Scriptures for the entire service – there were no readings from the Bible, no sermon, and only one brief prayer. The entire service consisted of songs, most of which were sung by the band alone and most of which were unknown to the congregation. During some of these (sunday-school-type) songs the congregation was required to leap up out of their seats or to jump up and down like Jack-in-the-boxes. Interspersed between these antics were comments out of this man’s personal experiences. Other Christians who attended with us were rather taken with this service and found it different and refreshing. I was disappointed, especially by the neglect of the preaching of the gospel and the absence of any serious reference to the Bible.

It appears that this neglect of the Bible in churches is not unusual. When my family and I have attended church services in a range of denominations we have noticed that very few people bring a Bible to

worship, whether or not pew Bibles are provided. Consequently, when it comes to the reading of the Word of God very few people turn to their Bibles to follow along. When the minister begins preaching few are able to “examine the Scriptures” to see if what is said is true (Acts 17:11). Have ministers contributed to this situation? Have we created an expectation that no one need bring their Bible because it is not all that important? Do those who attend anticipate that they will not be given time to turn to a passage being read, follow it, study it for themselves, and compare what they read with what is being preached?

The churches we have worshipped in may not be typical, or perhaps we just arrived on a bad Sunday. Yet we have to admit that even in Bible believing evangelical and charismatic churches the reading and preaching of the Bible is being displaced by many other attractions. A service typically begins with an extended time of ‘worship’ where the congregation is required to repeat songs of a lightweight theology, or even worse, which are downright heretical. It is assumed that this creates the right ‘mood’ or ‘atmosphere’ for worship, engendering good feelings in those attending. As the service progresses there may be a time of testimony during which people can speak about their own experiences of God. Increasingly churches are adding liturgical dance, puppet presentations, drama and skits as well as showing the occasional video. The poor cousin amongst all these innovations is the preaching of the Word of God. Biblical preaching is overshadowed by a plethora of novelties in worship.

Even where preaching remains a central part of the service it is not always well done. In interviews with people from various denominations and Christian organisations I asked people for their evaluation of preaching in New Zealand today. Not one of those I interviewed was positive or enthusiastic. All agreed that, generally speaking, preaching in New Zealand was in a poor state. Certainly there are wonderful exceptions, and New Zealand has some able preachers, but they concurred with the assessment of one pastor who said, “There are too few gifted preachers in our land”. Those interviewed complained that preaching was sometimes full of waffle,

often dull, did not address the real issues people were facing, lacked Biblical content, was weak and non-offensive and that it did not get across the fundamentals of the faith. Much preaching in this country is anecdotal rather than expository, a series of stories strung together rather than a clear explanation of the Bible. After fourteen years 'on the road' in New Zealand, Gordon Miller of World Vision came to the conclusion that there is not much "informed, content-filled preaching and teaching around."² It would seem that too few pastors know what to preach or how to preach faithfully from the Bible.

Some of this can be attributed to a lack in seminary training. A high proportion of pastors in some denominations have had little theological education; if they have, more often than not, their training has been thin on exegesis in the original languages and on homiletics. The Baptist Union churches noted "a paucity in worship and preaching" as one of the problems they faced.³ It is encouraging to hear that a number of denominations are concerned about the low level of preaching and are determined to see it improve. In 1997 leaders of the Baptist Union set a new direction for their denomination in noting that preaching had to be more intentional, especially on evangelism.⁴ They resolved to encourage better preaching through exposure to good models and ongoing training. Between 1992 and 1997 the Salvation Army movement called its officers back for a three week preaching course; over 120 officers out of a total pool of 380 active officers completed this course. A Seventh Day Adventist pastor told me that in his denomination there was a growing awareness of the need for Biblical preaching. These are encouraging signs but much more needs to be done to lift the standard of preaching in this country. That is the concern of this book.

THE STATE OF PREACHING GENERALLY

Poor preaching is not an isolated problem and certainly not unique to New Zealand. Concerns about preaching can be heard from many

parts of the world. Some church leaders observe that preachers seem to have lost confidence in this form of communication. They no longer take the trouble to study the Scriptures and their preaching lacks authority and power.⁵ Others lament the lack of convicting preaching, noting that many church-goers appear to view preaching as a meaningless act. People do not come to church excited to hear a sermon convinced that preaching is a transforming event. Rather, they endure the preaching.⁶

It is hardly a surprise, therefore, that the number of church goers in New Zealand is declining and that, with other novelties being added to worship, those who do attend often have a poor knowledge of the Bible. Some of the blame for this biblical ignorance must be placed at the feet of preachers. People hear plenty of sermons but what sort of sermons do they hear? Too often they listen to sermonettes producing Christianettes; “pitiable little homilies” that do not encourage spiritual maturity; “snippets of sermons” that do not yield the well rounded Christian understanding we want to see.⁷ These sermons lack the Biblical content and solid teaching required to convert the unbeliever and to build up believers in their faith. Such poor preaching further erodes people’s confidence in preachers and preaching and raises more questions and objections to the whole place and role of the sermon in society. Even in the church many object to preaching and believe it has had its day. We need to note these objections so we can face them squarely and respond to them.

Chapter 2

IS PREACHING EFFECTIVE?

OBJECTION: PREACHING IS OUTMODED AND INEFFECTIVE

In New Zealand today those inside and outside the church have lost confidence in preaching, regarding it as dated and inefficient. In times past people had their criticisms about sermons, complaining they were dull, boring or unrelated to the point of the text. These criticisms, however, were aimed at the *kind* of sermon preached; today we hear criticism of the sermon as *a means of communication*.⁸ Objections to preaching have escalated since the advent of radio, television, video and computers. Before this century preaching was the only show in town – not any more! Modern multi-media presentations offer high-tech competition to preachers. Rather than go to church on a Sunday evening people can stay home and watch the Sunday evening movie on TV, hire a video or see a sports game on Sky. The box in the lounge has replaced the pulpit in the church.⁹ Today it seems unlikely that one person standing alone and speaking from an ancient book could possibly impact this word-saturated, image-driven society.¹⁰

Another effect of modern technology has been to raise people's expectations about preaching. Anyone can turn on the TV at night and watch a polished presentation of the news or see professional entertainers introduced by smart and smooth hosts. Interspersed through all of this are some brilliant advertisements with words crafted to catch our attention and lodge in our memory. Your average preacher is no match for such performances. Nor is he a match for the famous preachers who have entered the world of show business, like Benny Hinn, or Robert Schuller in his "Hour of Power" from the Crystal Cathedral. Unfortunately too many of these tele-evangelists and preachers are more concerned about holding an audience than about preaching the message of the Bible without fear or favour. Yet

such well funded, high class and practised performances set a standard which is well nigh impossible for a local pastor to attain.

Not only has modern technology raised people's expectations – it has also lowered their concentration and their ability to assimilate information. Television, with its rapidly changing images and frequent commercial breaks, has not encouraged serious listening or mental discipline. In his penetrating critique of television Neil Postman warns of its powerful and destructive effect on people's attention span and ability to think. He notes that programmes are structured so that each eight minute segment may stand as a complete event in itself. Furthermore the average length of a shot on network television is only 3.5 seconds. The eye never rests. It always has something new to see.¹¹ Postman explains the significance of the changes brought about by television by demonstrating that we have shifted from the Age of Exposition to the Age of Show Business. By "Exposition" he means a culture that concentrates on words rather than images. As an illustration of the Age of Exposition he cites the first of seven debates between candidates Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. This debate took place on August 21, 1858, in Ottawa, Illinois. Douglas opened and spoke for one hour; Lincoln was permitted an hour and a half to respond; and then Douglas was given another half hour to rebut Lincoln's reply. This three hour debate was considerably shorter than what these two men were used to.¹² The length and complexity of these debates, and others like them, was testimony to the ability of the average American citizen to hear and absorb considerable amounts of spoken information. Contrast this with the American presidential debates that took place on television in the "Age of Show Business". Prior to the 1983 election the two presidential candidates confronted each other in 'debates'. Each candidate was given five minutes to present his view on a certain question. His opponent was then given one minute for a rebuttal. In the limitations of this time-frame it was obviously impossible to present a sustained and reasoned argument defending their policies. The outcome of a debate like this does not depend on logic or truth but on style and impression. It is significant

that in this election the people of America chose Ronald Reagan, the well-known television actor, as their preferred president. This television age raises some serious difficulties for the preacher. When people have become so accustomed to brief segments how will they listen to a sermon for twenty or thirty minutes? When viewers are accustomed to constantly changing images on a flickering screen how can they concentrate on one man speaking for any length of time in the church?

Another effect of television has been to encourage us to evaluate everything we see and hear for its entertainment value. Television presents most of its information in an entertainment format. Perhaps the primary reason for this is that programmers are aiming to attract viewers and maintain their ratings. Programmes must hold the attention of the viewer. Postman concedes that he has no objection to television presenting material that is entertaining. In fact, one could well argue that it is good to have our path in life brightened by light and laughter. This, however, is not the issue. The problem is not that some subject matter on television is entertaining but that all subject matter on television is passed through the grid of entertainment. "No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching assumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure."¹³ One clear example of this is the news broadcasts. Our New Zealand TV stations are competing for ratings and so the heat is on to attract viewers to tune into the news. It is important, therefore, that the presenters be presentable, the news interesting, the pictures rivetting, the style lively, and, most important, that the viewers stayed tuned. What we see on the six o'clock news is not merely information but has become "infotainment". The problem with this is that serious matters are treated in a trivial manner, tragic events in the world are trivialised, and events that ought to be a cause for distress are lost in an overall context of humour and fun. In a report on the changes in news broadcasting in America *Time Magazine* supported Postman's analysis: "The public's attention is turning from substantive news to celebrity gossip, going from the age of news to the age of entertainment."¹⁴

The significance of all this is not lost on church leaders. Many have responded by steering the church in a similar direction. They are driven by a laudable evangelistic motive in that they want to present the Christian message to a lost society. If we are going to attract an audience, they argue, we must present the service in an entertaining manner. However, there is a great danger in this: Rather than ensuring that the church service is driven by the truth of the message it is tempting to allow the ‘audience’ to drive the service – the service is ‘seeker-friendly’ rather than God-centred. Soon the primary concern is to find a message and a style that will attract listeners (‘seekers’) and hold them. In this setting, style all too easily becomes more important than substance: Truth gives way to impression.

This move away from words to a visual image is also seen in the increasing use made of dance and drama in worship. One of the strongest advocates for the use of drama in worship is Willow Creek Community Church. Senior Pastor, Bill Hybels, defends the enormous amounts of time, energy and money invested into drama and the arts by saying, “This is the generation that grew up on television. You have to present religion to them in a creative and visual way.”¹⁵ He is deeply offended by accusations that they are entertaining people rather than proclaiming the truth; “Who was the master composer? Who created the arts? Whose idea was it to communicate the truth through a wide variety of artistic genres? I think it was God. Then why has the church narrowed its options and selected a talking head as its only form of communicating the most important message on the planet?”¹⁶ Evangelism director Mittleberg explains that “drama is an important thing and the way to kind of break through some barriers and communicate a message.”¹⁷ These comments also reflect the influence of the television age. Christian leaders are arguing that we need to present the message of the Bible in a visual manner for a world that is visually orientated. Drama, they maintain, is one of these visual means.

Those working with children also question the value of preaching. They believe that children have been “turned off by boring,

predictable, unchallenging, irrelevant, sophomoric attempts to teach them God's Word."¹⁸ In the foreword to a book on creative Bible teaching M. Scott Peck claims; "The best way to teach the Bible is not through words, but through actions, through mentoring and entertainment and an accepting community."¹⁹

Finally, contemporary communicators and educators question the whole concept of preaching telling us that mono-directional communication is ineffective. Someone has described a sermon as a "monotonous ministerial monologue", or, in even more unflattering terms, as "a monstrous monologue by a moron to mutes."²⁰ If we truly want to change people's attitudes and behaviour, we are told, we must deal with people in small groups or one-to-one. In the current climate of opinion preaching is "out-dated, old-fashioned, little more than a rather quaint ecclesiastical anachronism,"²¹ a dinosaur in a computer age.

All this does not encourage pastors to concentrate their efforts on preaching. Living in this context, and with these criticisms of the sermon, we ask, "Why bother to preach? Is it worth the time and effort? Are there more productive ways of spending our time and more effective means of communicating the gospel? In response, I believe there is compelling biblical, historical and practical evidence in favour of preaching. It is a biblical and therefore an effective means of conveying the gospel message, even in this postmodern age. We need to consider these arguments in favour of preaching.

RESPONSE 1: PREACHING IS COMMANDED

Just before his ascension Jesus commissioned his disciples, as representatives of the church of all ages and places, with the task of being his ambassadors; "...repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:47). This is the message of the well known words of the Great Commission; "All authority in heaven and

on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). The means by which the disciples would “make disciples” would be the preaching of the good news about Jesus.

In his instructions to Timothy the Apostle Paul notes that there are elders of the church who are set aside especially for the work of “preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). Timothy himself was a *teaching* elder. Paul, his father in the faith and companion in the ministry, urged him to concentrate his attention on preaching. In his first letter he lists various Christian doctrines and then says; “Command and teach these things.... Until I come devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Timothy 4:11,13). In his second letter he writes; “I give you this charge: Preach the Word” (2 Timothy 4:2). “Charge” has the sense of testifying under oath. Giving as much weight as he could to this commission Paul reminded Timothy that he must conduct his ministry “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead” (2 Timothy 4:1). All preachers of the gospel would do well to go over these words regularly as a reminder of the solemn nature of our calling.

The Apostle amplified this command when he urged Timothy to “be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim 4:2). The word used here for “prepared” has the sense of urgency, earnestness and insistence.²² Preaching is not a matter of indifference but rather a matter of life and death – all of eternity is at stake in the message we preach – so we must be sincere and fervent. When Paul tells Timothy to “correct” he wants him to address God’s Word to the *minds* of his congregation. At times God’s people will have doubts, questions and misgivings. Part of the task of the preacher is to speak to the minds of his listeners so as to correct their thinking and put them

back on track. The word “rebuke” addresses the Word of God to our *lives and our lifestyle*. We may fall into sinful patterns of living and we need to hear the rebuke of God’s Word through the preacher. “Encouragement” comes when the Word of God is aimed at our *emotions*. There will be times when we are low or discouraged – then we need the encouragement and exhortation that comes from the Scriptures. All this needs to be done with “great patience and careful instruction”. One of the difficulties in the ministry is that we do not always see instant results: Christian growth is often a slow process; we may be tempted to become frustrated. So we are called to teach and preach with patience, believing that God’s Word will bring life and maturity.

Inherent in this command is the *content* of what is preached. The word translated as “preach” here is the Greek word *kerusso* which refers to the authoritative proclamation of a herald who was sent out by the king. No preacher may make up his own message. Rather he must pass on what he has received. This is why Paul wanted Timothy to preach “the Word”. The Word of God is to be the content and subject of preaching because it is the Word of the King. Preaching this message of the King must be the main task of the ministry.

Kerusso describes not only the substance of his message but also the *method* of the messenger. A herald would *proclaim* his message, crying it out in a public place so it could be heard by the people. In this sense, the Old Testament prophets were heralds (Jonah 1:2, 3:2-4, Zephaniah 3:14, Zechariah 9:9) as were the New Testament apostles – they were called to the verbal and public proclamation of the Word of God. This is a solemn task which no man can take on himself – he must be called to this by the Lord through the church. Before ordaining a man as a minister of the Word the church must carefully examine his gifts, intellectual ability, spiritual suitability and sense of call. Having declared him a suitable candidate they can then ordain him as a pastor of God’s people and a herald of the Word. The herald, therefore, is a messenger appointed by Christ through the ordination of the church (1 Timothy 4:13-14, 2 Timothy 1:6) and “sent” (Romans 10:15) to

proclaim the message of salvation in Christ.

The centrality of preaching in the early church is illustrated in that the New Testament has thirty words to describe preaching.²³ In addition to *kerusso* three of these deserve mention. *Euangelizomai* is used to describe the declaration of the gospel. It does not define a method of communication but rather the content of the message as being good news. This joyful news about Jesus was passed on in personal conversation (Acts 8:4, 35) or was proclaimed in a public and official manner (Acts 8:5). *Didasko* refers to teaching and is often used to describe the public declaration of God's truth. When used in this way it has the same meaning as *kerusso*. A distinction may be made between preaching and teaching, not in their content but in their method. Preaching always has the element of proclamation whereas teaching may not. All preaching must involve teaching but not all teaching is preaching. *Marturein* describes part of the task of preaching as bearing witness to what a person has seen and heard. The Apostles, as eye-witnesses of Christ, were called to bear witness to what they had seen (Luke 24:48, Acts 1:8). Preachers today are not eye-witnesses of Christ but they are to bear witness to what the apostles proclaimed about him and to what they have seen by faith (John 20:29).

The New Testament also explains how the ascended Lord Jesus gave "pastors and teachers" to his church. These two words are linked so as to suggest that these functions were combined in the one person; this person was to pastor and teach God's people to prepare them for works of service (Ephesians 4:11-12). With his usual insight Calvin notes that God, who could have perfected his people in a moment, has rather chosen to have them mature and grow "solely under the education of the church" through "the preaching of the heavenly doctrine." This was the pattern in the Old Testament. God did not give the law alone, "but added priests as interpreters from whose lips the people might ask its true meaning (cf. Malachi 2:7)". From Ephesians 4:11-12 he concludes:

the church is built up solely by outward preaching.... Paul shows by these words

that this human ministry which God uses to govern the church is the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body. Whoever, therefore, either is trying to abolish this order of which we speak and this kind of government, or discounts it as not necessary, is striving for the undoing or rather the ruin and destruction of the church. For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth.²⁴

With these words Calvin explains the vital place of “pastors and teachers” in the church of Christ.

Having examined the command to preach and some of the key words used for preaching we should also note that already in the first century preachers had their critics. The Apostle Paul had to deal with people who ridiculed both the message and method of preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5). On the one hand there were the Jews who wanted to see miraculous signs and for whom the message of the cross was a stumbling block; they could not comprehend a crucified Messiah – he was not the person they had awaited for 2000 years. On the other hand there were the Greeks who prided themselves on their wisdom. Their philosophical systems emphasised the spirit over against the body; they could not believe in a god who not only became a man but also died on a cross. To them the cross was utter foolishness. Yet this, the apostle insists, was God’s chosen means of saving a lost humanity (1 Corinthians 1:21-25).

Moreover, God chose to have this message of Christ crucified communicated through preaching. This is why Paul rejected the rhetorical techniques of Greek oratory; “When I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.... My message and my preaching were not with wise or persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on man’s wisdom but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:1,4,5). By this he is not suggesting that preachers should neglect the art of speaking; his point is that the power is not in the technique, nor in the preacher, but rather in the

Word of God as it is applied by the Holy Spirit. To the world preaching may seem a “foolish” and ineffective method of communication. That is how it seemed to unbelievers in the first century. However, despite this appearance the Apostle points out “God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21). Such preaching must still be *the* method of communicating God’s truth.

In writing to the Christians in Rome the Apostle Paul states that the message of salvation must be preached if people will come to faith. “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14). In his excellent commentary on Romans the Presbyterian theologian John Murray notes that in this verse “the Apostle is thinking of the institution which is the ordinary and most effectual means of propagating the gospel, namely, the official preaching of the Word by those appointed to this task.”²⁵ This is not to deny that God may, and does, use other means to bring people to faith. These include reading the Bible personally and as a family, group Bible studies, conversation with Christians, personal witnessing, lectures, Christian books, tracts and pamphlets. Yet the Apostle Paul makes it clear that the proclamation of the Word through preaching is the primary means God will use to save the lost. This is the chief means he will use to apply the work of redemption to his elect people. If this is so it must occupy the central place in the life of the church.²⁶ Our great need as preachers today is to understand this New Testament teaching on the centrality of preaching and to keep reminding ourselves of it, believing that this is an important and effective work which the Lord will use in a powerful way.

In emphasising the preaching of the Word we are clearly distinguishing ourselves from the Roman Catholic church and its emphasis on the sacraments as the primary means of grace. They believe that the sacraments work *ex opere operato*, that is, they work in and of themselves having a power of their own. This is in opposition to the protestant belief that the sacraments only convey spiritual

benefit when they are accompanied by true faith. The practical effect of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the sacraments is to downplay the role of the Bible and preaching in the church. Many Roman Catholics believe they have received all the grace they need simply by attending mass – therefore they do not need to read the Bible or hear a sermon. With the Reformers, however, we insist that the *Word of God* is the chief means of grace, not the sacraments. There is, of course, no conflict or rivalry between the ministry of the Word and the sacraments: Both are “intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation.”²⁷ The message of the gospel is illustrated and confirmed through the ministry of the sacraments. They are signs and seals of what God reveals and communicates through his Word. However, administered on their own, apart from the context of biblical preaching, the sacraments “can become dumb ceremonies and magical rites, breeding grounds for blasphemy and superstition.”²⁸

This emphasis on preaching also stands in contrast to the mystics who put the weight on inner spiritual experience and private revelations received directly from God quite apart from the Bible. Present day examples of this mysticism can be found in pentecostal and charismatic circles. There it is not uncommon to hear a person or a pastor claim; “God spoke to me”, or “God gave me this word of prophecy”. The claim to direct and private revelations attacks the sufficiency of the Bible as the Word of God and casts doubt on the necessity of preaching. If a person can receive the Word of God immediately and personally why should he bother to read the Bible or hear a sermon? In his mind it is far better to hear God directly rather than through the use of means. The Scriptures, however, oppose such mysticism by emphasising the sufficiency of the Bible, assuring us that it is profitable for “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul warned the Christians in Colosse against the false teachers who promoted a first century mysticism: “Such a person goes into great detail about what he

has seen and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions” (Col 2:18). Examples of this abound in the church today. In the face of widespread mysticism in the twentieth century we must hold to the biblical emphasis on the Word of God, written and preached, as it points us to the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). It is by proclaiming him “that we may present everyone perfect in Christ”, being “encouraged in heart and united in love” and having “the full riches of complete understanding” (Colossians 1:28, 2:2).

Underlying all powerful and effective preaching is the foundation of a biblical theology of preaching. We who preach must believe that the proclamation of the Word of God has the power to save the lost bringing them from darkness to light, from error to truth, from bondage to freedom. Every sermon may be seen as a struggle for souls. Through preaching the Lord will convert those he has chosen for salvation (Ephesians 1:4) opening their hearts to respond to the gospel message (Acts 16:14). God has promised that his Word will be powerful and effective;

It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

The writer to the Hebrews made the same point when he wrote, “The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow” (Hebrews 4:12). To the Church at Rome Paul wrote that the gospel “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). He could assure the Christians in Thessalonica that God had chosen them, “Because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). All these passages testify to the power of the Word of God both written and preached. We need to believe that our preaching of this Word will be powerful

through God's Spirit.

This does not mean that the preaching of the gospel will always bring about salvation in those who hear it. For some the gospel is "the fragrance of life" while for others it is "the smell of death"; the former will respond and be saved while the latter will reject the message and perish (1 Corinthians 2:14-17). Those who do not respond cannot blame the gospel; this same gospel brings light and life to some while others close their minds and harden their hearts. Either way the preaching of God's Word will penetrate souls and judge "the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

God's chosen method of communicating his truth is not only commanded but there are also many biblical and historical examples of how preaching was powerful and effective. It will be instructive and encouraging to note some of these.

Examples of Preaching in the Scriptures

The prophets of the Old Testament were, first and foremost, forceful preachers of God's truth. Men such as Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and Daniel fearlessly proclaimed God's Word in the city and country, before nations and kings. They preached with the conviction that they were bringing the Word of God to his people (Hosea 4:1, Joel 1:1); they knew they had to proclaim it no matter what it cost them (Jeremiah 1:7-8, 17-19). In their role as prophets they pointed forward to a greater prophet who was going to come. The Lord promised this person through Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command them" (Deuteronomy 18:18). These words were fulfilled in the prophetic ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus opened his ministry on earth in the synagogue at Nazareth by quoting the words of Isaiah, one of the great Old Testament prophets; "The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has

anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18f, Isaiah 61:1-3). From that time on Jesus made preaching the primary work of his ministry (Matthew 4:17). He preached in the synagogues, from Peter’s fishing boat, on a mountainside and to his disciples as they walked from town to town. His preaching was popular with the common people and even his critics had to admit; “No one ever spoke the way this man does.” (John 7:46).

Someone might object that Jesus also performed many miracles. Yet Jesus urged those who heard him to concentrate on his *words* rather than his *deeds*. He warned the crowd of 5000 he had fed saying; “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:27). He rebuked the Jews for their constant hankering after signs, directing them instead to the preached Word; “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.... The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here” (Luke 11:29,32). After he had healed many in Capernaum the crowds came searching for him. “Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed; ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come’” (Mark 1:35-39). Matthew summarises the ministry of Jesus with these words: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (Matthew 9:35). John explains that Jesus’ miracles were “signs” proving he was the person he claimed to be, confirming his words, and calling people to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:30-31). His miracles were secondary; his primary work was preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

Jesus wanted his disciples to pursue this same task. While still with them “he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:2). These miracles had the same role in the ministry of the

disciples as they did in the ministry of their Lord – they were signs confirming the message preached. As he was about to leave them Jesus charged them to be witnesses of him. His last great commission to His Church was to evangelise the world. The apostles were to make disciples of all nations by preaching the good news to all nations (cf. Matthew 28:18 and Luke 24:47). This was the Lord’s strategy for His Church in communicating the message to the world. “From the very beginning the Church was a preaching church.”²⁹

We see this emphasis on preaching throughout the book of Acts. In the first sermon of the New Testament church Peter quoted from the Old Testament to show that Jesus was indeed the Messiah long awaited by Israel. He confronted the Jews with their sin of crucifying Jesus Christ. In response to that powerful sermon three thousand people were added to the church that day. Many years later the Apostle Peter explained that these New Testament believers had “been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God.... And this is the Word that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23,25). When the Jewish authorities arrested Peter and John and warned them against speaking or preaching in the name of Jesus they responded; “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). They were released but later were arrested again and once more were forbidden to preach, but continued on; “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42).

Nor did the Apostles want to be distracted from this task. In the early days of the church they outlined their priorities when they gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables.” They advised the church to appoint seven men to concentrate on a ministry to the poor and widows so they could give their attention “to prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his superb book *Preaching and Preachers*, comments: “Now there the priorities are laid down once and for ever. This is the primary task of the

Church, the primary task of the leaders of the Church, the people who are set in this position of authority; and we must not allow anything to deflect us from this, however good the cause, however great the need.”³⁰

Significant preachers of the early church include Stephen who spoke in such a way that those arguing with him “could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke” (Acts 6:10) and Philip who “went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there” (Acts 8:4). Yet the most influential preacher of this period was the Apostle Paul. We have already considered his exhortations to Timothy – here we note that he practised what he preached. Writing to the Corinthians he outlined the priority of his ministry; “Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17). This was an urgent obligation; “Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). The Apostle was utterly convinced that God had set him apart from birth and called him to preach Christ to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15-16). He explained this to the Christians in Ephesus; “Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: To preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...” (Ephesians 3:8). To the Christians in Rome he could write; “I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome. I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:15-16). It was this conviction that drove him in his ministry, that took him around the Mediterranean and through Asia Minor, that motivated him to preach whenever and wherever he could – in synagogues, market places and a lecture hall; in private homes, on the steps of Roman barracks and at the Areopagus in Athens. “Preaching the gospel was, for Paul, not only an inescapable duty. It was a divine obligation. It was the *raison d’être* of his ministry, the thing he was born to do in the purpose of God.”³¹

Examples of preaching in church history

Throughout church history the Holy Spirit has used powerful preaching to fan the flames of revival and to bring about times of reform in the church, both of which were desperately needed at many points. The authoritative preaching of the apostles was imitated in the following centuries by powerful preachers such as Ambrose, St. Augustine and John Chrysostom who all shared the Apostle's confidence in the power of preaching.

The most well-known and influential of these three men was Augustine who lived in the fourth century after Christianity had been made the official religion of the Roman Empire. He was converted to the Christian faith through the ministry of Ambrose who was the Bishop of Milan at that time. At first Augustine listened to his preaching from a professional point of view to learn something from his eloquence. But after a time he was attracted to the truth of what he heard. Augustine said of Ambrose; "I was brought by God to him in order that I should be brought by him to God."³² He was baptised by the bishop in 387 AD at the age of thirty three. Many have ranked his conversion second to that of the Apostle Paul in its significance for the influence of Christianity. He became the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and laboured in that city for 38 years. The teenagers who heard him in the fourth century were still listening to him when they were grandparents.

Most well known for his monumental writings Augustine was also a great preacher. As a professor of rhetoric he had been a brilliant teacher in the art of communicating. As Bishop of Hippo he devoted himself to communicating God's Word through preaching. Throughout his life he was engaged in an intensive study of the Scriptures that gave him a phenomenal knowledge of their content. That knowledge came through in his preaching. His sermons have been described as "biblical rambles": Biblical because they were full of the Bible; rambles because in them he wandered all over the Scriptures, quoting from memory many different passages. In a day

and age where there were few Bibles and where many could not read his sermons gave people a good knowledge of the Scriptures. His work as a pastor and judge in the civil courts gave him a good knowledge of his people and a vast store of anecdotes and illustrations that held the attention of his audience. His preaching did not just address the mind but also pulled at the emotions and issued a challenge to the will. He did not just want to convey information; he wanted to proclaim God's truth and to persuade people to action. In preaching, he said, "One loving heart sets another on fire."³³ While the major weakness of his preaching was his allegorical approach³⁴ his great strength was his desire to preach Christ so that his people might know the Lord. "Why do I preach? Why do I sit here on the cathedra?³⁵ What do I live for? For this one thing alone, that we may one day live with Christ! This is my honour, my fame, this is my joy and my treasured possession!"³⁶

With the death of the early great theologians and preachers, and the political acceptance of the church in the Holy Roman Empire, preaching began to decline. During the centuries that followed the church became increasingly worldly and political while interest in the Scriptures and in preaching waned. There were some great exceptions, most notably the Waldensians in the twelfth century and, in the next century, two orders of preaching friars, the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Yet these were faint stars in the dark night sky of biblical ignorance. For much of the Middle Ages the Bible was an unknown book, even to the clergy, and sound preaching was not heard in the churches. Many of the clergy were uneducated and ill-equipped to teach their people. The Bible was only available in the Latin translation known as the Vulgate and so was inaccessible to the vast majority of the common people. Those who could read were not given access to the Bible. Only handwritten were available and these were chained to the pulpits in the churches.³⁷

A growing number in the church became increasingly concerned about the ignorance and superstition that was widespread in the church and made efforts to bring about reform. One of these was a great English preacher by the name of John Wycliffe (1320-1384 AD).

He preached the Bible and aimed to help his hearers understand its literal meaning. Not only did he preach himself but he also trained evangelical men from Oxford University as preachers of the gospel. He sent them out in pairs carrying only their staff and their Bible. These 'Lollards' or 'mutterers', as they became scornfully known, were sent out on their mission with these words of Wycliffe; "To the people the Gospel must be preached as God commands. The Truth must be proclaimed to them even though they receive it unwillingly. Not comedies or tragedies, not fables or droll stories, but simply and solely the law of the Lord as Christ and the Apostles delivered it: For in the law, that is the gospel, is hidden the life which is able to quicken the church." Wycliffe believed in the value of preaching; "The highest service to which man may attain on earth, is to preach the Word of God.... The church is honoured most by the preaching of God's Word."³⁸

John Hus, another fore-runner of the Reformation, was also a vigorous preacher. Twice a Sunday and often during the week he preached to a capacity crowd in his large church in Prague. Hus preached from the Scriptures and subjected the practices of the church to the searching light of the Word of God. As a result he condemned the corruption and heresy of the pope and clergy. For his efforts he was 'tried', condemned as a heretic and burnt at the stake.

Those who were martyred did not give their lives in vain for the sixteenth century finally saw a great movement known as the Reformation. The reformers brought the church back to the Bible as the sole authority for faith and life initiating dramatic changes in theology and worship. As in all periods of reform and revival in the church the Reformation was also a time of stirring preaching. It was the preaching of the Bible that carried the Reformation forward. Certainly the written Word, reproduced on the recently invented printing presses, greatly aided the progress of reform, but it was the preaching of the Word that warmed cold hearts and gave clarity to confused minds. Martin Luther himself was a lively and gifted preacher. John Calvin, although totally different in temperament and character,

preached systematically through the Scriptures to thousands in the city of Geneva bringing about significant and lasting changes to the spiritual and moral life of its citizens. Other great preachers of the Reformation included Hugh Latimer in England, Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, and the fiery Scottish preacher, John Knox.

Reformational preaching was continued in England by the Puritans who sought to reform the church beyond what parliament had established in the Anglican church settlement. Their opponents gave them this name to deride their attempts to purify the church. Most of the Puritans pressed for these reforms from within the Church of England but a small group withdrew completely from the Anglican Church, beginning the English Independent or Congregationalist movement. The Puritan era lasted for about a hundred years, beginning around 1559 and ending with the Act of Uniformity in 1662. Subsequent years have given the Puritans a bad press. Yet history has not been fair to these Christians who sought to apply the Word of God with rigour to every area of their lives – to their marriages, homes, church and society. They combined careful discipline with fervent devotion and sought to understand the doctrine of the Bible well so as to live it out in their lives.³⁹

This Puritan era was not only a time of careful godliness, it was also a time of powerful and effective preaching – the former being largely a result of the latter.⁴⁰ Puritan preachers were keen to apply the Word of God to the daily lives of their people.

...the Puritans brought into their preaching both the learning of the study and the practicability of the market place. Their sermons savoured of close meditation in the closet and no less close observation in the street. Their preaching was lively because it dealt with life as it was.... And thus it was that by the even quality of its matter, by the forceful sincerity and spiritual power of its utterance, by the soundness of its doctrine and the thoroughness of its practical application the Puritan pulpit produced the golden age of evangelical preaching in England.⁴¹

Their ability in preaching arose out of their convictions that this was the

primary work of the minister, the climax of the worship service, and the main means God used, through His Spirit, to bring people to salvation and faith. Robert Traill reflected the Puritan view on this matter when he preached a sermon entitled, *By what means may ministers best win souls?* He said, “The principal work of a minister is preaching; the principal benefit people have by them is to hear the Lord’s Word from them.... Art thou a minister? Thou must be a preacher. An unpreaching minister is a sort of contradiction.”⁴² In keeping with this view of preaching they had a high view of the office of preacher and teacher. Richard Sibbes illustrates this high regard; “It is the gift of gifts, this ordinance of preaching. God esteems it so, Christ esteems it so, and so we should esteem it.”⁴³

This Puritan era saw a consistent and high standard of preaching. These preachers devoted themselves to a study of the Scriptures and of human life with a diligence that has not been seen since then. In our own day and age any one of them would have gained note as an outstanding preacher. One of the best examples from this period is Richard Baxter who, in the assessment of J. I. Packer, was “the most outstanding pastor, evangelist and writer on practical and devotional themes that Puritanism produced.”⁴⁴ Baxter ministered at Kidderminster from 1641 to 1660, with a five year break during the Civil War. Most of the 2,000 adults in the town were converted under his ministry. Before he arrived “they had hardly ever had any lively serious preaching among them” and “there was about one Family in a Street that worshipped God and called on his name”. But his ministry of regular preaching and systematic catechising was greatly blessed by the Lord so that by the time he left “there were some streets where there was not past one Family in the side of the Street that did not do so.”⁴⁵ His work, *The Reformed Pastor*, is regarded as one of the classic exhortations to ministers to apply themselves to the work of preaching and catechising. In it Baxter describes how he went about the work of teaching his people. This, to him, was the minister’s main task: To be exercised both in the public preaching of the Word and in private instruction.

One of the most enduring legacies of the Puritans for theology and preaching was the work done by the Westminster Assembly. This assembly of 121 clergymen and 30 laymen was called together by the Parliament in 1643. The vast majority of those who attended the session were Puritans who favoured a presbyterian system of church government. In addition to the Westminster Confession, the main document produced by the assembly, they also prepared a *Larger Catechism* to be used for pulpit exposition and a *Shorter Catechism* for teaching children. Their views on church order and worship were expressed in a *Directory of Worship* which contains one of the most succinct and helpful statements on preaching you will find (see Appendix). The Puritans were spiritual giants in theology and practice, preaching and pastoral work. Today we have much to learn from their example and would do well to imitate their diligence and devotion.

The Puritan era came to an end with the Restoration of Charles II to the English throne in 1660 and the subsequent Act of Uniformity in 1662 which prescribed the use of a newly revised *Prayer Book*. In one day about 2000 Presbyterian and Congregational Puritans who refused to use the *Prayer Book* were driven from their pulpits and parishes and reduced to poverty. Their biblical and practical preaching was replaced in the Church of England by dry and cold talks on morality. Clergy in the Church of England were often lazy in their lives and heretical in their doctrine. Many of them were more interested in their social standing and income than the spiritual and moral well-being of their parishioners. As a result England went into a sad decline spiritually and morally. By the opening decades of the eighteenth century life in England was in a deplorable state. Widespread unbelief went hand in hand with drunkenness, immorality and brutality.

All this began to change in the 1740's. Again the Lord used preaching to bring about a great revival of faith and godliness. Certain men were convinced that if people's lives were to be changed they had to preach the great truths of the gospel. When they were not permitted to preach in the churches they went out into the open air where thousands came to listen to them preach the doctrines of the Bible. Rev

J. C. Ryle, a forthright Anglican Bishop of the nineteenth century, wrote of these remarkable events and the Biblical truth they preached: “These were the doctrines by which they turned England upside down, made ploughmen and colliers weep till their dirty faces were seamed with tears, arrested the attention of peers [Lords] and philosophers, stormed the strongholds of Satan, plucked thousands like brands from the burning, and altered the character of the age.”⁴⁶ The leading figures in this great revival of preaching and the Christian faith were George Whitefield and John Wesley, both of whom were very able preachers. Whitefield was Calvinistic in his doctrine and a dramatic and powerful preacher, being blessed with a voice that could be heard far and wide by thousands. Wesley was Arminian in doctrine but was earnest, practical and fearless in his preaching.⁴⁷ Through their preaching in England God brought about a great change known as the Methodist revival.

A similar revival occurred in North America, known as the Great Awakening. The most prominent preacher of this movement was Jonathan Edwards. Edwards shared the same Calvinistic convictions as Whitefield but was very different in his style of preaching. While Whitefield’s preaching was expressive and emotional Edwards was far more reserved in the use of his voice and gestures. He preferred to write out his sermons in full or, later in his ministry, in a detailed outline, and would follow his script closely when preaching. Yet he preached with a desperate passion and fervency of spirit. He was absolutely convinced that he was preaching the Word of God and that God had placed him in a position of spiritual authority over those in his church.⁴⁸ Edwards, as a descendant of the Puritans, regarded preaching as the essential task of the ministry: “The work and business of ministers of the gospel is as it were that of servants, to wash and cleanse the souls of men; for this is done by the preaching of the Word, which is their main business: Ephesians 5:25 – ‘That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.’”⁴⁹ In his farewell sermon to his Northampton congregation, at the end of twenty three years of ministry, he described how he had given himself to this task:

I have spent the prime of my life and strength in labours for your eternal welfare. You are my witnesses that what strength I have had, I have not neglected in idleness, nor laid out in prosecuting worldly schemes, and managing temporal affairs, for the advancement of my outward estate and aggrandising myself and my family; but have given myself to the work of the ministry, labouring in it night and day, rising early, and applying myself to this great business to which Christ has appointed me...⁵⁰

The Puritan legacy continued to influence preaching in America into the early nineteenth century. Alexis de Tocqueville, the French sociologist and historian, writing about America in 1831, came to this conclusion;

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbours and ample rivers and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her fertile fields and boundless forests, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her public school system and her institutions of learning and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness, did I understand the secret of her genius and her power."⁵¹

This tradition of biblical preaching was continued on in England in the nineteenth century by the “Prince of Preachers”, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the Baptist minister who preached at New Park Street (1854-1859) and then in the Metropolitan Tabernacle (1861-1891). Throughout these years he preached to a congregation of thousands. Every week on Monday he would revise one of his sermons which would be available in print on the Thursday. He began this practice in 1855 and continued it every week until his death in 1892. Demand for these printed sermons increased steadily throughout his lifetime and they were sold throughout England, Scotland, Wales and America, as well as being translated into many other languages. Each year the fifty-two sermons published during the preceding year were reprinted and bound together as a single volume, *The New Park Street Pulpit* that later became *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*.⁵²

An outstanding example of biblical expository preaching in the twentieth century is found in the ministry of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a Welshman, who left a promising medical career to preach the gospel. Early in his ministry he was strongly influenced by the writings of the American Presbyterian theologian B. B. Warfield and by the writings of the Puritans and became thoroughly Calvinistic in his theological convictions. After serving a church in Wales he was invited to succeed Campbell Morgan at Westminster Chapel in London, taking sole charge in 1943. This was the beginning of a ministry that has had an influence throughout the world. He was involved in the establishment of Banner of Truth, a publishing house committed to the publication of Reformed and Puritan works of the past and present. As with Spurgeon, many of Lloyd-Jones's sermons were collected into books, most notably his expository sermons on Ephesians, Romans and the Sermon on the Mount. He retired in 1968 after spending forty-one years in the preaching ministry, thirty of which were spent in Westminster Chapel. His convictions about preaching are expressed in his sermons but also in his book *Preaching and Preachers* which has continued to be a standard work in many seminaries.

This brief survey of some of the outstanding examples of preaching in the Old and New Testament times and in the history of the church reinforces the point that preaching is not only commanded by the Lord but has also been powerfully used by God to bring about reform and revival. These examples encourage us today as we seek to “preach the Word” in our own context and as we face the critics of this biblical method. The biblical and historical background just given answers some of the primary objections raised against preaching. Others listed earlier still remain, particularly those relating to the visual character of our age. We need to consider these.

RESPONSE 2: PREACHING IS EFFECTIVE

When dealing with objections to preaching it is important that we argue the case on principles rather than pragmatics. Most of the objections listed earlier were pragmatic rather than principial and have already been answered in the biblical and historical data presented. We should also note that this low regard for the spoken word is of recent origin. For most of human history verbal communication was the main means of learning, persuasion and debate. Rhetoricians in ancient Greece and Rome spent much time and energy instructing students in the art of public oratory. The church too trained her ministers in the skill of communicating to people through the spoken word. Some were more able than others and there were times that the church put a higher value on preaching than at other times. But preaching was a mainstream form of communication; it wasn't peculiar, odd or different, but normal, usual and acceptable. It is only in more recent times that the value of preaching has been widely questioned.

Yet every day much more information is communicated by plain speech than in any other way. An old proverb states the importance of the visual: 'I *hear*, I forget; I *see*, I remember; I *do*, I understand.' There is truth in this, but we should not underestimate the power of what we *hear*. Despite this visual age there is still an enormous number of words being written, read and spoken. Even much of what happens on television is presented by a person or persons speaking to others. Think of all the television talk shows as one example and the news broadcasts as another. Many business organisations and teaching institutions still use the spoken word when addressing large audiences. The spoken medium is still well used.

Preaching is also more personal than the electronic television medium; the people speaking through those flickering images seem close at hand but they are remote, inaccessible and unapproachable. By contrast the preacher is 'live', a flesh and blood person, someone 'real'. Moreover he is accessible and approachable – you can shake his

hand after the service, ask him questions and converse with him. Not only can the listener have contact with the preacher but there is also the opportunity to have fellowship with the rest of the congregation, an opportunity not afforded by a person sitting at home alone in their living room.

Even Willow Creek, with all its emphasis on drama, music, programming, lighting and image, recognises the central importance of preaching. In a special message to senior pastors at Willow Creek's leadership conference Pastor Bill Hybels had this to say: "Now I don't like to say this around the staff; I don't like to say this, you know, around the church or even in public. But in closed-door sessions with senior pastors I like to say – it would be difficult for you to overestimate the importance of great preaching. It's not much of an exaggeration to say it's about 85 percent of the game."⁵³ Even with the thousands of hours that are poured into all the other aspects of Willow Creek's ministry Hybels recognises the central role of what is preached.

A further result of the electronic media is the increased expectation of listeners for a stylish performance. We have to admit that it is difficult for the pastor of a local congregation to achieve the standards of presentation seen by the professionals on television. However, we should not use this as an excuse to be lazy in preparation or sloppy in presentation. We all have different gifts and abilities but the Lord expects us to make the best possible use of the talents he has given us. The words of the Apostle Paul encourage us to apply ourselves to preaching with the gifts God has given: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith... if it is teaching let him teach." (Romans 12:6-7).

As we prepare and preach we need reminding that the power of preaching does not lie in our slick technique but in the power of the Holy Spirit applying the Word of God to people's hearts and minds. This was a recurring theme in the prophets of the Old Testament. God spoke through Zechariah; "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord almighty." (Zechariah 4:6). Ezekiel was given a

dramatic illustration of the power of God's Spirit when he saw a valley of dry bones come to life as he preached to them! (Ezekiel 37). In the New Testament the Apostle Paul was aware that we who are preachers have this treasure of the gospel in jars of clay "to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us". (2 Corinthians 4:7). We may not have the abilities of some of the television stars but having the power of the Holy Spirit we have all we need.

What of the objection that people today cannot concentrate – that their attention span is limited. The Puritan preachers of the 1600s generally preached for one hour; today many preachers hesitate to speak for more than fifteen minutes. It is true that we cannot ignore the capacity of the listener to absorb the message. Yet as preachers we ought to be encouraging and training our congregations to concentrate harder and to listen longer. Stories and illustrations can help; they provide a 'breathing space' and enable people to listen more attentively for an extended time. Illustrations are to a sermon what windows are to a building – they let in light and air, so aiding concentration. Providing an outline of the sermon can also help people listen – perhaps on an overhead projector, or written up on a whiteboard, or printed in the church newsletter – this can help people see where the sermon is going. Taking notes can also help the listener to concentrate. As preachers we should do all we can to assist the congregation to apply their minds and pay close attention to the Word of the Lord.

The visual character of this age has encouraged a growing move to include drama in worship. What are we to make of this? This debate about drama needs to be seen against the background of the question, "What is permitted in worship?" In answer to this Roman Catholics felt free to *add* many ceremonies and rituals in worship; Lutherans did not allow anything into worship that was *forbidden* in Scripture; Anglicans did not allow anything into worship that was *inconsistent* with Scripture; Reformed churches did not allow anything into worship that was not *commanded* in Scripture.⁵⁴ The Reformed position is summarised in the Westminster Confession of Faith; "But the

acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.”⁵⁵ Most Reformed people have understood this ‘regulative principle of worship’ to exclude the use of drama in the worship service.

A drama may be defined as “a play”; as “a work to be performed by actors”; or as “works intended for the stage.”⁵⁶ Following this definition there is a clear difference between a play and a sermon: A play is a performance while a sermon is a form of verbal communication; in a play an actor represents another person while in the sermon the preacher speaks for God. A play can only attempt to illustrate the truth while a sermon can state the truth plainly. Even advocates of drama concede the difficulty of communicating a message through a play acknowledging that it is best used to connect people with a problem rather than provide a solution. Preaching, however, is not about raising problems and questions but about presenting solutions and answers. In a recent book on public worship, Dr. John Frame, Professor of Philosophy at Westminster Seminary, himself sympathetic to the use of drama, acknowledges its limitations:

In my experience, dramas are most effective in worship when they pose a question to which the sermon presents a Scriptural answer.... I am not an advocate of the use of drama. In my view there are many considerations arguing that the Word is usually presented better through the traditional monologue than through drama. Dramas are hard to write, plan and rehearse. When done poorly they are a distraction, and when done well (usually by professional leadership), the cost exceeds the value of the performance. And perhaps especially now, amid all the technological and media clutter, it can be refreshing and powerful to receive a straightforward “live” message from one man entrusted with the Word of God, speaking from the heart as “a dying man to dying men.” The simplicity of such an address can have, as our puritan forefathers emphasised, a great spiritual power.⁵⁷

Most of the advocates for drama base their arguments on the dramatic elements in the Scriptures. It is true that some of the prophets occasionally used symbols to reinforce their message⁵⁸ but these actions were incidental to their primary calling to be preachers. We would do well to be cautious about building a strong case for drama on the basis of these few and scattered incidents of prophetic symbolism.⁵⁹

Turning to the New Testament others argue for drama on the basis of the dialogue style of the preaching of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. They also note that the parables of Jesus were stories. Yet to allow drama in worship on this basis is to broaden the definition of drama considerably. There is quite a difference between a preacher telling a story and a group of people acting it out. In a sermon a preacher is verbally proclaiming God's truth, in drama people are acting out a scene. Drama cannot state propositional truth; the best it can do is *illustrate* the truth. Why use an inferior method when a superior method is available? It is significant that the Apostle Paul did not draw on this medium for the presentation of the gospel message, especially considering that elaborate drama festivals were a popular part of the Greek and Roman culture and well known to him. Nowhere do we see him imitating this method nor do we hear him advocating that others use it. He wanted to proclaim the gospel free from any associations with the pagan culture around him using a method that the prophets of the Old Testament had used for centuries. Far from using any song and dance routines the Apostle Paul proclaimed the Word of God and, as we have seen, called others to do the same.

Another weakness of drama is that it is aimed at the emotions whereas preaching addresses the truth of God to the mind. Willow Creek recognises this distinction and readily admits that their musical and dramatic programming are aimed at the language of unchurched Harry – that is, his emotions. They maintain that *experience*, not *evidence*, is the “mode of discovery” for ‘Unchurched Harry’.⁶⁰ Yet the Scriptures constantly emphasise that the truth of God's Word must inform and transform the minds of those who hear. Pritchard, who conducted a thorough doctoral study of Willow Creek, points out that

the use of drama dilutes the message of the gospel: “Creekers often use visual stimulation as a substitute for thought and do not value verbal precision. Making Christianity more visual tends to make it less verbal. Simplicity is valued and conceptual complexity is devalued.”⁶¹ At its very best drama is preparatory to the preaching of the Word. At worst it is distracting, or manipulative, or both. In a study of the biblical and historical data on dance and drama in worship Brian Edwards concludes:

The arts have never been widely used when the church has been at its liveliest. For nine hundred years the gospel percolated throughout Britain before anyone thought of peppering up the church services with drama! The method most widely used by man for communicating truth is plain speech. From the pulpit, the lecture hall, the classroom, the garden fence or the BBC studio, plain speech is the easiest, most natural and most effective method of communicating.⁶²

The bottom line of the case for preaching is that the Lord commands us to preach and He regards the preached Word as the primary means of communicating the gospel to His people and to a lost and searching world. Moreover, this is the method that has been practised by the church down through the ages and has been powerful and effective in bringing reformation to the church and revival in society. Even the modern technology available to us and the emphasis on the visual in today’s world should not dissuade us from preaching. It remains the obligation of every man called to the ministry to preach “the unsearchable riches of Christ” and to do this with confidence, clarity and conviction.

Chapter 3

IS PREACHING AUTHORITATIVE?

OBJECTION: PREACHING HAS NO AUTHORITY

People have not only questioned the *effectiveness* of preaching in our modern multi-media society but they have also questioned the *authority* of preaching. At the root of this critique is a lack of confidence in the Scriptures. There have always been those who have questioned the truth of the Bible but in the last three centuries the Scriptures have come under heavy fire from deism, rationalism and liberalism. As a result of these devastating movements in the history of ideas “God so shrank in men’s minds that the miraculous realities of regeneration and inspiration became incredible to them.”⁶³ Modern liberalism has undermined confidence in the authority of God’s Word.

People don’t respect the Bible

Most people do not believe that the Bible is truly the Word of God or that it speaks to them with any authority. Even many theologians and preachers do not believe that the Scriptures are inerrant and trustworthy. Rather than boldly proclaiming the Word of truth they timidly share their doubts about the Bible, especially when it comes to some of the central truths about the Lord Jesus – his virgin birth, miracles and resurrection. Early in 1998 Dr James Veitch, senior religious studies lecturer at Victoria University and a Presbyterian minister, asserted that more than 80 per cent of the stories about Jesus Christ are not based on fact. He claimed the backing of many modern New Testament scholars in support of his belief that the resurrection of Jesus should not be understood in a bodily sense. “We’re discovering

the metaphorical value of much of the story telling about Jesus in the gospels,” he said.⁶⁴ These ideas, of course, have been around for some time. What is tragic is that they are being promoted by theologians and preachers in the church. It is little wonder that congregations do not trust the message they hear from pulpits and that there has been a loss of confidence in preaching. As the Apostle Paul put it; “...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” (1 Cor 15:17-19). Responding to the Liberal ‘gospel’ Frank Colquhoun expresses himself forcefully but truly when he writes;

It is tragic when men who profess to be the ministers of the gospel appear to be more sure of what they do not believe than of what they do. They are convinced of their doubts; they are doubtful of their convictions. But the final tragedy is that instead of keeping their miserable doubts to themselves they drag them into the pulpit and give them an airing in almost every sermon. There is no apostolic ‘We know!’ about their preaching but only a hesitant ‘We venture to suggest’.⁶⁵

Such hesitancy is the natural consequence of a loss of respect for the Scriptures.

A lack of confidence in the authority of God’s Word has contributed to a change of approach in preaching. Rather than preaching the Bible many pastors believe they should focus on human needs and hurts. One church advertised the public meetings of a visiting minister with a healing ministry: “SICK of being SICK. Fed up with feeling LONELY and HURT. This is the GOOD NEWS! JESUS is still in the healing business.” An advertisement such as this addresses a person’s physical and emotional hurts rather than their spiritual need. Preaching that follows this line will be more anthropocentric than theocentric. Traditionally a preacher may have begun with the human situation to gain the attention of his congregation but then directed them to the Scriptures. In this new style of preaching the Bible is placed in the

background; the centre of attention is the situation of the listener. At the root of this approach is a loss of confidence in the authority and power of the Word of God.

People don't respect the preacher

Connected with a loss of confidence in the Bible is a loss of respect for the preacher. In times past the minister was a highly respected member of society. Not any more. Not long ago I was looking to buy a trailer and was examining one located in the garage of an older man. He asked me what I did for a job. When he heard I was a minister he immediately responded, "Well, they don't have such a great record do they!" While his response may not be typical it is not uncommon. Many people don't take the pastor seriously any more. Some will feel sorry for him, others will be sceptical, still others will be cynical.

Preachers don't rate highly in a pragmatic and utilitarian society where everything is valued for its practical use or its economic return. We can't contribute anything visible or tangible or of practical benefit to others; therefore, in the eyes of those around us, we aren't all that important. Ask school leavers in New Zealand what they want to do for a job – chances are the profession of clergy will be near the bottom of the list!

Media presentations of the clergyman have not helped our image. Generally they picture him as an older man, slightly confused, rather eccentric, who occupies his time drinking afternoon tea with old ladies. Add to this the moral fall of some of America's tele-evangelists and it is little wonder that preachers are working uphill to get a hearing.

A general rejection of authority figures also contributes to the loss of respect for the minister. In previous generations people respected men who occupied positions of authority – parliamentarians, policemen, teachers, doctors and ministers. Much of that has gone, especially since the 1960s. The mood of the day is anti-authority. A preacher cannot expect to gain a hearing just because of his position. Improved

opportunities for learning and a method of education that encourages pupils to ask questions have sharpened people's critical faculties. Now everybody has his own opinions and his own convictions and considers them just as good as the preacher's.⁶⁶ As they hear a sermon people ask, "Who does he think he is? Fancy telling me what to do!" The way people use pulpit words reflects this distorted understanding of the task of the minister. To 'preach' has come to mean "to give advice in an offensive, tedious or obtrusive manner", while to be 'sermonic' is "to inflict on someone a patronising harangue."⁶⁷

A loss of respect for the preacher inevitably leads to a loss of respect for preaching itself.

People don't respect preaching

There have always been people who have found the preaching of the gospel repugnant. What is to one "the fragrance of life" is to the other "the smell of death" (2 Cor 2:16). The preaching of Christ crucified, writes the Apostle Paul, is "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor 2:23). No one likes to face their own sin and need of salvation – yet the preaching of the Word must expose our human poverty. Such exposure is bound to be offensive to some. We see this in some of the reactions to the preaching of the Apostles: Those listening were "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37), they "were furious and gnashed their teeth" (Acts 7:54), they "raised their voices and...were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air" (Acts 22:22-23). To be sure, these were violent and extreme responses but they illustrate that the gospel can be extremely distasteful to some. Often, however, preaching is too bland for people to be offended. Preachers are sometimes afraid of offending people so they soft-pedal the hard parts of the gospel – the call to discipleship, the wrath of God on sin, the punishment of hell for the unbelieving and ungodly. Yet the task of the preacher is to proclaim the Scriptures. He must make the gospel plain enough for people to see the issues, sufficiently clear for

people to either accept or reject the message.

Others have found the preaching of the gospel predictable and boring. They come to church merely out of habit or custom and do not expect anything to happen. They do not anticipate any dramatic effect in their minds or any impact on their lives. They do not believe that preaching has any life changing significance.⁶⁸ Some have come to church for years and Sunday after Sunday have left untouched and unchanged. Maybe they have hardened their hearts, but often the fault lies with the preacher. Too often the preacher himself does not expect any results from his preaching – he does not anticipate any dramatic results or even subtle changes. Perhaps he is weary, lethargic and tired. Boring preaching, however, is not gospel preaching. Whatever else happens during the preaching people must not be bored; challenged, rebuked or exhorted – but not bored.

Still others come to church expecting to be entertained. This, after all, is an entertainment culture. People are amused by television for many hours of the day; they are occupied by their sport and by a host of leisure pursuits – why not be entertained at church as well? They come with the question, “What’s in this for me? What can I get out of this?” Many preachers have obliged, turning their Sunday services into lively showcases designed to cater to the consumer mentality of our culture. Such a response further undermines the authority of preaching because it encourages those who come to church to look for entertainment rather than the truth. Worship services are focussed on providing an experience rather than on proclaiming God’s Word. The emphasis is on my needs and wants rather than on God’s will and truth.

How should preachers respond to this situation where the Bible, the preacher and preaching itself are no longer respected or valued? Those who preach must believe that they are proclaiming an authoritative Bible; they must believe that they have authority as preachers of the Word; and they must believe in the authority of preaching. We will examine these three in turn.

RESPONSE: PREACHING IS AUTHORITATIVE

Over the last century conservative theologians have fought against liberals in a battle for the Bible. This is not the place for a detailed description of this debate. Yet we need to remind ourselves that throughout her history the church believed that the Great Creator who made this world and everything in it spoke to his people in words that have been written down in the Bible.

The authority of God's Word

Historically both Rome and the Reformers believed that the Bible, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is the Word of God. They believed this Word to be inerrant and authoritative, clear and sufficient, to be read as “an historically structured, self-authenticating and self-interpreting organism of revealed truth.”⁶⁹

Some of the best formulations of the church's confession about the Bible are found in the old confessions of the Reformation. The Belgic Confession (1561) is representative of what the Reformers believed:

We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they carry the evidence thereof within themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled.⁷⁰

All these books must be preached as the Word of God because it is only through the Bible that people can believe in Jesus Christ and so escape eternal judgement. In the parable about the rich man and Lazarus the rich man, unable to obtain relief in the fires of hell, pleaded with Abraham; “Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house,

for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead’” (Luke 16:27-31). One lesson in this parable is that the Word of God is the only means we have available to us for the conversion of the lost.

The written Word of God has this power because it tells us about the Living Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was there at the beginning (John 1:1), through whom all things were made (Col 1:15-18). Jesus Christ is central to the Bible. The Old Covenant is full of longing and expectation for the arrival of the Messiah as is evident in the prophecies about his coming in the Old Testament. When he began his preaching ministry Jesus explained that he was the fulfilment of these promises. As he travelled the road to Emmaus with two of his disciples he took them for a tour through the Old Testament; “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27) The New Testament gospels describe his life, suffering, death and resurrection, while the letters go on to explain the implications and applications of his person and work. He is the central figure in God’s great plan of redemption. When we preach the Scriptures we must preach about the Lord pointing people to all the glorious facets of who he is and what he has done – his humiliation and exaltation; the benefits and blessings of his offices as prophet, priest and king; the glory and scope of his kingdom; the nature and task of his church on earth; and the glorious expectation of his return. Martin Luther directed preachers to focus on Christ; “We preach always Him, the true God and man. This may seem a limited and monotonous subject, likely to be soon exhausted, but we are never at the end of it.”⁷¹ James Stewart echoes this when he writes; “Settle it in your own souls now that, whatever else you may do or leave undone, you will preach in season and out of season God’s redemptive deed in Christ. This is the

one inexhaustible theme.”⁷² To preach is to declare this central message of the Bible – the person and work of Jesus.

People will not gain a respect for preaching unless there is a renewed confidence in these Scriptures and a conviction about its content. When we have recovered a conviction about the truth of the Bible then we will see a renewed confidence in preaching. Belief in the authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God will lay the basis for a revival of Biblical preaching in this country and, in turn, will lead to a new respect for the preacher.

The authority of the preacher

There are no quick-fix solutions that will magically polish up the tarnished image and reputation of the clergy. Preachers themselves cannot control the way people view them, nor should this be our primary concern. Yet there are two things we should concentrate on as preachers – one is to understand and fulfil our calling as heralds; the other is to live holy and godly lives as those who minister in Christ’s name.

Our authority as preachers does not lie in ourselves; it does not come from an ‘authoritarian’ style (in fact, in today’s climate, that may even be counter-productive); it does not come from dressing in robes or using ‘churchy’ language. None of these things will convince people that they should listen to us. The only authority we have is that given to us by Christ.

This is how the Apostle Paul saw his authority. He regarded himself as an apostle of Christ, commissioned and appointed by the Lord himself. Even in his day there were those who questioned his right to speak and preach to them. His authority was challenged, especially by some in the church in Corinth. Paul had to write to that church defending and maintaining his apostleship. As he did so he explained the authority of gospel preachers: “So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.”

(1 Cor 4:1) He described himself and the other apostles as “servants, through whom you came to believe” (1 Cor 3:5), “God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor 3:9, 2 Cor 6:1), “an expert builder” (1 Cor 3:10), “a father” (1 Cor 4:15), “ministers of a new covenant” (2 Cor 3:6) and as “Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Cor 5:20). With these terms he made it clear that their authority came from God; “Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant.” (2 Cor 3:4-6). What Paul wrote of himself is also true of ministers of the gospel today. We too are ministers of the new covenant with a competence that comes from the Lord. We are not self-appointed or self-ordained; rather every minister is called to this task by the Lord and set aside for it by the church.

This truth is also explained in the word “herald”. Earlier we saw that this term was used of a messenger sent out by the king. Here we note that he is also sent with the *authority* of the one who sent him. People had to listen to him because he proclaimed a message in the name of the king. As the king’s messenger he represented the king and came with his authority. His message usually demanded a response – the subjects of the king were to do what the king commanded them. Preachers in the church today are also heralds. We must set forth the demands and commands of the king, expecting people to obey. An old hymn puts it well when it says,

Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea,
I’m here on business for my King.⁷³

This is how we must see ourselves – as invested with the king’s authority and entrusted with his message. Ministers of the Word should not allow their view of their calling and authority to be shaped by the current climate of opinion in the church or the world. Rather, our view must be shaped by the Word of God. The pulpit will gain more authority when we see ourselves as God sees us.

However, we will only gain a hearing if people see that our lives are consistent with our message. We must be holy and godly. Public moral failure has discredited not only those individuals who have sinned but has tainted the reputation of all ministers. To prevent this it is essential that we *practise* what we *preach*, that what we *do* backs up what we *say*. The Apostle Paul reminded the Christians in Thessalonica of the ministry of the apostles among them: “As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.... You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed.” (1 Thess 2:7,8,10). Paul could write to the Philippians urging them to join with others in following his example (Phils 3:17). We ought to be able to say this as well.

Our example as preachers and men of God is a living sermon that reinforces the message we preach. A struggling minister came to Wesley inquiring as to the cause of a lack of power in his ministry. Wesley gave the following forthright and honest evaluation: “Your temper is uneven; you lack love for your neighbours. You grow angry too easily; your tongue is too sharp – thus, the people will not hear you.”⁷⁴ Bryan Chapell reminds us of the importance of a godly life in the following observation:

I must recognise that if I were to return to churches that I have pastored it is unlikely that people will remember many specifics I said... not one person will remember a dozen words of the thousands I have spoken through the years. The people will not remember what I said, they will remember *me* and whether my life gave credence to the message of Scripture.”⁷⁵

In a society which already has a poor image of the minister it is imperative that we pray that the Holy Spirit will work within us to shape our Christian character and fill our lives with his fruit. Then we will gain an authority that comes from the Word of God as it is preached by a godly man.

The authority of preaching

Preaching has authority when it is a faithful exposition, explanation and application of the Word of God. John Bunyan's description of the preacher in *Pilgrim's Progress* beautifully illustrates the centrality of the Word of God for the minister of the gospel – he had “the best of books in his hand.”⁷⁶ John Wesley loved to describe himself as, *homo unius libri*, “a man of one book,”⁷⁷ and Billy Graham, to quote a more contemporary example, was known for his well used phrase, “the Bible says.”⁷⁸ The preacher of the gospel must stand before the congregation and be able to say; “Listen to the Word of the Lord”.

Preaching the Word of God

A sermon is not a social commentary. It must apply to the world, relate to our situation, and connect with society; but the Word of God, not the newspaper or the latest political development, must be the text, set the agenda and determine the content.

Nor is a sermon a string of stories. Certainly illustrations can be helpful in adding interest, colour and light; but a sermon of only stories is like a meal of only meringue – there is no substance to it – it will not feed God's people who come to church week by week hungry for spiritual nourishment.

Nor is a sermon to consist of reflections on our own experiences, crises or struggles. Too often preachers offer their own ideas, comments or insights. Bryan Chapell cautions us against “peppering our sermons with expressions such as “I believe this means...,” “I feel we should understand,” or even, “I think...” “Quite frankly, except for peripheral matters, biblically astute congregations are not interested in what the preacher thinks.”⁷⁹ People do not come to hear *our* word, but rather a word from the *Lord*! James Stewart reminds us that “human hearts, bombarded with grim perplexities and damaging shadows of despair, are crying as never before, “Is there any word from the

Lord?" ... They don't want our views, opinions, advice or arguments. *Is there any word from the Lord?"*⁸⁰ It is imperative, therefore, that preachers do not expound their own experiences or opinions but preach the message and content of the Scriptures.

Nor is authority in preaching a question of manner or style. Preaching must have authority but should not be authoritarian. To carry convicting power the preacher does not need to shout, rant or rave – in fact, ranting and raving may turn people away from the message. The authority in preaching comes from the Word of God itself, not from an authoritarian manner.

To return to my opening statement: Preaching has authority when it is a faithful exposition, explanation and application of the Word of God. John Stott explains this clearly when he writes:

Preaching is a 'manifestation', *phanerosis*, of the truth which stands written in the Scriptures. Therefore, every sermon should be, in some sense, an expository sermon. The preacher may use illustrations from political, ethical, and social fields to illumine and enforce the Biblical principles he is seeking to unfold, but the pulpit is no place for purely political commentary, ethical exhortation or social debate.⁸¹

Haddon Robinson puts it this way; "When a preacher fails to preach the Scriptures, he abandons his authority. He confronts his hearers no longer with a word from God but only with another word from men."⁸²

All this reflects the view of the Reformers who rightly regarded the faithful preaching of the Word of God as the Word of God. Calvin expresses this plainly when he writes: "...the word of the gospel, whatever man may preach it, is the very sentence of God, published at the supreme judgement seat, written in the Book of Life, ratified, fixed and firm, in heaven."⁸³ This was expressly stated in the *Second Helvetic Confession* of 1566: "The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful; and that neither any other Word of

God is to be feigned nor to be expected from heaven.” The Ordination service for the priest in the Anglican church also reflects a high view of the authority of preaching and its close connection with the Word of God. A successful ministry, according to the ordinal, is one in which a man is “a faithful and effective communicator of the biblical message.”⁸⁴ To do this requires that a man give adequate time to “daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures” so that he may “wax riper and stronger” in his ministry.⁸⁵ With these statements the Reformers were simply expressing the truth of the Bible itself. The Apostle Paul, for instance, wrote to the Thessalonians; “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). The Word the Thessalonians heard was the Word the apostles had preached to them, which Paul regarded as the very Word of God. When a preacher today faithfully preaches the Scriptures then his sermon is truly the Word of the Lord. This is not to say that every sermon preached is the Word of God because, sadly, many sermons are a proclamation of a preacher’s own ideas rather than being a proclamation of the Scriptures. To be the Word of God to God’s people a sermon must be thoroughly Biblical, both in its content and in its faithfulness to the intent of the passage being preached.⁸⁶ Such preaching has usually been described as ‘expository’.

Expository Preaching

Expository preaching has been defined in many ways. Some understand exposition to consist of a running commentary on a passage, explaining it verse by verse and applying it along the way. Others define an expository sermon as one based on three or more verses of Scripture distinguishing it from textual preaching which is based on a shorter passage or one verse. It is better, however, to define expository preaching, not on the length of the passage, but on the faithfulness of the sermon to the Word of God. An expository sermon

must explain, illustrate and apply the intent of a selected passage of the Bible. This may require the preacher to distil the essence of a long passage or to explore the meaning and implications of a brief verse.⁸⁷ Brian Chapell talks about an “expository unit” and defines it as “a large or small portion of Scripture from which the preacher can demonstrate a single spiritual truth with adequate supporting facts or concepts arising from within the scope of a text.”⁸⁸ Haddon Robinson defines expository preaching as “the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.”⁸⁹ Common to these two definitions is that a sermon must communicate the truth of a passage of Scripture.

This book is not an explanation of the mechanics of preparing expository sermons – that subject is well covered in other books, including the two just quoted. We should note, however, that a sermon must concentrate on one main truth. An effective sermon is not a running commentary on a passage but a well shaped message emphasising one central point (variously described as a proposition, theme, concept, main thought, thesis statement, or big idea). Sermons don’t fail from having too many ideas but from having ideas that are not connected with the main theme of the sermon.⁹⁰ A sermon should be like a single bullet rather than the hundreds of little pellets of a shotgun blast; all the ideas mentioned in the sermon should contribute to the impact of the one main idea. This idea should be developed in a clear, logical and well-structured outline, fleshed out in vivid language, illustrated with pertinent stories and examples, and applied to the needs of the congregation. Expository preaching is powerful because it is biblical. It allows the Scriptures to speak. It explains and applies the truth of the Bible. Such preaching carries the authority and power of the Word of God.

Expository preaching may be contrasted with preaching that is based on our own thoughts or ideas. The Lord spoke through Jeremiah condemning the prophets who prophesied the visions and

dreams of their own minds rather than the Word of the Lord: “Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully.... Is not my word like fire and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces.” (Jer 23:28-29). The great need of our day is not the prophesies, dreams and visions that so many claim to have had but the faithful preaching of the Scriptures. The neglect and absence of such preaching must be a major reason why many churches in New Zealand today are declining. There is no clear “word from the Lord”. There is no proclamation, exposition and application of the Scriptures – no, “Thus says the Lord!” Frank Colquhoun calls for such preaching when he writes:

The Bible is the preacher’s textbook... in the sense that it is the authoritative Word which it is his main business to expound and on which he bases the whole of his message. Only as he looks at the Scriptures in this light will he be able to meet the needs of those to whom he ministers. The unspoken cry of every gathered congregation to the preacher is not “Is there any bright idea from the current religious debate?” but “Is there any word from the Lord?”⁹¹

Topical Preaching

The authority of preaching, as we have seen, comes from its faithfulness to the Scriptures. Yet preachers face a constant temptation to inject their own ideas into their sermons and to borrow from the thinking of the surrounding culture. It is especially easy to fall for this temptation when preaching topical sermons. There are as many definitions of the word ‘topical’ in relation to sermons as there are of the word ‘expository’. We could define ‘topical’ sermons as those organised around a subject or topic rather than a passage of the Bible. In the topical approach the preacher summarises what he believes the whole Bible is saying on a particular topic, whereas expository sermons are rooted in a detailed analysis of particular passages of Scripture. Both types of sermons are difficult to write and preach. Both

require a substantial knowledge of biblical and systematic theology. Many preachers believe that topical preaching is easier, but they underestimate the difficulties of this approach. Topical preaching is fraught with dangers because it is extremely difficult to present a balanced and comprehensive study of a topic in one sermon. To do this requires a substantial theological education and a good grasp of the overall teaching of the Bible. Preachers ought to have such a knowledge, but many do not.

Another weakness of topical preaching is that preachers pass their messages through the grid of their own ideas. The information in a topical sermon is organised according to the ideas of the preacher rather than letting the passage itself provide the content and outline. Of course, even in expository preaching the preacher may organise his sermon around a logical outline rather than following the flow of thought in the passage. Yet the danger of imposing one's own ideas on the Scriptures is increased in topical preaching – it is all too easy to preach one's own agenda rather than the content and intent of the Scriptures.⁹²

A further weakness of the topical approach has to do not only with *content* of the sermon but with the *approach* to the subject. Topical messages are usually chosen because of the perceived relevance of the topic for the congregation at that time. The preacher will be interested to demonstrate just how relevant this topic is. Of course, relevance and application are crucial elements of a sermon, but the great danger of the topical approach is that the application will control the exposition rather than the exposition controlling the application. In our desire to preach 'relevantly' on this topic the preacher may be tempted to put the cart before the horse; ie. to think first about how the listener will hear the message rather than asking what the Bible is actually saying and then asking how it applies. To avoid this danger in the topical sermon the preacher must be sure he does careful exegesis, expounds the passages and makes the application from the texts he is preaching. Systematic exegetical preaching, by contrast, makes it easier for a preacher to stay close to the Biblical text. In doing so there is less

possibility of straying from the content and emphases of the Scriptures.

Yet another weakness of the topical approach is that ministers tend to preach their hobby horses. We all gravitate to subjects we are interested in. If the topical sermon is our main approach to preaching we run the great danger of missing key themes and elements of the Scriptures. Rather than preaching our favourite subjects or pet themes we must preach the fullness of the revelation God has given us in the Scriptures. This is worth exploring further for a moment.

The whole counsel of God

A topical approach to preaching aims to deal with particular subjects. Yet we must aim to imitate the Apostle Paul who assured the Ephesian elders that he had not hesitated to proclaim to them the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The best way to achieve this is through systematic expository preaching. If we work our way through the Scriptures in a systematic and thorough manner then over the years we will cover the range of biblical truth that will be helpful to those who hear. Following this method will ensure that we are never short of truth to preach. James Stewart expresses this well when he writes;

If there are indeed “unsearchable riches” in Christ, you will always be pioneering and exploring, always discovering new depths in the gospel, and the streams of the river of life will never for you run dry. The longest ministry is too short by far to exhaust the treasures of the Word of God. Certainly if you preach your own theories and ideas, using Scripture texts merely as pegs to hang them on, you will soon be at the end of your resources – and the sooner the better. But if you will let the Scriptures speak their own message, if you will realise that every passage or text has its own distinctive meaning, you will begin to feel that the problem is not lack of fresh material, but the very embarrassment of riches.⁹³

There are many examples of preachers who have successfully followed this approach. One already mentioned is D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his long ministry in Westminster Chapel. A contemporary

example is John MacArthur Jnr., who has been the pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California since 1969.

There are various ways to achieve a systematic expository ministry. Probably the most common approach is to preach through a book of the Bible. As we work our way through one book after another, according to the needs of the congregation, preaching both the Old Testament and the New, we will cover the full range of biblical truth. Our preaching will also give weight to areas that the Scriptures themselves give weight to. Another approach is to follow the church year. Some denominations (Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran) follow the lectionary readings from Epiphany through to Trinity, which also ensures a good coverage of the Biblical data. Archbishop Cranmer designed the first (1549) Prayer Book for the Anglican church so that the whole Bible would be read continuously through the year. Following his plan the Old Testament would be read through once and the New Testament through three times per year. “No church before or since has ever read the Bible so assiduously as Cranmer directed the Church of England to do.”⁹⁴ In my own denomination ministers will generally preach through a book of the Bible in the morning service but in the afternoon or evening service they will follow the sequence of Christian doctrine and life as summarised in one of the four confessions of our churches (The Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, Canons of Dort and Westminster Confession). Any one of these methods (or a combination of them) will help us preach through the Bible in a systematic manner.

What is important is that the Scriptures are preached. Following the church year or a catechism or confession of the church may be seen as a guided topical approach to preaching. This will avoid the dangers of the topical sermon if we take a passage of the Bible as our starting point and seek to preach the intent of that passage rather than our own thoughts and ideas about the subject of the catechism or the lectionary reading for that Sunday.

In all of this it is more important that we have a good grasp of a

theology of preaching than that we master any particular technique. We need to be utterly convinced that the Word of God is the inspired record of what God wants mankind to know for faith and practice; that the Head of the church sets aside certain men to be preachers of this Word; and that this Word must be preached in a way that explains the intent of the passage and applies it to our contemporary situation. When the Bible is so preached people will see its relevance for their lives. To this we now turn.

Chapter 4

IS PREACHING RELEVANT?

OBJECTION: PREACHING IS IRRELEVANT

The first objection we considered dealt with the method of preaching and questioned its effectiveness. We responded by pointing out that preaching is commanded in the Scriptures and has been used powerfully by the Lord in the history of the church. Then we considered the objection that preaching lacks authority in the world today. We noted that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God and that God has appointed preachers to be his heralds. When they faithfully preach his Word their sermons are the Word of God to those who hear.

Others object that preaching is not relevant to the real issues and needs of people today. The *Collins Concise Dictionary* defines ‘relevant’ as “having direct bearing on the matter in hand”. Many in both the world and the church would argue that preaching has no “direct bearing” on their lives – it is irrelevant.

The attitude of society

People in society often accuse the church and its ministers of being irrelevant. We have to admit that often this charge is true. Many people come to church expecting, hoping to hear a “word from the Lord” that will speak to their lives; too often they travel home disappointed. Perhaps the preacher spoke in a language and a tone that was difficult to understand; maybe there was no application or connection with people’s lives; possibly the message seemed foreign to their situation. This has happened with sufficient regularity for many to have

developed low expectations of preaching.

These factors have contributed to a situation where few New Zealanders look to the church for any meaningful advice or guidance. Most people looking for direction will go to the social scientists and psychologists, not to the church. Television and radio commentators will consult so-called ‘experts’ rather than speak to the clergy. The columnists in *Woman’s Weekly* have replaced the pastor as the advisers and counsellors in people’s lives. In our secular society preachers and preaching have been sidelined, relegated to the wings, only to be called on if some religious controversy erupts or a theological debate is stirred.

The attitude of the church

Unfortunately, trends within the church have contributed to the perceived irrelevance of preaching. Increasingly over the past few decades ministers have been distracted from their preaching task by other responsibilities and expectations. Last century the job description of a minister was relatively simple (even if the task was not). He was expected to devote his time to preaching in two services on the Sunday, to instruct the young people of the church and to be a pastor. Today’s pastors have many and varied expectations placed on them. Some of these arise out of the high profile of ‘successful’ pastors of mega-churches: “Meet Pastor Jones, Superstar. He can preach, counsel, evangelise, administrate, conciliate, communicate and sometimes even integrate. He can also raise the budget.”⁹⁵ Yet, realistically, most pastors cannot do all these tasks *and* still prepare thoroughly for the preaching on the Sunday. Other pressures arise out of the expectations, exhortations and hype of the church growth movement that mails pastors a constant stream of information giving them the latest techniques and methods to build a church that is vibrant, successful and multiplying. Increasingly pastors are being distracted from the task of preaching the gospel and shepherding

God's flock by other functions that are at best peripheral to the ministry and at worst harmful to it.

One of the main additions to a minister's workload is the increasing time spent in counselling and therapy. This reflects the breakdown in society and the increasing problems and difficulties in people lives. Many people in NZ suffer from some form of depression; we have the highest youth suicide rate and the second highest teen pregnancy rate in the developed world; there are 175 divorces every week and two out of every five births occur outside of marriage. These statistics are representative of enormous and deep-seated problems in people's personal lives. A growing band of professional counsellors and psychologists deal with these people, but many of these problems are also present in the church and come to the pastor. It is too much to expect a pastor to prepare well-studied and thoughtful sermons when he is trying to cope with a growing tide of counselling situations. Something is going to suffer – often it is the preaching.

Management responsibilities are another demand on the minister's time. The growth in administration is a result of a number of factors: The increasing complexity of society, the diversification of the church's ministries, denominational responsibilities and the trend to larger (even 'mega') congregations. There is a trend for the minister to become the Chief Executive Officer of a large ecclesiastical operation, modelling his actions on the managerial techniques of the business world. Again what often suffers is the preaching of the Word.

Preaching has also taken a secondary place to other elements of worship. "At the present time liturgy is all the fashion and focus of interest. We are told that worship must come first; that worship is the church's first duty and is more important than preaching; that people do not go to church to listen to sermons but to give glory to God."⁹⁶ For some, therefore, this shift of emphasis has been deliberate – they believe that other forms of communication are more effective than the preaching medium – such as mime, dance, drama and puppets. For others this has happened more by chance than by design; the complexity and diversity of worship styles and format has meant that

the minister has become a worship coordinator more than a preacher, a facilitator more than a theologian. The current trend in worship is from content towards experience, from proclamation towards atmosphere, from preaching to entertainment. One week I drove past a church that advertised its Sunday evening youth service with a board that said; “YOUTH SERVICE: Loud Music! Drama! Action!” The following week it was advertising a “FAMILY SERVICE: Scones, Country and Western”. Preaching may well be a part of the service but no mention was made of it in the advertisement, probably because it is not seen as a drawcard.

All these factors make preaching an uphill battle in today’s climate, both in the world and the church. Preaching has taken second place to other ‘livelier’ and more ‘modern’ forms of communication. The many expectations of the twentieth century pastor have diversified his task with the result that he is spread thinner and over a wider area than he was, say, last century. Campbell Morgan warned that, “This is a day in which one of our greatest perils is that of doing a thousand little things to the neglect of the one thing, which is preaching.”⁹⁷

So, is preaching relevant? Does it have “direct bearing” on the lives of those who listen? Are those pursuing the therapeutic and managerial models of ministry on the right track? Perhaps we should give way to the current trends? Are those who neglect preaching to focus on a more entertaining and diversified form of worship onto something? In response, I maintain that preaching is relevant to New Zealanders today because it has direct bearing on their needs, both their eternal need and the more immediate needs in their lives.

RESPONSE 1: PREACHING IS RELEVANT BECAUSE IT DEALS WITH ETERNAL ISSUES

Faithful preaching of the Scriptures addresses the greatest need of each person – the need to know God through repentance and faith. True preaching brings every person face to face with God and

challenges them to believe in him. Preaching the Word of God will bring great issues to the attention of those who listen, critical issues they must consider. Such preaching will be based on the ultimate and absolute truth of the Bible. It will expose human sin and the misery that arises out of it. It will explain our need for salvation. It will point people to Christ as their great hope. It will call people to a response of faith and obedience. The subjective and changing needs of our human situation all too easily distract us from these central truths. Yet the Word of God “is rather addressed to that *objective* and true human condition stripped of all the lies of human subjectivity.”⁹⁸ The Bible enables us to see ourselves as we are in relation to the God who made us. For this reason preaching is always relevant because the need of mankind is always the same.

Some preachers and churches put a lot of emphasis on meeting the ‘felt needs’ of those they are trying to reach. They believe we must be sensitive to these needs and that people’s sense of need ought to guide the selection of topics preached and the content of the sermons. It is true that felt needs can provide a good starting point for the preacher – it provides a way in, an entry point. But the need a person *feels* may not be his most important need. He may feel sad that his marriage has broken up but may be oblivious of his guilt in this and his need for repentance; his felt need may obscure his real need. It is also true that Jesus met people’s needs – at times. He welcomed mothers with their little children, he healed lepers, he gave sight to the blind, made a paralytic walk. But he also confronted people with their sin, he rebuked the pharisees for being “blind guides” and “whitewashed tombs”, and he threw over the tables of the money changers and chased the traders out of the temple. In these instances he was hardly sensitive to the ‘felt needs’ of these individuals. “What the Christian community says to the world should be based on criteria of truth, *not* on sociological market research or public relations.”⁹⁹ The substance and content of our sermons should not be guided by the felt needs of the audience but rather by the Word of God. This Word has a timeless message addressed to people through all the ages.

The essential message of preaching does not change from one century to another – that is; “That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). The content of the message does not change because “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). One Christian writer observes that, “the nearer we come to the heart of the gospel, the deeper we penetrate beneath the changeable surface of life, and the closer we get to matters in which our needs are indistinguishable from the needs of men in any other period of history.”¹⁰⁰ This also answers the objection that preachers are too ‘other-worldly’. Campbell Morgan responds; “When we cease to be otherworldly we lose our ability to touch this world with any healing and uplifting power.”¹⁰¹ Alistair McGrath makes the same point: “To be right is to be relevant...the task of Christian apologetics is to bring out the inherent attraction of the gospel by its faithful and responsible proclamation and presentation. In other words, the best way of ensuring that Christianity remains relevant to the modern world is to be faithful to Christian orthodoxy, while ensuring that this is articulated in intelligible terms to the world.”¹⁰² Good preaching will frequently and regularly deal with the timeless truths of the gospel because these are matters of eternal significance and are of direct relevance to the life of every individual in the world.

RESPONSE 2: PREACHING IS RELEVANT BECAUSE IT DEALS WITH PEOPLE’S LIVES

Preaching has direct bearing on the immediate issues we face in our lives. It must not be academic and theoretical but grounded in the daily realities of existence. It must help people resolve their doubts, carry their cross, survive their struggles, endure their trials. Congregations need to be “instructed and edified and equipped for the battle of life.”¹⁰³ Our preaching must be practical, earthed in normal everyday events and regular routines. For instance, the Bible has much to say

about marriage and the various relationships we have in the family as husbands and wives, parents and children. It has a good deal to say about money – how we should manage it, what to do with it and our attitude to it. It deals with work and our relationships to those over us and under us. Preaching the Word of God will deal with these practical matters.

If we are to apply the Scriptures to people's needs we must know what these needs are. People living in the world come to church week by week expecting to hear "a word from the Lord", but "as they rise to go home, they go hopeless and helpless, wondering why the Biblical message is so irrelevant today." The cause may be that the preacher "is living in a different world, immersed in fantasies, far from the pain, confusion and hard choices people face."¹⁰⁴ To avoid this situation an effective preacher must also be a pastor. He is not like an actor performing to an audience, but rather a shepherd caring for his flock, a father speaking to his children, a minister looking after his congregation. John Stott quotes Bishop Phillips Brooks who said; "The preacher needs to be a pastor, that he may preach to real men. The pastor must be a preacher, that he may keep the dignity of his work alive. The preacher, who is not a pastor, grows remote. The pastor, who is not a preacher, grows petty."¹⁰⁵ To preach sermons that connect we must be visiting our congregation in their homes and workplaces so we know what they are going through and what is on their minds and hearts. "The effective preacher is always a diligent pastor...The more they speak to him in his study on weekdays, the better he will speak to them from the pulpit on Sundays."¹⁰⁶ Another teacher of preachers put it like this; "Preaching does not take place in a vacuum. Effective preaching requires that we develop authentic relationships with our hearers. There should be a conversation going on between you and your congregation all the time. You are truly in a dialogue with them about life, faith, hope, making sense of the past, planning for the future, helping them see the relevance of their faith in the light of their daily situations."¹⁰⁷ We must be seen as fellow pilgrims, travelling the same path, experiencing similar struggles, going

through common difficulties. If we are to gain a sympathetic hearing we cannot stand two metres high above contradiction and divorced from their situation.

In our preaching we must show that the Scriptures do speak to everyday problems, to life situations, to what goes on from Monday to Saturday. Of course, the Bible does not say everything about everything, but it does say something about many things, and it gives us principles that can be applied to every situation. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* expresses this principle as follows; “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”¹⁰⁸ As preachers we must believe that the Word of God is relevant to our listeners; but we must also show them *how* it relates to their lives. We must show those listening how this particular passage of the Bible intersects with their situation.¹⁰⁹ To do this we must ask two questions; “What did this passage say to the original hearers?”, and, “What does it have to say to us today?” Or, more succinctly; “What?” and, “So what?” The timeless truths of the Word of God must be applied to these particular times in which we live. As we attempt to do this there are two dangers we face. One is to put too much emphasis on relevance to the world. The other is to disregard the question of relevance and ignore the world.

THE DANGER OF ABSORBING THE WORLD

One danger facing preachers is to over-emphasise the need to be relevant and to let the world set the agenda and determine the content of what is preached. This is the classic error of liberalism. In its eagerness to please modern man it has been all too ready to “reinterpret Christianity according to the latest intellectual and cultural

fashion.”¹¹⁰ Liberals have always wanted to be up-to-date. “Enlightenment liberals had their rational religion and criticism of the Bible; romantic liberals had their warm feelings; existentialist liberals had their crises of meaning and their leaps of faith; there is now a postmodern liberalism.”¹¹¹ The problem with liberalism is that it takes over the thinking of the world. This is a danger for every believer. It is possible to become so immersed in the world and its thinking that we bring the categories of the world into the Bible. We allow our thinking to be shaped by the world. Brian Smith, former Principal of the Baptist Theological College, warns against the dangers of ‘relevance’:

For all its attractiveness, however, the road to relevance is a broad way that leads to destruction, the destruction of the gospel. Translation into ‘relevant’ categories leads inevitably to the message being reduced to what is acceptable. Eventually it is transformed into the truisms of its hearers. (After all, who is going to deny that people need housing?) In the end the radicality of a God who cares enough about us to sacrifice a Son is transformed into banal mumblings about being nice to our neighbours and doing the decent thing. The road to relevance is a dead end that terminates in the cul-de-sac of the commonplace.”¹¹²

Os Guinness sounds a similar warning when he writes; “The pursuit of relevance for its own sake quickly leads to superficiality, anxiety, burnout, and compromise.”¹¹³ This is a word of caution for preachers obsessed with being ‘up-to-date’ and for those chasing the latest fad or fashion. If we are always trying to preach a message that relates to the newest trend we run the danger of becoming irrelevant. Preaching that concentrates on current events and the tastes of the day “loses all true relevance and founders in the ephemeral triviality of the moment.”¹¹⁴ William Willimon puts it well when he says; “I’m not saying the issues of our day should be ignored, but too often we let their seeming urgency overshadow the gospel, which in the end is the really urgent message we have.” He writes;

My first priority, then, is to preach a sermon that speaks about the gospel, not

a speech that explores people's experiences.... A sermon is, first and foremost, about Jesus Christ and what he has done for us and what he calls us to do for him and one another. I want to preach so that people come expecting to hear a word about that. In short, I want to train them to ask not "Was this relevant to the latest things going on in my world?" but "Was this sermon faithful to the revealed text of Scripture?"¹¹⁵

Such preaching is relevant because it is the proclamation of the timeless and eternal truth of the Word.

A long time ago the apostle Paul recognised the danger of trying to keep up with the times when he warned Christians in the early church; "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within." (Romans 12:2, J.B. Phillips Translation). Campbell Morgan reiterated this warning in our own century when he said; "Our business is never to catch, but by eternal truth to correct the spirit of the age."¹¹⁶ Yet too often we have *caught* the thinking of the world rather than *corrected* it. The Biblical message is then distorted or lost.

I venture to say that many preachers in New Zealand today have lost power in their preaching because they are more concerned with being acceptable to the modern mind-set than with being faithful to the truth of the Bible.

THE DANGER OF IGNORING THE WORLD

The other equal and opposite danger is to ignore the world and the culture we live in. Some may react against the danger of liberalism to the point they become irrelevant. They fail to communicate because they don't understand the culture or language of the people they are speaking to. We have probably all seen groups of Christians standing on a street corner addressing those hurrying past them, announcing the judgement to come and warning of the punishment of hell. These people may be 'preaching' but they are hardly communicating.

What we need to do is take the Word of God and apply it to our modern day context; we must bridge the gap between the Word of God, written 2000 years ago, and the world today, with its different technology, races and cultures. This is the task of the preacher.

PREACHING CONNECTS THE WORD TO THE WORLD

A church billboard announced; “Jesus is the Answer!” Underneath someone had written, “What is the question?” The lack of appropriate and perceptive questions is one of the barriers to communicating the gospel. Many do not see the connection between the Word of God and the world they live in. They do not realise the importance of the issues of eternity. They do not realise that the Bible has much to say about the practical details of our lives. The challenge facing the preacher is to raise the underlying issues and the practical questions of life and to show that the good news of the gospel answers these.

This requires that a preacher know God’s Word, the world, and his congregation, and be able to relate the three. In other words, he must demonstrate the relevance of God’s timeless truth to the times we live in; to apply the Word to our contemporary life situation. This has been the concern of all preachers. Karl Barth is reputed to have said that we must preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. James Stewart wrote, “But while the basic message thus remains constant and invariable, our presentation of it must take account of, and be largely conditioned by, the actual world on which our eyes look out today.”¹¹⁷ John Stott describes the preacher’s task as that of a ‘bridge-builder’ – bridging the gap between the Word of God and the world in which we live.¹¹⁸ This must be done for both believers and unbelievers.

The relevance of preaching to believers

Our preaching must help those within the church see how the Word of God bears on the world they live in. We want our people to maintain their faith in all the pressures and temptations of our modern world. But we want them to do more than survive – we want them to be able to fulfil the calling God gives them. We want them to be useful members of the body of Christ, able citizens of God’s kingdom and faithful witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. We want them to be a salt and a light in our present desperate situation so that they are a preserving and transforming influence in society. Our task as preachers is to help believers know their calling and live it out.

To do this believers must know both the Word of God and the situation they live in. They need a good knowledge of the Bible and the contemporary setting. Then they must be able to see how Biblical truth should be applied in the situation God has placed them. As preachers, therefore, we must have a good grasp of both the Scriptures and our culture; we must be able to relate the gospel to the current issues, trends and world-views around us. Our preaching must apply to our local situation, but also to our current day and age. It must be localised geographically and chronologically. We are not preaching to the world of the eighteenth century or to the sixteenth century, but to our own context, to the world as it is. So we must think carefully about our own situation and consider how to present this message from God in a way that speaks to the people today.

The Bible is full of examples of such audience adaptation – messengers from God brought the truth to bear on the specific situation of those listening. The Old Testament prophets proclaimed God’s Word and applied it to their contemporary situation. They lived in diverse situations and spoke God’s Word to their own generation. Nathan was called to speak to King David about his sin; Elijah and Isaiah prophesied to Judah in times of apostasy the ninth and eighth centuries respectively; Ezekiel encouraged the disheartened exiles in Babylon in the sixth century; and Haggai and Zechariah spurred on the post-exilic people struggling to rebuild the temple and re-establish themselves in Israel. In each of these situations the truth of God

remained the same, but it was applied to different circumstances. The Apostle Paul also knew the importance of communicating age-old truth to the people and the age he found himself in. He urged the Christians in Rome to be obedient “understanding the present time” (Romans 13:11).¹¹⁹

Connecting preaching to our modern world is more than turning “every newspaper headline into a topic for next Sunday’s sermon.”¹²⁰ It requires that we do more than read the latest *Listener* surveys, analyse statistics, or recognise felt needs, useful though these may be. Certainly there are plenty of illustrations and examples to be found in contemporary events, but our analysis must go deeper than this. We must understand the main features of our age, the movement of our times, the direction of events. We must listen carefully so we understand the heart and mind of our culture.

This, of course, takes a lot of reading, study and thinking. Some will object that this is impossible: “Just dealing with the normal routine of church life keeps me more than occupied. I cannot add this sort of reading to my administration, visiting and counselling.” But if we are to preach effectively to our congregations we must be students of the Bible and of life. “Your preaching is most effective when you shine the light of the gospel onto the confusing paths on which your people walk. Help them to discover that the message of Jesus Christ is as relevant today as it was in the first century.”¹²¹ Through such preaching believers who gather in congregations week by week will be better equipped to serve the Lord Jesus in his kingdom.

The relevance of preaching to unbelievers

The principles of relevant communication not only apply to preaching in the church but also, and even more so, when preaching to unbelievers. Most of our preaching as pastors is to Christians. Yet we should be thinking of ways we can communicate to those who do not yet believe. Preaching, of course, is not the only way to do this. Other

means include seminars, Bible studies, videos and lecture presentations. I wish to concentrate, however, on preaching for, as I have argued earlier, I believe this to be the primary and most effective means of proclaiming the gospel. Maybe we could make more use of open-air preaching at beaches, shopping malls, universities or public squares? Can we learn something from the Apostle Paul? Certainly, he was an Apostle, a gifted communicator, a missionary, and an itinerant preacher, all of which you and I may not be. Yet we can learn something from the way he made use of every opportunity to reach unbelievers: He preached in the Jewish synagogues, a lecture hall, the market places, a river bank and the steps of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. We could be more creative and adventurous in finding places to preach.

When preaching to unbelievers it is essential that we show them that God's Word does have a direct bearing on their lives. This will involve an awareness of the needs a person has, the issues he is facing and the questions he is asking. Jesus, more than anyone, demonstrated an acute sensitivity to the peculiar situation of those he was talking to: He spoke to the woman at the well about living water; to the Pharisee, Nicodemus, about the necessity of rebirth; to the blind man about the Light of the world; to the tax collectors about money; to the Galilean fishermen about being fishers of men. Jesus found a 'point of contact' with each individual he spoke to.¹²²

This audience sensitivity can be applied beyond the individual to our communication with groups of people. We can see this in the sermons of the Apostle Paul. When preaching to a Jewish audience he began with the Old Testament Scriptures showing that Jesus was the fulfilment of all that had been promised and that he was the Messiah, the Christ. When preaching to a Gentile audience on the Areopagus in Athens he began with God the Creator and our responsibility to seek Him and find Him, and then went on to the revelation of God in Christ (Acts 17:16-34). Paul adapted his approach to his audience. Our situation in New Zealand today has many similarities to that of Athens in Paul's day and his approach has many lessons for us in our own

preaching today. Adaptation like this requires a good understanding of our audience and their situation. We apply this principle to our mission work. If a church sends missionaries out to a foreign country it will ensure they receive a thorough training in the language and culture of that country. The missionaries themselves want to be familiar with the culture they are ministering in. This should be true of us as we serve in our own country. We too need to be familiar with the culture, thinking and world-views present in New Zealand. A good grasp of these things will help us to be more effective communicators of the gospel.

A genuine concern for audience adaptation has motivated the 'seeker service' approach modelled on Willow Creek. Their aim is to present the message of the Christian faith in a manner that effectively communicates to unbelievers who may be seeking. This aim not only controls the style of the service but also the selection of subjects to be preached. While the aim of effective communication is a good one this seeker sensitive approach suffers from a serious weakness. Darrel Schultz, a former senior pastor of a Willow Creek style church comments; "For the preacher who wants to be seeker-sensitive, the list of potential topics goes up and list of usable Bible passages goes down. It is more than likely that many of the areas a church needs to hear about (for example... sin, repentance, and God's judgement) will fall victim to the preacher's inner censorship board which evaluates all seeker-service events on the criterion of sensitivity to non-churched Harry."¹²³ The seeker service approach has a distinct bias away from biblical breadth and theological depth. A regular diet of seeker services is likely to produce seekers and believers who are biblically and theologically under-nourished.

Good preaching, however, will direct those listening toward the goal of Christian maturity. When preaching to those unfamiliar with the Scriptures it may be useful to introduce the sermon with an event in society or a need in their life that will give us an initial foothold. This will be more important when dealing with a subject such as Christ's propitiatory sacrifice than when dealing with relationships, as the latter will seem more immediately relevant. Yet we must go deeper than

these initial points of contact in preaching. If we are always preaching about relationships and never proclaim the cross then unbelievers will not be converted nor will they become thorough-going disciples of Jesus. In an address to the VISION New Zealand Congress in January 1993 John Hitchen described the breadth and depth of the Biblical pictures of salvation. He pointed out that specific analogies can speak to different people but warned against “looking only for relevant aspects of the gospel.... While essential in initial evangelism, they are inadequate as a final goal in evangelism. The task is not complete until the person is on the transformation pathway that will lead to maturity.”¹²⁴

This reinforces the point that the whole gospel must be proclaimed, even in evangelism. If we do not proclaim the fullness of the gospel we run the grave danger of misrepresenting it. Those listening may not hear the essence and heart of the gospel message and may be like the seed that had no depth of soil; they may not count the cost and be like the seed choked by the thorns. Here is a critical danger in seeker-friendly sermons and seeker-services. In our desire for ‘relevance’ and ‘interest’ we may minimise the call to “repent, believe and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Certainly, we need to begin where people are, but then we need to point them down the narrow way, which is demanding and difficult, but that leads to life eternal. This, surely, is the goal: Not just that we fill our churches with seekers but that they “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing...have life in his name” (John 20:30). Even then our task is not completed – for we must teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded (Matthew 28:20) so that “we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Colossians 1:28).

Words and Language

Using the right language is also an important part of effective

communication. A sermon full of cliches is difficult to comprehend; we need to avoid jargon and work hard to speak in everyday language. We must use words and terms people can understand. The preaching of the Puritans was plain and easily understood. It was their aim to “think like great men, but speak like common people.”¹²⁵ This does not mean that their preaching was dull. Far from it. Their plain speech made their preaching lively and direct. Rather than make a good impression they wanted to preach to the hearts of those listening. Lewis quotes the Puritan John Flavel who made this point:

A crucified style best suits the preachers of a crucified Christ.... Prudence will choose words that are solid, rather than florid: as a merchant will [choose] a ship by a sound bottom, and capacious hold, rather than a gilded head and stern. Words are but servants to matter. An iron key, fitted to the wards of the lock, is more useful than a golden one that will not open the door to the treasures.... Prudence will cast away a thousand fine words for one that is apt to penetrate the conscience and reach the heart.¹²⁶

We ought to aim for simplicity and clarity in our speech and language so as to communicate the gospel as plainly as possible.

Having said this we must also teach our congregations to understand the language of the Scriptures including biblical terms such as justification, righteousness, atonement and redemption. Every human activity has its own language and words peculiar to that context. Anyone who is serious about knowing the truth of the Christian faith must understand the terms and language of the Bible. So we ought to use such terms in our preaching while also explaining their meaning.

As well as using everyday language we must also speak in a normal tone of voice. In times past it was not uncommon for the preacher to speak with a “stained glass” voice. For the unbeliever this only highlighted the apparent distance between the listener and the preacher, between his world and the world of the Church.

CONCLUSION: PREACHING THE WORD TO THE WORLD

Preaching has many opponents. They argue that this means of communicating the gospel has been superseded by more modern technological methods. The church is better served, they argue, by livelier and more attractive techniques. They maintain that preaching has no authority today and commands no respect. Furthermore, they believe preaching is irrelevant and does not speak to the real needs of people.

In opposition to these critics I believe that God commands pastors to “preach the Word” and that this is the primary task of the minister of the gospel. God has blessed such preaching in the past and will continue to do so in the present. Faithful expository preaching will always produce a reaction in those who hear: They will either respond in repentance and faith or turn away in hardness of heart and unbelief. Those who respond find that the Word of God is relevant to their present and eternal needs. The task of the preacher is to apply the Scriptures to those who hear, demonstrating how this ancient book has specific and contemporary application to their lives. To do this effectively the preacher must understand these postmodern times. The church needs men who, knowing both the world around them and the Christ above them, are able to proclaim the Word of Christ to the world. We need preachers who are able to see through modernity and postmodernity, who understand how pluralism and secularism work and who are able to “preach with passion the truth of God’s Word, reflecting on that truth and seeking out the points at which it intersects with modern life.”¹²⁷ Our aim is to preach the “old, old story” so that it speaks with power, relevance and clarity to our modern listener.

PART II

UNDERSTANDING OUR NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT

Chapter 1

A GENERAL HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Many who analyse our times believe that we are in a time of significant transition. “A massive intellectual revolution is taking place”, claims Diogenes Allen, Professor of Philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary, “which is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages. The foundations of the modern world are collapsing and we are entering a postmodern world.”¹²⁸ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon are even bolder. In their book *Resident Aliens*, they begin by claiming that the new era has already arrived: “Sometime between 1960 and 1980, an old, inadequately conceived world ended, and a fresh, new world began.”¹²⁹ These two opinions are representative of many commentators who draw attention to the significance of this period. But these times are also troubled. The evidence for this is glaringly obvious given the increase in crime, the high rate of divorce, the general instability of relationships, the widespread collapse of the family and the loss of honesty and trust in society.

Those of us called to preach at this time must be like the men of Issachar, “who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:32). To be like this requires an understanding of history. C.S. Lewis drew our attention to this some time ago:

Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much which seems certain to the uneducated is merely contemporary fashion. A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his age.¹³⁰

To understand *these* times requires an appreciation of *past* times;

what happened in history has shaped what is happening now. To get our bearings we must not only look at our New Zealand history but we must also look further back to see where we have come from. The history of Western civilisation can be divided into three main periods: Premodern, modern and postmodern.

PREMODERN (Before 1700 AD)

A defining feature of the premodern Western period is that people believed in the supernatural. Most people in the cultures, nations and empires of the ancient world believed in many gods, while the nation of Israel, the early Christians, and later on the Muslims, believed that there was only one God. Whether polytheistic or monotheistic, the people in ancient cultures believed that the world originated from God (or the gods) and that there was a spiritual realm beyond the senses.¹³¹ Within this general supernatural understanding of the world there were three main views of religion. One arose out of the biblical revelation given to the Old Testament people of Israel. Another, mythological paganism, had its roots in the animistic nature religions of primitive cultures. Finally, there was the classical rationalism of the ancient Greeks developed by outstanding philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle.¹³²

For now our focus will be on the biblical revelation. The Bible's story begins with the creation of the world by God and the revelation of his will to Adam and Eve. They, however, disobeyed his command. Adam, through his position as the representative of all who would follow him, brought all of humanity into sin. God, in his electing purpose and mercy, called Abraham and established a binding relationship with him and with the nation that would come from him, a relationship the Scriptures call a "covenant". Throughout Israel's history God continued to reveal himself "through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (Hebrews 1:1) all the time promising a Saviour who was yet to come. Eventually, in the "fullness of time",

God the Father sent his Son. Jesus came to make the Father known (John 1:18), to do his will and to speak his words. He was the complete and final revelation of God's character and law,¹³³ the fulfilment of all the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament, and the One who came to save his people from their sins. In obedience to his Father's will he died for the sins of his people and then rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to take his place as Lord of the universe. He left his disciples on earth to be his witnesses and to continue the work of establishing his kingdom.

The early church began witnessing with great zeal. The power to do this came from the Holy Spirit poured out on them by the ascended and glorified Lord Jesus. Overcoming a reluctance to disperse beyond Jerusalem the Spirit forced the early believers out of the city by means of persecution. As they scattered they "preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). In addition to the personal evangelism of these individual lay Christians there was the witness of deacons, such as Philip, and the missionary work of the Apostles. Peter preached the gospel to the Jews while Paul, Silas and Barnabas, sent by the church, took the good news to the Gentiles.

Under the blessing of God Christianity spread rapidly through the Roman empire. The Apostle Paul preached the gospel in the cities of Asia Minor and Macedonia. Eventually he was taken to Rome, the capital of the empire. Despite his house arrest he preached the kingdom of God and taught about Jesus "boldly and without hindrance" (Acts 28:30-31). It has been estimated that by the end of the third century the number of Christians had reached 10-12 million, or roughly a tenth of the total population of the Roman Empire.¹³⁴ Despite this remarkable growth Christian influence was moral, not political. Christians, for the first three centuries, were a powerless and often persecuted minority. They witnessed to the Roman Empire through their love for one another, their perseverance under persecution and their courage in the face of death.

A significant change took place in 313 AD. Constantine, ruler of the Roman Empire, gave formal recognition to the Christian faith. He

became fully supportive of the church, calling councils of bishops, building churches and financing the copying of Bibles. The number of Christians grew from a mere ten percent of the population to form a majority, although many of these were nominal in their faith. The Roman Empire became a 'Christian' empire. For the next 1500 years in Europe Christians were a powerful majority influencing all of life and culture including government, art, music, education and architecture. Christianity was closely identified with European thought and culture. This whole period (from 313 until the 1960's) has been described as the era of Christendom – literally, "the domain of Christ". Certainly there were challenges to the Christian world view, such as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and there were many who did not believe or who opposed the Christian faith. Yet through this entire period most of the people took the existence of God as self-evident, accepted the vital role of the church, and believed in the certainty of a day of judgement and the reality of heaven and hell.

This Christian influence in Europe was extended through the work of Christian missionaries. Earnest missionary endeavours were undertaken by Patrick to Ireland in 432. Later, in 536, Columba took the gospel from Ireland to Scotland. In 590 Pope Gregory sent Prior Augustine with forty monks from Italy to England, and in 690 Willibrod went from England to the Frisian Islands (Netherlands and Northern Germany). One of the outstanding missionaries of these 'Dark Ages' was Boniface who, in 732, went from England to Germany where he had a very successful mission work. Subsequent mission into Saxony and Scandinavia spread the Christian faith still further in Europe so that by the end of the first millennium much of Western Europe had heard the gospel.¹³⁵

As the church grew in influence and numbers it was assumed that everyone was part of the church. The more the church expanded in Europe the more its ministry became pastoral rather than evangelistic. The church "saw its task as preserving the peace, upholding the God-given social order, calling nobles and peasants to their godly duties and responsibilities, teaching the faith to each new generation,

encouraging the wholeness of life and character.”¹³⁶

Despite the dominance of the Christian world-view there was a serious weakness in Christendom in that the theologians of the medieval church attempted to combine two opposing world-views, ie. biblical revelation and Greek philosophy. These theologians looked back to the classical rationalism of the ancient Greeks to aid their understanding of the Bible. The supreme example of this medieval scholasticism is Thomas Aquinas who attempted to read the Bible in the light of Greek philosophy. He used the ideas of Aristotle to come up with a massive synthesis of Biblical truth and Greek thought. The scholastics may be commended for their desire to maintain the unity of truth, but they put too much confidence in human reason and the truth discovered by unbelieving philosophers. Scholastic theology “subordinated the Bible to Aristotelian logic, sacrificing the purity of biblical revelation.”¹³⁷ This, however, was not the only problem in the medieval church.

As the church grew in power the temptations associated with this also grew. Many succumbed. Increasingly, the church was plagued by corruption, nepotism, greed, indolence, ignorance and error. Individuals and groups concerned about the abuses in the church spoke out. Examples include the Waldensians and the Cistercians, both of the twelfth century, led by Peter Waldo and St Bernard of Clairvaux respectively. We have already noted the protest of the great English preacher, John Wycliffe, in the fourteenth century, and that of John Hus in the early fifteenth century. Sometimes the church took note and made efforts at reform; at other times the voices of protest were crushed.

By the late Middle Ages many in Europe were eager for change. They found a spokesman in Martin Luther. Luther had been struggling to find peace for his own soul but had been unable to gain this through the doctrines taught by the church. Penance, ritual prayers, indulgences and the life of the monastery did not offer him the forgiveness he desperately longed for. His position as professor of biblical studies at the University of Wittenberg gave him opportunity to

lecture on the Psalms, Galatians and Romans. Through his close study of the Scriptures he came to understand that a sinner is not justified by good works made possible through an infused righteousness; rather, the sinner is justified by a righteousness imputed by God on the basis of Christ's death on the cross. This came as a great light to him.

I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven."¹³⁸

From this insight the Reformation was born. The emphases of the Reformation were summed up in the Latin slogans of the time: *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone), and *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone). Men and women who believed these truths were prepared to die for their convictions and many did. Biblical reformed truth was preached from pulpits, defended in books, expounded in confessions, taught in catechisms, demonstrated in life and in death.

MODERN (1700-1960s)¹³⁹

The Reformers placed God in the centre of all of life believing that everything should be guided by his revelation in the Scriptures and done for his glory. They believed firmly in the supernatural. The thinkers of the Enlightenment, however, deliberately and forcefully rejected God and took their stand on human ability and reason. Belief in the supernatural had already been challenged in the premodern era with the Renaissance movement of the mid to late 1400s. Renaissance scholars went back to their classical sources and rediscovered the rationalistic philosophy of the Greeks. The Renaissance exalted human reason and achievement and placed man, rather than God, at

the centre of all things. This trend toward rationalism and humanism was checked by the Reformation but came to a high point in the eighteenth century Enlightenment (c.1650-1780).

Rationalism did not reject religion entirely, not at first anyway. Rather it refashioned Christianity into a rational religion called Deism. Deists believed in God but regarded him as a distant figure. According to their thinking he made the world, giving it order and system, but then withdrew leaving it to run on its own like a vast machine. He did not, they held, reveal himself to mankind, nor did he step into creation to perform miracles. God, according to the Deists, was not actively involved in his world.

It was not long, however, before people realised that they did not need such a God. Why believe in a God who was not active or involved in his creation? In a short time God was replaced by science and human reason. The scientific world view of the time, with its confidence in experimentation and the sure results of the scientific method, contributed to the decline in a belief in God. The world was seen as a closed system of cause and effect. Everything could be explained from within the system. Enlightenment thinkers substituted the medieval faith in God with a science and ethics based solely on human rationality. This radical change of direction was initiated by Descartes with his famous statement, *cogito ergo sum*, "I think therefore I am."¹⁴⁰ What was novel was not the emphasis on human reason, for this had been a feature of the Aristotelian tradition of the pre-modern period, but rather, the complete isolation of the human mind from any accepted body of truth, revelation or religious faith. According to the modern mind-set knowledge was to be found within the structures of human rationality and by the processes of the human mind. The modern period was built on the assumption that the human mind could understand all of reality unaided by faith or a belief in God.

For several centuries after this science and philosophy were used to exclude even the possibility of God. To illustrate the attitude to Christianity in the modern era Diogenes Allen quotes Max Muller, a distinguished anthropologist, who in 1878 wrote;

Every day, every week, every month, every quarter, the most widely read journals seem just now to vie with each other in telling us that the time for religion is past, that faith is a hallucination or an infantile disease, that the gods have at last been found out and exploded.”¹⁴¹

This atheism was not confined to the journals and the universities but was being increasingly extended to the man in the street.¹⁴²

Running parallel to these trends was another trend in theology that reinforced what was happening in philosophy and science. Theologians in the modern period were profoundly influenced by the rationalism of the Enlightenment and adopted what we now describe as a ‘Liberal’ position. They were embarrassed by the ‘pre-scientific world-view’ of the Bible and wanted to make the Scriptures fit into the modern scientific view, thus rendering them more ‘believable’ and ‘acceptable’ to modern man. To those following the viewpoint of Higher Criticism it was clear that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, nor could God have revealed all these laws to Israel – rather, all this was the fruit of the evolution of their religion. It seemed plain that Jesus could not have been God; that the virgin birth was an impossibility; that there were scientific explanations for all the miracles; that the resurrection of Jesus was the result of the wishful thinking of the disciples; and that the record in the gospels was the interpretation of the early church and not the actual record of the deeds and words of Jesus. These theologians and preachers of the liberal ‘church’ have given modern people less and less to believe. It used to take courage to be an atheist and to assert your disbelief in God. Now liberal theologians have done the atheist’s work – they have cut out all that was supernatural, demythologised all that was difficult to accept for scientific people and accommodated Christian belief to the ideas of the age.¹⁴³ There is hardly anything left to disbelieve.¹⁴⁴

In rejecting God Enlightenment thinkers also rejected his laws as revealed in the Bible. Consequently they had to find another foundation for morality. Rather than basing it on religion they

attempted to base it on reason. Using reason alone they tried to show “that some things are wrong in nearly all circumstances, that to become a moral person is of supreme importance for an individual and society, and that moral behaviour is objective and not a matter of individual choice nor relative to society.”¹⁴⁵ This modern ethic originated with Emmanuel Kant and his “categorical imperative”. He believed that if an individual thought clearly then he would come up with the right action and that this would be a universal principle any other rational human person would apply in the same situation. For Kant, being moral was a matter of being more human, that is, more rational.¹⁴⁶ This rational basis for morality made ethical decisions a matter of individual choice or the collective choices of individuals, ie. majority opinion. Modern men, however, were left without any basis for deciding disputes between people who disagreed about what was right or wrong, except that one person was more or less rational than the other. In adopting a rational foundation for morality the Enlightenment lost an objective basis for deciding between good and evil. Morality became pragmatic – a deed is good if it works well; or utilitarian – a deed is good if it makes the system run more smoothly; or situational – a deed is good if it is guided by the overriding principle of love.

The Enlightenment offered a philosophical challenge to Christendom and contributed to a declining influence of Christians in society generally. In Western Europe Christians had been at the centre of political and cultural life. As Enlightenment ideas took hold a Christian influence diminished. The development of the American colonies and of European colonisation took the Christian faith to new lands and loosened the connection between Christianity and European culture. A break between church and state was formalised by the two major revolutions of this time: The American Revolutionaries wrote up their creed in the Constitution of 1789 which clearly separated the roles of church and state,¹⁴⁷ while the French Revolution of 1789 forcibly removed Christians from political influence (as did the Russian Revolution of 1917).¹⁴⁸ These were early

examples of a general tendency to edge the church out of the centre of society and culture. This has continued throughout the modern period until today. Now, the church in the western world and in New Zealand finds itself out on the fringes of public life. It has no favoured status. Its voice is just one voice among many in our pluralistic world.

The trend to discard God and sideline the church was reinforced in the nineteenth century by the evolutionary ideas of Charles Darwin, explained in his work, *The Origin of the Species* (first published in 1859). His ideas seemed to offer a credible alternative to belief in a Creator God. In time this theory came to have the status of scientific fact and, in the modern period in the western world, became the dominant explanation for the origin of the world and of mankind. Evolution was a creature of its age – it would not have gained acceptance without the groundwork having been laid in the ideas of the Enlightenment. Darwin's theory strengthened the atheism of this era and cemented the idea that God was superfluous. "The origin of the species" could be entirely explained within the closed system – science could account for everything. Modern theologians, living in this age of science, reinterpreted the creation account of Genesis in the light of modern evolutionary 'fact'.

Western societies born out of the Enlightenment and the theory of evolution began their new life with high hopes for the future and confident rhetoric about what they would achieve. Reason, they proclaimed, would give people access to sure and certain knowledge. Through reason humans would "understand the cosmos, establish social peace and improve their condition."¹⁴⁹ People of the Enlightenment wanted to master the earth for the benefit of humanity. They believed that through rational management and technology they could improve the quality of life and create a better world. The *American Declaration of Independence* (1776) is evidence of the high ideals that marked the modern period; "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." This is an example of the

positive Enlightenment view of the world. Modern Americans were supremely optimistic about their future and their freedom in their new land.

To be sure, the modern world has made great achievements and significant improvements in many areas. We can thank modernity for liberty in politics, in economics and in conscience. Other benefits include better health, longer life expectancy, more mobility, instant communications and an improved standard of living. Despite these great advances, confidence in the ability of man and his reason has been badly shaken. In his Templeton Prize Address Michael Novak noted that modernity

has been spectacularly wrong in its underlying philosophy of life. An age wrong about God is almost certain to be wrong about man... Modernity tore down the only philosophical foundations that can sustain the free society.... If you stay within your own school of thought, the foundations of the free society seem secure. Peek outside, however, and you will hear the raucous voices shouting. The Age of Enlightenment has failed to secure a mode of public moral argument worthy of the institutions it has erected."¹⁵⁰

The fruit of modern beliefs has become more apparent as this century has unfolded and as the influence of Christianity has waned. Having abandoned Biblical revelation no other world view has been able to give meaning or direction to our twentieth century Western world. In the Enlightenment perspective there was no real basis for morality and there was no way to hold back the spiral into evil, corruption and crime. Evolution, science and technology and their ideas of inevitable progress were challenged as people failed to find solutions to the problems of pollution, racism and poverty. Two world wars and the Great Depression shook people's confidence in the innate goodness of the human person and shattered hopes of a western utopia. Despite the optimism of the modern period the terrible events of this century have dashed the great hopes people had. "What we got was not self-freedom but self-centredness, loneliness, superficiality, and harried

consumerism. Free is not how many of our citizens feel – with our overstuffed medicine cabinets, burglar alarms, vast ghettos, and drug culture.”¹⁵¹ On an overall assessment, the Enlightenment has failed.

Thomas Oden believes we are seeing the end of modernity and that the strength of its four dominant motifs – autonomous individualism, narcissistic hedonism, reductive naturalism, and absolute moral relativism – are rapidly diminishing.¹⁵² Others are not as confident that we have seen the end of modernity. Diogenes Allen cautions that not everyone can clearly see that we are in a new situation because the dust from the collapse of the modern mentality has not yet settled.¹⁵³ Modernist assumptions continue to form the basis of scientific endeavour and are still guiding liberal theology. The Enlightenment opinion that science and religion are opposed to each other lingers on, as does the idea that religion is outdated and only for the weak and ignorant. Hedonism and relativism continue to direct people’s behaviour. We should not underestimate the residue of the Enlightenment.¹⁵⁴

Just as the modern world was anticipated in the pre-modern period by the renaissance, so too the postmodern world has had its forerunners in the modern period. Postmodernity was anticipated with the movements of romanticism and existentialism. Romanticism appeared in the early nineteenth century as a reaction away from the Enlightenment. It replaced the emphasis on reason with an emphasis on human emotion. Rather than believing that God is far away and removed from the world it believed he was intimately involved in creation. Some went so far as to identify God with nature and with the self. If people could get in touch with their feelings and intensely experience all of life they could become “one with nature” and achieve unity with the life force that pervades all of reality.¹⁵⁵ Wordsworth’s famous poem, *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* illustrates this sentiment. After quiet reflections on the beauty of the countryside he writes:

Nor less, I trust,

To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened – that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on –
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.¹⁵⁶

In this poem nature not only has the power to relax and quiet him when he was troubled, but it also has a spiritual power enabling him to “become a living soul” and giving him the discernment to “see into the life of things”. These ideas anticipated the pantheism evident in the New Age movement of these postmodern times. “Romanticism cultivated subjectivity, personal experience, irrationalism, and intense emotion. It encouraged introspection and attention of the inner life.”¹⁵⁷

Another reaction to the rationalism and resulting materialism of the Enlightenment was existentialism, which reached its peak in the middle of the twentieth century. It arose as a despairing response to fascism and World War II and was especially strong in France with philosophers such as Satre and Camus. They came to the conclusion that if there is no God, and if we are at the mercy of the inexorable laws of nature, or even worse, of absurdity or nothingness, then there is no meaning or purpose to life. Existentialist philosophers came to the same assessment as the Teacher in Ecclesiastes when he surveyed all of life apart from God. “Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). The Preacher, however, eventually came to see life from the perspective of the Creator and saw that when a person knows God there is meaning

and purpose to life: “I know that there is nothing better than for men to be happy and do good while they live. That every man may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in his toil – this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken away from it. God does it, so men will revere him” (Ecclesiastes 3:12-14). Existentialists, however, did not come to this clarity of mind. Since the world was meaningless they believed they had to create their own meaning. They believed they could do this by their own individual choices – by making their own decisions in the face of a futile and empty existence. The French existentialists tried honestly and to the best of their ability to face the truth about man, and to do this without hope. In Albert Camus’ novel, *The Plague*, the main character, Doctor Rieux, reflects on his experience in fighting the plague in the city; “...all a man could win in the conflict between plague and life was knowledge and memories... how hard it must be to live only with what one knows and what one remembers, cut off from what one hopes for!”¹⁵⁸ What counts in this situation is doing one’s duty; “there’s no question of heroes in all this. It’s a matter of common decency. That’s an idea which may make some people smile, but the only means of fighting a plague is – common decency.”¹⁵⁹ This is an admirable and yet tragic response. We can admire such devotion to duty and the desire to help one’s fellow man. But it is tragic that there is nothing more than duty in his service for others – no grace, no God and no hope. Existentialism anticipated the relativism and pluralism of these times. You must create your own meaning in life, they claimed; the meaning you choose is valid for you; you cannot impose your meaning on anyone else. This approach was applied to religion, ethics and truth: Every religion is valid; you are free to do and live as you please; you must believe what is true for you. All of these ideas have come to their full expression in our postmodern days.

POSTMODERN (post 1960s)

Despite the challenges presented by the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Existentialism, the Christian faith continued to exert a strong influence on the western world throughout this time. People lived and worked against the general background of a belief in God, some knowledge of the Bible, and the restraining influence of the ten commandments as the basis for morality. These Biblical assumptions, however, were being undermined by the philosophical movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, the strength of Christianity was being drained by theological liberalism.

The chickens of the Renaissance and Enlightenment came home to roost in the 1960s. This was a significant and revolutionary decade in which young people questioned modern civilisation and its reasoned outlook, regimentation and confidence in technology. They revived the romanticism of the early nineteenth century with its focus on getting in touch with your feelings and with nature. Young people experimented with drugs, threw off traditional rules and restrictions, and pursued pleasure with abandon. In this decade the philosophy and ethics of the Enlightenment come to practical expression. As the certainty of modernity came to an end people were less and less restrained by any traditional morality and more and more open to a moral relativism. People reasoned that if there was no God then they could do as they pleased without the restraint of the laws of God or of human society. Consequently many cast off the traditional Christian ethic and conformity to what was culturally acceptable and felt free to do their own thing. The 1970s continued this trend with an emphasis on self-fulfilment, a meeting-my-needs philosophy, and self-esteem. People were consumed by materialism and expected to be able to 'have it all'. The selfishness of this decade has been captured in the phrase, the 'me generation'.¹⁶⁰ This self-centeredness continued in the 1980s, although with a slight change of emphasis – a 'greed is good' philosophy.¹⁶¹ Not much has changed in the 'money generation'¹⁶² of the 1990s; as a more market-driven economy has been exploited by

human selfishness and greed producing an excessive interest in making money and displays of excessive consumption.

All these descriptions of the decades are generalisations because trends do not usually fall into neat and tidy ten year patterns. This is also true of the following analysis by Ian Grant who describes what people have lost over the past five decades. In the 1950s, he says, people lost their innocence; in the 1960s they lost their trust in authority; in the 1970s they lost their love and replaced it with lust; in the 1980s they lost their hope; and in the 1990s they lost their respect. Whether these losses happened at these times, or in this order, is debatable, yet this highlights all that has been squandered over the last fifty years. It also illustrates the basic selfishness of people. This is especially obvious at the present time with the emphasis on self-expression, self-preservation and self-fulfilment. Many in our society are absorbed in a quest to find themselves, to develop their full potential, to achieve their personal growth, to enlarge their mind power. This self-absorption is the logical outcome of the Enlightenment but it stands in marked contrast to the Christian ethic which call us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and to follow Jesus.

Having passed through modernity our western society has rejected the revelation of the Christian world view and the rationality of the modern era. Christians are not in a majority position any longer. Our mission field as Christians in New Zealand is not only far away across the seas but is also at our own doorstep. The Christian world view is not predominant in this country, or in the Western world generally. In fact, no one view dominates. Our world is a melting pot, not only racially, but also philosophically. In this postmodern period we are reaping what has been sown philosophically in the Enlightenment and theologically in liberalism. The cement of faith has been dissolved in the traditionally Christian societies and nations.¹⁶³ In these last few decades we are seeing the fruit of the past few centuries in which philosophers, theologians and the man in the street have turned their back on God and his Word; we are seeing the consequences of a

rejection of God the Creator. Thomas Oden puts it forcefully when he writes;

The party is over for the hedonic sexual revolution of the period from the sexy '60s to the gay '90s. The party crasher is sexually transmitted diseases, with AIDS leading the way. We are now having to learn to live with the consequences of the sexual, interpersonal, and familial wreckage to which this narcissistic money-grubbing, lust-enslaved, porn-infested, abortive self-indulgence has led us. Its interpersonal fruits are friendlessness, disaffection, divorce, and the despairing substitution of sexual experimentation for intimacy.¹⁶⁴

The term used to describe this confusing and confused time in which we live is 'postmodernism'. Yet the term itself is just as confusing and difficult to define. "Is it a hip word for the trendy and novel? A grab-bag term for everything after the modern? ...Is it a philosophy, a school, a mood, a nostalgia, a reaction, a sales fashion?"¹⁶⁵ One thing is clear: Postmodernism is a rejection of modernism, of the Enlightenment project, of absolutes and objectivity, and of the assumption that the Truth can be grasped by our human reason. Os Guinness sums up the contrasts well;

Where modernism was a manifesto of human self-confidence and self-congratulation, postmodernism is a confession of modesty, if not despair. There is no truth, only truths. There are no principles, only preferences. There is no grand reason, only reasons. There is no privileged civilisation (or culture, beliefs, norms, and styles), only a multiplicity of cultures, beliefs, periods, and styles. There is no universal justice, only interest and the competition of interest groups. There is no grand narrative of human progress, only countless stories of where people and their cultures are now. There is no simple reality or any grand objectivity of universal, detached knowledge, only a ceaseless representation of everything in terms of everything else.¹⁶⁶

Modernism asked the question, "Is there a God?", and responded in the negative. Postmodernism asks the question, "Which God?"¹⁶⁷ and responds with a multitude of voices, all saying different things. This has

led some to conclude that the defining feature of our present situation is the loss of a meta-narrative – there is no grand story that holds everything together, no unifying Truth to which we can all subscribe. Now everyone has their own story to tell and their own truth to trumpet. The novelty of our present situation can be summed up in the following contrasts:

- ◆ *Premoderns* believed that we can only know truth if we assume the existence of God; *modernism* claimed to be able to understand all truth through logical analysis apart from any reference to God; and *postmodernism* rejects even the concept of truth.
- ◆ The *premodern* people of Christendom believed right and wrong were given by revelation from God; *moderns* believed that people determined what was right or wrong; *postmoderns* say there is no good or right or wrong.
- ◆ *Premodern* people with a pagan and classical world-view were often fatalistic about their lives and were encouraged to simply accept whatever came their way, while people in Christian Europe believed that their lives were ordered by the providence of God; *Moderns* believed they could order the world themselves through science and the application of the scientific method and so solve all our problems; *postmodernism* is sceptical of this claim.

What has been called ‘postmodernism’ may be seen as “a total repudiation of modernism,”¹⁶⁸ or as the final consequence and outworking of modernism. Thomas Oden prefers the term ‘ultramodern’ to describe the desperate despair of the final throes of modernity.¹⁶⁹ Postmodernism is modernism carried to its final conclusions and the consequent rejection of that position. Yet, as we noted earlier, we should not be too quick to assume that now *everything* is postmodern. The set of ideas we call modernism may

have collapsed but not everyone realises this. Many people are still operating with a scientific Enlightenment way of thinking. It will be some time before everyone catches up with the new situation and for these ideas to filter through to the man in the street. We also need to realise that the structure of modernity – as a system – is still going strong. Modernity is the product of deep-seated structures including capitalism, industrialised technology and telecommunications. These structures and all their effects continue on today.¹⁷⁰

The postmodern attack on modernity is right in many respects. It was arrogant of moderns to claim they could understand the world without reference to God. Postmodernists are correct in their critique of rationality and its claim to understand the world in purely scientific terms. They have rightly pointed out that human reason is an inadequate basis for ethics. We can applaud their emphasis on the spiritual dimension to the human person and to life. Christians, however, should be wary of being too joyful over the collapse of modernism because its substitute, postmodernism, brings its own problems and is just as threatening to the church. We need to take a close look at postmodernism and its challenges and opportunities. I want to examine these in the context of our New Zealand culture. In order to do that we need to familiarise ourselves, not only with the history of Western thought, but also with our short history as a nation.

Chapter 2

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY IN NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand's Christian history began in 1814 with the arrival of the first missionaries from the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England. Samuel Marsden arrived in the Bay of Islands from Parramatta, Australia, a few days before Christmas. On Christmas Day he led the first service for the Maori inhabitants preaching on Luke 2:10, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy." It is worth noting that the first mission work in New Zealand was done through preaching, and that the first subject was the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ. Initially the mission work did not go well, due to unsuitable personnel and the European traders already working in the country. Sealers and whalers had left Europe as adventurers and, on the whole, were "not particularly pious."¹⁷¹ They did not respond well to the appeal of the missionaries to set a good example for the Maori people. In 1823, however, a sound beginning was made with the arrival of Rev Henry Williams who, two years later, was joined by his younger brother, William. A steady stream of missionaries arrived during the 1820s and 1830s. They developed a generally good relationship with the Maoris, established schools and preached the gospel. The missionaries were well respected and their initial work amongst the Maoris resulted in many conversions.¹⁷² They did not favour large-scale settlement as they believed this would be detrimental to the Maori. Such settlement would pressure the Maori to give up their land and, they believed, would have a negative effect on their way of life and livelihood. The missionaries supported the Treaty of Waitangi because of the protection it offered to the Maori people.

Organised European settlement began in the 1840s with most of the immigrants coming from England. This shaped New Zealand's

cultural and religious life, although, as we will see, other immigrant groups have been influential in the religious character of the nation. To help us understand our situation today, especially the secular character of contemporary New Zealand, we need to note some characteristics of this English immigration. The first point to notice was a desire to avoid the religious controversies of England.

THE DESIRE TO AVOID DENOMINATIONAL CONTROVERSY

The majority of English immigrants to New Zealand claimed allegiance to the Church of England. Their views were shaped by the history and character of that denomination. At the time of the Reformation the Anglican church had opted for a middle way between the perceived extremes of Calvinism on the one side and Roman Catholicism on the other. England had been torn by religious conflicts in the three reigns before Elizabeth I and the English people were tired of fighting and extremes and wanted a peaceful settlement. Elizabeth I (1558-1603) brought about the desired, moderate religious peace by adopting a middle way between the Reformed Protestantism of Europe and Roman Catholicism. Through the English Parliament she re-introduced the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI and, in 1563, adopted the Thirty Nine Articles. These Articles were clearly Protestant in their formulation of doctrine but moderate in their statement. The English Reformation sought to bring the warring parties together by affirming a Protestant position without being too precise on doctrinal and liturgical matters. This attitude was carried over into New Zealand.

Yet there was another influence at work as well. From the very beginning the English settlement of New Zealand was marked by “a deliberate determination to avoid religious controversy, rivalry and the dominance of the church in the affairs of the nation.”¹⁷³ This attitude was a reaction to the competition in England between denominations and the rivalry for funding of education through church schools. Other denominations were envious of the privileged position of the Church

of England. The influence of this attitude can be seen in our public education system. In 1877 the Education Act provided for a schooling that was to be “free, compulsory and secular”. “Secular” did not mean non-religious as we understand the term today, but rather meant non-denominational, illustrating the desire of the nation’s leaders to avoid conflict between the churches.¹⁷⁴ This attitude is also seen in the decision of the first Parliament, meeting on 26 May 1854, to open their proceedings with prayer. After some debate the following motion was passed; “That in proceeding to carry out the resolution of the House to open its proceedings with prayer, the House distinctly asserts the privilege of a perfect political equality in all religious denominations, and that, whoever may be called upon to perform this duty for the House, it is not thereby intended to confer or admit any pre-eminence to that Church or religious body to which he may belong.”¹⁷⁵ A majority of the members of the House clearly wanted to avoid favouring one denomination over another.

The influence of this perspective has stifled a firm Christian witness and has contributed to the secular character of our society. The ability of each denomination or local congregation to speak on matters of morality and public life is severely curtailed when they can only speak about matters on which they agree with every other church. A lowest-common-denominator approach to religious issues inevitably weakens the witness of the wider church because the expression of its faith will be muted. If each denomination and minister may only speak about issues that have the concurrence of every other denomination and minister they will have little influence in public life.

Today the public and political statements of the mainline denominations are usually humanitarian rather than distinctively biblical and reflect a general social concern rather than a clear Christian statement. For instance, in 1998, on the eve of the budget, the General Synod of the Anglican Church launched a nationwide ecumenical march on Parliament to protest about “the intolerable levels of poverty and social breakdown in New Zealand.”¹⁷⁶ Rather than speaking about guilt before a holy God or about the need for faith

in Christ the symbolic walk concentrated on the creation of jobs, the public health system, wage and benefit levels, and affordable education. The concerns of the church have blended with the concerns of the general population. This, I believe, has its roots in the moderate church settlement of the Church of England and in the desire to avoid denominational controversy.

Another factor contributing to New Zealand's secular character has been the nature of English immigration.

THE PATTERN OF IMMIGRATION

Here again we need to look at developments in the Church of England following the Reformation because these have shaped New Zealand's religious history. The revival that took place in the 1740s under the preaching of Whitefield was followed by another period of decline through the nineteenth century. "The middle decades of the last century in England show a steady falling away from church life and from Christian faith... by the middle of the nineteenth century the working classes were secularists, largely disconnected from the church."¹⁷⁷ Those who were church-goers came from the English middle classes, but they had little reason to immigrate to New Zealand and few did. Most of those who emigrated came from the rural poor and the lower class in the industrialised cities who were already distanced from the church. In view of this immigration pattern it is hardly surprising that church attendance figures in New Zealand in the late 1800s were significantly lower than in England for the same period. "Once the habit of church going had been broken, it was not easily reformed. Even habitual church goers had to put forth more effort to go to church in a thinly peopled country where churches were few."¹⁷⁸ Between 1871 and 1911 the percentage of New Zealanders attending church out of the total population varied between 23-30%. By contrast, church attendance in England in 1851 by those over ten years of age was estimated to be between 47-51% of the population.¹⁷⁹

Early attempts were made to establish the church on a firm footing but with limited success. The New Zealand Company tried to plan the settlement of the country. Settlements began in the North Island but these were hasty and disorganised and consequently not very successful. Otago (1848) and Canterbury (1850) were later settlements and there was better opportunity for planning. With the North Island experience behind him Edward Gibbon Wakefield favoured the idea of church-based settlements and set aside revenue for education under the control of the churches. Christchurch was founded to be an Anglican city but the church was too closely identified with the upper classes to appeal to the mainly working class immigrant. The large working class area of Sydenham in Christchurch had no Anglican church at all. Bishops Selwyn and Harper were keen to see churches built and were conscientious in visiting their dioceses, often on foot, but the majority of immigrants who settled in the country had only a loose connection with the church. Michael Blain writes; “By the time our secular society organised its political and religious life in the 1870’s, we were already distinctly more secular than the Old Country.”¹⁸⁰

THE PRESENCE OF NOMINALISM

A further contribution to the process of secularisation was the nominalism of those who attended church. Wakefield wrote scathingly about the lack of religious conviction in the colonies, referring to English Canada, Michigan, South Australia and New Zealand. He had written a letter arguing for church based settlements, as Canterbury and Otago were supposed to be. In this letter he commented that “religion does not flourish there. There is in all of them more or less, a good deal of observance of religious forms, and the excitement of religious exercises. But in none of them does religion exercise the sort of influence which religion exercises here upon the morals, the intelligence, and the manners of those classes which we consider the

best-informed and the best-behaved; that is, the most respectable classes in this country.” In another letter he complained about the severe lack of “religious provisions for the colonies” complaining that what had been attempted in this area was “nearly all make-believe or moonshine”. He spoke more favourably of the Church of Scotland and in glowing terms of the organisation, zeal and compassion of the Wesleyan Methodists. The lack of clergyman and buildings for the Anglican church meant that some Anglican immigrants joined other denominations, “or, what is more common perhaps, soon really [belonged] to none.”¹⁸¹

Eldred-Grigg, writing about the South Island gentry, who were generally the run-holders, makes the following observation;

Church going was a social not a moral activity. People did not go to church to be moved, or to shout amens; they went to see their neighbours and to have a good gossip. Farmers bargained for cows in the churchyard, and women made bets on the Easter races... They put on their best clothes... Village women scrutinised the dress of landowners' ladies. The gentry enjoyed their role. At Kaikoura E.G.T. Gooch always ensured that he was a 'model of dignity' when he 'drove with stately grace to church,' dressed in a frock coat and silk top hat. The Ward family in Marlborough made a weekly procession on horseback from their Brookby estate to mass in Blenheim. Dressed in great state, they were dubbed by Bishop Redwood 'the Brookby Cavalry.'¹⁸²

Seventy five percent of the South Island gentry were Anglican and to attend church was the 'done thing'. They funded churches and opened their homes for picnics and church fairs, yet we might question the depth of their Christian commitment. Religion in the South Island was “formal, rather dry”, claims Eldred-Grigg. “The formality of South Island religion prevented the discongruity between gentry and others from having any violent consequences. Few people were fanatics, so there was no real tension.”¹⁸³ Yet, these were the people on the vestry and serving as elders in many of the local churches. “The gentry, in short, had their hands on the chalices's of every church they attended.”¹⁸⁴ Christianity was formally practised, but among the

church-going social leadership it was not, it seems, life-transforming.

Lady Barker's account of *Station Life in New Zealand* (1865-67) supports this impression. She gives us a description of an English upper middle class Anglican couple who were careful to keep up the formal routines of Anglicanism, including morning prayers and Sunday services. The Barkers felt a sense of duty to the "cockatoos" (cockies – farmers) of their district, who were their social inferiors, and were diligent about inviting them to their services. They were also keen to see the babies of the surrounding district christened by the Bishop. The farmers of the area were willing to attend services yet many of them also chose to live in isolated places far away from the fellowship of other believers and the worship services of the church. Again one gets the impression that for many religion was part of the social fabric but did not arise out of a genuine heart conviction. The statistics bear this out. By 1921 92% of the population claimed allegiance to one of the four main denominations of Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Methodist. Those claiming to be Anglican made up the largest group, but only 23.3% of them could be classed as 'actual' participants.¹⁸⁵ For many Anglicans a formal identification with the church did not translate into active participation or, it seems, into a living faith.

THE EFFECT OF LIBERALISM IN ANGLICANISM

Liberalism has also contributed to the secular character of our nation. The early Anglican missionaries, including Henry and William Williams, were sent by the Church Missionary Society. This society had been established in 1799. Although its members were Anglican it remained a voluntary society with no official standing in the Church of England.¹⁸⁶ Those belonging to the Society were from the Low Church wing of Anglicanism and were evangelical in outlook. They emphasised the necessity of individual conversion and were very interested in missions. Other Anglican clergy who followed were of a

different stripe.

On 30 May 1842, at the age of 32, George Selwyn arrived as the newly appointed Bishop of New Zealand. His friend, Henry John Chitty Harper, arrived in Christchurch as the bishop for the South Island in 1856. Both of these men were influenced by the Oxford Movement in England and represented the High Church wing of Anglicanism. The Oxford Movement in England had been promoted by Keble, Pusey and Newman by means of the *Tracts for our Times* and Newman's printed sermons. It had a wide influence, especially among the clergy, and promoted a new emphasis on ritual, music and vestments in the liturgy. The movement also promoted a high view of the sacraments with a strong emphasis on the mediatorial role of the clergy. Selwyn had held these views strongly since his mid twenties.

One of his primary goals in coming to New Zealand was to set up a comprehensive and centralised system of education. He aimed to follow a medieval ecclesiastical structure for the church and her education centred in the cathedral. St John's College, in Auckland, was launched as a model of his ideals.

In ecclesiastical matters Selwyn antagonised the Wesleyan missionaries regarding them as "schismatics" and "in a state of separation from the church, not by Difference of Doctrine, but by a renunciation of her discipline and orders"¹⁸⁵. He also clashed with the Church Missionary Society with his views on colonisation, education, the New Zealand Company and, most fundamentally, on theology. In his opposition to the Church Missionary Society he sought ways to destroy the good standing the Society had built up with the Maoris. His efforts were frustrated until late 1846 when Sir George Grey arrived as the new Governor. "Grey systematically removed evangelical influence from the executive branch of the government, and actively opposed the missionary policies of slow colonisation and full protection of Maori land."¹⁸⁸ Grey and Selwyn also sought to undermine the standing of the missionaries amongst the tribes, singling out Henry Williams in particular, attempting to discredit him by false charges about land holdings.¹⁸⁹ In September 1847 Selwyn

summoned a national synod at which he publicly declared his devotion to the Oxford Movement. At this synod he also delivered his first major episcopal charge to his clergy in which he rejected and criticised the evangelical position. In keeping with his sympathies for the Oxford Movement he introduced High Church practices such as candlesticks, surplices for preachers and intoning prayers. Throughout his time as bishop his relationship with the Church Missionary Society was not a happy one. In addition to significant theological differences with the Society he had an authoritarian temperament and a touchiness which made him difficult to get on with. Yet Bishop Selwyn's High Church sympathies had a considerable influence on the development of the Anglican Church.

By the end of the century the High Church movement had become identified with liberalism. Bishop Julius of Christchurch is one example of this. At the synod of 1898 he was "the most outspoken and forward-looking man on the Bench of Bishops". Referring to the Oxford Movement he said; "We in the colonies have felt too little of the forces of this new life." Despite the considerable influence the High Church movement had exercised on the Anglican church he obviously wanted to see more. He also pleaded for a teaching clergy who were well able to preach to the critical and intelligent layman who came to church.

Can we safely or honestly ignore the results of modern criticism? To go on preaching as if they had no existence is to drive intelligence out of our Churches. We may refuse to accept them if we please, but we are not justified in forcing our conclusions upon our people, dogmatising where the Church has not spoken or laying upon their faith unnecessary burdens greater than they can bear.¹⁹⁰

What is significant here is the obvious sympathy of Julius towards "the results of modern criticism". The same leanings can be seen a few years later in Rev T. H. Sprott, elected as the Bishop of Wellington in 1911. He was "well-known throughout New Zealand as the leading exponent of modern thought in its religious aspects."¹⁹¹ An eloquent,

scholarly Irishman, Sprott wrote a book entitled *Modern Study of the Old Testament and Inspiration*. He also adopted a positive attitude towards the modernist theological position.

Liberal theology has had a strong influence in the Anglican Church through to the present time. This was illustrated for me in an evensong service I attended in an Anglican Church in Christchurch. The service was well led in a reverent and clear manner. We sang fine hymns drawn from the rich history of the Christian church and these were beautifully accompanied. Meaningful prayers were read from the Book of Common Prayer. The sermon, however, was empty of Biblical content. Little was said about the text chosen; rather, the biblical passage provided the preacher with a platform to launch into a talk extolling the benefits of spiritual retreats, counselling and modern psychology. Rather than pointing people to the Lord the preacher directed the congregation to modern psychologists.

Today the Anglican Church is deeply divided. An evangelical and reformed strand has continued in the church, evident in the last few decades in Christchurch with Canon Orange and those he influenced, known in Anglican circles as “orange pips”. Some congregations hold to the Reformational position put forward in the Thirty Nine Articles, including St John’s, Latimer Square, in Christchurch, and others in the Nelson diocese. The rest of the church is divided between those who are liberal and those who are evangelical and charismatic.

THE EFFECT OF LIBERALISM IN PRESBYTERIANISM

Although they formed the largest church grouping (41.83% in 1871), Anglicans were not the only denomination in the country. Other major denominations were the Presbyterians (24.81% in 1871), Roman Catholics 13.89% in 1871), and Methodists (8.58% in 1871). The composition of each of these reflected their place of origin, with the Presbyterians coming from Scotland and the Catholics coming from Ireland. In addition to the Methodists two other non-conformist groups

came out of England – the Baptists and Congregationalists.¹⁹² Immigration to New Zealand came in three main waves: In the 1840s and 1850s from Great Britain; in the 1870s from Great Britain and Scandinavia as a result of the Vogel immigration scheme; and in the 1950s from Great Britain and the Netherlands. New Zealand churches show some variation in their regional strength. The Lutherans from Scandinavia are strong in Central Hawkes Bay, the Roman Catholics are well-represented on the West Coast of the South Island, and the Scottish Presbyterians in Southland and Otago.

Dunedin was founded by Scottish immigrants coming from the Free Church of Scotland. These Presbyterians came soon after the Disruption in Scotland and came with a vision to establish a city of God based on the theology of John Calvin and John Knox. Their commitment to the Scriptures and to a Calvinistic world-view produced a much stronger church life in Southland and Otago than was seen in the Church of England in Canterbury. One distinctive of the Scottish church settlement was their recognition of the importance of education. They attempted to organise a comprehensive school system and established Otago University, the earliest effort in New Zealand at higher education. Even so, the initial settlement was small and struggling. After 1862 it was swamped by gold diggers “with very un-presbyterian backgrounds”,¹⁹³ and this weakened the goal of a thoroughly Presbyterian settlement.

Presbyterianism was also weakened by the influence of liberalism. When the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand was formed in 1862 it took as its “Basis of Union” the Word of God as “the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and the only certain standard by which all matters of doctrine, worship, government, and discipline in the Church of Christ are to be tried and decided.” As *subordinate* standards the Church adopted the Westminster Confession of faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as well as “the Directory for Public Worship, the Form of Presbyterian Church Government, and the First and Second Books of Discipline, in so far as these latter are applicable to the circumstances of the Church.”¹⁹⁴ Sadly, however, the Word of

God and these subordinate standards were not adhered to as carefully as this “Basis of Union” might lead us to expect. Even the well-established theological roots of Presbyterianism did not prevent a decline away from evangelical and reformational Christianity. A shortage of ministers had forced the churches to recruit ministers and theological teachers from abroad who were often influenced by the liberalism in Scotland and Germany.

By the 1880s many of the Presbyterian ministers had a loose view of the Westminster Confession. Their doctrinal commitment was further weakened by the Declaratory Act that did not bind ministers to matters they considered not essential to the system of doctrine of the Confession. This Act was adopted by the Synod of Otago and Southland in 1895, by the Northern church in February 1897, and by the Union church in 1901. The General Assembly believed that this Act would remove the difficulties and scruples felt by a number in signing the Confession of Faith. In the conclusion the Act stated;

That while diversity of opinion is recognised in this Church on such points in the Confession of Faith as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed faith therein set forth, the Church retains full authority to determine, in any case that may arise, what points fall within this description, and thus to guard against any abuse of this liberty to the detriment of sound doctrine, or to the injury of her unity and peace.¹⁹⁵

This Act was adopted “as exhibiting the sense in which the office-bearers of this Church may interpret the Confession of Faith.” Writing later, Rev R. S. Miller, of the Westminster Fellowship in the Presbyterian church, said of the Act; “Its tendency is to impair the system of doctrine which it has been our happiness in this church to inherit. It seems calculated to loosen the king-pin of the Confession. It is to be feared, and regretted, that not a few regard it as a general escape hatch, far beyond what is warranted by the actual terms of it.”¹⁹⁶ The full significance of permitting such “diversity of opinion” within the church became apparent in the 1960s in the controversy

over the views of Professor Geering, then principal of Knox Theological College.

Knox Theological Hall, founded in 1876 in Dunedin, contributed to a weakening of a conservative biblical position in the Presbyterian church. Throughout the first half of this century the college displayed an openness to new theological ideas, a time Allan Davidson regards as a “stimulating period theologically”.¹⁹⁷ Dr John Dickie promoted this interest in theological innovation during his thirty two years of teaching at the Theological Hall in Dunedin until his sudden death in 1942. He was influenced by Higher Critical theologians such as Ritschl and Julicher, with whom he had studied in Germany, and he introduced his students to Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard. His book, *The Organism of Christian Truth*, was published in 1930 and promoted a modernistic theology. He wrote; “The permanent and unchanging in Christianity is neither an inerrant book, nor an infallible institution, nor a closed conceptual system, but a self-communication of God to us in the Person of His Incarnate Son.”¹⁹⁸ Some in the Presbyterian Church questioned the orthodoxy of Dickie’s theology, including a long-standing theological opponent, P. B. Fraser.¹⁹⁹ The Synod of Otago and Southland, however, rejected Fraser’s charges as being without substance. In 1932 Thomas Miller, minister at St Stephen’s Dunedin (1928-44), attacked Dickie’s book for grounding the authority for the Christian and the church in subjective experience rather than the Bible. By a large majority the Assembly affirmed its “confidence in its honoured Principal and Professor of Systematic Theology” and congratulated him on the success of his book.²⁰⁰ John Dickie was an influential figure in the New Zealand church and this contributed to the spread of his ideas. However, evangelical ministers continued in the church, among them Thomas Miller who was appreciated by conservative Presbyterians for his warm evangelical preaching. Individuals like Miller were notable because they were so few. By and large ministers of the church of this time were influenced by liberalism, neo-orthodoxy and the Oxford Group. Some had been taught by John Baillie at New College Edinburgh and H. H. Farmer at

Westminster College, Cambridge. This Liberal mindset directed the theology of the church for the next few decades.

These simmering debates came to the boil in the controversy over Professor Lloyd Geering in the late 1960s. Geering, then the Principal of Knox Theological College, wrote an article in the Easter issue of the *Outlook* in which he denied the bodily resurrection of Christ.²⁰¹ There was a strong reaction from within the church and a vigorous debate in the wider community. The Assembly of 1966 defused the issue by affirming the central doctrines of the Scriptures. These statements, however, only papered over the deep divisions in the church. Early the next year (March 1967) the debate flared up again after Geering preached a sermon in Wellington in which he stated that “man has no immortal soul”.²⁰² This time Robert Wardlaw, leader of the Layman’s Association, a group formed to defend the conservative protestant faith of the Presbyterian Church, laid charges of doctrinal error against Geering. Amidst massive publicity the assembly met to consider these accusations at St Paul’s, in Christchurch. At the end of the debate Geering was cleared of the charges. “Skilled Assembly leaders worked behind the scenes to bring opposing strands together. They feared that those who opposed Geering’s thinking would take the opportunity to form a separate church. In the event this did not happen; perhaps the leaders overestimated the influence of the Layman’s Association and ministers associated with it.”²⁰³ The outcome of this debate is testimony to the inroads liberalism had made into the Presbyterian Church and the weakness of the biblical and evangelical wing of the denomination.

In the debates it is also interesting to note the attention given to the Declaratory Act of 1901. In answering the charges, Geering agreed with one of his opponents, Mr. Blakie, that the force of the Declaratory Act, in practice, was to grant complete freedom of opinion. He admitted that he could not have entered the Presbyterian Church had it not been for the Declaratory Act. He went on to say; “This trial may well make clear among other things that the day for naming the Westminster Confession as a subordinate standard in any real sense is

now over.... I have long felt that the church has been in something of a dishonest position in continuing to pay lip service to these documents, when in fact we no longer use them as an effective standard.”²⁰⁴ Geering’s statements confirm the significant influence of the Declaratory Act in undermining the doctrinal position of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

Further attention to the views of Geering led to another vigorous debate at the Assembly in 1970. At the end of the debate the Assembly disassociated itself from Geering’s public position, although 54 members dissented from this decision. Within the church there was a perception that the tension caused by these theological debates was seriously weakening the church and her evangelism. Although this ended the controversy it did not diminish the influence of Geering’s ideas. “Theological pluralism continued to grow underground almost as a subversive element with first the liberal and then the conservative strands attempting to seize control of leadership positions and steer the church.”²⁰⁵ These deep divisions are present in the church today, brought to the surface in recent times by the debates over homosexual ordination. Some congregations holding to the conservative protestant position of the Westminster Confession, such as Owaka and St Andrews, Manurewa, are seeking to break away from the denomination. The rest of the denomination is split between liberals and charismatic evangelicals.

As we have seen, the church in New Zealand did not begin strongly. A desire to avoid the denominational controversies that had plagued England has weakened the doctrinal position and proclamation of the church. Church attendance, even in the early days of our history, has never been high because most of the immigrants came from the unchurched working classes in England (although there are significant provincial variations, especially in the early period of our history). Church-goers included a proportion who attended because this was the thing to do rather than out of personal conviction and genuine faith. Finally, the influence of liberal theology and a weak view of the authority of the Scriptures have made a significant contribution to the

decline of the mainline denominations. Since around 1900 the three main Protestant denominations have steadily lost members, leadership, a clear sense of purpose and the respect of New Zealand society. Liberalism, in my view, has prevented the church from providing clear teaching and direction from God's Word. This has contributed to the general decline of Christian influence in this country, a decline that has been especially rapid since the 1960s. All this is not to deny that most New Zealanders once claimed adherence to a church, nor the sincerity and genuine faith of many who did attend services, nor that life was conducted within a Christian moral framework and understanding. Rather it is offered as an explanation for the lack of influence of the church and the secular character of our society.

A CHRISTIAN COUNTRY?

We have been in the habit of describing NZ as a "Christian" country, even as "God's-own" ("Godzone" – Richard Seddon). This phrase has been used because New Zealand is a beautiful country. Yet it is also true in the sense that our history, traditions, culture and institutions have been shaped by the Bible and a heritage of Western Christianity. We have inherited Christian morals and values and our society was based on and built around Christian principles. This Christian influence and heritage can be seen in the words of our national anthem.

God of Nations at Thy feet
In the bonds of love we meet,
Hear our voices we entreat,
God defend our free land;
Guard Pacific's triple star
From the shafts of strife and war,
Make our praises heard afar,
God defend New Zealand.

Men of every creed and race
Gather here before Thy face,
Asking Thee to bless this place,
God defend our free land;
From dissension, envy hate,
And corruption guard our state,
Make our country good and great,
God defend New Zealand.

May our mountains ever be
Freedom's ramparts on the sea,
Make us faithful unto Thee
God defend our free land;
Guide her in her nation's van
Preaching love and truth to man,
Working out Thy glorious plan,
God defend New Zealand.

Let our love for Thee increase,
May Thy blessings never cease,
Give us plenty, give us peace,
God defend our free land;
From dishonour and from shame,
Guard our country's spotless name,
Crown her with immortal fame,
God defend New Zealand.

This hymn was written by Thomas Bracken and was officially adopted by New Zealand in its centennial year (1940).²⁰⁶ It is a prayer addressed to the “God of Nations” requesting that “God defend New Zealand.” Evidence of our Christian heritage can be seen in a number of other areas. Sessions of Parliament are opened with prayer in which we “humbly acknowledge the need for God’s guidance in all things.” When people become citizens of New Zealand they swear an oath which ends with the phrase, “so help me God.” Many New Zealanders gather for prayer services on ANZAC Day to commemorate our soldiers who died fighting in wars that involved our forces. A general

Christian influence may be seen on Waitangi Day, in movements such as Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, YMCA, YWCA, and in the annual meetings of a wide range of groups, although we might well question the nature and extent of the Christianity that surfaces in these groups and places.²⁰⁷

On the outside New Zealand has given the appearance of being Christian. Brian Carrell, Bishop of the Wellington diocese of the Anglican Church, gives a good description of the state of the church and Christian faith in Christchurch during the 1940s and 50s in a passage worth quoting at length.

Let me tell you about the world in which I grew up during the 1940's, the period of the Second World War, in a southern suburb of Christchurch, alongside the Heathcote River. It was a world in which God was 'in the air'. Not in a spooky sense, but everyone took it for granted that God was real and important. Nearly everyone in my primary school class went to Sunday School or to church somewhere. When it was appropriate the teachers without exception were able to talk naturally about God. We were taught to stand to attention and remove our caps when a funeral passed by. Some Protestant churches seemed always to have closed doors, but all Church of England and Catholic churches were always unlocked, day and night. The church I went to didn't even have a key!

Churches were not all full, and by no means did everyone go to church. But there were lots of them, all with their ministers. And when Sunday came the whole neighbourhood quietened down and everyone knew that was the day people went to Church. Sunday was patently a day for God. The *Press* and the *Christchurch Star-Sun* reported on the Anglican Synod, and the Methodist Conference, and the Presbyterian Assembly with care in those days. The press desk at Synod always had a roster of reporters on duty for any snippets of news. Rarely was a funeral not taken by a minister. The vast majority of children were baptised somewhere, and most weddings would take place in a church. There was no real embarrassment about believing in God – the objects of curiosity in that world were the occasional people who openly admitted being atheists or sceptics.

In brief, there existed what sociologist Peter Berger describes as a 'plausibility structure' for Christian faith. This was a legacy of Christendom, a legacy which, though we did not realise it then, was soon to run dry. But in those decades of the faith-filled 'forties and 'fifties we were still enjoying the

afterglow of Christendom: Christian values were assumed as the cement of society, the Church was esteemed as the soul of the community, and *God was there*.²⁰⁸

Francis Schaeffer has described this situation as a “Christian memory”, referring to the remembrance of Christian morals without a solid basis in actual belief. We have inherited a Christian culture and moral framework which has been of immense benefit to us as a nation and still lingers on. However, despite all this outward conformity to Christian values and culture we were not as Christian as we assumed we were. The 1881 census showed that approximately only 20% of the population attended church. Rather than people drifting away from the church we have to admit that many were never really part of it.²⁰⁹ Writing in 1962 W. H. Oliver said; “The Christianity which characterises the bulk of the New Zealand people is a vestigial sort which is manifested fitfully, in moral attitudes rather than in explicit beliefs or overt behaviour. It is enshrined, not in any building, but in such phrases as ‘giving a man a fair go’, ‘doing the decent thing’, ‘playing the game’,²¹⁰ and ‘lending a hand’ – colloquial debasements of the Golden Rule.”²¹¹ The appearance of Christianity was often just that – an appearance, a veneer, an external and formal religiosity. We were enjoying the legacy of Christendom – what Peter Berger calls “a plausibility structure” for the Christian faith, and what Brian Carrell describes as “the afterglow of Christendom”. Billy Graham’s evangelistic crusade in 1959 marked the end of this era.

In the 1960s we saw a revolt against the traditions and values of the Christian faith and a rapid crumbling of the moral and religious framework of our nation. Brian Carrell gives us a visual illustration of this.

A couple of years ago we moved into a new home in Palmerston North. It has a magnificent view from my upstairs study window. But it is a *changed* view. Only five years ago I could have seen from this window All Saints’ church tower, the Catholic Cathedral spire, St. Paul’s Methodist church, and St. Andrew’s Presbyterian church. But now there is only a hint of St. Andrew’s; a glimpse of the Cathedral. Why? Because of the changed landscape. The

churches in Palmerston North instead of being dominant features of the skyline, have been crowded out to become insignificant buildings on the sideline. This is a visual representation of what has happened to the place of the Church in society. 'Christendom' has become *post-Christendom*. A friendly environment for the faith has become an alien atmosphere for the Gospel."²¹²

The same illustration could be taken from Christchurch where the Cathedral, having once dominated the profile of the central city, is now hemmed in and overshadowed by the commercial buildings around it, again symbolic of what has happened to the Christian faith. Christendom has largely collapsed in the Western World and in New Zealand. No longer is the Christian faith the dominant or prevailing influence in our culture. We now live in a post-Christian, pagan society. We may have described ourselves as a Christian country in the past, but we can do so no longer. Our nation has been nominally Christian since its founding and is now post-Christian.²¹³ By far the majority of New Zealanders do not affirm the Christian faith – instead they have a vague humanism that has been distilled from Christian principles.

Our situation is not unique but is one we share with the rest of the Western world. We live in a global village. Western culture has become a global culture. New Zealand is part of world-wide situation that many are describing as "post-modern". Our culture is shaped by the rest of the world, perhaps even more so than other countries. Our small size and the ease of modern communication has contributed to an openness to (and even an excessive dependence on) overseas influences. In the past we have looked to England; now we tend to look more to the United States.²¹⁴ Partly because of this we have been slow to develop our own religious ethos. Most of the Protestant denominations have been dependant on overseas countries for their theology, leadership, preaching style, order of worship and hymnbooks.²¹⁵

Having said this, we do have our own version of western culture – our situation is unique, as is every country's. This brings us to consider

some of the primary characteristics of our society in New Zealand today. Although we share these with the rest of western culture they come to expression in particular ways in our own country. Understanding these features will help us communicate Christian faith, hope and love to the people of our culture.

Chapter 3

THE SECULARISM OF CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY

SECULARISM

For most of her European history New Zealand has generally been regarded as a *Christian* country. Now some are debating whether New Zealand or Australia is the most *secular* country in the world.²¹⁶ Maybe there are other close contenders, but even that this point is debated says something about the state of our country. Secularism describes our post-Christian culture as one that denies or ignores the existence of God. It describes the viewpoint that prevails in a society that was Christian in its outlook but has lost sight of that transcendent dimension. Secularism is “the outlook and values that arise in a society that is no longer taking its bearings from a transcendent world order.”²¹⁷ In the secular society we are self-reliant. God is superfluous. What is important is the pursuit of happiness here and now.²¹⁸ For secularists the world can be explained by purely natural phenomena. Rather than seeing the world as an open system (ie. open to God and the supernatural), they see the world as a closed system (ie. there are no supernatural influences). Secular people either do not believe in God, miracles, revelation or any supernatural intervention; or if they do, their belief does not make any practical difference to their lives. For all intents and purposes God does not exist. They may not be atheists philosophically, but they are practically. For the secularist God is either absent or irrelevant. Charles Darwin accurately describes this viewpoint; “I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation...This disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was

correct.”²¹⁹ This is secularism – where a person finds himself living without God and life continues on as usual – God and the church have become unnecessary. We need to distinguish this from secularisation.

SECULARISATION

Secularisation is “the process that creates the public environment in which these values seem natural and inevitable.”²²⁰ It is the process that leads to a society in which secularism prevails. At least three significant factors are at work in secularisation. First, improvements in medical science have given doctors more control over disease and death. In times past people felt themselves totally in the hands of God – now they place themselves confidently into the hands of the surgeon. Second, the movement from villages to towns and cities has loosened ties with the church. As people experienced the changes brought about by a move from the country to the city they often experienced a change in their religious commitment – the new freedom and opportunity meant they did not join a church in the new town. Third, the spread of new ideas and the rise of the mass media gave people more knowledge and a greater awareness of world events and caused them to be more questioning and critical in their attitudes. (National newspapers began to circulate in the 1860s, radio began to broadcast in the 1930s, and television began transmission in the 1950s). This critical approach also extended to the church, the Bible and the sermons of the preacher.

None of these factors by themselves, or even combined together, necessarily excludes a living faith in God. They were combined, however, with a higher critical approach to the Bible that undermined confidence in the infallibility of the Scriptures and their historical reliability. They were also associated with great changes in the world of ideas, especially the world and life view of the Enlightenment. All these combined to marginalise God, “to make what is absolute and transcendent irrelevant to the stuff of everyday life.”²²¹

PRIVATISATION

Secularism is closely connected with the privatisation of religion. This is the view that religion is irrelevant, even harmful, to the public sphere, and should be restricted to one's personal life. It arises out of the dualism of Greek philosophy. Dualism profoundly influenced the development of medieval scholasticism, especially the greatest of the scholastic theologians, Thomas Aquinas. He separated the realms of nature and grace, paving the way for a separation of reason and faith, fact and value, science and religion, the material and the spiritual. Privatisation has excluded religion from the public world of politics, economics, business and science and focussed it on the personal life of the individual and the family. The Christian faith is regarded as having nothing to say to the public sphere of life. Faith and the church are not seen as integrating principles of life but as one compartment of life – a private one. Os Guinness notes; “where religion still survives in the modern world, no matter how passionate or committed the individual believer may be, it amounts to little more than a private preference, a spare-time hobby, a leisure pursuit.”²²² The grand, global umbrella of faith, he observes, has shrunk to the size of a plastic rain hat.²²³ The processes of secularisation and privatisation have dramatically reduced the effectiveness of the Christian faith to shape and influence the culture. This is true even in the USA where religious belief is still high but where this belief may have no practical or tangible effect on the way people live or view the world.²²⁴ The Christian faith in America is, “socially irrelevant, even if privately engaging.”²²⁵

Privatisation has been a strong factor in the church and Christian faith from the beginning of European immigration. As we have noted, a fear of denominational conflict made the state wary of allowing distinctive denominational viewpoints in the public schools (Education Act 1877). This has had the effect, not only of keeping *denominations* out of the state schools, but of keeping out the *Christian faith* except, of course, for ‘private’ activities, such as Inter-Schools Christian Fellowship (ISCF). Even when *Bible in Schools* is taught the

school officially closes for that half-hour. Although the Education Act intended the word “secular” to mean *non-denominational* it has come to mean *non-Christian*. Privatisation in New Zealand’s religious history has also kept the church and Christians from having a significant influence on politics and the government. Analysing *The Social Context of New Zealand Religion*, Michael Hill admits that it is difficult to identify the influence of the religious factor in “its public, institutional form”, both now and for much of New Zealand’s history. Its influence is more easily found in the privatised area of individual commitment.²²⁶

SECULARISM IN NEW ZEALAND

If we look back over our history we have to concede that, on the basis of our opening definition, New Zealand has been a secular society for most of her history. Even though people generally believed in God and the Bible, their belief did not make much impact on their lives. Throughout the nineteenth century the majority of New Zealanders lived as practical atheists. Church attendance may be taken as some indicator of how seriously people take their Christian commitment – as we have seen, figures for regular church attendance have always been low, never rising above 30%. In recent decades this has declined even further. In a survey taken in November 1989 16% of the population claimed to attend church weekly. Most strongly represented was the older age group, especially those over sixty,²²⁷ with those between 18-29 as the least frequent attenders. 51% of the population never attend or attend less than once a year. *Vision New Zealand* research conducted in 1993 indicated that 11% of New Zealanders attended churches. (This figure came from denominational headquarter statistics for annual average attendances). Out of this 4% of New Zealanders were Roman Catholic and another 4% were attending mainline Protestant churches.²²⁸

Also declining is the percentage of the population identifying themselves with a Christian church. In the 1986 census 67.78%

claimed an affiliation with a church; in 1996, only ten years later, this had dropped significantly to 51.97%. As we would expect, more people are claiming to have no religion. In the 1981 census 5.3% claimed to have no religion, in 1986 this rose to 16.4%, in 1991 to 19.88%, and in 1996 to 24.71%. It may be that those who used to write “Church of England” or “Presbyterian” on their census form are becoming more honest and open about their lack of religious commitment and now state what they have always been.²²⁹ These figures confirm the secular character of our society. If we add to the 1996 figure of those who claimed to have “no religion” (24.71%), those who objected to stating their religious affiliation (7.09%), and those who identified with other religions and cults (5.54%), and those who did not specify any religious connection (5.19%), 42.53% of the population are non-Christian by their own definition. Another telling statistic illustrating this increasing secularisation are the figures for attendance at Sunday School. In 1960 50% of New Zealand children attended Protestant Sunday Schools. By 1992 the figure was down to 12%. Such a poor attendance at church and Sunday school has led to widespread Biblical illiteracy where people are appallingly ignorant of the Scriptures.

Prof. Michael Hill gives an overall impression of New Zealanders when he says that “about one fifth of the population can be described as a committed core of religionists, another fifth are avowedly non-religious, and three fifths show gradations of belief and practice.”²³⁰ Dr Jane Simpson, lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Canterbury, observes that in New Zealand there is a silence about religion, “a deep vein of reticence about religion”, which is almost a national trait. She describes the approach to religion in the general histories of New Zealand as “dismissive”. Part of her evidence for this is the failure of historians to acknowledge the religious dimension in the suffrage movement. Feminist historians in particular have ignored the religious motivations of the women who pushed for the franchise.²³¹

Secularism, of course, is not primarily an academic matter – it is

about how people live, think, and work. We see it operating in the lifestyle, goals and priorities of New Zealanders. They are busy in their gardens, building their own homes, protecting their weekends, throwing themselves into sport, walking and tramping the countryside and mountains. Modern New Zealand society offers much competition to the church and Christian faith and, at present, the attractions of society are winning. An article in the *Dominion Sunday Times* noted that; “Come Sunday morning 89 per cent of us stay put. On the big days – Christmas and Easter – and it’s not raining – 15% of us will venture out but most of us are a godless lot. The tattered remnants of ‘faith’ may lurk somewhere deep in the psyche but God’s ministers here on earth just don’t seem to have the pulling power any more.”²³² Brian Carrell summarises the present situation; “Secularism has advanced so rapidly over the last three decades since the 1960s, that it is a different landscape. We now live in a nation in which fewer and fewer people know less and less about God and care less and less about the gospel.”²³³ By contrast, the process of secularisation in England was delayed by decades because of two factors – “The Church of England had an established place and role in society by law and tradition, and overwhelming reminders of a Christian past were to be seen on every hand in the nation’s life.”²³⁴ New Zealand has not enjoyed the benefit of these restraining factors.

AN ANTI-CHRISTIAN SOCIETY?

Increasing secularism has gone hand in hand with a growing cynicism towards and sentiment against the Christian faith. This is reflected in the negative stance of the New Zealand media towards orthodox Christianity. “We also suffer in New Zealand from a media besotted with the theologically iconoclastic and bizarre. If someone is attacking Christian orthodoxy in some way, no matter how facile, inconsequential or fantastic his or her claims, time on radio and television and space in the press can be guaranteed, especially if the

person is a professor or a bishop. With due respect to Professor Geering and his considerable expertise, his over-exposure as a media religious expert has been at the expense of the intellectual integrity of Christian orthodoxy.”²³⁵ Christian leaders have a perception that “journalists in the secular media are biased against religion and that their coverage often negatively stereotypes religious people. They think that what does get reported tends to be sensationalised.... Journalists counter these claims by claiming that religious officials have unrealistic expectations of the media. They say religious events are assessed for inclusion in general news pages and bulletins according to the same factors as any other potential news.”²³⁶ There is, however, some basis for the perception Christians have of the media coverage of the church. An analysis by a journalism student of the contents of four metropolitan newspapers showed that “newspaper coverage of religion in NZ more than halved between 1954 and 1994 while at the same time religious affiliation dropped by only a fifth.” His survey of one NZ metropolitan daily newspaper showed that “only one percent of its stories had church groups or known Christians as their subject.”²³⁷ Religious programming on radio is equally deficient. In 1997 religious programming was reduced to one Sunday slot of 100 minutes (compared to the BBC allocation of almost 300 minutes per week). Thirty minutes of this time is Christian hymns, five minutes is religious news from around the world, and up to twenty minutes is made up of questions put to a “resident expert” who could be an adherent of any religion.²³⁸ In 1998 the spiritual content of radio programmes had dropped to 1.28% (compared with 2.6% in 1976), while for television it was 0.3% in 1998 (compared with 0.8% in 1976).²³⁹ The Waikanae Declaration of 1997 stated the concern of the Vision New Zealand Congress about “the general lack of balance in our media, and the unbalanced presentation of Christians and Christianity.”²⁴⁰ Brian Carrell, Anglican Bishop of Wellington, confirms this; “News of the Churches’ activities, exposure to a specifically Christian voice and viewpoint, and public access to prominent church leaders were kept to a minimum. Television

programmes such as *All Gas and Gaiters* made clergy look morons and the Church look foolish.”²⁴¹ He notes a recent change in this attitude but attributes this to the influence of postmodernity rather than an improved attitude to the church.

There are a number of incidents that illustrate this general insensitivity towards Christians. The Hero Festival, with its blatant and crude celebration of the homosexual and lesbian lifestyle, receives much publicity with posters bearing the City Promotions logo. Yet, in striking contrast, the Auckland City Council was criticised for sponsoring a life-sized nativity scene in Aotea Square and Auckland City Promotions officers are reluctant to put up street banners advertising Christian events.

On Sunday 17 November 1991 the South Island town of Waimate hosted the great Waimate car race – from 8.15 am. until 5.00 pm. The noise made it impossible for the churches to hold their services. After some negotiation all the churches could achieve was a postponement of the start of the race for forty minutes. This would allow them to squeeze in an early worship service. Worst affected was the Salvation Army hall because of its close proximity to the race pits. In a noble gesture the race committee paid for the hire of an alternative hall further away.²⁴² That the race should be held on a Sunday with almost total indifference for the church services of the town testifies to a low regard for the church.

Another incident took place early in 1998 when Te Papa, Wellington’s newly built national museum, featured a show of contemporary British art. Included in the show was a model of the Virgin Mary covered in a condom, and a version of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* depicting a bare breasted woman in the place of Christ. These two exhibits raised a storm of protest, especially from Roman Catholics, but the director of the museum refused to remove them. In an *Opinion* article *Press* writer Rosemary McLeod observed that “Mocking Christians is one of our national sports.” She contrasted this with the respect shown for Maoris or lesbians – “Just try sheathing a tiki in a condom and showing it in our national museum.” She asks,

“Why do Christians get up everybody’s nose? Hard to say, really. They just *do*.”²⁴³ These comments bear out the assessment above that our secular society not only ignores God and eternal realities but also actively opposes a Christian position. This opposition needs to be seen in the context of growing interest in and sympathy for other religions.

A RELIGIOUS SOCIETY?

Although the Christian world-view is declining in influence and the number of professing Christians in New Zealand is decreasing there is an increasing interest in spirituality. One of the most obvious signs of this is the attention given to the New Age movement. This came home to me recently when I was looking for a Bible in one of the Whitcoulls stores in Christchurch. I was having difficulty finding the Christian book section. Eventually I discovered why – it was located on the bottom shelf of a stand marked, “Inspirational”. There, tucked away in an obscure corner, I found a few Bibles and Christian books. Close by, however, an entire stand was devoted to New Age books and materials. Clearly, there is a market for New Age literature. Further evidence for a high level of interest in the supernatural is the popularity of science fiction movies such as the Star Wars series, Close Encounters of a Third Kind, ET, Independence Day, ID4 and TV shows like the X-Files.²⁴⁴ The idea that there is ‘something out there’ seems more believable today.

This revived interest in alternative forms of spirituality is also altering the views New Zealanders have of the Christian faith. Although many will still talk about ‘God’ they have different ideas about what this means. For most ‘God’ does not describe the personal Creator God of Christian revelation but rather a vague and mystical life force. In one survey 62% of those who claimed no religion believed in a life force/spirit while only 12% said they believed in a personal God. More disturbing than this statistic was the response of those who were regular church attenders: 36% of them said they believed in a personal

God while 61% said they believed in a life force/spirit not a person. Here is a sobering indication of the effect liberalism and the New Age are having on churchgoers. No doubt this influence will continue as movies borrow biblical categories but give them a new twist. One recent example of this comes from New Zealand director Vincent Ward with *What Dreams May Come*. The movie combines science fiction with New Age metaphysics as we are taken for a guided tour of heaven and hell. After being killed in a car crash the husband goes to heaven. Four years later his wife commits suicide and goes to hell. Her husband, aided by a guide, goes to find her and deliver her from her personal hell.²⁴⁵ That the future world is a subject for a film illustrates the new interest in spirituality. That the lines between heaven and hell are blurred shows how far we are from Biblical Christianity.

Paul Little, editor of the *Listener*, also believes that spirituality is important. He bemoans the pragmatic “give us enough number 8 wire and we’ll come up with a cure for cancer and throw in a batch of pikelets” attitude. His concern is that this present generation of young New Zealanders will have “precious little time to feed and water their immortal souls.” In response to this deficiency he would like to see a study of spiritual values covering “the widest range of religious thought, including atheism.... Spirituality is an exploration, not a discovery. A course of instruction shouldn’t attempt to provide children with answers. But it could help them work out where to start looking. At this moment, too many don’t even know there are questions.”²⁴⁶ This openness to spirituality is commendable, but his comments again demonstrate that we are a long way from the promotion of biblical Christianity.

Spirituality is also affecting western medicine prompting serious consideration of the spiritual side of healing. “Twenty years ago, no self-respecting American doctor would have dared to propose a double-blind, controlled study of something as intangible as prayer. Western medicine has spent the last 100 years trying to rid itself of remnants of mysticism.... As the 20th century draws to an end, there is growing disenchantment with one of its greatest achievements:

modern high-tech medicine.”²⁴⁷ Western medicine is seeing a shift towards the East. Deepak Chopra is one advocate of this trend. He has developed his alternative medicine out of Hinduism, but has synthesised this mystical approach with the language of technology and computers. His approach is part of a trend back to old and exotic solutions to medical problems: “The Tai Chi masters, the Tibetan sages and the modern shamans who treat illness with auras and crystals.”²⁴⁸ There is nothing new under the sun. New Age religion is a revival of old paganism. Behind the modern craze “lurks old fashioned divination, magic and demon possession. With the eclipse of Christianity, primitive nature religions come creeping back in all their superstition and barbarism.”²⁴⁹

Now that the God of the Scriptures is perceived to be absent he is rapidly being replaced with other forms of religious experience. In his great work analysing world civilisations Sir Arnold Toynbee argued that “successful societies have some sort of religious consensus. When this consensus is lost, new objects of worship will rush in to fill the spiritual vacuum.”²⁵⁰ This is precisely what we are seeing today. “The world, so recently emptied of the divine, is now awash with supernatural intrusions, with strange voices and mystical experiences of every conceivable kind.”²⁵¹ Having cast off the Christian heritage many New Zealanders seem ready to believe anything. It is a strange paradox that the more technological our society becomes the more people are attracted to astrology and other vague forms of religious expression. Our society is full of gurus, therapists, healers, promoters of meditative techniques and strategies for personal development, what Harold Turner calls “a religious variety show”.²⁵² Just look at the pages devoted to this in the weekly *TV Guide*: Psychic readings, Marilyn’s Guiding Line, Live Tarot Readings, Clairvoyant Helpline, Horoscope reading, Crystal Vision Tarot, Numerology Readings, Crystal Ball readings, Visions Personal, Positive and Compassionate. *The New Zealand Advertiser* (Issue 129) carried a full page add for a Tarot game with the assurance that if you posted it, “You will receive, by return mail, the exact answer to the question that is worrying you so

much.” All this growing interest in religious experience confirms the observation of G K Chesterton, an early twentieth century Roman Catholic theologian and novelist, that a culture that no longer believes in God will believe everything.

Not only is everything believed but some also want to see everything taught. Dr. Jane Simpson, religious studies lecturer at the University of Canterbury, would like to see a multi-faith study of religions taught in secondary schools. “We want a pluralistic approach that does not favour one religion, but celebrates and affirms religious diversity. That’s so important for social control and cohesion. Religion is much bigger than values.”²⁵³

This trend to spirituality should not surprise us. In Ecclesiastes the Teacher informs us that God has “set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes 5:11). We are spiritual beings; we were created to relate to God; we will search for God or for some replacement of Him. New Agers are on a quest for meaning, searching for spirituality. Sadly, in their search for spiritual experience people are by-passing the church and looking to Eastern mysticism, crystals and ‘the god within’. Some will have tried the church and found it wanting. Others will not turn to the church because they think they know all about it anyway and have rejected it. To some extent we can blame the liberals for this; they dismissed God and the supernatural as mythical nonsense leaving only what they could rationally understand. When people looked to the church and the Christian faith for the transcendent there was nothing to find – God had been written out of the script.

As Christians we can welcome this growing awareness of a spiritual world. People around us may be more willing to consider the truth of the Christian faith because they are not locked into a naturalistic mindset. At the same time this presents a great challenge to the Christian faith. Our secular New Zealand society has walked away from our Christian heritage but is busy exploring a range of other spiritual possibilities. Dr. Simpson’s comments, quoted above, show that the Christian faith is regarded as only one religious alternative among many. There is a smorgasbord of options to choose from and for most

Kiwis one is as valid as the next. This attitude is a consequence of the loss of truth in our western world and our situation of pluralism.

Chapter 4

LOSS OF TRUTH IN CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY

THE POSTMODERN VIEW OF TRUTH

God, in our secular society, has been pushed to the margins of life. This has had critical consequences for truth: If God is regarded as irrelevant to life then his truth is also regarded as irrelevant. The *Christian Research Journal* explained the significance of this new perspective on truth by noting that until recently “Christianity was under fire at most universities because it was thought to be unscientific, and consequently, untrue. Today, Christianity is widely rejected merely because it *claims* to be true! Increasingly, academics regard anyone claiming to know any objective or universal truth as intolerant and arrogant.”²⁵⁴ This neatly sums up the current situation – Biblical truth has been rejected as *The Truth* – all it can claim is the status of being *a truth*, one among many. This is a radically different way of looking at Christian truth.

In the premodern situation there were different ideas about truth. Each culture had their own gods and an official ‘story’ – that is, an account of the origin of the world and the place of their culture in the larger scheme of things. This story was regarded as true, was believed by most in the culture, and provided meaning to the society. All members of that society were expected to believe the truth and to conform to it, whether they lived in Ancient Greece, in Babylonia or Israel. Some toleration of other belief systems was permitted because the ancient world was polytheistic and many cultures were willing simply to add more gods to those they worshipped. The Greeks and Romans had an official policy of tolerating the religions of the peoples they conquered and incorporating these into their own worship. In

turn, the conquered peoples were expected to pay lip service to the state religion. Christians in the first century were persecuted because they challenged the existing belief system by refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the other gods. They insisted that their God was the only True God and they would not bow down to Caesar.

After 313 AD the Christian faith became the official religion for the Roman world, giving meaning to life and making sense of human existence and history. It was accepted by most of society as authoritative and enforced on the members of society by the church and the state. As we have seen, this began to change with the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The world view held by the church and supported by the state was challenged on all sides. Bloodshed in the religious wars of the seventeenth century prompted people to look for a basis for agreement in society other than the religious. Beginning with Descartes philosophers attempted to find a rational basis for unity in society to which all men could agree. After the Enlightenment truth was no longer tied to the revelation of God in the Bible but was based on the clear knowledge rational people could discover through careful observation of the world. This was the so-called 'scientific method'. It was also applied to the Bible in the Higher Critical approach and in liberal theology. The epistemology (theory of knowledge) of the Enlightenment era claimed "to reflect and represent reality so accurately that it simply mirrors the way things are."²⁵⁵ It claimed that there was a direct correspondence between objective reality and the thoughts of the knower. The naive realist of the Enlightenment claimed that we can have a sure access to truth – what we need to do is use our reason and powers of observation to determine the facts, and then convince others of the truth of these. This scientific certainty would establish "one singular, universal story that would serve as the foundation of all reality."²⁵⁶ Reasonable human beings could come to universally accepted objective truth. People living with the world view of modernity believed (and believe) they could gain absolute certain knowledge. Not only was this desirable – it was also attainable. Intellectual people of this era were supremely

optimistic about their quest for truth. All they had to do was apply the right method. Stanley Grenz illustrates this from the original *Star Trek* series, whose hero was Mr. Spock. “Spock was the ideal Enlightenment man, completely rational and without emotion (or with his emotions in check). Repeatedly, his dispassionate rationality provided the calculative key necessary to solve the problems encountered by the *Enterprise*. According to the creators of *Star Trek*, in the end our problems are rational and, therefore, they require rational expertise.”²⁵⁷ Some Bible colleges and seminaries also worked with this assumption holding that a thorough knowledge of Hebrew and Greek and a rigorous application of exegetical principles would guarantee the right interpretation.²⁵⁸

During the twentieth century, however, it became apparent that mankind could not achieve absolute certainty of knowledge on the basis of human reason alone. Truth is not only known through the mind, but also through our will, our emotions and through the community we belong to. This postmodern approach is clearly illustrated in the second *Star Trek* series, *The Next Generation*. Mr. Spock has been replaced by Data, who is also a “fully rational thinker capable of superhuman intellectual feats”.²⁵⁹ Data, however, is an android – a sub-human machine – who desires to become human. Although he often contributes to finding solutions to problems through his rational thinking, he is only one of several in the *Enterprise* crew. Another key member of the ship is Counsellor Troi, “a woman gifted with the ability to perceive the hidden feelings of others”.²⁶⁰ Aboard the *Enterprise* the truth is discovered by various people making their contribution with their unique abilities and approach. The truth is discovered by the community working together. This emphasis on the community is also typically postmodern. In the contemporary perspective truth is not discovered by reason, scientific observation or Christian revelation, but is rather created by a community of people. Reality is a social construction, something we make up ourselves. Our understanding of the truth is conditioned by the community we are part of. Truth is relational. This means that truth is relative to our

specific community. The truth is not timeless, universal or transcultural; rather, it is time-bound, specific and local.

Philosophers recognised that perfect objectivity is impossible; all knowledge has a personal element in it. They also recognised that we all come at knowledge with our own presuppositions; the framework we are working with will shape the questions we ask as well as our analysis and research in a certain subject. As a result no one can take a purely objective and 'scientific' approach to their inquiry. All our knowledge is conditioned by our subjective starting point and the paradigm we are working with.²⁶¹ Recognition of these ideas contributed to the development of a post-modern epistemology known as deconstructionism.

In this epistemology no one can claim to have *the* truth, because everyone makes up their *own* truth. The truth is as you see it. An objective view of truth is impossible because each one of us is standing inside our own representation of truth. Truth is always subjective because it is always a person's interpretation or perception of reality, not the real world itself. The roots of this idea can be traced back to Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who maintained that we cannot know what the world is like in itself because we see it through the patterns of our minds. We do not discover the truth that is out there but we impose meaning on the world by ordering the facts.²⁶² Others, such as Heidegger and Gadamer, pushed this idea further and came to the conclusion that everything we know is only interpretation. Objective truth and interpretation are impossible. This is the 'new hermeneutic'.²⁶³

Deconstructionists first applied their ideas to literature. They assumed that no work of literature can give us the truth because our interpretation of what has been written is conditioned by our own situation, circumstances and language. When reading the text an interpreter may 'deconstruct' what has been written, taking bits and pieces out of the context they were written, and refit them into his own framework.²⁶⁴ No one can understand what the text actually says; objective truth is impossible; all we can gain is *interpreted* truth. The

focus of interpretation is not on what the author intended to say, nor on what the text actually says, but on what the reader interprets it to mean.²⁶⁵

Clearly we are in the realm of pure subjectivism. The concept of truth has become very slippery if not meaningless. No one can claim that they have a better grasp of the truth than anyone else; no one may claim that their world view is right, or that it applies to anyone other than themselves. From this perspective no explanation, orientation or world-view can be absolute. "Once we let go of absolutes, nobody gets to have a position that is anything more than a position."²⁶⁶ Today we no longer have one overall story; "no single account can take priority and we are left with a conflicting field of myths and stories. There is no single truth, only truths."²⁶⁷ Truth has been localised.²⁶⁸ People used to believe in aiming at a bull's-eye centre of an absolute and knowable truth – today many have abandoned that quest.²⁶⁹

A contributing factor to this loss of truth has been modernity's failure to produce a world view or system of belief that has stood the test of time. There have been various attempts to produce a comprehensive perspective and make it hold; the most spectacular of these are Marxism/Leninism and the Fascism applied in Nazi Germany and Italy. Both have failed.²⁷⁰ Now postmodernists reject the very attempt to establish a "metanarrative". John Francois Lyotard, a leading postmodern philosopher, argues that no narrative can pull together all the details of social, economic and political life into an overall story. We must, he says, abandon the attempt to find one grand narrative. This is the post-modern position. No story has a privileged status. Every story and world view is on a level playing field.²⁷¹

Postmodernism's view of truth obviously has philosophical roots. We should not, however, underestimate the contribution television has made in devaluing and fragmenting truth. To maintain the interest of the viewer television breaks up its presentation into small fragments of information. A person is only permitted to think about one matter for a brief moment before being hurried on to the next image. Every programme is a constantly changing series of images. Each

programme is itself broken up by advertisements – not just one, but four, five or six – each of which carries the viewers into another world or impresses on them the value of a different product. Television producers aim “to keep everything brief, not to strain the attention of anyone but instead to provide constant stimulation through variety, novelty, action, and movement. You are required... to pay attention to no concept, no character, and no problem for more than a few seconds at a time.”²⁷² These same principles are applied to the presentation of the news; It is assumed that “complexity must be avoided, that nuances are dispensable, that qualifications impede the simple message, that visual stimulation is a substitute for thought, and that verbal precision is an anachronism.”²⁷³ This approach to programming and even to the presentation of the news militates against sustained thought or a coherent understanding of the world. Television is about “performing, not pondering. It is theatre rather than thinking, entertaining drama rather than edifying debate.”²⁷⁴ By presenting us with information that is irrelevant, fragmented and superficial television works against an historical and contextual grasp of where we are. In the absence of historical perspective and a broader context it is very difficult to integrate all these fragmented pieces of information into a coherent whole. People have given up trying. Most do not attempt to sort out all this information in their minds. All this data is filed away into separate little bytes. It does not concern a postmodern person that some of this information contradicts other information, or even whether all they see and hear is true. The image is more important than the substance, style of more interest than the truth.

This abandonment of the hope of a ‘grand narrative’ and the loss of a clear concept of truth has a number of significant consequences. Some of these will be developed in more detail as we examine other related aspects of postmodernism. For now we note some of the general consequences this has had in society.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR SOCIETY

One result of the deconstruction of reality is what has been called “anomie” – “the loss of nomos [Greek – law] – the loss of any secure sense of a meaningful order to the world.”²⁷⁵ In our culture there is a feeling of rootlessness and disorientation. The basic meaning of life has been questioned and threatened leaving many people in an unhappy position. They feel unsettled and restless. If truth is only a matter of interpretation then how can we be certain of anything? What can I build my life on? What is the point of living?

Another consequence is an unbridled pragmatism. For many ‘truth’ has become irrelevant. In our consumer culture people do not ask, “Is this true?” but, “What’s in it for me?”²⁷⁶ This reflects the personalised pragmatism of our age – I want to know whether it works and what I can get out of it!

A further effect of the loss of truth is irresponsibility. Modern knowledge is non-committal and consequence-free. This is partly the result of information overload. The Teacher writing in Ecclesiastes observed; “...With much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.” (Ecclesiastes 1:18). We can identify with that when we read the newspaper or a magazine of world news. The more we know the more anguish it causes. Yet, we know so much about so many people it is impossible to be involved in the lives of all of them. It is impossible to meet all the needs that we come to know about. This impossibility produces paralysis; because we can’t do everything we do nothing. Our paralysis is reinforced by the idea that it isn’t my responsibility; someone else will look after it; the experts will fix it; the government will step in. Os Guinness sums up the dilemma of modern knowledge by observing; “Never has more been known; never has less been required of what is known. From abstract mathematical formulas to anguishing international atrocities, the common reaction to modern knowledge is, ‘So what? Who cares? What do you expect me to do?’”²⁷⁷

One more result of the loss of truth is a trend to the misuse of power.

Under Christendom power was regarded as a servant of the truth. Those in power may not have applied this consistently but this was the general understanding. In more recent times truth has become the slave of power. Those in power manipulate the truth for their own ends. Michael Novak, in his Templeton Prize Address, asserts; “Those who surrender the domain of intellect make straight the road of fascism.”²⁷⁸ When people are no longer concerned about the truth they feel free to use any means available to gain and maintain power. As truth declines tyranny increases. Frederick Nietzsche foresaw that “the death of God would lead to the emergence of raw power as the ultimate truth, power expressed through a superior race and a super-man.”²⁷⁹ If there is no objective truth outside of ourselves then there is no moral guide; consequently we are left to our own devices and the principle that “might is right”. Nietzsche’s ideas provided the soil out of which grew Nazi Germany. In fulfilment of his words the cruel violence and brute force of that regime have been imitated over and over in the past few decades. These are horrifying examples of what happens when the concept of truth is diminished and when people manipulate it to their own ends.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR EDUCATION

A loss of truth has had some serious consequences in society: A feeling of rootlessness, a preoccupation with pragmatism, a sense of irresponsibility, and the abuse of power no longer restrained by a belief in Christian truth. The abandonment of truth has also had consequences for education. This is a crucial area of society because educators are training and influencing the next generation. Here I want us to examine how this new approach to truth is reflected in the goals and objectives of New Zealand education.

The following comes from an Education Department statement in 1904:

The purpose of the Public Elementary School is to form and strengthen character and to develop the intelligence of children entrusted to it... according to their different needs... They can endeavour to... Implant in the children habits of industry, self control and courageous perseverance in the face of difficulties; they can teach them to revere what is noble, to be ready for self sacrifice, and to strive their utmost after purity and truth; they can foster a strong respect for duty and the consideration and respect for others which must be the foundation of unselfishness...

Compare this with a directive from the Ministry of Education almost 90 years later:

The Board of Trustees will ensure that all students are given an education which respects their dignity, rights and individuality. This education shall challenge them to achieve personal standards of excellence and to reach their full potential. All school activities will be designed to advance these purposes.

Note also the mission statement of a church school:

[The school] challenges its pupils to realise their uniqueness and inspires them to develop their potential in a Christian environment through innovative programs, high quality tuition and a wide range of opportunities.

These extracts illustrate how the focus of education has shifted from a belief in the importance of objective truth and virtues to individualism and the fulfilment of personal potential. This is part of a larger trend away from content-based education to one which is child-centred, from education that is orientated to knowledge to one which is focussed on method and technique. Of course there may be some gains through these changes – interactive learning can be fun and interesting (but good teachers made content based learning fun and interesting). An emphasis on the process of learning, however, has reduced the content of what is learned. Universities often complain that entering students cannot spell or construct a proper sentence. Concern about the effect of child-centred education was highlighted in

a report prepared for the Education Forum, a group of people concerned about the trends in New Zealand education. It claimed that the child-centred method damages children and society and traced this approach back to the colleges of education which were “hostile to European inheritance and sympathetic to radical feminism, gay liberation, and assaults on the traditional curriculum”.²⁸⁰ A ‘dumbing down’ of educational standards is worrying enough, but of even greater concern is the lack of desire to instil a body of knowledge and a preoccupation with technique rather than truth. Rather than passing on truth and sustaining culture the teacher has become a mere facilitator, assisting the child in a discovery of their natural potential.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CHURCH

The postmodern view of truth has not only influenced society and education but has also had a profound effect in the church. Sadly the church has followed the world in diminishing the value of truth. David Wells maintains there is an anti-theological mood in the contemporary church seen in “vacuous worship”, “the shift from God to self as the central focus of faith”, “psychologised preaching”, “strident pragmatism”, and a “revelling in the irrational”.²⁸¹ Theology has been moved from the centre of the evangelical church to the periphery. No longer is the church guided by a theological understanding. Theology has been replaced by practice. In many churches and Christian organisations the question, “Will it work?” is more important than the question, “Is it true?” Being practical now substitutes for being theological, for there is little left to theology except practice.”²⁸² Ministers in the church are leading the charge toward pragmatism as they become less and less theologians and preachers of the Word and more and more managers and therapists. As examples of this trend Wells points to the professionalisation of the ministry and the low level requirements of some Doctor of Ministry degrees. In a further illustration he notes that between 1980 and 1988 less than 1% of

material in the *Leadership* magazine made any clear reference to Scripture, let alone any theological idea.²⁸³ Os Guinness sums up the trend succinctly with these words; “Theology has given way to technique. Know-whom has faded before know-how. Serving God has subtly been deformed into servicing the self... even at its best, pragmatism results in evangelicalism rich in ingenuity and organisation but poor in spirituality and superficial, if not banal, in doctrine.”²⁸⁴

This critique could well be applied to what is happening in New Zealand. Through the mail I received a registration brochure for “Leadership ’96: A Christian Leadership and Management Training Programme” run in Wellington and Auckland in October and November 1996. The programme was mainly orientated around twelve workshops:

1. Managing stress and preventing burnout
2. Effective time management
3. Managing change positively
4. The hard side of managing staff
5. Building teams
6. Assertive communication
7. Resolving conflict
8. Giving feedback
9. Running effective meetings
10. Marketing for agencies and churches
11. Strategic planning
12. Fun activities to involve groups

At the end of the following year I received a pamphlet advertising a “Motivation” conference run by Team Consultants. The explanation inside focussed on motivation, goals, “real power sharing”, delegation and support for your team. It was advertised as a Christian training programme that would equip people with the skills to lead competently.

These programmes reflect the overall trend away from theology

and truth to an emphasis on management and technique. It is true that we need to be efficient and good managers of our time; we need to run meetings well and build a good team of elders; we need to learn to manage the stresses of the ministry and prevent burn-out. My concern is the emphasis given to these matters. One could be forgiven for thinking that effective and competent leaders are those who have learned the right skills. Yet what the church needs more than anything else are leaders of Christian character who have a solid grounding in the truth of God's Word and the ability to communicate this to the church and the world. When describing the requirements for elders (leaders) in the church the New Testament puts the emphasis on Christian character. Even his ability to "manage his own family well" is indicative of his Christian character rather than his management skills. The only *skill* required of the elder is that he be "able to teach". The story is told of Japanese businessman who made a comment to a visiting Australian: "Whenever I meet a Buddhist leader, I meet a holy man. Whenever I meet a Christian leader, I meet a manager." It is time to shift the emphasis away from managerial skills in leaders to leaders developing Christian character and living holy lives.²⁸⁵

Wells contends that a theological vacuum amongst the clergy in America is reflected in biblical ignorance and an "astounding theological illiteracy" in the contemporary church.²⁸⁶ I suspect that his critique would also apply to the contemporary church in New Zealand. How many Christians here have a good grasp of the truth of the Bible and a depth and breadth of theological understanding? Some of this lack, no doubt, is due to intellectual laziness, but part of it is a result of the postmodern idea that truth does not matter. Today's church is preoccupied with movements that have shifted the emphasis away from theology and thinking to the relational, therapeutic, charismatic and managerial. The emphasis in the church and among Christians is not on the central doctrines of the Scriptures but on matters secondary and relatively peripheral – spiritual warfare, healing, signs and wonders, exorcism, tastes in music, counselling, the time and precise details of the return of Christ. All of these have become distractions.

More attention is given to a person's personal relationship and experience of God rather than to preaching and teaching. It is not that the former is unimportant but rather that at the present time it seems to be the sum total of people's faith.²⁸⁷

Theological education reflects this trend away from truth. Whereas the New England Puritans put much emphasis on theological education, "dreading to have an illiterate Ministry to the churches,"²⁸⁸ the churches of the late twentieth century appear to have no such concern. In the training of ministers more and more emphasis is put on practical, "how-to" subjects rather than on doctrine, theology, biblical languages and exegesis. This trend is by no means of recent origin. In the eighteenth century a leader of the Methodist church, Bishop Francis Asbury, contrasted study with soul-saving; "If you can do but one, let your studies alone. I would throw by all the Libraries of the World rather than be guilty of the Loss of one Soul." His followers added later; "We have always been more anxious to preserve a living rather than a learned ministry."²⁸⁹ A more recent and even more brazen example comes from Billy Sunday: "If I had a million dollars I'd give \$999,999 to the church and \$1 to education." He used to boast that he didn't know "any more about theology than a jack-rabbit knew about ping-pong."²⁹⁰ Today it is not uncommon to hear individuals and churches proudly claim that they have, "No Creed but the Bible". Ministers of the gospel will promote and defend this position. The Pentecostal leader, A. J. Tomlinson claimed, "We have the Bible for everything, and we have no creeds, rituals, or articles of faith."²⁹¹ I recall visiting a church in Tauranga while on holiday and hearing a sermon on why ministers did not need theological training. In support of this the speaker pointed out that the disciples were mostly unlearned men and not one of them had any seminary training. What escaped his notice was that these twelve men spent three years of intensive theological training with the best teacher and theologian the world has ever had, the Lord himself.

By contrast, liberalism in the church in New Zealand has put a strong emphasis on scholarship but, at the same time, has continued to

undermine confidence in the truth of the Scriptures. In November 1996 Dr James Veitch, a senior religious studies lecturer at Wellington's Victoria University, and an ordained Presbyterian minister, declared that he did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. "As an historical figure he was not divine but created to be divine by the church.... The church created Jesus...."²⁹² Rev Bruce Patrick, the minister of the Baptist Tabernacle in Auckland, objected to the statements of Dr James Veitch. On behalf of seventy Christian leaders who were widely representative of the Christian church in Auckland he tried to place a brief response to those remarks in the *Herald*, but without success.²⁹³ A Christian Coalition Candidate for the 1996 general election, Robin Corner, also responded by saying that James Veitch should be sacked from the ministry. Rev Kerry Enright, the executive secretary of the Presbyterian church, defended Dr. Veitch by saying that the church had room for such people.²⁹⁴ Another example of liberalism comes from a discussion document produced by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand that stated; "Absolute belief can be static. Absolute belief can inhibit growth. It may be blind to different facets of the diamond of truth. Jesus said. 'I have yet more things to teach you.' Absolute belief may inhibit the ability to communicate.... Absolute belief purports to be strong. It may in fact be weak, fearful of letting go in case the whole belief structure crumbles."²⁹⁵ A statement like this reflects the loss of confidence in the truth of the Scriptures. This document also raises discussion questions about our orthodox understanding of God when it asks; "Why does there seem to be an insistence on a definition of 'God as personal' as a prerequisite for salvation? Why should the belief in a personal God be regarded as superior or inferior to belief in God as 'a spirit or life force, not a person?' Is there not room for all our descriptions, the God of many names?"²⁹⁶ Raising these questions in this form suggests a positive answer. Here is evidence of the church promoting a postmodern view of the truth. A *Listener* article titled "Searching for Jesus Christ at Christmas" quoted Paul Morris, Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University. Discussing the gospel records he said;

“The question of literal, historical truth or untruth seems unnecessarily crude.”²⁹⁷

These examples are part of the general loss of confidence in Christian truth in our New Zealand society and in our churches. This respect eroded at a much faster rate after the 1960s, producing the current situation where everybody has their own version of truth. Not only has truth become multi-faceted but people are no longer so interested in truth itself – the issue of truth is secondary to its practical benefit. Going hand in hand with the loss of a Christian world view and understanding of truth is pluralism. The loss of truth and the advance of philosophical pluralism are two sides of the same coin. We turn our attention to this matter.

Chapter 5

PLURALISM IN CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY

From the fourth century AD the Christian world view dominated western society. It was challenged from the outside by other religions such as Islam, and from inside by movements within the church such as the Albigenians and the Waldensians in the twelfth century. Despite these challenges the Christian perspective was generally accepted. Its dominant position was undermined by the ideas of the Enlightenment and the movements that followed. More recently the rapid progress of secularisation has meant that the Christian faith has been relegated to the fringes of life. This has left a vacuum in our western world, an emptiness, a lack of a theological centre, thus opening the way for pluralism. Today there is no unifying tradition or ideology but rather a whole range of world views, cultures and traditions. David Wells writes; “What was once a single universe... has broken apart into a mass of smaller, independent worlds that are now moving away on their own trajectories.”²⁹⁸ Os Guinness describes the situation with this picture; “Pluralisation sees to it that there is no sacred canopy, only millions of small tents; no global umbrella, only a bewildering range of pocket umbrellas for those who may care to have one.”²⁹⁹ Secularisation is the background cause of this massive diversity, but secularism and pluralism each strengthen the other.

THE PRESENCE OF PLURALISM

In defining pluralism it is helpful to make a distinction between its *presence* and its *promotion*. We must acknowledge the *presence* of a plurality of peoples and ideas in the western world, including New

Zealand. Pluralism in this sense refers to the sheer diversity around us in race, language, heritage, culture and religion.³⁰⁰ Os Guinness describes pluralism in this strict sense as “a social condition in which numerous different religious, ethnic, and cultural groups live together in one nation under one government.”³⁰¹ Such a situation is closely tied in with capitalism which “– unlike socialism or totalitarianism – leaves room for the development and maintenance of a multiplicity of ideas, institutions, and ways of life.”³⁰² Pluralism has been compared to a smorgasbord luncheon with its great variety of foods, to “a carnival with a never ending array of sideshows”,³⁰³ as well as to a shopping mall with its huge range of boutiques and specialist stores.

The shrinking of the world to a ‘global village’ has been a significant contributor to pluralism. In previous centuries the world was orientated around nation states each with their own story and culture. In the second half of this century, with the advances in computer technology and communication, the world has become smaller. Improvements and cost-cutting in telephone links, the advent of faxes and email, the ease and relatively low cost of flying – all of these have linked people in the world as though they were living in the same town. Since World War II immigration has produced a mix of races, cultures and religions in many countries of the western world. The arrival of the global village has brought the ideas and belief systems of other cultures into our own society. Our postmodern world experiences a constant and increasing exchange of information, ideas and beliefs.³⁰⁴ We no longer live in isolation from other stories and cultures – rather we live with a plurality of views.

This plurality came to New Zealand slowly due to a tight immigration policy that restricted immigration primarily to English immigrants and other selected Western European countries. Since the 1960s large numbers have come from the Pacific Islands, especially Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands and Nuie, most of whom have settled in Auckland. Until recently, however, apart from the Pacific Islanders, New Zealand has remained largely bi-cultural, ie. Maori and Pakeha. It is only in the last couple of decades that New Zealand’s immigration

policy has loosened to allow significant numbers of immigrants from a wider range of countries including Asia, South Africa and the Middle East. Our own congregation numbers about 350 people and includes representatives of about ten different countries.

New Zealand used to be held up as the ideal of racial harmony. During the last generation, however, cracks have started to show in that veneer. We are having to take a sober and serious look at the past, to admit wrongs, and to redress these where possible. There is a great danger of polarisation between Maori activists and right wing Pakehas. This racial tension is not confined to Maori/Pakeha relationships; it can also be seen in the tensions between various polynesian groups. Recent immigration from Asia and Africa has also raised concerns in the minds of many, as was evident in the dramatic increase in support given to Winston Peters in 1996 when he raised questions about government immigration policies. His comments prompted a nationwide debate on the issues of race and demographic balance.

The move from a 'first past the post' electoral system to a MMP (mixed member proportional) illustrates and reinforces the pluralism of our society. It has encouraged a greater number of smaller parties, increasing the range of choice, and reflects the pluralism in our society. This form of pluralism looks set to stay. But we need to take our definition further.

THE PROMOTION OF PLURALISM

Pluralism is not just about variety, but about *extreme* variety.³⁰⁵ Today we are witnessing not only the *presence* of a diversity of cultures but the active *promotion* of this diversity. In this broader sense pluralism goes beyond a plurality of cultures and traditions; it not only allows for a great range of thought and practice but also approves it. All views are to be tolerated, accepted, even welcomed. Postmodernists celebrate the confusion and pluralism of our culture. Diversity is cherished and affirmed, both by the media and by intellectuals. The vision of Paul

Morris, Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University, for the new millenium is of a series of eclectic global religions – a little bit of everything – a smorgasbord of religious belief. “You can go to yoga and go to church. You can meditate on Mondays and go to a channeller on Wednesdays. There is a pick and choose.”³⁰⁶

Philosophical pluralism promotes the view that no ideology or religion may claim to be intrinsically superior to another. Any such claim is necessarily wrong. “The only absolute creed is the creed of pluralism. No religion has the right to pronounce itself right or true, and the others false, or even (in the majority view) relatively inferior.”³⁰⁷ You may say, “*This is true*”, as long as you do not add, “Therefore, *that is false*”.³⁰⁸ Paul Windsor believes “this is the foundational ‘-ism’ of our culture.... It spawns all other ‘-isms’ and legitimises them.”³⁰⁹ The affirmation of pluralism is inextricably linked to the loss of truth – if there is no “Truth”, and no overall story, then each one must tell his own story and we must simply accept their right to do so. This attitude makes people unwilling to be dogmatic about the truth of their own position. Rather than assert, “This is true”, they are only willing to say, “This is true *for me*.” G. K. Chesterton, writing before these ideas took hold on society generally, described such an attitude as a misplaced humility – rather than being humble about our opinion, which is a commendable humility, we are humble about the truth itself. As a result the supreme virtue in our postmodern pluralistic situation is *tolerance* – but tolerance of a peculiar variety.

THE VIRTUE OF TOLERANCE

In our pluralist society the cardinal virtues are tolerance and broad-mindedness, while the chief postmodernist sins are being judgemental, intolerant, narrow-minded, thinking that you have the only truth, and trying to enforce your values on anyone else.³¹⁰ Yet postmodern people have changed the meaning of intolerance: It “used to refer to bigotry and prejudice – that is, attacking people or excluding them

because of who they are or what they think.... But now, intolerance often means simply asserting that some beliefs are true and others are false.”³¹¹ We have come to a situation where a person is not permitted to question the position of anyone else; where we must leave everyone totally free to choose their own viewpoint and do their own thing. Carson comments that “In a relatively free and open society, the best forms of tolerance are those that are open to and tolerant of people, even where there are strong disagreements with their ideas.” This form of tolerance allowed for “a spirited debate over the relative merits of this or that idea”, while also engendering “a measure of civility in public discourse.” Today, however, we are urged to be tolerant of the *ideas* of others. “The result of adopting this new brand of tolerance is less discussion of the merits of competing ideas – and less civility. There is less discussion because toleration of diverse ideas demands that we avoid criticising the opinions of others.... There is less civility because now there is no inherent demand, in this new practice of tolerance, to be tolerant of people.”³¹² Morrow, writing about *A Nation of Finger Pointers* makes the same observation; “When old coherences break down, civilities and tolerances fall away as well.”³¹³ Under the new regime of tolerance we must simply accept the validity of everyone’s ideas, no matter how confused or perverse they might be; the truth or error of a person’s behaviour or position cannot be debated; we cannot even declare that a person’s views are false, or their position in error. Rightly, some are questioning the sanity of this attitude.

Agnes-Mary Brooke, a Nelson based writer on socio-economic subjects, raised a concern about the decline of manners in traditionally respected institutions and ceremonies. She objected to the notion of turning “libraries into quasi-drop-in centres”. After attending the capping ceremony of Canterbury University she was deeply disturbed by the “displays of yoboism” coming from “members of the public obviously more used to attending football matches than a ceremony highlighting scholarly pursuits.” Such displays included yahooing, whistling, giggling in groups, shrieking, loud calling out while others were being capped and congratulated. Brooke was not convinced by

the justification of such behaviour given by a senior staff member of the university who repudiated “draconian prohibitions”. She argues that “excessive tolerance has become servility” and that our social cohesion as a nation is threatened by our tolerance of the loud-mouthed and assertive. Educated New Zealanders, she argues, have become too passive; their withdrawal has allowed a “general sliding of standards” and contributes to our increasing social disintegration.³¹⁴ Her comments make the point that tolerance has gone too far – it allows for views and behaviour that ought not to be tolerated.

Postmodernists themselves, however, have become very intolerant. Here is the irony of our situation. Pluralists regard all positions as negotiable, except their own.³¹⁵ No one may question or debate the position of pluralism. Its truth, it seems, is self-evident or, at least, so widely accepted as to be beyond question. Many people and groups in our society will advocate tolerance but when another view is presented will become extremely defensive and hostile. Lance Morrow describes these people as the “candlesnuffers of behavioural and political correctness”. These “busybodies” go about seeking to control the behaviour of others “accomplishing intolerance in the name of tolerance, regimentation in the name of betterment.”³¹⁶ In New Zealand some of the most consistent examples of intolerance are directed towards Christians. In his news show, television broadcaster Paul Holmes is generally antagonistic to Christianity, as illustrated in recent years with his treatment of the Closed Brethren and his handling of the opposition of the Christian Heritage Party to homosexuality. We are in a situation today where all views are tolerated, except the Christian view, because it is declared to be intolerant.

THE RESULTS OF PLURALISM

Pluralism promotes a separation and segmentation in society. Some segmentation occurs naturally, as when people of the same culture and race congregate in the same geographical area. This is most

striking in Auckland with a concentration of Maoris in Otara, Samoans in Mangere, and Asians in Howick. Difficulties arise, however, when one group presses this separation further than simply a desire to live in a certain geographical location. One example of this is the Ngati Kahu sub-tribe along the North Island's Wairoa river who refused to pay the registration fee for their dogs claiming that a dog is a taonga (treasure) protected by the Treaty of Waitangi. Another instance occurred in January 1995 when Wanganui Maori Kirk McRitchie was caught fishing for trout in the Mangawhero river without a license. A district court found him not guilty on the ground that he had been exercising his treaty right to fish in his tribal river. Maori leaders agree with this decision, but former Attorney-General Paul East argued that "there should be one law for all New Zealanders in respect to trout fishing." Another issue is whether Maoris have rights to use whales and other marine mammals. This will bring them into conflict with environmental lobby groups.³¹⁷ These are examples of how pluralism separates people into small groups with their own special interests.

Not only do people live side by side but so do ideas and theories. In our present society different views are tolerated even though they may conflict with each other. Gene Veith illustrates how this might work out in the area of psychology; "For example, if you need psychiatric help, you might be treated by a Freudian, a Jungian, a humanist, or a behaviourist. Your treatment might consist of telling about your childhood, recording your dreams, getting in touch with your feelings, or exposing yourself to operant conditioning." He points out the inconsistency and difficulty of this situation; "The philosophies behind these psychological theories are incompatible – Freud and the behaviourists cannot both be right – and the methodologies are untestable."³¹⁸ Another example of this blending of contradictory ideas is found in President Bill Clinton. In an Essay article *Time* magazine named him 'The First Postmodern President'.

Call him the son of the White Queen, who, as she told Alice, sometimes 'believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast'.... This

postmodern president is left and right, which seemed logically impossible just yesterday. And what a lovely campaign strategy it is.... Hence a baffling question: Why does the electorate go for Clinton's "You can have it all" strategy?

Call it the Winnie-the-Pooh syndrome. When Pooh was asked whether he wanted honey or jam on his bread, he replied, "I'll have both – but I won't take the bread." Today's voter is a perfect complement to the postmodern presidency. The electorate has been "deconstructed", meaning those who have traditionally heeded the call of class, religion or ethnicity have become nimble-footed shoppers in the market of political goodies."³¹⁹

We need to consider the consequences of this approach. One result is that the truth is devalued. Many do not consider the truth of what they believe or do – they are simply unthinkingly caught up in the latest fad or fashion or, like President Clinton, are instinctively following a pragmatic course that will win votes. When people hold contradictory ideas without trying to work these out in some way then the truth will suffer. Postmodern pluralism makes all views relative and cuts off any meaningful discussion of ideas that people hold, making genuine dialogue impossible.

A further result of these different ideas and conflicting voices vying for attention is a "bewildering cacophony."³²⁰ Many different ideas and beliefs around us provide us with a massive range of options. This is even more so now than in the modern or premodern era. In those former periods the acceptance of the predominant world-view conditioned the choices an individual would make. Today, however, the climate has changed; there is no generally accepted world-view that predetermines a person's selection. People are aware of the choices they have and they make them freely.³²¹ In a smorgasbord society there are endless decisions that have to be made. Choice has become not only a "state of affairs" but also a "state of mind".³²² People regard the freedom to choose as a right, a non-negotiable; choice has become one of the idols of our time.

An increase in choice means a decline in commitment; "the extension of choice leads to the evasion of choice."³²³ When a person

is confronted with too many options and possibilities they find it hard to make up their mind. Instead they stall and flit from one thing to another without committing themselves to any one thing. For these people the range of choice becomes too much; like people overwhelmed by the noise and confusion of a fair, or dazed by the endless variety of a shopping mall. The very variety makes it impossible for some to choose – they are paralysed by the range of choice. This massive diversity has had a profound effect on the Christian faith and on churches.

PLURALISM AND THE CHURCH

The decline in commitment evident in society is also evident in the Christian church. Pluralism and choice act like a “non-stick coating” on the Christian faith.

Pluralisation “acts like a spiritual Teflon, sealing Christian truth with a slippery surface to which commitment will not adhere. The result is a general increase in shallowness, transience and heresy. Picking, choosing and selectiveness are the order of the day. Asked once about her beliefs, Marilyn Munroe replied, ‘I just believe in everything – a little bit.’ Many Christians are only slightly different. Doctrinal dilettantism and self-service spirituality are all part of the trend towards an effete gourmet godliness.”³²⁴

Again, this has its roots in a loss of truth. Generally speaking, Christians in New Zealand lack a commitment to doctrine – their choice of a church is not guided so much by theology or truth as by personal preferences and tastes. In the religious supermarket of this new millennium every individual can download their own personalised faith from the internet.³²⁵ A striking illustration of ecclesiastical freedom of choice is the electronic church. In North America every individual can choose his own church and, from his armchair, with the press of a button, can switch from one church to another. Such options for televised “church” have recently become available in New Zealand,

although it is difficult to estimate how many use it as a substitute for the real thing.

However, we don't need the electronic church to provide us with this "gourmet godliness". The current ecclesiastical scene here presents Christians with a great diversity of churches – people can pick and choose exactly what suits them, and they do. Some attend a church because they like the style of worship, others go down the road because the music appeals to them, still others go elsewhere because they "gets something out of the service" or the sermon "speaks to them". When they tire of that style, the sermons, the music, they flit off, like spiritual butterflies, to another church where things are more to their liking. Few churches will press the point of commitment because we too have absorbed the thinking of our culture in which you "make your own choice" and "find what suits you". Gordon Miller of World Vision describes how these "restless wanderers" approach church life in New Zealand; "Whereas they once attended church out of loyalty to God and the institution, now they increasingly go to church because they are searching for experiences of God. So if they can't find the experiences at their own church, they change churches, move between several churches, or even stop attending."³²⁶ Other factors are also at work in the movement from one church to another, such as the decline in rural parishes as younger people move to the larger towns and cities. Even allowing for this there is a good deal of movement between churches that is not driven by demographic or economic factors, truth or doctrine, but rather by the consumer mentality of church goers.

Another effect of pluralism has been the production of a broad ecumenism that denies all differences and distinctions between people and groups. This is nothing new: De Tocqueville, writing to a friend in 1831, described the tolerance of Protestants as "nothing but a huge indifference". More recently G. K. Chesterton said, "Tolerance is the virtue of those who don't believe anything".³²⁷ David Wells contends that the theological unity of protestant evangelicalism has grown "ever thinner and more insubstantial".³²⁸ Some of this is also evident in New

Zealand where moves towards ecumenicism have often been at the expense of a sound doctrinal position. All too often statements of unity reflect the lowest common denominator of the various doctrinal positions of those coming together. In our current pluralistic environment there is a distinct danger that the church will continue to go down this track. Already church leaders are predicting that we will see less denominationalism in New Zealand. Will we also see less doctrinal clarity and commitment?

Under the influence of pluralism Christians might also be tempted to adopt a broader and more tolerant attitude to the beliefs of other religions. Many have already succumbed to this temptation as is evident in the broad ecumenicism of the World Council of Churches and in statements it has issued that clearly abandon the uniqueness of Christ.³²⁹ We may also detect this broad tolerance in New Zealand in the current ‘politically correct’ attitudes to Maoritanga. Michael Blain offers this Christian response to Maori religion: “If the diffuse spirituality of Maoritanga is recognised, it will mean a spiritualisation of life. But here I am very conscious that pakeha must draw back from speculation on what forms this affirmation and discovery will take. A positive courtesy and goodwill we can offer, and the redistribution of resources.”³³⁰ This approach suggests a broad and open-ended acceptance of Maori spirituality. Yet, surely the church can offer more than “courtesy and goodwill”? Christians have twenty centuries of theological reflection to draw on as well as the creeds and confessions of the church. I am all for the spiritualisation of life, but its shape and form must be soundly and solidly Christian rather than be directed by the mysticism of the New Age or the spiritism of Maoritanga. In the third section of this book we will explore in more detail how we ought to respond to this situation of a wide diversity of views and ideas.

Pluralism, we have seen, is not only *present* in our contemporary society but is actively *promoted*. A new form of tolerance is advocated whereby we must accept all ideas as equally valid. This approved pluralism has produced a world where choice is part of life. All of these factors contribute to the increasing fragmentation of our society.

Chapter 6

THE FRAGMENTATION OF CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY

The fragmentation of our modern world takes two forms; individualism which has been a feature of modernity, and the growing tribalism which is a feature of post-modernity. By *individualism* we mean a focus on the individual in isolation from the group – the needs and desires of the individual person are regarded as all-important. By *tribalism* we mean a focus on the group or the sub-group rather than the individual person. We need to examine these two features in more detail.

INDIVIDUALISM

This has been a key characteristic of modernity and arises out of Enlightenment thought. The Enlightenment encouraged people to see themselves as autonomous individuals whose identity lay in themselves rather than in any group relationships or communal setting. This is how many regard themselves in our modern culture: Each person is an individual entity with no essential relationship to other individuals, each constructing and controlling his or her own life.³³¹ People see themselves as independent persons isolated from others. In modern individualism we define who we are from within rather than from our relationships or connections with others. We are individuals who then choose to contract together to form relationships.³³² In Enlightenment individualism we are accountable only to ourselves. There is a sharp focus on the human person and the self – all our decision-making is guided by self-interest and the duty we have to ourselves.³³³

If the Enlightenment provided the philosophical basis for individualism the industrial and technological revolutions have confirmed this trend in practice. Our large cities give us frequent but superficial contact with vast numbers of people. The car has improved our mobility but not our relationships; the telephone, fax and email have increased our communication but not our community. Technology has eroded our sense of togetherness and heightened the individualism of our society. Perhaps the primary culprit here is television. Watching television stifles conversation and allows the individual to be absorbed in his own world. Sky and Cable television have reinforced this trend allowing each person to choose exactly what suits them. Such individualisation and fragmentation even extends to television news. During the 1990s America saw a proliferation of personalised news sources allowing every individual to find information that interested them personally. Now people are able to customise the news to their own taste providing each person with the *Daily Me*.³³⁴ Such individualised news reduces the common pool of information and increases the trend to fragmentation in society. We could argue that this has the advantage that society is not conditioned by what is broadcast from only one channel, thus encouraging independent thought. Yet encouraging people to think for themselves as individuals is quite different from an individualism that isolates one individual from another. It seems the latter is the prevailing tendency. Such individualism is not only an American phenomena but is a strong feature of New Zealand society.

Individualism in New Zealand

This characteristic of our New Zealand pakeha culture is partly a result of our history. Immigration attracts a certain personality type – a person who is willing to break out of familiar patterns and to set out on his own. In the early days an immigrant had to be self-reliant and resourceful to survive in a new land and to make a living on isolated

farms and in forests. Generally speaking we are a nation of lone rangers, a collection of isolated units – every man for himself, you mind your own business, you do your own thing. In a controversial book on nineteenth century New Zealand Miles Fairbain has argued that our society was founded by transient people who lived atomised lives, without kinship networks or much social structure. Introducing his thesis, he states:

The first claim in this book is that New Zealand's social organisation was of a particular type. It was gravely deficient. Community structures were few and weak, and the forces of social isolation were many and powerful. Bondlessness was central to colonial life. The typical colonist was a socially independent individual. The other claim in this book is that atomisation can account for a large cluster of the traits and trends which characterise the colonial social pattern. Many of these were pathological, others benign and healthy. The deficient framework of association produced appalling social problems of a predictable kind – loneliness, drunkenness, violence. The same want of interpersonal ties, however, also helped to prevent social problems of another sort, collective protest and group disorder, and so assisted in maintaining Pakeha New Zealand's remarkable political stability.³³⁵

Evidence for the continuation of this 'atomisation' can be seen in the pattern of housing in New Zealand with separate homes surrounded by lawns and high fences, and in privacy about income levels and decisions we make. A golden rule of Kiwi culture is, "Look after No.1". "When we compare ourselves with Polynesian groups, the Pakeha sense of the individual is evidently much stronger than its sense of community. We have difficulty in accepting the leadership of another, in conceding personal opinion to the wisdom of the group, of acting in solidarity with others."³³⁶ This isolation is especially true of New Zealand European men. In his book on the Pakeha male Jock Phillips argues that our early history made New Zealand males rough and tough: If they were not, they had to pretend. This was the result of men being together for long periods without the civilising influence of women. To be a pioneer meant brawn, virility, excessive drinking,

looking after your mates, and being able to ride and sleep in the open under all conditions. Tough men did not share their feelings – they could handle it, on their own – further reinforcing their inner isolation.³³⁷

Basic sinful human selfishness is, of course, a major contributor to individualism – a one-eyed concern for your own prosperity and security. Individualism is not peculiar to New Zealanders but is true of western society in general, especially ex-colonial western societies such as Canada, the United States and Australia. Preoccupation with self is illustrated when husbands, wives and parents pursue their own interests without regard as to how this may affect their spouse. Similarly, many parents are seeking their own self-fulfilment and self-interest without sufficient consideration for the well-being of their children. As I was writing this chapter I heard a radio news item about the rising rate of teenage drunkenness. It was reported that 200 youths, some as young as thirteen or fourteen, were involved in a drunken fight in Auckland. A social worker noted that many parents seemed unconcerned about where their children were or what they were doing, presumably being too wrapped up in their own lives. In recent years this inherent selfishness has been reinforced by the self-esteem movement.

Individualism and self-esteem

The Enlightenment view of the individual forms the background and basis for the current pre-occupation with self and the self-esteem movement. For some time the memory of our Judeo-Christian heritage held in check the basic human selfishness of our society. Over the past few decades this memory has faded. The 1980s were appropriately named the “Me” decade, a description that also aptly describes the 1990s. Self-centeredness is now promoted as a virtue – evidence of just how far we have fallen from our heritage. Consider the extent to which “self” has entered our current vocabulary in self-

assertiveness, self-fulfilment, self-esteem, self-identity and self-motivation. A *Listener* article entitled “Wizards of Id” pointed to all the “self-help” books available that promise to help you “Find the Power Within”, “Think Like a Genius” or “Become a More Interesting Person”.³³⁸ In our present climate egotism is interpreted as a strength, whining self-pity as a reason for others to take a course in sensitivity training. Denis Welch, also writing in *The Listener* reports; “There’s a widespread view that the cult of market forces has turned us into a nation of me-firsters, so pre-occupied with personal gratification that we’ll elbow aside old ladies in the street to get it. After all, our political masters have spent the past fifteen years extolling the virtues of competition, individualism and social aggression.”³³⁹ The older virtues which promoted self denial and service for others “have been drowned in a deluge of selfism”.³⁴⁰ “In a secularised age, with its low cognitive ceilings and lost moorings, we have turned in on ourselves. We now seek our access to reality only through the self, having decided that neither God nor his revelation is any longer pertinent.”³⁴¹ Carson points out that today feeling good about yourself is regarded as more important than a clear conscience, and your opinion of yourself as more important than God’s opinion.³⁴² Dozens of talk shows and popular articles tell us to look after No. 1 because no one else will. This self-help philosophy appeals to our individualistic culture.

Further evidence of this selfism is found in popular psychology where every emotional disturbance or broken relationship is traced back to a lack of self-esteem. This in turn, is traced back to the wilful harm or lack of attention others have or have not lavished on us in our past. Such blame shifting is sometimes carried to ridiculous lengths as is evident in victimisation. In a desperate effort to protect themselves some are all too ready to blame others for anything that goes wrong in their lives or for perceived unfulfilled rights. *Time* magazine accused Americans of turning into “crybabies” who see themselves as “eternal victims”. These people “see the American dream not as striving fulfilled but as unachieved entitlement. Cry-babyhood is all blame, no pain, for gain.” The writer observed a “touchiness” in American

society that is “the visible fruit of the rise of self-absorbed individualism.”³⁴³ Victimisation is present in our society as well when people are ready to pass the buck for their actions. Others are to blame, whether parents, society or New Zealanders’ favourite whipping boy – the government.

Individualism and the church

Individualism in the wider society has rubbed off on the church producing in Christians a privatised spirituality. Christians too have become self-centred. Rather than seeing the church as a living community of fellow Christians bonded together in Christ they see it as a voluntary association of loose individuals. Preaching in the churches also tends to cast the gospel and salvation in personal rather than communal terms, putting the emphasis on what God can do for the individual rather than on the covenant people of God and the body of Christ.

Members holding such a view are more concerned with their own needs rather than with a care and concern for others. In this scheme of things “God is less the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ than a Christianised species of the genie in Aladdin’s lamp”³⁴⁴ called on to fulfil the selfish wishes of those conditioned to having their ‘needs’ instantly met and their desires immediately gratified. Preachers keeping up with the church growth movement are encouraged to conduct market surveys to discover people’s needs and find out what they want to hear. Church life and sermons are adjusted to suit. The prime evils today are unhappiness and unfulfilled needs. “If something bad happens to us we are enraged because our lives are supposed to be perfect.”³⁴⁵ As Churches we have absorbed the unrealistic expectations of our modern world – we expect everything to go swimmingly all the time and that the surgeon will be able to cure every ailment. In keeping with this trend sermons become more anthropocentric rather than theocentric – the focus is on the needs of

the self rather than on the glory of God.³⁴⁶

Every action, however, produces a reaction. Having been preoccupied with self there are indications of a move to another form of fragmentation which is really an old form of tribalism.

TRIBALISM

Many in the western world are beginning to see that this emphasis on the perpendicular pronoun has been misplaced. In reaction there is a new sense of group identity, a solidarity which may be described as “tribalism”. Increasingly people are finding their identity, “not so much in themselves, nor in their families, nor in their communities or nation, but in the groups they belong to.”³⁴⁷ Such groups are many and varied: Green, gay, feminist, fundamentalist, pro-life, pro-abortion, animal rights, natural foods, the disabled and AIDS victims. Even Christians have become a subculture within society, with their own radio station, TV programmes, music and bookstores.³⁴⁸ Postmodernism fragments people into cultures and subcultures which are isolated, opposed and unintelligible to each other. “People are segmented into self-contained communities and contending interest groups.”³⁴⁹ The result is fragmentation and diversification. The terrorist cell may be seen as a model of postmodern fragmentation. Such a group “is segmented from the rest of society, insulated by its own self-identity. The group recognises no values that transcend its own. Fuelled by a sense of victimisation, self-righteousness, and group solidarity” the terrorist cell will not hesitate to carry out mindless acts of violence against other groups within society, those opposed to or unsympathetic to their group.³⁵⁰ These groups may be described as ‘sub-worlds’ – ‘worlds’ made up of small units of meaning.³⁵¹ A person might live in a number of these small ‘worlds’, passing in and out of them a few times during the day. Each ‘world’ has its own identity, its own way of looking at reality, and each one is disconnected from others, independent. The unity of the modern period has been lost.

The current emphasis is on separate cultures, not countries; on the parts, not the whole; on sects, not religions. The world is breaking up into rebellious factions and dissenting minorities, nowhere more clearly seen than in the former Soviet Union.³⁵² We see this growing diversity in New Zealand with the increasing multiculturalism of our society. The emphasis on things Maori and on separate Maori schools also is part of this trend to segmentation.

Another angle to this growing group identity is the rise of “generational tribalism”.³⁵³ Here members of a similar age group identify themselves as belonging to an identifiable set. The most familiar and well used of these ‘generations’ is the baby boomer group – those born between 1946 and 1964. Many labels have been suggested for those born after the boomers: “Baby-busters”, “Twenty Somethings”, “Generation X”, the “Angry Generation”, “Latchkeys”, “Mall Rats” or “Nowheres”. Attempts to define each generation, or even each decade, with a particular label can be unhelpful in that they oversimplify the complexities and nuances of each period in our history. It is all too easy to attach a label to a generation and then conclude that we have them all worked out. We may, at best, only have a vague and distorted understanding of those people, who often, belong to more than one group at a time.

Generational tribalism has entered the church with specific services being aimed at particular ‘target’ groups. Many church leaders believe the church must offer worship services with different styles to cater for the diverse needs of each ‘generation’. One of the directors of Renewal Ministries, Rev Ian Wood, notes that churches are slowly grappling with meeting the needs of people who have grown up in traditional churches as well as the needs of younger generations who want worship to be dynamic and experiential. “And the reality is you can’t put the two things together. Because if you do, nobody’s happy and you have people dropping off both ends. So multiple worship services are a critical key to a church becoming a missionary people. Different styles for different generations.”³⁵⁴ In a similar way there is a trend to ethnic churches where each ethnic group has its own identity.

Television has also contributed to the splintering of society. For a time it brought people together. There were a limited number of channels and they arose out of the same culture and expressed the same world view. Television contributed towards “a centrally produced, standardised, and homogenous culture”.³⁵⁵ However, with the introduction of cable Television, Sky and Satellite TV, people can watch whatever they want. Contemporary television offers a huge range of channels, each of which is aimed at narrow segments of society, confirming each group in their peculiar view.

How long this trend to sub-groups continues remains to be seen. Other analysts of world trends are predicting a trend to global unity. Strobe Talbott writes; “I’ll bet that within the next hundred years... nationhood as we know it will be obsolete; all states will recognise a single, global authority.” Each of us, he says, will be a “citizen of the world”. He admits that nationalism has re-emerged in its “ugliest, most divisive and violent form” but maintains that there is a trend to globalization, a movement other observers have termed “McWorld”.³⁵⁶

In previous centuries people may have been individualistic but they shared a common culture, a world view, a way of understanding themselves and those around them. Enlightenment thought seemed to be successful in holding the world together. It did not, however, provide the utopia that was promised. The current collapse of individualism is another instance of the twilight of modernity – we are witnessing the crumbling of another part of Enlightenment ideals and values. Yet the trend to tribalism is an over-reaction. Our Western societies are lurching from one extreme to another – from individual autonomy to group conformity.³⁵⁷ “The idealised vision of progressive modernisation and global harmony has degenerated into violent and deadly tribalism.”³⁵⁸ Increasingly the individual is minimised in favour of the group. In Part III we will consider how the church ought to respond to these opposite polarities. Before we do that we need to consider a few more features of our present world. The next is relativism.

Chapter 7

RELATIVISM IN CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY

Again it will be helpful for us to see this matter in its larger perspective and to realise that, historically, relativism is a recent phenomena. From the time of Constantine until the Enlightenment ethical standards in the western world were largely determined by the Bible. God's law formed the basis of morality. Right and wrong were determined by consulting the Scriptures. People may have debated points of interpretation and application but no one seriously questioned the biblical basis.

The Enlightenment challenged the Judeo-Christian ethic by undermining the foundation of ethics. Enlightenment thinkers argued that morality ought to be determined by human reason, not by revelation from God. Moral philosophers of the seventeenth century put much faith in human reason and sought a rational and objective standard for human action. They believed that free individuals would be able to discover universal, binding ethical norms and that everyone would agree on what they were.³⁵⁹ This was also the approach of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) with his "categorical imperative". Rather than grounding ethical judgements in the Christian faith he wanted to establish universal laws based on neutral human reason. The difficulty with this approach is that free individuals using their own unaided reason have not been able to agree on what is right and wrong. Nor have they been able to develop universal laws that can stand the test of time and culture.³⁶⁰ Enlightenment thinking and morality eroded the Biblical ethic and removed the absolute standard of the Scriptures with the result that now, in the modern world, there is no real basis for determining right and wrong. This is what we mean by *relativism*. It is the perspective that believes there is no objective criterion of truth and

so no absolute standard for deciding right from wrong.

In a relativistic society the only two means of deciding how people should live are public opinion or arbitrary power. The first puts everything up for grabs because public opinion is never constant but always changing. Consider the high profile given to public opinion polls on moral issues – the people of the nation always want to know what other people think as a guide to their own thought. The other alternative is arbitrary power – might is right – he who has the most power gets to determine who is right. Alexander Solzhenitsyn has given us a comprehensive account of how this worked itself out in the United Soviet Socialist Republic under Stalin's rule. With horrifying detail he described the prison system of the Gulag Archipelago and the cruel systematic elimination of those who either opposed the people in power or were perceived as a threat to their position. Neither public opinion or arbitrary power provide a reassuring basis for ethics. The majority could be sincerely and thoroughly wrong in their view. Nor can we guarantee that the person who holds the most power has the best moral position. Given that “all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”, it is likely that the dictator is a tyrant. Reviewing these alternatives we can see that the Enlightenment put ethical standards on roller blades and built morality on shifting sand.

Moral relativism has also had the effect of detaching choices from consequences. An example of this is the effect of the pill on sexual behaviour. Prior to the introduction of the pill men and women had to think about the consequences of their immorality. Maybe they did not think about them at the time, but those consequences would catch up with them. Now, with the widespread availability of this contraceptive people believe they can have the pleasure of sex without the consequent responsibilities.³⁶¹

Relativism is clearly part of our New Zealand society. In 1988 the *New Zealand Herald* reviewed our 125th anniversary as a nation (1863-1988). Gordon McLaughlan reflected on the cynicism and doubt that had replaced the early innocence of New Zealanders. This has come about in part because we never clearly defined our values or

embraced them as our mythology. “Without a national unifying mythology and some sense of morality all things have the same value. Trivia is accorded the same place in the national debate as matters that ought to be of profound social concern. Outrage at injustice is strident but scattered, diffuse, because values are out of focus.”³⁶² His comments confirm the lack of moral direction in our country, a confusion that has only deepened since these words were written.

Sadly, illustrations of such relativism can be found in the church. In April 1997 the *Christchurch Press* reported that Alyson Murrie-West, a lesbian theological graduate, was licensed as a probationer for the ministry by the Wellington presbytery moderator, allowing her to preach in any Presbyterian church in New Zealand.³⁶³ The controversy raised by this incident is part of the debate going on in the Presbyterian church over the ordination of homosexual ministers. When the church cannot take a clear stand on a matter such as homosexuality it is hardly surprising that our wider society will disregard biblical truth and morals. In the same month in 1997 a New Zealand MP made outrageous statements to the effect that the Treaty of Waitangi was more important than the Ten Commandments. It isn't surprising that such a view should be expressed; what was surprising was the vehemence of the attack and the ridicule heaped on God's Word in the public debate that followed.³⁶⁴

In response to this moral confusion some are seeking to restore some core moral values. Two programmes are being promoted for values education in New Zealand public schools, one by former Invercargill principal, John Heenan, and the other by an English educationalist, Richard Whitfield, who has made a number of visits to New Zealand. John Heenan's programme is founded on what he calls the eight cornerstone values of honesty, kindness, consideration for others, responsibility, respect, duty, compassion and obedience. Richard Whitfield, promoting a similar programme of values, believes that “unless we radically rethink the curriculum, there is a great danger that schools will wind up producing ‘clever devils’ – young people with their heads stuffed full of facts but ill-equipped to form worthwhile

relationships, take responsibility for themselves and generally survive in the moral jungle out there.”³⁶⁵ Echoing this idea the Prime minister, Jenny Shipley, observed that our purely secular education was not working well and that parents, via the school boards, should be able to promote religious, spiritual and cultural values. Bruce Logan, of the New Zealand Education Development Foundation, comments; “Education arbitrarily cut off from its religious roots has not delivered.... Values have to be taught deliberately, with conviction. Without reference to our religious traditions, that is very difficult.”³⁶⁶ Even if parents and school boards would agree to values education there is still the question as to whose values would be taught. In our present relativistic climate there is no consensus on this matter.

That point became quite clear when in 1998 the government distributed a public discussion document, *Toward a Code of Social and Family Responsibility*. A primary motive for this initiative was a desire to rein in the ever-increasing expenditure on welfare (\$25 billion in 1998 – \$70 million a day on health, welfare, education and superannuation). It was hoped that this would raise a sense of social responsibility amongst welfare recipients. Individuals, households and organisations were invited to respond to a series of questions about the current state and future direction of our society. There was a widespread debate on the document itself and its obviously skewed questions. When the results were finally published in October 1998 the whole exercise turned out to be a dead duck. Only three substantial proposals emerged and the rest was “a potpourri of woolliness and apple pie.”³⁶⁷ This only highlights the impossibility of attempting to instil values in a society that has lost its moral base.

Chapter 8

CONSUMERISM AND A LOSS OF HOPE IN CONTEMPORARY NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY

Christianity and its biblical values have been replaced with new goals and different values. A regular family outing to the shopping mall has become the secular equivalent of going to church, and an insatiable desire for things has become the supreme value for most kiwis. A focus on the world to come has been replaced by straight-out worldliness. In this consumer society the shopping mall has been identified as a symbol of postmodernism. The mall has replaced the cathedrals of the pre-modern era. These bright and airy temples are filled with dazed consumers worshipping the god of mammon. Soft music lulls them into the appropriate mood for the purchase of this world's goods. Such purchases are necessary in order to keep the religion of consumerism alive and well.

Consumerism began after the industrial and technological revolution when the supply of goods exceeded their demand. Continued supply required the stimulation of demand. New markets had to be created. Manufacturers had to point out new needs within existing markets. Rather than being a means to live, purchasing had to become a way of life.³⁶⁸ A new breed of people arose with the specific goal of turning desires into needs, luxuries into necessities. Their aim was to nurture the covetousness inherent in our sinful nature so that we would desire more and better: Shop at the Warehouse, Buy a Nissan, Fly to London, Drink Milo, Eat Cadbury. These ad-makers are the "Hidden Persuaders" of our postmodern era.³⁶⁹ They began their art by seeking to persuade people on the basis of information about the product. Increasingly, in keeping with the postmodern ethos, the emphasis has shifted from substance to image, from information to association. Advertising is not so much about selling goods as about

selling a lifestyle, an image – giving us the “Marlborough man” and the “Revlon look”.³⁷⁰ The techniques of the ad-makers are so powerful that we have become convinced by their deception – we honestly believe that we need all these things. Our present society promotes greed and self-indulgence as virtues. Consider an advertisement selling a television set that blared, “Welcome to the world of STATUS”, or an advertisement for the Sheraton in Auckland which invites us to, “Indulge in a Five-Star Fling!”

The vigorous promotion of buying, getting and having reinforces the materialism that is fundamental to our society. Materialism emphasises the visible and tangible. It “gives primacy to what can be touched, seen and measured. It focuses on having rather than being.”³⁷¹ The focus has shifted from finding our identity in what we produce to what we possess, from a work ethic to a consumption ethic.³⁷² This approach to life teaches people that they can and should seek happiness in the here and now. It extols comfort and pleasure, personal peace and affluence. The most blatant pursuit of these goals may be seen in Las Vegas, the entertainment capital of the world – a “hypereclectic 24-hour-a-day fantasy-themed party machine”.³⁷³ In 1992 twenty million Americans and two million foreigners went to Las Vegas, “a place devoted to the anti-puritan pursuit of instant gratification – no waiting, no muss, no fuss.”³⁷⁴ The city promotes itself as an entertainment centre for families. What this means, however, is that Mum and Dad have a place to dump the kids while they squander the family savings on cards and dice. Las Vegas is the supreme symbol of America’s pursuit of selfish, instant and extended gratification.

Las Vegas, despite the new theme-park accessories, remains the epi-center of the American id... still focussed on the darker stirrings of chance and liquor and sex.

If it is now acceptable for the family to come to Las Vegas, that’s because the values of America have changed, not those of Las Vegas. Deviancy really has been refined down. The new hang-loose all-American embrace of Las Vegas is either a sign that Americans have liberated themselves from troublesome old repressions and moralist hypocrisies, or else one more symptom of the decline of Western civilisation. Or maybe both.³⁷⁵

Although we have less money to spend such consumerism is present in New Zealand. The kiwi dream used to be a quarter-acre-pavlova-paradise. In recent years the blocks of land have shrunk in size and are measured in square metres rather than perches, but the goal remains essentially the same – a house, a car and enough money to retire comfortably. New Zealanders are striving for economic security and personal comfort. Even our watching of television is part of this consumer culture: Hours of mind-dulling inactivity are spent as people follow the in and outs of the fictional lives of the Shortland Street cast, vicariously participate in sport and watch the game shows. More recently, and more energetically, consumerism has found expression in the thrills and excitement of the recreation industry – whitewater rafting, jet-boating, paragliding and bungee jumping; and in overseas travel – holidays to Fiji, Bali and the Gold Coast. And people are greedy for more. New Zealanders have always been preoccupied with gambling, a form of consumerism that must rate as the greatest waste of time and money imaginable. We bet at the race track and in the casinos. Among the flashiest ads on TV are the “Lotto” ads, convincing devoted and hopeful gamblers to queue up on a Saturday afternoon for the last-minute purchase of that lucky number. Pleasure, travel, greed and the accumulation of possessions have become such a part of our culture that hardly anyone questions these goals, even in the pulpit.

CONSUMERISM IN THE CHURCH

Church-goers have also become consumers seeking to have their ‘needs’ met, their desires fulfilled and their wants satisfied. They are less interested in the truth of a matter and more concerned with what they can “get out of it”. Some churches have tried to appeal to these people by preaching a “health and wealth” gospel – “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be healthy, wealthy and wise!” Sometimes this is known as the “prosperity gospel”, or “name it and claim it”, most

obviously promoted by healing evangelists Benny Hinn and Kenneth Copeland. Other churches have responded with a marketing strategy for the church. “The religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be *marketed*. It must be ‘sold’ to a clientele that is no longer constrained to ‘buy’. The pluralist situation is, above all, a *market situation*. In it, the religious institutions become marketing agencies and the religious traditions become consumer commodities.”³⁷⁶ Pursuing this line some churches have sought to supply the ‘needs’ of their customers. Some have conducted market surveys to find out what people expect from the church. Others sell the gospel by adopting a ‘What-Jesus-can-do-for-you’ approach. These various marketing strategies reflect the prevailing emphasis in our culture – the emphasis on self. In keeping with the current fads of self-esteem, self-fulfilment and self-love Christians too are urged to seek counselling so that they might find themselves, to attend a seminar so that they may be empowered and achieve their full potential, to give attention to their personal growth and to develop their mind power so as to be in charge of their destiny. Rather than being a place to worship God the church has become “a therapeutic centre for the meeting of one another’s unchecked, unexamined needs”.³⁷⁷ Living in a buyer’s market the church has taken up the philosophy of the marketplace: The customer is always right, the customer is king; what the customer wants, the customer should get.³⁷⁸ Instead of seeking the glory of God as their “chief end” Christians are encouraged to seek fulfilment and a happy life. Willow Creek puts much emphasis on the fulfilment the Christian faith provides. Bill Hybels promises that there will be a positive benefit from a life of faith. “Christianity is presented as the answer to anxiety, pain, meaning, identity, self-esteem, loneliness, marriage, sex, parenting, and work.”³⁷⁹ In taking over the marketing strategies of the world the church has become conformed to the surrounding culture and has lost her distinctive challenge. She has also failed to point people beyond the passing pleasure provided by the things of this world to the abiding blessing of the world to come. The world and the church are too taken up with the concerns of this life, too

preoccupied with the here and now, to have a vibrant expectation for the future.

This loss of hope is evident in New Zealand society, especially amongst young people. Statistics for suicide provide the most haunting evidence for this. In 1992 there were 493 suicides in New Zealand. In the 15-24 age group 112 were male and 17 were female. Suicide is the second most common cause of death after motor crashes in this age group. It is also believed that a number of deaths in 'accidents' involving young men may also be suicides.³⁸⁰ New Zealand has the highest rate of suicide amongst young men in the developed world. Sociologists, educators and the government ponder the cause of these shocking deaths. Many social causes may be mentioned, but the most deep-seated and fundamental problem is that people have not found a reason to live. The greedy consumerism of our society has not provided people with a purpose for their existence.

Sadly, the church has failed to give people a realistic perspective on this life and has failed to point them beyond these passing years to the eternity that is to come. In a 1997 cover story on religion in America *Time* magazine asked the question, "Does Heaven Exist?" For many church leaders the answer was, "No". Through "an apparent combination of lay ignorance and pastoral skittishness" heaven has been minimised. One of the most fundamental concepts of the Christian faith has been marginalised. In public debates in America heaven is "often just a metaphor for the concerns of a perfectible secular kingdom of man."³⁸¹ Part of the neglect of the doctrine of heaven is the good life we currently enjoy – many people are so well off now they do not think about the better things to come. The prosperity gospel preached by some church leaders reinforces this concept. Why look forward to heaven in the hereafter when we can have it in the present? Why anticipate the future when life here and now is so good? Another reason for the neglect of heaven is that many Christians think about it as a vague and misty place. They think of people floating on clouds, playing harps, singing in choirs and of an aimless eternity with little to do. Understandably, most of the young

people in New Zealand have no joyful or compelling yearning for heaven when it is understood in these terms. When we add this lack of hope to the futility and emptiness of materialism it is little wonder that many young people in New Zealand are living in despair and hopelessness. They need to hear the preaching of the gospel, the Word of life that centres in Jesus Christ, a Word that gives meaning to our lives in the present and hope for the future.

SUMMARY

In the first part of this book we saw that preaching is the primary means of communicating the good news about Jesus. God has commanded us to preach the gospel. Down through the centuries God has blessed the preaching of his Word for the conversion of the lost and the building up of the saved. Pastors are called to preach the message of the Scriptures in a way that is true to their original intent and that demonstrates the relevance of this message for those living here and now. To do this they must understand the times in which we live.

In the second part of this book we have briefly traced the movement of thought in the western world that has brought us to where we are, noting that today we live in a period of transition between modernity and postmodernity. The main beliefs of the modern period still live on – a confidence in man's reason and an optimistic view of the future based on our technological achievements. Intertwined with these are new ideas that recognise the limitations of our reason and that doubt our ability to solve the massive problems of the world through technology. These new views, however, continue to exclude God from the public arena. Postmodernists go on to question our human ability to know the truth at all. This has encouraged the pluralism of our society where every view is not only tolerated but celebrated. The affirmation of such a plurality of ideas contributes to the fragmentation of our society. In the modern era this fragmentation produced an extreme individualism; now it is increasingly associated with a growing

tribalism. The loss of absolute truth and the approval of pluralism has produced a relativism in morality. When people discarded God and his revelation they lost any firm and sure basis for deciding between right and wrong. Now these matters are decided by the majority or by might, by the greatest number of people or by the person with the most power. In the emptiness of our culture people are seeking to bring purpose and pleasure to their lives by the accumulation of possessions.

What are we to say to the people of this society? How can we communicate the message of the Christian faith to those who seem so far from it? Where should we put the emphasis when preaching in this context? These are the questions we want to consider.

PART III

PREACHING THE GOSPEL IN OUR POSTMODERN NEW ZEALAND SITUATION

INTRODUCTION

From our historical survey, we saw that after the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christianity had to survive and witness in a pagan and pluralist world. In 313 AD Constantine initiated a change in the relationship between Christianity and the culture by officially endorsing the Christian faith. Over the next few hundred years Christianity became the accepted and dominant world view. Despite challenges this dominance continued on in western civilisation until this century. However, the people of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment had attacked the very foundation of Christian belief by shifting the source of authority from God's Word to human reason. Over time Enlightenment ideas infiltrated people's thinking, gradually edging out a Christian mind. The loss of a Christian world-view became apparent in the 1960s when young people threw off the last remaining restraints of a Christian perspective and 'did their own thing'. Consequently, people in today's setting do not understand the language of the gospel as they did in past generations. Before the 1960s people were familiar at least with Biblical concepts and language. "The task of mission was essentially one of proclamation. The message itself was not foreign to the culture, and could be understood by anyone with ears to hear. From the church's viewpoint many of the sheep may have been lost to the fold, but at least they knew there was a fold and had some idea of what lostness meant."³⁸² This is no longer so. Christianity is no longer the prevailing world view but merely one small segment of our society. There is a great ignorance of the Bible and Christian concepts. Most New Zealanders are biblically illiterate. As we go about the work of preaching and evangelism we can assume that most of our listeners have little or no understanding of the Bible or of the Christian faith.

In many ways, we have returned to the situation of the first century; we are in a minority position in a pagan and pluralistic society. Yet there is one important difference between the first and twentieth

centuries. Pagans in the first century heard the Christian gospel for the first time; Jesus had come, suffered, died, risen and ascended, and the apostles proclaimed this brand new truth. By contrast, in our situation today the gospel has been heard and *rejected*. This is a post Christian culture in which the Christian faith has been deliberately discarded.³⁸³ Leslie Newbigin points out that the paganism of our western culture, “having been born out of the rejection of Christianity, is far more resistant to the gospel than the pre-Christian paganism with which cross-cultural missions have been familiar. Here, surely, is the most challenging missionary frontier of our time.”³⁸⁴

Our role at the beginning of this third millennium will be similar to that of the church at the beginning of the first millennium – it will be the role of a prophet. Rather than being part of the mainstream we will stand on the outside looking in. Yet we are not on the outside as uninterested bystanders. Not at all, for we have a deep concern for the men and women of our society. We have a message from the Lord addressed to the people of our culture.

This message is based on the Word of God. In the hey-day of liberalism the church was too busy listening to the ‘wisdom’ of the day and was asking; “What does modern man have to say to the church?” This is the wrong way round. Instead we should be asking, “What does the church have to say to modern man?”³⁸⁵ All that the church has to say to modern man must come from the Scriptures. If it does not we are merely passing on our own thoughts and ideas. These will be of little or no help to people who need to hear words of life. Therefore, in order to communicate usefully to our world preachers and pastors need a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures. We need to be well-grounded in the Word of the Lord.

Yet we also need a good knowledge of men and women today. To be effective missionaries to our culture we need to understand how we came to be where we are, and we need a good grasp of our current situation. We cannot assume that we will know this automatically, because the situation has changed so much in the last few decades, and is still changing. We need to understand why our society is the way

it is and keep abreast of where it is going. To be relevant to a new situation does not mean that we should alter the essential message of the Christian faith. Instead we need a critical evaluation of our present context and the application of the unchanging truth of the Scriptures to this changing world.

In many respects the present outlook is sobering. There are examples of heresy as churches become careless about the truth; of blasphemy as Christians lose their reverence for the Lord; of nonsense as evangelical believers get caught up with whatever is current; of weirdness as Christians become weak and flabby in their understanding of the Bible and vulnerable to leaders who have an “appearance of wisdom” (Colossians 2:23) but who preach false doctrine and error. Our growing pluralism provides fertile ground for the rapid growth of alternatives to the gospel. These include a revival of pre-Christian paganism promoted by liberal churches, as well as speculative gnosticism dressed up in its New Age clothing. The widespread disintegration of marriage and the family contributes to crises that mount up year by year. Our postmodern disregard for truth raises many questions and doubts in people’s minds.

In the light of these problems some may feel pessimistic about the possibilities of reaching New Zealanders with the gospel. After all, churches have been trying to do this for some time and have constantly sought new strategies to reach the lost and cause the church to grow. One technique after another has been attempted. We have seen a succession of visiting speakers from North America promoting one or another programme. Various targets have been set for the evangelisation of New Zealand and denominations have promoted a decade of evangelism. As yet we have seen little fruit for all this effort. One writer reflects on our situation in these words; “Things are not good in New Zealand. The life of the Church in New Zealand is not healthy. The Christian movement in New Zealand over all, is in decline.... Our backs are to the wall; the tide is currently turning against us, but there are little signs that the tide could be going to turn.”³⁸⁶ While we need to be realistic about our present situation we need not

be pessimistic. We are called to be witnesses for the Lord. There is a time of sowing and a time of reaping. Some plant a seed, others water it, but God makes it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6). Here is an opportunity to proclaim the gospel and we must make good use of it.

Furthermore, there are also some more hopeful signs. With the decline of modernism some of Christianity's traditional rivals, such as humanism, secularism, Marxism, and Freudianism, are at their lowest ebb for four hundred years.³⁸⁷ The church is in bad shape but the opponents of the church are also in disarray. This presents the church with a great opportunity to present the gospel in a powerful and persuasive way. There are also some positive aspects to preaching the gospel to this nation. We live in a small country and this makes the population reachable. We have a comparatively short history and so we are not weighed down by a long tradition of having to do things in a certain way. Although New Zealand has remained a homogenous society for most of her history she has been open to new ideas. Our small size has meant that new thoughts are easily taken up and implemented. One obvious example of this is the way New Zealand led the world in the welfare reforms of the late nineteenth century. Another example is the rapid application of the free enterprise economic policies of the 1980's which became known as 'Rogernomics'. The smallness and newness of New Zealand makes us more receptive to change. Consider too that the Bible has never been more available for people and we have the benefits of communicating and disseminating information by modern technological means such as the world wide web and electronic-mail. Finally, our confidence lies in the sovereignty of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit to change the hard and cold hearts of our hearers so that they truly repent and believe in the Lord Jesus.

That God is sovereign does not mean that we can sit back. To be good witnesses in New Zealand Christians must be prepared to stand apart from the culture and society. One major problem in Western European culture was that many people regarded themselves as being Christians and as part of the church, when they were not – they were

hypocrites. The present situation provides the church with a new opportunity for witness. Here is a new challenge for the church because there are clear lines between the church and the world. Brian Carrell, speaking to Anglicans, addresses this issue by saying; “it is no longer going to be enough to be carried along on the coat-tails of our predecessors, letting our Christianity be little more than a modicum of decency plus an occasional visit to church. It needs more private passion and public profession.”³⁸⁸ We are to be a pilgrim people, bearing witness for the Lord as people whose citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:17-21). As the people of God we are called to “live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12). We who are ministers of the gospel need to be godly in our lives, living as examples to those around us. We also need to be men who obviously and sincerely believe the Bible and who preach it with ability, clarity and conviction. Our task is to preach to believers so that they are equipped and motivated to live out and speak forth their faith. Then they will be able to proclaim the truth of God’s Word with courage and power. They will be able to live as Christians in the place God has put them, in their sphere of activity and influence. Our task as believers “is to show our nation that there is another way of looking, another way of living, another way of understanding the universe and our place in it, another way that begins and ends in Jesus Christ.”³⁸⁹

Our mission field is right here, on our doorstep, over the back fence, in our workplace. Certainly we have a mission responsibility overseas, but we need to recognise that we live in a society where approximately 90% of New Zealanders do not have a saving faith in Christ. We need to “make disciples of all nations” beginning in this country (Matthew 28:19). We are ambassadors of Christ, proclaiming the good news about Jesus, urging that people “Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Introducing the papers of the 1993 Vision New Zealand Congress, Bruce Patrick wrote; “New Zealand’s majority culture, media-massaged and educated to be more secular than most,

inoculated against the life-changing power of the gospel by long exposure to religious formalism and caricature Christianity, now needs missionaries as skilled and dedicated as any in the world.”³⁹⁰ How can we, as preachers, address our congregations who are living in a post-Christian New Zealand society, and how can we address unbelievers with the message of the gospel? What do New Zealand preachers need to emphasise in the light of our history and present context?

Chapter 1

PREACH THE REALITY OF GOD

In response to a secular culture where many people either deny the existence of God or ignore him, Christians, and especially preachers, need to affirm the reality of God – that “He is There and He is Not Silent”.³⁹¹ In Old Testament times this is what the prophets did. They preached this truth to the many in Israel who gave prominence to the idols of the surrounding cultures and who relegated God to the sideline. The prophets boldly proclaimed that the Lord was God and that he was the Maker of the heavens and the earth. He was the true God, he was supreme and sovereign and he did whatever he pleased. Elijah prayed that God would answer him by sending fire from heaven on his soaked sacrifice; “so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” When the Lord did indeed answer with fire the people fell prostrate on the ground and cried; “The Lord – he is God!” (1 Kings 18:37-39). Many years later the prophet Isaiah pointed out the futility of Judah’s service to idols and the reality of the Lord who is God. He pointed out that the same wood used to make an idol was also used as fuel for a fire (Isaiah 44:12-20, cf Jeremiah 10:1-16). In striking contrast to the useless idols Jeremiah prophesied from the Lord; “This is what the Lord says – Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6). The prophets proclaimed the biblical truth that God is God. Following the primary biblical method of preaching they proclaimed this truth so that Israel would honour the Lord as God. We need to do this in our culture, pre-occupied as people are with their garden, rugby and cricket, and the New Zealand weekend. Without a living relationship with God through the Lord Jesus people live in the present without meaning and purpose, and they face the future without hope and light. Only through

a knowledge of God and by faith in him can people find the purpose for their existence. We need to recover a confidence in the Bible and in the power of the gospel so that, with the Apostle Paul, we can confidently affirm that we “are not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16).

This gospel is quite different from much of the religious experiences that are being promoted today. We have noted that in recent decades New Zealand has seen a growing awareness of spirituality, evident in the popularity of the New Age movement, science fiction movies and the use of alternative medicine. People today are thinking outside the naturalistic framework of modernism and are no longer bound by scientific rationalism. Yet it is distressing to see people by-passing the transcendent realities of the Christian faith in favour of other forms of religious experience. It is also disturbing to see that many Christians are prepared to adopt these diverse forms of spirituality. Biblical Christianity is being sacrificed in favour of the vague spirituality of our postmodern age. Rather than accommodating the Christian faith to the thinking around us Christians need to confront the world with the orthodox truth of a transcendent God who has revealed himself to his people through his Word, the Bible. We must proclaim this truth, revealed in the Scriptures, communicated by the Triune God, evident in the “True Spirituality” of the believer.³⁹²

The worship services of the church must direct our attention to the Lord and his greatness. Through the Sunday services believers and unbelievers are reminded that there is a God and a transcendent dimension to life. Evangelical and charismatic Christians in New Zealand tend to use the word ‘worship’ to refer to a time of singing praise to God. To use the word in this way is too restrictive, for true worship embraces all the means by which God is honoured and adored. This includes listening to the preaching of the Word. Preaching that directs our attention to God should be the highlight and climax of worship. This is the contention of Charles Haddon Spurgeon;

to rightly listen to the gospel is one of the noblest parts of the adoration of the Most High.... Reverently hearing the Word exercises our humility, instructs our faith, irradiates us with joy, inflames us with love, inspires us with zeal, and lifts us up toward heaven.... True preaching is an acceptable adoration of God by the manifestation of His gracious attributes: the testimony of His gospel, which pre-eminently glorifies Him, and the obedient hearing of revealed truth, are an acceptable form of worship to the Most High, and perhaps one of the most spiritual in which the human mind can be engaged.”³⁹³

Preaching the Word of God is the foundation of true worship. If preaching is weak in its content or misdirected in its focus the people of God will find it difficult to give to God the glory he deserves to receive. Those leading the service will be inclined to manipulate the congregation with the use of music and song to attempt to stir up feelings of worship. Many believers are happy to co-operate because they “want a shortcut to faithfulness and love, praise and worship, fellowship and service of God without having to do the hard work of thinking about God.”³⁹⁴ But there are no shortcuts to genuine worship. Our worship of God must be informed by the truth of God’s Word as it is conveyed through preaching. The more we understand the truth about God from his Word the better we will be able to praise and honour him. A preacher’s great concern is that those who listen gain a greater understanding of God from the Scriptures. This knowledge of God ought to be the great issue for teachers in seminaries, preachers in pulpits and Christians in churches.³⁹⁵ Carson comments that “Preachers and teachers who do not see this point and passionately hold to it are worse than useless: They are dangerous, because they are diverting.”³⁹⁶ In his book on preaching John Piper puts this same point positively. He maintains that people are starving for God. In all the talk about people’s needs this is their deepest need; “Our people need to hear God-entranced preaching. They need someone, at least once a week, to lift up his voice and magnify the supremacy of God. They need to behold the whole panorama of his excellencies.”³⁹⁷ Piper explains that the burden of his book is;

to plead for the supremacy of God in preaching – that the dominant note of preaching be the freedom of God’s sovereign grace, the unifying theme be the zeal that God has for his own glory, the grand object of preaching be the infinite and inexhaustible being of God, and the pervasive atmosphere of preaching be the holiness of God. Then when preaching takes up the ordinary things of life – family, job, leisure, friendships; or the crises of our day – AIDS, divorce, addictions, depression, abuses, poverty, hunger, and, worst of all, unreached people of the world, these matters are not only taken up. They are taken all the way up into God.³⁹⁸

Sunday by Sunday preachers must feed their people from the Word of God, pointing them beyond their limited vision to the eternal realities of heaven, directing their attention away from self-centeredness to the worship and adoration of God our Creator. Preachers must preach about God.³⁹⁹

PREACH THAT CHRIST IS LORD

Preaching about the reality and the greatness of God will enable believers to overcome the temptation to privatise their faith. Biblical Christianity should not be understood as a pietistic withdrawal from the world. Christians ought not to lock their faith away in a compartment marked, ‘Private and Personal’. Our faith is personal, but it is not private. A preacher will have much to say about personal faith in the Lord and a relationship with God the Father. But he will also expound what the Bible says about marriage and the family, business and social ethics, as well as the role and function of the government. Christianity embraces everything we do giving us a comprehensive outlook on all of life. It also provides us with a perspective on the world that enables us to make sense of the broad lines of history. God is working out the history of the world so that all events ultimately serve the purposes of his kingdom. The ‘kingdom of God’ describes the overall work of God in the world. Its scope is broader than the other major themes that run through the Scriptures,

including both the themes of the covenant and of the church.

We could define the *covenant* as a relationship established by God with his people that involves privileges and responsibilities. The covenant focuses on the fellowship between God and his people seen in the central promise of the covenant; “I will be your God and you will be my people.” *The church* may be defined as the people of God called out of the world and gathered under the spiritual oversight of the elders for worship, nurture, fellowship, and praise; who then disperse into the world as Christ’s servants and witnesses. Broader than these two concepts is the *Kingdom of God*. This has been defined simply but clearly as, “God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule”. It describes the people of God (its citizens), living in obedience to God (the King), in his world (his realm), in the totality of their lives.

Common to these three concepts of covenant, church and kingdom are *the people of God* who are organised and structured in these three arrangements. God uses the covenant as an instrument of his kingdom. It is a means of gathering and nurturing the people of God to live as citizens of the kingdom. Through the covenant God preserves a people for himself and calls parents to pass on the truth from one generation to another, teaching their children about “the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.” (Psalm 78:4).⁴⁰⁰ God’s people are gathered into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ which also functions as an agency (or instrument) of the kingdom as it nurtures the people of God. Through the teaching ministry of the church believers are trained, equipped and encouraged to build each other up in their faith, to evangelise the world in Christ’s name, and to promote the kingdom service of its members. The members of the church are also citizens of the Kingdom of Christ. They are called to submit to the laws of the King and to extend his reign in society, calling other people to bow to his rule and obey his laws. In this way they seek to extend the kingdom of God, not only in their own lives and their families, but in the whole of society. As the broadest description of God’s rule in the world the kingdom of God calls the people of God to live as citizens of the kingdom in total

obedience to Christ the King.

Preachers of the Word are not only called to preach the reality of God but also to proclaim the breadth and scope of the kingdom and the Lord's calling that Christians live in obedience to him. All believers are also called to promote the cause of Christ's kingdom and extend his rule in the particular place the Lord has put them, for his glory. We do this in the awareness that Jesus is Lord over everything. If Jesus really is Lord, as the early church proclaimed, then he must be Lord of all or he is not Lord at all. He is to be Lord of our marriage, home and church; but also of our business, our study, our factory, our office and our classroom. He is to be Lord over our social life and our recreation. That Jesus is Lord has implications for the television programmes we watch, the magazines we read, the movies we see, the conversation we have. Christians need to be working out the implications of Christ's lordship in every area of life – for medicine and business, politics and economics, science and education. The Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper, spoke about the scope of Christ's rule and said; "There is not a square inch of all creation over which Christ does not say, 'It is mine!'"⁴⁰¹ Or, in more contemporary imagery; "The church cannot become simply another customer centre that offers designer religion and catalogue spirituality to the hoppers and shoppers of the modern world."⁴⁰² Part of the task of the preacher is to enable the Lord's people to see the breadth of this kingdom and to challenge them to be effective citizens of the Lord.

Preaching the kingdom of God, however, ought not to be reduced to the social gospel of the liberals who see the fulfilment of heaven as the kingdom of God on earth. Sadly many preachers in the church have been so influenced by rationalism and liberalism that they have lost sight of the transcendent and the supernatural. They hesitate to proclaim the biblical message of a personal and transcendent God and the future hope of heaven. They have flattened the Christian perspective, reducing all Christian truth to the horizontal dimension. But the Christian faith is nothing without a belief in God and a hope for the resurrection to come. Biblical and effective preaching needs to be

theocentric, focussed on God, orientated to the vertical, forcing God's people to look up.

In response to the secular character of our society where God is either ignored or rejected, preachers of the gospel need to proclaim the truth that God is real and that he demands that we bring all of life and all our activities under the sovereign rule of Christ. To preach the truth of the Bible is to preach the reality of God.

Chapter 2

PREACH THE TRUTH OF THE BIBLE

Preaching about God will mean that we preach his Word, and that we preach it as the truth. Yet the whole concept of truth is under dispute in our society. Modernists, as we have seen, have their own view of the truth, while postmoderns hold a different view. How are we to respond to these people, especially in the contemporary situation where the whole possibility of truth is disputed? What is a Christian view of truth? And how is the truth to be preached? These are some of the questions we need to consider.

A RESPONSE TO MODERNISM

One of the commendable features of modernism was its quest for truth. Those living in the modern era believed that it was possible to know the ‘truth’, and they sought to find it. This quest for certainty was admirable. Modern people, however, were mistaken in their *basis* for truth and in their *method* for discovering truth. They sought to establish the basis for truth in objective human reason. Enlightenment thinkers believed that by means of human reason they could come to absolute certainty. In leaving God out of the picture they claimed to be wise. Yet, echoing the judgement of the Apostle Paul, “their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise they became fools.... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things, rather than the Creator – who is forever praised” (Romans 1:22,23,25). Human reason is limited and we cannot achieve certain knowledge on the basis of our reason alone. True understanding is based on a knowledge of God and reverence for him. “The fear of the Lord is the

beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10). Without this “fear of the Lord” no one will come to true knowledge or understanding. Those in the modern era also over-estimated our ability to be objective. Postmodernists have correctly pointed out that all knowledge has a subjective element; perfect objectivity is impossible. We come to know, not only through our mind, but also through our will, and even through our emotions. Our understanding is also shaped by our prior knowledge. All knowing proceeds from certain presuppositions. Everyone looks at the world through their own lenses and these colour how they see the world. These presuppositions or assumptions about reality may or may not be acknowledged but they do shape our thinking. Modernists ignored the truth about God, overestimated our ability to be objective, underestimated the influence of presuppositions, and put too much confidence in reason as the foundation of truth.

Moderns were also misguided in their *method*. They believed they could attain certainty as they used their reason to apply the scientific method. But this method is limited. Not all of reality can be explained in scientific or analytical terms. ‘Love’, for instance, cannot be taken into a laboratory and subjected to scientific tests, neither can joy, or sorrow. There are some things we receive as true that cannot be ‘proved’ or analysed by this method. We accept many ideas that seem reasonable but cannot be absolutely demonstrated by means of our reason; rather we accept them by faith or belief. Postmodernists are right to reject human reason and the scientific method as the supreme basis and means of achieving certain truth.

A RESPONSE TO POSTMODERNISM

On the other hand Christians should beware of buying wholesale into the ideas of postmodernism or we will leap from the frying pan into the fire. Postmodernism has gone too far in that it discards the possibility of truth altogether. In rejecting the modern ideal of certain knowledge

contemporary thinkers have thrown out the whole idea of objective truth and sure knowledge. We can agree with those who claim that absolute objectivity is impossible and that all knowledge has a subjective element in it. We also agree that understanding involves our will and emotions – knowledge is volitional and emotional as well as rational. And we agree that truth is relational – it is shaped by the community we belong to. This interpretive community influences our understanding in many ways. But having said this we can still affirm that it is possible to know and be certain about the truth. Postmodernism rejects both these affirmations: It denies the possibility of knowing the truth and abandons the quest for certainty.

The most obvious example of the denial of truth is deconstructionism. Those who follow this approach maintain that anyone reading a text cannot understand what the author intended or what the text actually means. All a reader can do is establish what the text means *to him*. All reading is interpretation without the possibility of objective understanding. Yet, as Carson points out, deconstructionists affirm a link between what they have written and their authorial intent. They want reviewers to interpret their work *correctly*. In the real world, despite the deconstructionist viewpoint, “we still expect people to say more or less what they mean (and if they don’t we chide them for it), and we expect mature people to understand what others say, and represent it fairly.... True knowledge of the meaning *of a text* and even *of the thoughts of the author who wrote it* is possible, even if perfect and exhaustive knowledge is not.”⁴⁰³ In actual practice, then, we assume that people will say what they mean to say and write what they intend to communicate. People operate with an assumption that the truth can be stated and understood.

Christians must guard against the influence of deconstructionism when reading the Bible. We must operate with a biblical hermeneutic rather than one that is postmodern. My aim in reading the Bible is not to deconstruct the text in order to construct my own meaning. Rather I aim to understand, as best as possible, the intent of the author, how the original readers (or hearers) would have understood what was

written (or spoken), and then, how I should understand it today. To adopt the premises of postmodern thought is to lose certainty and truth, including the truth of the gospel. Church Bible studies conducted in a postmodern framework of truth will not attempt to understand the meaning of a biblical passage, but will decline into a general sharing of ideas and opinions, all of which are equally valid, without any certainty as to whose opinion is right. In the contemporary perspective the question of who is right, or whose view is correct, is immaterial – what is important is that everyone has the opportunity to share his thoughts. This way of thinking has already infiltrated much of the church. Yet Jesus assured us that we can know the truth (John 8:32). Truth is not for everyone to decide for themselves but has been authoritatively revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ and has been infallibly recorded in the Scriptures. Anyone reading the Bible with a sincere desire to understand it will be able to grasp its main message. In this sense the Scriptures are clear and can be understood. Certainly, there are passages that are difficult to comprehend, but the overall purpose and thrust of the Bible is clear to the attentive and prayerful reader.⁴⁰⁴

Yet postmodernism has made truth relative and has prohibited anyone from making the claim that he has ‘The Truth’. It denies that there is such a thing as absolute Truth which excludes other truths. As Christians we object to this ‘absolute’ assertion of postmodernism. Not all ways of looking at the world are equally valid nor is it enough to say that everyone’s truth is ‘true for them’.

If we do not maintain a tight connection with our theological traditions and scriptural authority, we will have no basis for appropriately judging one story over another. We must exercise the courage to boldly assert that not all stories will fill the spiritual vacuum felt so deeply in the human soul. Recognising that there are many things we can learn from other traditions is not the same as insisting that all stories are equally valid. No one has ever been as open and compassionate and engaging of divergent worlds as Jesus. Yet though he met people where they were, he still led them to the well where living water was to be found.⁴⁰⁵

There is absolute truth. Preachers should not hesitate to make that

claim, or even to highlight the truth by contrasting it with the errors of our day. In the muddle and confusion of postmodernity we need to be crystal clear as to what we believe, to define the truth in precise terms, and to be willing to say; “This is true, that is false; this is orthodox, that is heretical.” We need to be prepared to state the truth in contrast to the thinking of our age.

Having said this, it is not enough to simply assert that the Christian faith is true; we also need to defend the truth. We believe that the Christian faith is defensible and that it can hold its own. Even more, we can be used, through the power of God’s Spirit, to persuade people of the truth of the Bible. Our faith can be defended in the marketplace of ideas. What we believe is intellectually satisfying and reasonable. Good evidence can be produced in favour of Christianity. We do not demand any privileged status such as the church enjoyed for a long period after Constantine, but we do want a reasoned and reasonable debate on the truth of what people hold to and teach.

We have seen that modernists were too optimistic in believing that they could attain perfect certainty by means of human reason as it applied the scientific method. We have also seen that while postmodernism was correct in critiquing this aspect of modernism, in abandoning *any* claim to truth it has swung too far the other way. What then do Christians believe about the truth? What are the main outlines of a Christian epistemology? If we are to have clear answers about truth for people today we need to reflect on this further.

A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF TRUTH

Christians believe that God has revealed himself in the created world (Romans 1:18-20) and in his acts of history in times past (Psalms 78, 106, 107). He also spoke to people “through the prophets at many times and in various ways” (Hebrews 1:1). Some of his deeds and words have been recorded for us in the Scriptures, which is the Word of God and objectively true. God has spoken finally and climactically

in His Son, who is The Truth and who taught us all his Father wanted us to know. Jesus came to reveal God the Father to us; Jesus has “made him known” (John 1:18). The writers of the gospels record the historical events of the person and work of Jesus – his birth, life, miracles, words, death, resurrection, and ascension. They wrote what they knew to be true and recorded all of these events as historical facts.

The objectivity of truth

It is vital that Christians retain an emphasis and an approach that gives a prominent place to the objective truth of an historical gospel. We have a unique message, not because it leads to wonderful spiritual experiences, but because it is true. In a moment I will give attention to the importance of the subjective side of our belief, but here I want to emphasise the objective reality of God’s truth. *Truth is not primarily subjective, rooted in our own experiences, but is objective and rooted in the actual events of what God has done in history, especially in his Son Jesus.* The historic truth of God’s deeds is the basis for Christian belief. The truth of what God has done is recorded in the Bible by the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New, all of whom had a certainty about God’s truth.

They were convinced that God’s revelation, of which they were the vehicles and custodians, was true. True in an absolute sense. It was not merely true *to them*; it was not merely true *in their time*; it was not true *approximately*. What God had given was true universally, absolutely, and enduringly.”⁴⁰⁶

Truth for the biblical authors was “objective, public, and authoritative.”⁴⁰⁷ If we abandon a truth-orientated approach that is grounded in history then we have abandoned the gospel, both the gospel of the Old Testament and that of the New.

This objective and historically based Christian truth was quite different from the pagan view of truth that was centred on the

individual and his inner experience. Truth for the pagan was subjective and emotional, an inner and mystical experience based on their own perception of reality. This is essentially the concept of truth that dominates our postmodern world. People do not believe in a universal, readily accessible truth, but in a private, personal truth, true for each individual. Postmodern truth is not found in the Bible but in oneself. It is not an intelligent conviction but a vague feeling. It is not based on revelation but on intuition. Such truth cannot be authoritative for anyone else but is relative to every situation and personalised for each individual. The contrast between Christian truth and the contemporary view can be seen in the table below:

A COMPARISON OF CHRISTIAN v POSTMODERN TRUTH	
CHRISTIAN TRUTH	PAGAN & POSTMODERN
Objective	Subjective
Facts	Perception
Historical Events	Human Imagination
Biblical Revelation	Mystical Experience
Public Truth	Personal and Private Truth
Revealed	Intuitive
The Voice of God	The Voice of Self
Truth	No "Truth"
External	Internal
Intelligent Conviction	Vague Feeling
Authoritative	Relative

In contrast to the postmodern view of truth we maintain that God has spoken truthfully to us in the Bible. In this book he has communicated to us verbally and intelligibly. The Bible is true, inerrant, trustworthy, and authoritative. It contains all we need to know for doctrine and life, revealing what we need to believe and do. It reveals the Lord Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life. This is the truth we can communicate with confidence in our postmodern culture.

As we seek to do this we can take some lessons from the apostles who lived in a culture and context very similar to our own. In their pluralistic culture they boldly proclaimed the objective truth of the Christian faith. Today's preachers can confidently do the same. In writing his gospel Luke emphasised the historical accuracy and truth of his account.

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4).

Luke obviously believed that people could have *certainty* about the truth and about events that had happened. The Apostle Paul began from the same premise. When speaking to Jews in the synagogues he “reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead” (Acts 17:2-3). When preaching to the gentile Greeks he took a reasoned approach (Acts 17:17) and offered a coherent and well argued presentation of the Christian faith. In preaching the gospel he tried to “persuade” men (2 Corinthians 5:11) because he was convinced that the gospel was the truth coming from the God of truth and that all men ought to believe it. Even though every man may be a liar we must “let God be true” (Romans 3:4). This truth was powerful in the lives of God's elect: It is “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes”

(Romans 1:16). Jude was eager to write to first century Christians about “the salvation we share” but on further reflection altered his approach; “I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). Today we too must “contend for the faith”, in both the church and the world, as the Apostles did in their day. The Scriptures call us to proclaim, teach and defend the truth of God *about* God.

In proclaiming the truth Christians are not saying they know all there is to know about everything. Modernists optimistically believed they could understand everything and have absolute certainty. Postmodernists are more pessimistic, believing that all knowledge is merely interpretation and that no one can know the truth. Christians reject both of these positions. We believe that God has revealed his truth to us. In order to make his truth known to us God must overcome the effects of sin in our hearts and minds. He does this through the powerful and sovereign work of his Spirit, regenerating our hearts and enlightening our minds so that we can see the light of God’s truth, understand it and believe it. God only reveals to us what he wants us to know, keeping other things to himself in his own divine counsel. We are only human and our ability to understand is limited (Isaiah 55:8-9). Nevertheless, God has revealed his truth to us; “The secret things belong to the Lord, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Although God has not revealed *all* things to us, what he *has* revealed is *true*. Our knowledge of God’s truth is finite, but accurate. We may not have an exhaustive knowledge of the truth but what we do know of God from the Scriptures is true. With confidence we can say that Jesus was born, he died, he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, he is coming again, and he is Lord. We do not understand all these statements in all their infinite detail or in all their great depth. Nor do we understand just how Jesus became a man, or how he rose from the dead, or how he will come again. Nevertheless, we can affirm that all of these statements are true. We can and do have an objective knowledge of God’s truth revealed in the Scriptures.

The subjective aspect of truth

Proponents of postmodernism deny the possibility of objective truth in favour of the subjective nature of truth. Christians affirm both – the truth is both objective and subjective. I have already defended the objectivity of the truth – God has revealed his truth to us and it can be taught, known and understood. Yet Christian belief is not merely belief ‘out there’, it must also be internalised. It is not only objective, it must also be personal. The Bible repeatedly emphasises this personal element, especially with its emphasis on the heart. In Hebrew thought the heart is regarded as the seat and centre of our being. Our thoughts, motives and feelings arise from our heart. Therefore, we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart (Deuteronomy 6:5); the law of God must be on our hearts (Deuteronomy 6:6); this law must not be allowed to slip from our hearts (4:9); instead it must be hidden in our heart (Psalm 119:11). This emphasis on the heart shows that the knowledge of God and his truth is not merely an intellectual head knowledge; rather it must be believed and retained in the core of our being.

The New Testament confirms this approach. At the end of his gospel the Apostle John tells us that he had not written to give his readers bare facts about the events that had happened but he had written, “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). In the letters of the New Testament the Apostles reinforced this message. To the Ephesians the apostle Paul wrote; “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:16-17). He expressed a similar desire for himself in his letter to the Philippians; “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). Again and again the Scriptures emphasise that the truth about the Lord must be personally believed

and experientially known.

This must also be the goal of preaching – that people may come to know the truth about the Lord Jesus and live in the joy of this knowledge. God wants us to be reconciled to him and to know him. Carson comments; “Although this involves rational thought, more than rational thought is involved. God is more interested in eliciting from us trust, obedience, holiness, delight in his presence, humility of heart, than merely formal understanding (though he certainly wants that for us as well).”⁴⁰⁸ To know God is not merely to know information about him, but rather to know him as a person. It is not enough to know facts about God, we must also believe in him, trust him and obey him. The Heidelberg Catechism, a mid-sixteenth century protestant confession, puts this well in its definition of faith;

True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true, it is also a deep rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.”⁴⁰⁹

It is correct, then, to emphasise the *personal* nature of knowing, not because this is the current postmodern thinking, but because this is consistent with the Bible.

How are we going to communicate this biblical perspective on truth, with its objective and historical reality, as well as its personal and subjective character? How will we do this in today’s climate where the objective character of truth is denied? How are we to do this as *preachers* of the gospel? What should be our response to trends in the church that minimise truth and theology in favour of experience and pragmatism? What is an appropriate style and stance for preaching in our postmodern scene?

PREACHING CHRISTIAN TRUTH

In our present situation there is a new openness to spirituality. Postmodern people are no longer locked into the scientific world view and are more prepared to think about matters of faith. This provides us with new opportunities to preach the gospel. Yet this change in thinking will require a re-evaluation of how we present the gospel and what we emphasise. In the past we could assume that people believed that there was such a thing as truth and that it was important to discover, know and believe the truth. Today people are not concerned about the truth of the Christian faith; they are more concerned about whether it *works* than whether it is *true*. Some suggest we should respond to this new situation by abandoning questions of truth and instead focus on the practical and utilitarian benefits of Christianity. Certainly, it is useful to demonstrate the practical benefits of the truth in our lives and in the church. Yet it would be wrong to neglect the content and truth of the Bible. Christianity, as we have seen, is built on the historic reality of the truth – the truth of what God has said and done. “There is non-negotiable, biblical, intellectual content to be proclaimed.”⁴¹⁰ Preaching must convey the content of the Bible as the truth. There is no substitute for the truth and content of the Word of God.

Truth must be communicated because God saves people through the proclamation of his Word as it is addressed, first of all, to their minds. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome; “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). His repeated prayer for believers was that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better” (Ephesians 1:17). Such “wisdom and revelation” comes through our minds. A “knowledge of his will” comes as people apply their minds to what God has revealed (Colossians 1:9-10). In order for people to know the truth it must be proclaimed by a preacher, heard by the ears, understood in the mind, and believed in the heart (Romans 10:9-15). Carson comments; “a

necessary component in conversion and in Christian discipleship is the proper use of the mind.... God is worth thinking about. God's thoughts, in so far as he has disclosed them, can become our thoughts."⁴¹¹ Christians already have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16); our aim is to grow in a greater understanding of Christ and all his truth. This emphasis on the mind does not minimise the importance of understanding the people of our generation, or the necessity of preaching with conviction and compassion; or the vital role of the Holy Spirit. Rather, I want to stress the foundational character of the truth addressed to the mind. To neglect this is to undercut the Christian faith and leave it without a foundation. Although people do not believe in the truth, and even deny the possibility of knowing the truth, we must still preach the truth of the Scriptures because this is what will save men and women today.

When defending the truth our final authority must always be the *Bible*. It is possible to put so much emphasis on communicating in a relevant way that we end up neglecting the Scriptures. Liberalism has made the mistake of beginning with the world and interpreting the Bible in the light of contemporary ideas. Contemporary evangelicals, seeking to be relevant, could repeat the same mistake – neglecting the Word of God in favour of an emphasis on the world. I heard an example of this in a central city church service aimed at youth. The preacher spent most of the time exegeting the youth culture and explaining the hurts afflicting young people, and making only passing references to the Scriptures. Yet it is the Word of God that will change people's lives, not our incisive analysis of our contemporary situation. A focus on the Bible will help us avoid diversions such as a preoccupation with the end-times, the laughing of the Toronto Blessing, and the spectacular but dubious practice of 'slaying in the spirit'. None of these have any biblical foundation and undermine the credibility of the gospel in the eyes of an unbelieving world.⁴¹² There is an offence in the message of the gospel but the offence must be a biblical one, not one generated by our own ingenious programmes. Moreover, the popular practices of the contemporary church will not

change people's hearts and lives. Powerful appeals based on emotionally charged stories will not change human behaviour. Subjective experiences are no substitute for mentally digesting God's objective revelation. Entertaining services can never make up for lack of thought. Only the Word of God, proclaimed and applied by the preacher, impressed on people's hearts by the Holy Spirit, can lead to the salvation of sinners and the building up of believers. Our focus must be on the Bible.

Our presentation of Biblical truth also needs *authority*. Peter Berger notes that "strong eruptions of religious faith have always been marked by the appearance of people with firm, unapologetic, often uncompromising convictions.... Put simply: Ages of faith are not marked by 'dialogue', but by *proclamation*."⁴¹³ He calls the Christian community to adopt *a stance of authority* towards the modern world. By this he does not mean an attitude of arrogance or of "authoritarianism". Rather he hoped the Protestant church would recover from its demoralisation and failure of nerve and show the authority of those "who are convinced that, in however imperfect a measure, they have grasped some important truths about the human condition."⁴¹⁴ Yet even this is understated. Preachers of the gospel can speak to everyone in our society with the authority of those who believe the Bible to be the Word of God, confident of the relevance and importance of its message. Jesus amazed the crowds "because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28-29). Today preachers ought to preach and teach with authority because they are proclaiming the truth about Jesus, and not as the theological liberals, interpretative deconstructionists, or tolerant pluralists.

Our speaking about the truth ought to be *vigorous*. This is something we are inclined to forget in a time of tolerance and the general acceptance of the views of everyone. Hauerwas and Willimon contend that the "suffocating niceness and domesticated metaphor of much of what we hear from liberal pulpits today has so reinterpreted and demythologised the truth of what the Apostle wrote so that it is

rendered innocuous.”⁴¹⁵ In trying to make the Christian faith acceptable to the contemporary trends of thinking liberal theologians and preachers have taken the heart out of the Christian faith. These writers go on to say; “We suspect that the church loses its vitality when its speech is cleaned up, pruned down, domesticated to ensure that our relationship with God is predictable and nice.” They cite the example of someone who proposed omitting the traditional Prayer for Enemies from the new Anglican Book of Common Prayer because, “Episcopalians are now so nice that they no longer make enemies.”⁴¹⁶ The suggestion was made in jest, but like every joke there was an element of truth behind it. Let such prayers remain in place because the truth is worth fighting for, even dying for. We have noted that Jude wrote to the first century churches urging them to “*contend* for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). More than once the Apostle Paul used battle imagery to describe the Christian life. He encouraged Timothy to “Fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Tim 6:12) and urged the Christians in Ephesus to “put on the full armour of God”, so they would be able to stand their ground in the heat of the battle against the attack of the “spiritual forces of evil”. (Ephs 6:10-18). This Biblical language suggests vigour and zeal in our defence of the Christian faith.

Preaching must also *train believers* to communicate the truth in a new situation. If Christians are to be clear witnesses of the gospel and effective citizens of Christ’s kingdom they must be well taught by their pastors. Church leaders must be deliberate about teaching and equipping all believers, but especially young people, to live as *Resident Aliens* in a godless and hostile environment. Pastors must be intent on proclaiming the uniqueness of the Christian faith and the exclusive claims of Jesus on the lives of His disciples. The devaluation of truth and the context of pluralism makes it more difficult to transmit the Christian faith and character to the next generation. Through the media children and young people in Christian homes are bombarded with the ideas and values of other peoples, and through school and society they are confronted with a huge range of beliefs and lifestyles.

This context raises questions for them about the truth and reality of the Christian faith. All the more reason then, for the clear and faithful proclamation of God's Word Sunday by Sunday. If the world denies the truth of the Bible then the church must counter this by boldly affirming what it believes about the Scriptures. To do otherwise is to capitulate to the forces of the enemy. As pastors we need to preach the Scriptures and apply them to what is going on in the lives of those listening to us. If Christians are to live and speak as disciples of Christ in their situation they must have a good knowledge of the Bible and the ability to defend it apologetically. Pastors can help their people to understand the culture they are living in and witnessing to. Equipping Christians for witness involves teaching them the truth about God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and the great plan of a triune God for the salvation of a lost and fallen world. Much of this can be communicated through preaching, supplemented by biblical education and discipleship training.

PREACHING THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Postmodernists no longer believe in a metanarrative; they have lost any hope for an overall explanation of the world that can give meaning to their lives. Yet they are longing for a purpose to existence. They may deny the reality of an overall narrative but they cannot suppress the yearning for it. Christian preachers can take advantage of this by telling the Biblical narrative of God's dealings with his covenant people. Preaching the history of God's dealing with his people is not different from, or opposed to, preaching biblical truth but is rather another way of doing this, another angle on the truth. The Bible explains this world and our place in it. As pastors tell of what God has done in the lives of others people will see that this God is also at work in their situation – he is active today as he was then. The record of God's acts in history gives meaning to our lives by pointing out our place in God's plan. Such preaching will ground Christians in the Scriptures and help

correct an appalling ignorance of the Bible.

Preaching like this will also be an effective means of proclaiming the gospel to non-Christians. Unbelievers today have little or no knowledge of the Bible. They have no understanding of who Jesus is or why he came. Therefore the record of the person and work of Christ must be set in the larger framework of the Bible. This is how Paul preached to the gentile Greeks in Athens (Acts 17). He first of all spoke about God as the great Creator and of God's purpose for us – that we might seek him so that we might find him. Then he spoke about human ignorance and sin and of the necessity of repentance. Only after he had laid out this background did he introduce the person of Christ and his resurrection. In this way he covered the central theme of the Bible – the creation of the world, the fall into sin, and God's redemption of his people. All the stories of the Bible must be read in the light of this larger context, including the account of what God did in the lives of individual people.

The Bible is full of examples of what God has done in people's lives. All of these are instructive for us – “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11). As we read these examples we must bear in mind that they are not primarily written about these people, but they are the record of what *God* was doing in their lives. *God* is the hero of the Bible and of every story in it. As we read about how *God* was at work in the lives of others we are able to see how he is at work in our lives. These examples shed light on the events and circumstances of our lives and help us find answers to our problems.⁴¹⁷ Statements and injunctions by themselves are not sufficient in preaching. To simply say, “God forgives sinners”, or, “Love your neighbour” is not as effective as when the same truth is illustrated and applied to those who are listening. Moses did this in Deuteronomy when he reminded the people of Israel of the laws God had given them, urging them to

faithfulness, and explaining the consequences of obedience or disobedience. Jesus did this in his ministry when he demonstrated his power in miracles and illustrated the truth in parables. To the hard and suspicious pharisees he proved that he had the power to forgive sins by raising a paralytic from his bed (Luke 5:17-26), and to the teacher of the law he explained the meaning of love for one's neighbour with the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In this way Jesus often used parables to reinforce and illustrate the point he wanted to make. Thus the Bible is full of examples, both real-life stories and also parables, that are used to explain the truth.

When preaching the parables we need to be sure that we are preaching the truth Jesus intended to convey and not just their story line. Some advocate the preaching of parables in contrast to doctrinal preaching because they perceive the latter to be cold or rationalistic. Preaching the parables, they believe, will gain the attention of the listener, stimulate the imagination, and provoke reflection. In response we should note, firstly, that the parables of Jesus were told both to reveal and to conceal the truth – to reveal the truth to those who believed and to conceal it from those who did not (See Mark 4:10-12, Luke 8:9-10). Secondly, to understand properly many of Jesus' parables requires a good understanding of the history of the Old Testament and a knowledge of the customs and cultures of first century Palestine. Preaching the parables just because they are stories does not guarantee a ready form of communication to postmodern people. Thirdly, the parables could easily be misunderstood by people who are atheistic, pantheistic or ignorant of the Bible. Unless our preaching is anchored in "objective, propositional, confessional truth... the entire heritage of biblical Christianity will be sold for a mess of subjectivist pottage."⁴¹⁸ By all means, let's preach the parables, the narrative parts of the Bible, and the entire story of what God is doing in history, but let's preach this as the historical, factual and genuine truth God has made known to us. Furthermore, let's preach this truth in all its substance, depth and theological weight.

PREACHING AND THEOLOGY

In the protestant churches of New Zealand there is a tendency to emphasise experience rather than doctrine, tongues rather than teaching, signs and wonders rather than systematic theology, technique rather than truth. Church advertisements in the Saturday papers indicate a whole range of choices for the contemporary Christian. Many of these churches promote themselves as fulfilling people's needs rather than as preaching the truth. There is a tendency to focus on ourselves rather than on God, with the result that many regular churchgoers are appallingly ignorant of basic doctrines of the Bible. Instead they are often distracted by matters secondary to central teachings of the Christian faith.

If the truth of God is central to Christian belief, as I have claimed, then we must make the truth central in preaching. If theology is the study of God then preachers of the Word must be theologians. Preachers, of all people, ought to be diligent students of the Scriptures. Ministers ought to have a sound and solid grasp of Christian truth – both in biblical and systematic theology. We need a good grasp of the overall content of the Scriptures and the progressive development of God's revelation, as well as a comprehensive and systematic knowledge of the main teachings of the Bible. This knowledge ought to undergird our preaching and teaching. It ought to be the backbone of all we have to say. Not that all this learning has to be displayed in our sermons – a sermon is not a lecture in theology. Nor should a preacher draw attention to himself and his knowledge; his task is rather to point people to a knowledge of God through Christ. To give people a knowledge of God requires that we have a well developed theological understanding.

The means that New Zealand preachers need to be well trained in the Bible and theology. After his appointment as principal of Carey Baptist College Paul Windsor conducted a "consult" in an attempt to gather information to help set a direction and curriculum for the Baptist college. He summarised the discussions as "a ringing endorsement for

the retaining of a biblical/ theological/ historical core in the curriculum.”⁴¹⁹ He noted that increasingly people do not have this as the foundation and framework for their Christian thinking and so there was a need for close and careful biblical studies to give Christians “an integral grasp of the whole of Scripture as a guide for the whole of life.”⁴²⁰ Responses from the consults emphasised the need for a balanced, thorough and systematic theology that is orthodox and dynamic, as well as a study of the history of the church. He noted that there was a need to “establish with staff, students, and the denomination that this College is returning to a commitment to the Bible as the authoritative Word of God and all theology and curriculum begins at this ground level.”⁴²¹ The implementation of such a curriculum in the Bible colleges and seminaries of New Zealand, in the context of a protestant understanding of the Scriptures, would help turn the church back to a biblical understanding and practise of the truth.

Formal theological training is only the beginning of what ought to be a lifelong process of study and learning. College or seminary training only provides us with the tools we need to begin a study of the Word of God. Regular preaching and teaching forces us to keep reading, studying and growing in our knowledge of the Lord and his truth so that we can pass this on to the people of God and those who are searching for the truth. Ministers of the Word will also find it helpful to attend conferences or seminars that will assist them in their continuing education. A quick glance at *Challenge Weekly* or other Christian magazines illustrates the huge number of such opportunities available to church members and leaders. Unfortunately, many of these are weak on content and theology. In-service training for ministers must focus more on the Bible, truth and doctrine rather than following the current trends of leadership, vision casting and management. If members of the church are going to grow in their understanding of the Bible and Christian truth then ministers must be leading the way by their example. A sound knowledge of the Bible and theology will also help believers be more effective evangelists in our society.

PREACHING AND EVANGELISM

Preaching should also encourage and equip Christians to live out and speak about the truth of their faith wherever the Lord has placed them. We are clearly in a mission situation in New Zealand today. Christians are a small proportion of the total population – less than 10%. The culture and values have almost lost the vestiges of a Christian memory. Christianity enjoys no privileged status and has no honoured place. Pluralism challenges even our right to evangelise. Opponents of Christianity assert that even the claim to know and declare the truth is arrogant and ridiculous. Carson, describing the North American situation, writes; “We face new levels of hostility, new levels of biblical illiteracy, new forms of resistance, even when this generation speaks freely and somewhat wantonly of ‘spirituality’.”⁴²² Evangelistic strategies used in the past no longer have the same appeal or effectiveness. Most people are suspicious of those who go door-to-door, partly because of the frequent use the cults make of this, but also because of the rising crime and violence of our nation and an awareness of ‘stranger danger’. A Sunday school ministry is not the drawcard that it used to be. With all the talk of child-abuse many parents are hesitant to put their children into the care of others they do not know well. Revival meetings no longer have the cultural support they enjoyed in the hey-day of the Billy Graham crusades, and now those who do attend are mostly believers.⁴²³

Today we find ourselves in the same situation as that of the early church, because they too were in a minority position in a pluralistic empire. When they were forcibly dispersed by persecution, “Those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4). It is worth noting that the apostles remained in Jerusalem while the ‘lay’ people went out – the members of the church were the ones witnessing. The word translated as “preached” literally means “to bring or announce good news”. It can be used to describe the formal preaching of this good news, but it often refers to individual believers ‘passing on’ good news to those they meet. These early Christians

communicated their faith by “informal chattering to friends and chance acquaintances, in homes and wine shops, on walks, and around the market stalls. They went everywhere gossiping the gospel; they did it naturally, enthusiastically and with the conviction of those who are not paid to say that sort of thing.”⁴²⁴ This is what we need to encourage among Christians today. All believers must see that they have a task of being witnesses for the Lord through their good deeds and their God-honouring speech. A holy life and a personal testimony about Jesus are powerful evangelistic tools. To share the gospel in this way believers must deliberately build contact with non-believers, being wise in their relationships, and making the most of every opportunity (Colossians 4:5). Christians must fulfil this role at school, polytech and university, as well as in their communities and places of work.

As preachers we ought regularly to encourage the members of our church to bring unbelievers to hear the preaching of the Word. Individual Christians can and should talk about their faith to those they meet, but they should also be urged to invite unbelievers to listen to the preaching of the Bible as this is one of the primary means God uses to bring people to faith in Christ. A commendable feature of churches who have adopted the ‘seeker service’ approach is their conviction that unbelievers will come to hear the preaching of the gospel and that the Lord will use this in the conversion of those who do not believe. Would that preachers in all the churches in this country really believed this and preached for the conversion of the lost. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher of the nineteenth century, recalls this conversation with a preacher named Mr. Medhurst regarding evangelistic preaching;

One day, with a very sad countenance, he said to me, “I have been preaching for three months, and I don’t know of a single soul having been converted.” Meaning to catch him by guile, and at the same time to teach him a lesson he would never forget, I asked, “Do you expect the Lord to save souls every time you open your mouth?” “Oh, no, sir!” he replied. “Then,” I said, “that is just the reason why you have not had conversions: ‘According to your faith be it unto you.’”⁴²⁵

Believers should be encouraged to pray for the salvation of unbelievers. They should also be urged to pray for their minister, that he may be able to preach the Scriptures clearly, faithfully presenting the truth, and that God's Word may accomplish the purpose for which it was sent.

In response to the loss of truth in our postmodern society Christians affirm that there is Truth and that it can be found in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Word of God. God has spoken to us authoritatively and clearly in the Bible giving us a true, although not exhaustive, understanding of his creation and of reality. This truth is historical and objective, but to be a living faith in Christ it must also be personally experienced and believed in our hearts. If ministers of the gospel are to be effective preachers they must have a thorough grasp of Christian truth and theology and must seek to pass this on to believers and unbelievers alike. As believers hear the truth Sunday by Sunday they will be more established in their faith and better equipped to be ambassadors for the Lord and citizens of his kingdom. They will also be encouraged to invite unbelievers to hear the truth of the gospel in the preaching of the Word.

Part of the reason for the loss of truth in our society is that we live in a pluralistic environment. Pluralism and the loss of truth are intimately related matters. The huge variety of races and ideas tends to devalue the truth of the Christian faith, and the depreciation of the value of truth encourages further pluralism. How are we to preach in this situation?

Chapter 3

PREACH THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS AS LORD

In the discussion of pluralism I distinguished between the *presence* of pluralism in our western world and its *promotion*. The former is simply part of our world situation at the beginning of a new millennium and is neither good nor bad. We could even argue that diversity adds variety, interest and colour to our society, and that it gives the church an opportunity to demonstrate how different races and cultures can be brought together in the community of the Lord's people. My objection was not against this form of pluralism but rather against the promotion of pluralism as an ideology. Christians cannot accept that all religions are equally valid or that all 'truths' are acceptable. On the contrary, the Scriptures teach us that there is only one true religion and that there is only one truth.

AN EXCLUSIVE MESSAGE IN A PLURALIST WORLD

Jesus made an exclusive claim for the truth when he said; "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6). This claim of the Lord Jesus cuts across the grain in our pluralistic world. Yet Jesus frequently reaffirmed this statement. After the beautiful invitation of John 3:16 Jesus went on to say about himself; "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18). John records the final invitation of the Lord in his public ministry; "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:46). But immediately after this John

records the warning Jesus gave; “There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day” (John 12:46, 48). The eternal salvation of every individual in the world is dependant on their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ is not “a confusing roundabout sign pointing in every direction” but is “still the place where *all* men are meant to kneel.”⁴²⁶ Every individual is called to receive Jesus as Lord. To believe in Jesus is the only way to be saved.

This is the consistent teaching of the Bible. The Apostle Peter confirmed this when he spoke about the Lord Jesus to the Jewish Sanhedrin; “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name, under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas; “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” they directed him to Jesus – “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household” (Acts 16:30-31). The Apostle Paul pointed his readers to Jesus when he wrote; “...If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved” (Romans 10:10). He went on to describe how people could only believe if they heard the message, and they could only hear the message if someone preached to them (Romans 10:14-15). In other words, the only way to be saved is to hear the message about Jesus and believe in him. The writer to the Hebrews also pointed out the supreme and central position of the Lord Jesus when he wrote; “In the past God spoke to our forefathers at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us in his Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). Here again Jesus is not offered as one option among many, but as the final revelation of God the Father to whom we must listen, in whom we must trust, through whom we are given eternal life. One day we must give an account to him.

Carson points out that this exclusivism is narrower than the inclusivism found among many theologians who teach that although people are saved on account of the person and work of Christ,

“conscious faith in Jesus Christ is not absolutely necessary”.⁴²⁷ Our approach is also opposed to the pluralist view “that all religions have the same moral and spiritual value, and offer the same potential for achieving salvation, however ‘salvation’ be construed.”⁴²⁸ Rather than accommodating ourselves or our views to the smorgasbord around us we must preach the biblical message that salvation is to be found through faith in Jesus alone.

Some may object that the first century Christians made exclusive statements because they were in a very different cultural and historical situation. However, their position in their society was actually very similar to our own. Many scholars point out that never before in the history of Christendom has our situation so closely paralleled that of the first century A.D.⁴²⁹ That Ancient Greek and Roman world was also pluralistic and pagan. As the Apostle Paul wandered the streets of Athens “he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17:16). The religious world of Athens, and indeed the entire Mediterranean rim, was home to hundreds of sects. Greek society had many gods, a set of religions, and a number of philosophies. Roman religions were also polytheistic as well as having the official Roman religion that deified the Caesars. “Pluralism was the stuff of everyday life in biblical times.”⁴³⁰ The various religions at that time made few exclusive claims. Indeed, most people believed that all the religions had some merit in them. One “intransigent exception” was the Jews,⁴³¹ who did make an exclusive claim to truth and believed that their God was the supreme Creator of the heavens and the earth who alone deserved to receive worship.

In this pluralistic setting the early Christians stood apart from other religions. They believed in “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:5-6). They refused to go along with the idolatry and polytheism of their world. They did not accept that all religions lead to God, nor did they accommodate themselves to the Roman emperor cult, nor to any of the other religions or philosophies of the day. Instead, they unashamedly proclaimed Jesus as Lord and insisted that he was

supreme. Against the mixed heresy facing the Christians in Colosse the Apostle Paul asserted the sufficiency of Christ to make them complete (Colossians 2:9-10). He rejected the “fine-sounding arguments” of the false teachers and scorned “their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body” (Colossians 2:4, 23). All the believers needed for salvation was to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Since we live in a similar pluralistic setting we should not hesitate to proclaim the uniqueness of the Lord and lay out the distinctive claim of the Christian faith.

A BETTER FORM OF TOLERANCE

This raises a further issue: Granted the claims of Christ in our postmodern society how should we see our place in this setting and how will we regard other religions and ideas? Of course, we must acknowledge that religious pluralism is a reality in our society. Recognising this situation, however, is different from acquiescing to it. We do not celebrate such religious diversity as the postmodernists do. Rather than see people worship the worthless idols of our age our desire is to see all men acknowledge Jesus as Lord. We cannot impose that on them, nor can we force people to believe. What we can do is to point out the falsehood of other religions and the errors of postmodernism, such as its promotion of pluralism and selfism. We can also promote an environment that allows for a free and open discussion and critique of the ideas prevailing in the culture. In the absence of a unifying shared public philosophy those holding widely varying views must find a way to live at peace with each other. Os Guinness proposes that Christians aim for a religious freedom that allows all religions to practise and does not instantly seek the advantage of our religion. This can be done by promoting three R's: “the *right* to believe and practice any religion or none; the *responsibility* to guard this right for everyone, not least those with whom we most disagree; and *respect* meted to everyone, especially

those with whom we disagree.”⁴³²

What Guinness is arguing for is a form of tolerance, but not the tolerance of the postmodern mentality. The tolerance of the latter, we noted, is in fact an intolerance of any view that makes an exclusive claim to truth. In the current thinking people are not permitted to make judgements about the truth or morality of any other view – to do so is to be charged with bigotry. Wells describes this as “a kind of friendliness within which all absolutes perish either for lack of interest or because of the demands of the social etiquette.”⁴³³ This is not Christian tolerance. Instead, we want to allow for, and even promote, a vigorous exchange of ideas so that the truth may be clarified and believed. We must be tolerant of other people and respect the views they hold, but we must be permitted to debate those ideas, to question their position, and to discuss the relative merits of what they believe. Our attitude to others may be easily misunderstood because of differing perspectives on toleration.⁴³⁴ To avoid this misunderstanding we must deliberately explain that we are allowing others the right to disagree with us, and that we are not forcing anyone to believe what we believe, while, at the same time, seeking to persuade them of the truth we hold to.

We do this because the great issues of eternity are at stake. All people in this world are either on the broad road that leads to destruction or on the narrow path that leads to life (Matthew 7:13-14). Our genuine concern as Christians is to see more and more people enter through the narrow gate and so begin the journey to the heavenly city. Our burning passion as preachers is to be “Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Our constant prayer is; “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). While we must allow people the liberty of holding their own view, our preaching and prayers are directed towards seeing people rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son God loves, “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins” (Col. 1:13).

THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

Part of the problem in preaching this gospel is that the church itself has lost conviction and clarity on the uniqueness of Christianity and has been effected by the pluralism of our day. Earlier I gave an extreme example of this in the World Council of Churches. However, the broad ecumenical approach evident in this organisation runs counter to the exclusive claims Jesus made for himself (John 14:6). While there may be elements of truth in other religions *The Truth* is found in Christ alone and in the Bible alone. Only through faith in this Lord Jesus Christ can a person be saved.

The influence of pluralism may also be seen in a growing ecumenism among protestant evangelical churches. Denominational distinctives are giving way. The current trend is towards combined worship services among local churches and towards co-operation in ecumenical activities, such as the *March For Jesus*, despite the differences of theology and doctrine there may be. An organisation such as *Promise Keepers* has modified its statement of faith to include the Roman Catholic view of justification by faith. If churches are only upholding their traditions and familiar ways of doing things there may be some value in such a trend. But I suspect that the weakening of denominational commitment also reflects less concern for the truth, a decline in theological understanding, and an attitude that minimises what one believes. If denominations continue to give away the distinctives of their beliefs this will lead to a further watering down of their doctrinal position. This does not mean that the doctrinal position of every denomination is right – if we say this we are back to the postmodern perspective. If churches hold differing perspective they cannot all be true. What we ought to encourage is a healthy discussion about the views we hold on various issues and doctrines. This could take place in minister's associations. These meetings provide good opportunities for Christian fellowship. At times, however, there is a lack of interest in discussing points of difference; these tend to get swept under the carpet in favour of an emphasis on unity and co-operation.

Certainly, all true believers are united in Christ. But we ought to strive for the highest degree of unity possible through careful theological and biblical discussion.

Attitudes among the clergy are bound to influence the laity. If theological precision is of little concern to pastors it will be of little concern to other believers. This is part of the reason so many Christians are content to wander around the churches and are prepared to listen to and accept whatever is said or done. The Bible, however, puts a premium on truth – so too should all believers. The adherence of the church to truth ought to be our primary concern, of greater concern than the architecture of the building, the quality of the choir or the flair of the minister. An old confession of the church summarises the marks of the true church by insisting that all things be “managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church.”⁴³⁵ The primary consideration for believers looking for a church to attend and join as a member ought to be the faithfulness of the church to the Word of God in its teaching and practice. If the church is led and taught by faithful pastors and elders then other important matters such as genuine fellowship and a concern for evangelism will flow out of that.

This ecumenical attitude and blurring of distinctives may also be part of the reason for the degree of ‘church hopping’ we see at present, where believers flit from one church to another like restless wanderers. Yet, if believers are going to enjoy upbuilding fellowship with other believers, and if they are going to grow through the preaching and teaching of the Word, then they need to commit themselves to one congregation. Gordon Miller, Church Relations Manager for World Vision New Zealand, notes that these wanderers need to become committed to a local church and be part of the body of Christ in a certain place. They must be loved and led to a more solid commitment to the church. Miller urges pastors to give themselves to preaching as they have never done before – “work hard at bringing warm, relevant and inspiring messages that bring the great truths of the Bible alive.

Your wanderers will wander less when their hearts burn within them as you speak (Luke 24:32).”⁴³⁶ If they settle down into a church and attend regularly then they will get to know a group of believers, will be accountable to a body of elders, and will benefit from a consistent pulpit ministry. Alternatively, if they float around from one place of worship to another they will not enjoy any of these benefits, nor will they be able to contribute effectively to the lives of other Christians. This leads us to consider the importance of teaching and preaching the doctrine of the church.

Chapter 4

PREACH THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY

Earlier I drew attention to the individualism that prevails in our society. This arose from the ideas of the Enlightenment and was reinforced by the move to big cities and by the effect of television. In reaction, there has been a move towards tribalism as people begin to find their identity in small groups, drawn together by a common cause, interest or even age-group. As Christians we have an adequate response to this present crisis and confusion because we believe in the church.

The church of the Lord Jesus provides a home for the individual within the wider community of the people of God. Each person can find a place and has an important role to fulfil, using their own gifts and abilities. The Apostle Paul spells this out when he compares the church to a body (Romans 12:1-16 and 1 Corinthians 12). Such a view of the church avoids both the extremes of individualism and of tribalism. The church is not a loose collection of isolated and independent individuals, nor is it a forced collective of people all conforming to the same mould. Rather, it is a community of believers, who all have varied gifts and abilities, each of whom has something to contribute, and who share a common identity and bond in Christ, and a unity in God the Father (Ephesians 4:3-8).

The New Testament both prescribes and describes a structure and order for the government of the body of Christ. The church is not to be led by a 'one man band' but rather by a plurality of elders (Titus 1:5) who are assisted in their task by deacons. These deacons are to take care of the work of administration and the poor, leaving the elders free for the "ministry of the word and of prayer" (Acts 6:1-4). Churches

today would do well to study these principles of church government and seek to implement a biblical pattern.

The Biblical descriptions of the church as a body (1 Corinthians 12), a household (1 Timothy 3:15), a building (Ephesians 2:19-22) and a bride (Ephesians 5:25-27) provide preachers with many rich avenues to explore with their congregations. As we develop the New Testament teaching about the church we can show how it rejects both the rampant individualism and the splintering tribalism of our culture.

A COVENANT COMMUNITY

Part of the problem in our society is the increasing segmentation of people into separate and distinct groups who have little or nothing to do with each other. Here again the church can model a better society that demonstrates genuine unity and harmony. Developing this in the church will require a good understanding of the covenant God has established with his people. This biblical idea has deep roots in the Old Testament. A covenant is a relationship between two parties who are bound together by solemn oaths and promises. Both parties have various responsibilities and obligations to each other. God established covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and the people of Israel, Phineas, and with David. It is the covenant with Abraham that receives the most attention in the Scriptures. In it God established a relationship with Abraham; “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you for the generations to come” (Genesis 17:7). The Lord continued his covenant with his people, often repeating its central promise – “I will be your God and you will be my people”. This covenant arrangement continued into the New Testament; there the Apostle Paul described New Testament believers as the children of Abraham and heirs of the promise (Romans 4:16-17, Galatians 3:7-9, 26-29). Today we are part of God’s covenant people who have been

drawn into a relationship with him, not just as individuals, but as part of a larger community. In the Old Testament this community was the people of Israel; in the New Testament it is the church. We are part of the larger picture of what God has been doing in the world and through history. This concept of the covenant is worth emphasising by preachers in a postmodern generation that has lost its identity and its roots. Here, surely, is a good antidote to the restlessness, fragmentation and rootlessness of people today.

A MODEL COMMUNITY

Churches in New Zealand ought to provide examples of healthy and positive relationships among individuals. This ideal will not be realised in all churches at all times because Christians too are selfish people whose relationships are disrupted by their sinful nature. Yet a harmonious church community is the ideal and is worth striving for. Sometimes churches seek to engineer unity through such means as detailed sharing of their lives, holding hands, hugging your neighbour or telling the person next to you in worship that you love them. Rather than pursuing these artificial and manipulative techniques preachers would do well to preach and teach the truth about Christian relationships. Believers in the churches of the first century were called to live together in peace and harmony – so are Christians today. We are to practice the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and are to live in humility, gentleness, patience and love towards each other (Ephesians 4:1-3). We should not look to our own interests but to the interests of others, having the same attitude as Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:1-5). Unity and peace in the church will come about as believers apply these principles to their hearts and lives with the help of the Holy Spirit, and as we provide small group settings where people are able to share their lives in a natural and open manner.

A LOVING COMMUNITY

It is not enough for us to preach the truth of the Bible – we must demonstrate it in practice. To believe in Jesus is to know him as a person and to follow him through life. Yet, it also involves belonging to his body, the church, and showing love for others. Jesus told his disciples that the distinguishing mark of his followers was to be their *love for each other*: “All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (John 13:35). This was the concern of the Apostle James in his letter. What good is it to say we have faith if we don’t show it in our deeds. Love must be especially evident in the church community, seen in a consideration and care for orphans, for widows, and for the poor (James 1:19-2:7). We need to build the church as a strong community where people look after each other; where children are loved, appreciated, and cared for; where the poor learn how to manage their finances; where unemployed learn skills and find encouragement; where young people can find hope for the future and creative outlets for their energy. Church communities like this will be a powerful testimony to the truth of the gospel. The truth of what we believe must be seen in our Christ-like lives, in the evidence of Christian character, and in our love for God and for one another. Our lives should reinforce and illustrate what we believe to be true. The loneliness of many individuals and the insulated subcultures of our society cause many people to long for genuine expressions of love and acceptance. We have an opportunity to show this to them.

A COMMUNITY OF TRUTH

It is also through the church, both past and present, that we come to a full appreciation and understanding of the truth of God. We need to remember that the church did not begin with us. Rather it began when the Lord called Abram to be the father of a great nation and it has continued in history, in two main phases, for 4000 years. For the first

2000 years God continued to reveal his truth and will to his people. Much of this was recorded in the Scriptures. For the last 2000 years the risen Christ has given his church his Spirit so that he might illumine these Scriptures, enabling us to understand them and helping us to live by them. In this understanding we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us: Augustine, Luther, Calvin, The Westminster Assembly, Jonathan Edwards. We don't have to start from scratch as though nothing has been said or thought; instead we have the benefit of all that has been studied and written down by the church in past ages. Not only do we benefit from the church in the past, but also from the church in the present. It is "*together with all the saints*" that we grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ (Ephesians 3:18). Other believers assist us in our comprehension of God's Word and enrich our grasp of the love God has shown to us. They help us apply this Word to our own situation, correcting our blind spots and enlarging our understanding. The church is a community of truth.

A SELF-SACRIFICING COMMUNITY

In response to the current pre-occupation with self-esteem we need to emphasise that the individual not only has a relationship with others but also with God, who has created us in his image. The Enlightenment focussed solely on the human person and said that each person was accountable only to himself, whereas the Protestant Reformation emphasised that each individual was personally accountable to *God* for their decisions and actions. The Lord has an interest in every individual and is patient, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Each individual is also responsible to the Lord because God is the Creator and he calls all of us to know him, love him and serve him. Consequently, our focus in life ought to be on God and not on ourselves. This goes against our natural inclination, because by nature we are self-centred. The present

concentration on self encourages this in-built sinful tendency.

Earlier we discussed victimisation as one extreme example of this pre-occupation with self. Certainly there are victims in our own nation and in the world – victims of the brutality, greed and the vice of others. We cannot dismiss all those crying for help as “cry-babies”. Yet we must be discerning, and where we find people adopting a ‘victim’ mentality we need to urge them to take responsibility for their own lives, their own sin and their own failures. At the same time they can look in hope to the Lord Jesus who came to “bind up the broken-hearted” and “to comfort all who mourn” (Isaiah 61:1-3, Luke 4:16-19).

This emphasis on self is in direct conflict with the teaching of the Lord who did not promote a philosophy of *self-esteem* but of *self-denial*. Rather than urging sinful selfish people to love *themselves* he commanded them to love their *neighbour*. The call of the gospel is to “deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me” (Mark 10:34). Writing to the Philippians the apostle Paul gave the same message; “...in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). Rather than pandering to the selfishness of the human heart preachers of the gospel need to preach the biblical truths of self-sacrifice, not self-esteem; self-denial, not self-fulfilment; service to our neighbour, not the satisfaction of my needs; a focus on God, not on man; the glory of God, not the gratification of my pleasure. We need to remind people that what God thinks of us is all important, not what we think of ourselves. A proper view of ourselves is gained through a proper knowledge of God and of ourselves in relation to God, through Christ. In contrast to the prevailing trends our teaching must be more theocentric and less anthropocentric; we must put more emphasis on faithfulness and less on fulfilment; we must seek the glory of God first of all, and not our own.

A UNIFYING COMMUNITY

Another issue we must address is the tendency to divide the church up into specific sectors according to age, race or inclination. It is true that each period of history has its own character and challenge. In the gospels Jesus often referred to “this generation” (Luke 7:31). He was referring to those who were alive on the earth at that time and to their responsibility before the Lord. Each generation must be aware of its calling to hear the Word of the Lord and to respond to it. Each period of history is significant and each individual and group must fulfil their responsibility at that time. Our task as preachers is to proclaim the eternal truth of God’s Word to this generation so that they might live in obedience to the Lord “understanding the present time” (Romans 13:11).

It is also true that patterns of immigration have placed certain racial groups in a culture very different from the one they are familiar with. New Zealand today has significant numbers of Christians from Samoa, Taiwan and Korea. These believers must meet together in their own congregations because they can only worship in their own language.

Yet, when we examine the New Testament’s description of the early church and its doctrine of the church we see a striking emphasis on the power of the gospel to bring people together. In the body of Christ “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Through the cross of Christ racial and cultural distinctions lose their power to divide and separate. By means of his death Jesus removed “the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” that separated Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14). “His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (vs 15-16). People who were traditionally bitter enemies found themselves brought together in the New Testament church. Here is a great testimony to the power of the gospel to break down the barriers that separate different groups. All true believers are united with each other

through their union with the Lord Jesus Christ evident in their baptism.

It seems to me that the current trend to segmentation in the church is breaking up what ought to be together. The church is a covenant community of all believers, who, rather than being separated into a 'children's church', 'youth' service, 'traditional' worship, or a 'contemporary' service, ought to be able to worship together as the people of the Lord. There is, to be sure, a place for children to get together and be taught at their level (in Sunday school for instance), and for young people to have fun and fellowship together in youth clubs. But the worship of the Lord's people provides a setting for the entire church to gather for the corporate worship of the Lord, young and old, male and female, Kiwi and Korean, Maori and Pakeha. In this fragmented society of ours we need to show that the church is the family of God. Here we have a golden opportunity to demonstrate the power of God's Spirit to bring people together in the fellowship of the church.

As the church we must beware of buying into the thinking of the age, whether that be individualism or tribalism. Preachers of the Bible have a particular responsibility to understand and expose the erroneous ideas of our culture and to preach the Biblical truth of the church, applying this to the concerns of our time.

Chapter 5

PREACH THE ABSOLUTES OF GOD'S LAW

A RESPONSE TO RELATIVISM

Those who hold to a position of relativism believe that there is no objective criterion of truth and no absolute standard for determining right from wrong. In the Enlightenment perspective people must use their reason to make moral decisions. Yet, basing ethical choices solely on human reason is an unstable foundation for ethics because human beings cannot come up with absolute and unchanging standards. Morality guided purely on our own reasoning will base morality on public opinion (the latest polls), or power (might is right). Neither of these offer a reliable basis for ethics. With regard to the former we know that public opinion is extremely variable and there is no assurance that the majority will be right or wise in their will. With regard to the latter we concede that a powerful ruler might promote good laws and make wise decisions, but there is every possibility that power will corrupt his judgement and that he will pursue his own interests. As Christians we need to point out the weaknesses in these approaches.

We also need to highlight the difficulties that come about when consequences are detached from choices. At present people feel free to pursue their rights without real consideration for their responsibilities. They want to be free to do their own thing without regard for the results or effects of that. Every action, however, produces a reaction. Every choice we make has certain effects. Our decisions have consequences. To teach this to our children is one of the tasks of parenting. Parents need to encourage their children to consider the results of the decisions they make and need to let them feel the effects of their wrong choices in a controlled environment. Many children and young people in New Zealand are not learning this truth in their homes. Only a widespread return to the truth of

God's Word and to patterns of parenting based on the Bible are going to solve this problem. Here is where Christians have a great responsibility and mission.

Despite the pluralism of our age believers must be promoting biblical values. This is an urgent task because our society has no unifying consensus on moral issues. The failure of the Code of Social Responsibility illustrates the difficulties of trying to instil values of honesty and truth without a Christian ethical base. This same difficulty confronts educators in the schools and Colleges of Education. Children and young people need more than "values clarification" and teachers need to be more than merely "facilitators". They need to be taught clear moral principles based on God's revealed truth. Anything else may be useful, but it will not provide society with a genuine and lasting basis for ethical principles.⁴³⁷

Only the Word of God and his law provides an authoritative and stable basis for morality and truth. It gives us a secure base for moral standards. God has revealed his truth, will and law to his people. Micah the prophet explained this to Israel; "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). The prophet knew that God had "showed" Israel "what is good"; he had revealed his will to Israel. This law, however, was not given only to Israel, but to all people. All human beings are obligated to keep the law of the Lord because God is our Creator and we are his creatures. He is the Lawgiver and we are commanded to keep his law. The Lord our God made all human beings in his image and we are called to respond to him in love and obedience. God's will is expressed in the ten commandments, is amplified in the five books of Moses, and is summarised by our Lord Jesus in the double command to love God and to love our neighbour. In the law God has explained how obedience should work out in practise and in the detail of our lives. If preachers are going to explain God's law effectively then we need to be clear on the content, use and application of the law.

LOVE GOD AND YOUR NEIGHBOUR

The main content and direction of the law can be summarised in the words of Jesus – that we ought to love God and our neighbour. When Jesus called us to love God he was summarising the intent of the first four of the ten commandments. He did this by quoting the words of Deuteronomy 6:5; “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Our Lord described this as “the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:38). The other six of the ten commandments lay out the basic principles of living with our neighbour. When Jesus summarised the intent of these commands he again went back to the Old Testament, quoting from Leviticus 19:18; “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39). All human beings are called to love their neighbours in the same way they love themselves, because human beings are God's image-bearers. This is the reason given for looking after the poor; “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God” (Proverbs 14:31). Our attitude towards our neighbours, and our treatment of them, is an expression of our relationship with the Lord.

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT LAW

This brief description of the ten commandments and the summary of the law indicates that the law of God is found in both the Old and the New Testaments. Few Christians dispute the importance and necessity of keeping the laws of the New Testament. There is, however, significant debate over how the laws of the Old Testament apply to New Testament believers. Some Christians believe that only Old Testament laws expressly repeated in the New Testament apply today. At the other end of the spectrum there are those who believe that all the Old Testament laws in their detail are applicable today unless they

have been expressly abrogated in the New Testament. The latter view is held by ‘theonomists’ who also advocate the ‘Christian reconstruction’ of society according to the law of God.⁴³⁸

The view that we are only obliged to keep the laws of the New Testament is seriously flawed. It regards all the laws of the Old Testament as being of merely historical interest but of no enduring relevance. This, however, ignores the substantial continuity between the old and the new covenants. Certainly, many of the Old Testament laws were given to Israel for their specific situation; but the law of God is also an expression of his unchanging character and his laws contain abiding principles. The New Testament bears this out. Jesus quoted from Old Testament laws in his ‘summary of the law’ (Matthew 22:34-40). He also told us that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it; “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:17-18). With these words Jesus pointed to the continuing validity of Old Testament law. In the rest of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus clarified and reinforced the moral principles of the Old Testament Scriptures. He clearly saw a continuity between the law of the old and the new covenants.

Some, however, argue against this continuity by pointing to the New Testament teaching that we are “not under law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14, Galatians 5:18). They point to verses that describe how “we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (Romans 7:6). They read these verses as presenting a contrast between the use of the law in the Old Testament and that of the New Testament. Some take this even further and minimise the overall importance and value of the law (antinomianism). A superficial reading of the passages quoted above might suggest that now we do not need to live according to the law but need only to be “led by the Spirit”. Yet, in many other parts of his letters the Apostle Paul urged his readers to keep the law of the Lord and spelled out what that law involved. When he says we are “not

under law” he is referring to the law as a means of obtaining righteousness; believers do not need to gain righteousness through the law because Christ has gained this righteousness for them. They are not under the condemnation of the law nor do they need to fear its punishment. Paul explains this in Romans 8:1-2; “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of Christ set me free from the law of sin and death.” In the rest of Romans 8 he explains how a believer must “live according to the Spirit” (Verse 4). Living *according to the Spirit* must not be seen as *contrary* to living *according to the law*. The Spirit and the law are not opposed to each other for the Spirit gave the law and the Spirit helps us keep the law. This means that believers in the New Testament who live according to the Spirit are also obligated to live in obedience to the Lord as defined by the law. Jesus said; “If you love me you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). The law of the Old Testament is not to be disregarded – Christians are obligated to keep the law of the Lord as it is expressed in both the Old and New Testaments.

Having said this, there are some laws in the Old Testament that no longer apply to the New Testament believer. The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the ceremonial laws were fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Few Christians dispute this. There is debate, however, over the continuity of the civil and judicial laws of the Old Testament. Theonomists argue that we should presume continuity between Old and New Testament principles and regulations unless God's revelation tells us otherwise. They argue that the Old Testament law gives us principles that apply to the moral, political, economic, and judicial life of the nation, and that it offers us a model for socio-political reconstruction in our own day. This law, they say, is to be enforced by the civil magistrate where and how God has stipulated this.⁴³⁹ As society becomes more and more Christian it will be possible to apply these laws in more detail. This view is usually linked to a postmillennial view of the future – they believe that the kingdom of God will grow and increase and dominate the world for a long period of time prior to the

return of Christ. One of the main exponents of Theonomy, Dr Greg Bahnsen, argued for “the abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail”.⁴⁴⁰ This, however, is to overstate the continuity. Many of the laws given to Israel through Moses were addressed to their specific historical situation living, as they were, as an independent geographical and political nation. God wanted them to be a distinctive witness to the other nations of the world. In order to do this he gave them laws that emphasised their unique position among the nations. Many of these no longer apply to us. Having said that, all the laws God gave to Israel have a general principle, or what the Westminster Confession calls their “general equity”.⁴⁴¹ We may presume continuity between the ethical principles of the Old Testament and those of the New.⁴⁴² While the principles apply to believers in the New Testament many of the details do not because of the differences in culture, technology and salvation history. To interpret the laws of the Old Testament, distil the principles, and make a modern day application, is not a simple matter. Yet all the laws given by God have a continuing principle that has application to our lives. Understanding and holding this position keeps us from the two extremes outlined above – that of completely ignoring the laws of the Old Testament and that of assuming that they continue on in exhaustive detail. We are called to love God and our neighbour as defined and described by the law of God in the Scriptures.

THE THREE USES OF THE LAW

Having described the content of God’s law we should also consider the application of this law to ourselves. Here it is helpful to think about what has been described as the ‘three uses’ of God’s law. One purpose or ‘use’ of the law is to *restrain sin* in civil society. In this way the law acts like a bridle on a horse, guiding it in a certain direction and keeping it from galloping out of control. The police force is an example of this restraining influence. Where the police force is efficient and respected

lawlessness is curbed. If, however, the police force is corrupt or weak lawlessness will be free to increase.

The law also functions as a *mirror for sin*. Just as a mirror shows us the flaws in our appearance so too the law of God shows us the sins and failings of our lives. This is clearly explained in Paul's letter to the Romans; "Now we know that whatever the law says it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:19-20). In his law God requires that we be perfect; "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Sin is the failure to live a perfect life; it is a transgression of God's commandment; it is disobedience to God's law. Jesus told us that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind; correspondingly, to fail to love God in this way is "the first and greatest delinquency."⁴⁴³ God does not treat us as robots or toys but as responsible beings. He holds us accountable for what we do and also for what we fail to do; for sins of commission and for sins of omission; for wilful sins and for those that are hidden. Sin must be seen against the brilliant background of God's holiness and purity. God is a holy God. He cannot and will not tolerate sin and evil. He calls his people to be holy as he is holy. David Wells emphasises the importance of God's holiness with these words;

The holiness of God is the very cornerstone of Christian faith, for it is the foundation of reality. Sin is defiance of God's holiness, the Cross is the outworking and victory of God's holiness, and faith is the recognition of God's holiness. Knowing that God is holy is therefore the key to knowing life as it truly is, knowing Christ as he truly is, knowing why he came, and knowing what the end will be.⁴⁴⁴

It is because God is holy that he will bring about a final judgement. Then God will finally balance the scales of good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice. Then each person will receive what is due

to him for the deeds he has done, whether good or bad. Every individual in the world must face this final reckoning; “It is appointed for a man to die once and then face the judgement” (Hebs 9:27). Those who have put their hope and trust in Christ Jesus do not need to fear the judgement because Jesus has died in their place, taken their punishment and given them his righteousness. Preachers of the gospel must preach the law of God so that the Holy Spirit might use this to bring people to recognise their sin and turn to God in repentance. The law must be preached as a mirror to show people their need of a saviour. To this end we must preach the holiness of God and the certainty of the judgement at the end of time. While these may not be popular themes they are essential to a proper understanding of our position before the Lord and of the issues of eternity.

A third function of the law is to *guide the believer in thankful living*. The law functions as a rule of gratitude.⁴⁴⁵ It directs the lives of believers as they seek to express their love for the Lord by living in obedience to his commands (John 14:15). Even the structure of the New Testament letters bears this out. For instance, Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus begins with a stirring explanation of all that God has done for the church in and through Christ (chapters 1-3). The following three chapters (4-6) apply this with detailed instructions on how to live our lives in response. Paul begins this section by saying; “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). Other letters of the New Testament follow a similar pattern. Faith must produce works. Doctrine must be put into practice. What we believe must be evident in what we do. Part of the task of preachers is to spell out the implications of the redeemed life. We need to outline the shape of Christian character. We need to explain how God’s people can express their thankfulness to the Lord in holy and godly living.

These three uses of the law give the preacher ample opportunities for explaining the relevance and application of God’s will to our lives: as a bridle to restrain lawlessness, as a mirror to show us our sin, and as a rule of gratitude for the believer.

A LOVE FOR GOD'S LAW

Careful explanation and application of the law will enable people to see the law positively rather than negatively. Unfortunately, too many people, even Christians, view the law with disapproval. Rather than eagerly embracing the law of God they hold it at arms length, not wanting to study or follow its requirements too closely. This was not the attitude of the man who wrote Psalm 119. He loved the law of the Lord. In this psalm he reflected on what the law meant to him. He expressed his appreciation for God's commands, his delight in God's decrees and his longing for God's laws. He resolved to meditate on God's precepts, to choose the way of truth, to set his heart on God's laws and to walk in his ways. Here is a rich and varied devotional meditation of the riches of God's Word. This lengthy psalm encourages us to see the law of God positively; his attitude to God's commands are an example to us.

This love for God's law is evident in the lives of many of God's people. It was said of Ezra that; "He was a teacher well versed in the law of Moses.... For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and law in Israel" (Ezra 7:6,10). King David wrote a psalm about the perfection of God's law (Psalm 19:7-11) describing its many benefits. The Apostle Paul described the law as "spiritual" and said that he delighted in it in his inner being (Romans 7:14, 22). Preachers of the gospel need to encourage this same loving delight in God's law that is evident in the psalms and in the lives of God's people.

TEACHERS OF GOD'S LAW

Just as the priests of the Old Testament, like Ezra, were to be teachers of God's law, pastors today are to continue this task. Only through the regular reading, preaching and teaching of God's law can we hope to see Christians strengthened to resist the relativism of our day. Only

through these means can we offer a credible alternative to the moral morass in our society. This means that pastors themselves need to be convinced of the validity of God's law, understand its various functions, and be able to apply it to our contemporary situation.

There is immense value in pastors encouraging parents to teach God's law to their children and instructing them in how to do this. The law of God ought to be taught in Christian homes. It is the home that functions as the basic education centre for teaching Christian values. This is the underlying assumption of the book of Proverbs. Solomon assumes that instruction, nurture and education all take place in the context of the family first of all. The exhortation, "Listen my son to a father's instruction", sums up the attitude and emphasis of this important book of the Bible (Proverbs 4:1). Our aim as parents, however, is not to enforce an outward conformity to God's law, but rather to see willing and heartfelt obedience. Children ought not to keep the law of God out of fear or social constraint, but rather out of a genuine desire to please the Lord. Our aim as parents is to see a glad obedience that arises out of a changed and open heart.⁴⁴⁶

This is also the aim of pastors and elders in churches. Obedience ought not to be forced or conscripted but rather be a cheerful and thankful response to all that God has done for us. Conformity to God's law must arise out of a grateful heart. Submission to his will must flow out of genuine love for the Lord. Obedience like this will be a good testimony to a society being swept away by the outgoing tide of relativism and may be used by the Lord to bring New Zealand to a sound Christian base for moral thinking and action.

Chapter 6

PREACH CONTENTMENT AND HOPE IN CHRIST

CONTENTMENT IN SOCIETY

Consumerism and materialism have become a way of life in our western culture. There is a great emphasis on getting and gaining, on having and holding. People are sold the idea that obtaining more things is the means to happiness, fulfilment and satisfaction. Millions of dollars are poured into advertisements to maintain this illusion. The ad-makers are the “hidden persuaders” of this time, urging us to buy the things we don’t need to impress the people we don’t like. ‘Keeping up with the Joneses’ has become such an accepted part of our culture that we hardly think about it any more.

The Bible has a lot to say in response to this. Some people think of the Bible as being ‘other-worldly’ – yet it is a book that has a great deal to say about money and our attitude to possessions. One of the people of Old Testament times most qualified to speak about the use of money and wealth was Solomon. He was supremely wealthy. We are told that “the weight of gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents” (1 Kings 10:14) – the equivalent of 23 tons. There was so much silver available in Israel at that time they didn’t measure it and considered it to be of little value (1 Kings 10:21). In addition to his sheer monetary value he also built a splendid temple, overlaid much of it with gold, constructed a large palace, sailed a fleet of trading ships, imported and exported a huge range of goods and received expensive and rare gifts from people all over the known world. He described his wealth, activities and projects in the book of Ecclesiastes telling his readers; “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labour” (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Having enjoyed such vast wealth and the

benefits of great riches Solomon then went on to offer a sobering perspective on all this; “Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun” (verse 11). He came to the realisation that wealth in itself does not make a person happy. We have seen enough illustrations of this amongst the ‘stars’ of Hollywood to know the truth of this statement. Solomon realised that he could work his whole life and amass vast amounts of wealth, but in the end he had to leave it to the one who would come after him; “And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?” (Ecclesiastes 2:19).⁴⁴⁷ The man after him could waste all his hard-earned gain in frivolous and foolish spending. So there was nothing to be gained in great wealth. He asked; “What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labours under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23). After enjoying the benefits of wealth and reflecting on his experiences in life Solomon came to the conclusion that work and wealth were satisfying when seen as a gift from God and when enjoyed in a relationship with him. Here is his conclusion; “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or drink or find enjoyment” (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25).

The book of Proverbs summarises some of these insights on wealth in brief, pithy statements that pass on the wisdom gained from observing life in the light of God’s Word. One of the “Sayings of the Wise” reads:

Do not wear yourself out to get rich;
have the wisdom to show restraint.
Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone,
for they will surely sprout wings
and fly off to the sky like an eagle. (Proverbs 23:4-5)

In the “Sayings of Agur” we read the following prayer;

give me neither poverty nor riches
but give me only my daily bread.
otherwise, I may have too much and disown you
and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’
Or I may become poor and steal,
and so dishonour the name of my God. (Proverbs 30:8-9)

Proverbs like these are good passages to preach in our consumer-driven society. Preachers today would do well to advise restraint and moderation in the accumulation of possessions.

The gospels amplify God’s revelation on the subject of money and wealth by urging us to use our wealth wisely. Jesus warned his hearers against storing up “treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). Many of the parables of the Lord address our attitude to money and wealth. The parable of the rich fool warns against storing up things for ourselves rather than being “rich toward God” (Luke 12:16-21). The parable about the shrewd manager was told to encourage us to invest our worldly wealth so as to help those who are in need; these “friends” will one day welcome us into “eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:1-9). In the story about the rich man and Lazarus Jesus contrasts the rich man who lived in luxury and had no regard for the poor with a beggar named Lazarus who was lying at the rich man’s gate (Luke 16:19-31). Part of the implied condemnation of the rich man is that he had no compassion on Lazarus. The parables of the faithful and wise servant (Matthew 24:45-51), of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-36) and of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) all direct us to make good use of the talents, abilities, money and the opportunities the Lord gives to us and remind us that we will be called to account for how we have

used these things. Preaching through parables such as these gives us opportunity to make many helpful applications as to how people ought to use the time and money the Lord has given to them.

In the letters of the New Testament there are further instructions about using our wealth. Where God has blessed people materially they are urged to be generous with what God has given to them;

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant or to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-18).

In the same letter the Apostle Paul describes the benefit of contentment and the danger of the love of money;

Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

It is not easy to be content with what we have. Advertising has influenced us in subtle ways to create the ‘new poor’ – the people who live in a plain three bedroom home, who run an old Victa lawnmower, who have a previous generation computer, who are wearing last year’s fashion. In the face of a barrage of clever advertising it is difficult to resist the temptation to covet the latest Toyota, the new microwave, this season’s clothing, that leather lounge suite. If we fall for this temptation we will become restless, disgruntled and dissatisfied. We will end up unhappy and ungrateful. Christians today need to learn what the Apostle Paul had discovered;

for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through him who gives me the strength. (Philippians 4:11-13).

To learn this contentment we need to remind ourselves and our listeners that God will provide for all our needs. And we need to learn to be content with God himself. This truth is expressed in the Psalms; “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My heart and my flesh may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26). The writer of Hebrews directs us to contentment with the Lord himself when he writes; “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5). True contentment comes as we seek God so much that everything else seems unimportant in comparison; all else fades into the background because we are seeking first, “his kingdom and his righteousness”, trusting that all these things will be given to us as well (Matthew 6:33). Again an exposition of these passages would be most useful to people living in our materialistic atmosphere. Preachers of the gospel can encourage people to resist the pressure to envy their neighbour’s goods and the temptation to covet their possessions.

CONTENTMENT IN THE CHURCH

It is vitally important that preachers have a biblical perspective on these matters because the church itself has been influenced by a ‘consumer’ mentality. Some have tried to win people to Christ by telling them how Jesus can meet all their needs. Still others have tried to make the gospel appealing by emphasising the ‘fulfilment’ that God offers to Christians. These approaches reflect, to a greater or lesser degree, attempts to

market the gospel. There are, however, problems with these methods.

The approach that emphasises people's needs often ignores the deepest need that people have – to be in a right relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. People's needs are limitless, especially in our affluent consumer society where 'greeds' are confused with 'needs'. Sometimes these needs provide us with a way into the lives of people, allowing us to lead them to the deeper and larger issues of life. As pastors we need to realise that we are not just another helping profession, like doctors and lawyers. Our task is not to help people get out of their problems as an end in itself, but rather to point them to God in the midst of their problems. Our aim is not to help them be a little less miserable but rather to orientate them towards God. To do this requires a great deal of concentration. We must ruthlessly eliminate all the tasks that are distractions away from this and concentrate our time and energy on preaching, teaching and pastoring the people of the church to live in the presence of God and in the light of his Word. Our primary concern, then, is that people hear the truth about God. "Failing at that, the pastoral ministry is doomed to the petty concerns of helping people feel a bit better rather than inviting them to dramatic conversion."⁴⁴⁸ People's greatest need is the conversion of their lives – that they turn from being absorbed with selfishness and self-interest and turn to live selflessly for the Lord. Our task is to direct them to this Lord who calls for a wholehearted and total commitment of life.

The faithful pastor is the one who helps people look past their own surface needs to the deepest need in their life. People may come to church for all sorts of reasons: They may come because they want to meet others rather than be home alone; or they may come to find help for a failing marriage; or for advice in dealing with troublesome teenagers; or to break a bad habit. Whatever the motivation the pastor can help them to look beyond these real but secondary needs, to their primary need to be reconciled with God through Christ. They are in church because God, in his wise and powerful providence, has led them there so that they might be saved by him.⁴⁴⁹ They must be helped to realise their real need before a Holy God and, through Christ, come

to know him.

The approach that promises all Christians a ‘fulfilling’ life can also be misleading. Pritchard offers a helpful critique of this approach as it is practised by Willow Creek.⁴⁵⁰ He notes that there are verses in the Bible, especially in Proverbs, that speak of the positive effects of serving the Lord. Yet there are also passages in the Scriptures that warn us that Christianity will not always be fulfilling. Jesus warned his disciples; “In the world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). They could “take heart” because he had “overcome the world”, but that would not take away the fact that they would experience difficulty. Often in his letters the Apostle Paul wrote of the troubles he had been through (2 Corinthians 1:8-9, 4:8-12, 16-18, 12:7-10, Philippians 1:12-14). He knew that his readers had also experienced trouble and that God had comforted them in it (2 Corinthians 1:1-7). He warned Timothy that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). The writer of Hebrews described the persecution and suffering of God’s people in times past (Hebrews 11:35-39) and urged his readers to “endure hardship as discipline” because God was treating them as sons (Hebrews 12:7). In the letters to the churches in Revelation the Lord warned the church in Smyrna, and the church of Christ of all ages and places, that some believers would be imprisoned and persecuted and urged them to “be faithful, even to the point of death,” encouraging them with the promise, “and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). All these verses warn us that following Christ will often involve cross-bearing. Pritchard comments;

To argue for Christianity primarily by pointing to its usefulness in satisfying needs is ultimately to undercut it. To teach Christianity as a means eventually teaches that it is superfluous. If someone is able to satisfy their felt needs without Christ, the message of Christianity can be discarded.... Fulfilment theology has an inadequate understanding of the biblical truth about the fallenness of the world and the role of suffering in the Christian life.⁴⁵¹

Approaches that seek to ‘market’ the gospel by emphasising its benefits and appealing to the needs of the ‘consumers’ run the grave danger of watering down the truth of the Bible. Preachers following this method will be tempted to blunt the sharp edges of the Bible, to soften the hard truth and to down-play the demands placed on followers of Jesus. They may shy away from urging people to “count the cost” before submitting to Jesus. They may hesitate to talk about the “narrow way” that leads to life, or fail to warn people of the persecution that may well come to believers. When the Scriptures speak about communicating the gospel they describe it as truth that needs to be “proclaimed” to needy and selfish individuals, not as a message to be ‘marketed’ to the needs of consumers. We would do well to stay with the biblical method. For the Holy Spirit, in and through the Scriptures, is pointing people beyond the trials and troubles of this world to the better world that is yet to come. Preachers of the gospel, therefore, must also preach its hope.

THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL

People in the western world are pre-occupied with the here and now. Despite the increasing interest in the supernatural the vision of most people extends only as far as the material things of the present and to the borders of this life. Christians too have been profoundly influenced by the world view around us that teaches us to expect happiness and fulfilment today. We, along with the rest of society, have come to regard this as our right. “We’ve recast Christianity into a mould that puts happiness above holiness, blessings here above blessings in heaven, health and wealth as God’s best gifts and death as the supreme disaster.”⁴⁵² The message of the Bible, however, is that we are not here to live for the moment nor to please ourselves. Rather we are here to “glorify God and enjoy him forever”.⁴⁵³ The Scriptures point us beyond this world to the world to come. Our hope does not lie in what we can gather around us in this life, but in what God will give

us in the life beyond this one. The supreme goal is heaven; this world is not an end in itself but is a preparation for the inheritance waiting for us. We are to look beyond this life to the eternal future God has promised to all believers. This is the Christian hope spoken of in the Bible.

Hope is one aspect of the famous triad of faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13). As believers we look forward in hope to the return of the Lord Jesus and the final consummation of His kingdom. We are painfully aware that all is not right in this present world, but we know there is a better world coming. The Apostle Paul describes our present suffering and our future expectation in these famous words of Romans chapter 8;

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved (Romans 8:22-24).

By its definition hope is looking forward; “Hope that is seen is no hope at all” (Romans 8:24). Christians, however, have not yet received their final inheritance and so they are still looking ahead.

Without this expectation for the future our faith would be useless. The Apostle Paul makes this point very clearly when writing to the church in Corinth. Under the influence of Greek philosophy some of the Christians had difficulty believing in the resurrection of the dead. Paul pointed out the logical necessity of a future resurrection by basing it in the resurrection of Christ. He explained that the physical resurrection of Jesus is the absolute foundation of the Christian faith. If Jesus has not been raised from the dead certain things must follow:

Our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.... Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ Jesus are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than

all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1 Corinthians 15:14-20).

Without the resurrection of Jesus preaching would be pointless, our faith would be futile, the apostles would be liars and we would have no hope. By contrast, the resurrection of the Lord gives point to our preaching, purpose to our faith, confirms the testimony of the apostles and guarantees our hope. The hope of a future resurrection is absolutely essential to the Christian faith. This hope is squarely based on the historical event of the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ whom God raised from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus was raised, so too believers will be raised to live with the Triune God in the glory of heaven.

Believers look forward to heaven. Sometimes we do not look forward to it as much as we might because our view of life in the hereafter is too misty and vague – we picture it as soft clouds, golden harps and beautiful choirs. Yet the biblical descriptions of the future describe a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1).⁴⁵⁴ It is likely that heaven will be a lot more like this earth than we usually imagine it to be; except that it will be this earth thoroughly renewed. Anthony Hoekema notes that “to leave the new earth out of consideration when we think of the final state of believers is greatly to impoverish biblical teaching about the life to come.” He writes;

The Bible assures us that God will create a new earth on which we shall live to God’s praise in glorified, resurrected bodies. On that new earth, therefore, we hope to spend eternity, enjoying its beauties, exploring its resources, and using its treasures to the glory of God. Since God will make the new earth his dwelling place, and since where God dwells there heaven is, we shall then continue to be in heaven while we are on the new earth. For heaven and earth will then no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be one (see Revelation 21:1-3).⁴⁵⁵

Jeffrey Burton Russell corrects mistaken ideas about heaven when he says; Heaven is “not dull; it is not static; it is not monochrome. It is an endless dynamic of joy.”⁴⁵⁶ Or as another writer puts it;

Heaven is destination and reward, succour and relief from earthly trials. It is reunion with those we love, forever, as we loved them. It is our real home, our permanent address, our own true country. It is the New Jerusalem and Paradise Regained, the community of Saints and the eternal Eucharist; everlasting Easter and a million Christmases. It is an end to death's sting; it is the eternal, ongoing, ever growing experience of God. It is the ecstatic dream of St John: Holy, holy, holy.⁴⁵⁷

To describe the happiness of heaven the biblical writers use the pictures and language of this earth. The prophets of the Old Testament pictured a richly productive earth, the desert blossoming like a rose, the ploughman overtaking the reaper and the mountains producing sweet wine. To aid our appreciation of heaven God tells us that; "There will be no more mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4). This is what we would expect in a world where God is "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

All that happens in heaven centres on God and his throne. When the Apostle John was given a description of the glory of heaven his opening vision was of "a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it" (Revelation 4:2). This throne is full of majesty and glory and the one seated on it is the object of worship by all the people and creatures of heaven. In her book, *Heaven, Your Real Home*, Joni Eareckson Tada gives us a thoroughly God-centred picture of what heaven will be like; "Most of all, together we shall fall on our faces at the foot of the throne and worship our Saviour forever". She also encourages us with the blessings that will be ours; "Together, we shall receive the morning star and be crowned with life, righteousness and glory."⁴⁵⁸

Christian hope must be centred on the coming of the Lord Jesus, the resurrection of the dead and the new heaven and earth that will follow. Preachers of the gospel do not help believers or unbelievers by speculating on the details of exactly what will happen before Jesus returns, nor by attempting to set dates and predict the time of Jesus coming (the very thing Jesus warned us against doing). We would do well to avoid the temptation of attempting to pry into matters God has not revealed to us and instead, follow the main lines and clear events

of our future expectation.

It is vitally important that we not only help our listeners to understand the past but that we also point them towards the future. This doctrine of Christ's return is crucial because we only understand the present in the light of the past and the future. We will only appreciate the full story of what God is doing when we come to the end. At present we only have a partial view; then we will have the full perspective. So we live in the present in the light of the future; we live in the hope of what is to come. The Bible teaches us that the Triune God is guiding all of history and is using the church to spread the gospel so as to prepare people for Christ's second coming. Life is not merely "a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."⁴⁵⁹ History is not cyclical as the Greeks believed, nor is it pre-determined by the unseen hand of fate. Rather, it is the record of how God is guiding all people and all events in this world for his overall purposes. Theologians describe this as God's providence: By this, "We believe that the same good God, after he had created all things, did not forsake them or give them up to fortune or chance, but that he rules and governs them according to his holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without his appointment."⁴⁶⁰ The history of God's work in the world has a beginning, in creation; a mid-point, in the birth of Christ; and an end, in his coming again. History is going somewhere; it has a goal; it is moving to a grand finale. Preachers of the Word have the great privilege of proclaiming the victorious work of the Lord Jesus Christ in the assurance that God will bring history to a triumphant conclusion in the second coming of our Lord.

CONCLUSION

My concern in writing this book is to build confidence in preaching as the primary, although by no means the only instrument God uses to build his church. Certainly the church in New Zealand, at this present time, needs to be built up. On the one hand, the evangelical church in this country has had an anti-intellectual attitude that has tended towards revivalism, pietism and a devotional strain of Christianity. This has also made it more open to the influence of the charismatic movement which has put more emphasis on experience than on theological thinking. On the other hand, the intellectual part of the church in New Zealand has tended towards liberalism which has weakened the church by removing the biblical and living heart out of the Christian faith.

Preachers ought to be building up the church, but preaching in New Zealand is in bad shape today. People tend to get more excited about 'prophecy' and visions than they do about expository sermons. Too often this is because the preacher has not studied the passage carefully and so his sermon is shallow and lacking application. However, both pastor Murray Robertson and Bishop Derek Eaton, speaking from very different denominational backgrounds, have noted that people will show up for good expository preaching. "Some means will grow the church faster", Bishop Eaton commented, "but nothing will grow the church more solidly than good expository preaching."⁴⁶¹ Preaching is like the shop window of the church; it is the face the church presents at weddings, funerals and at the services on Sundays. This being so, preachers need to aim for sermons that have quality and substance rather than sermons that are merely froth and bubble.

Sound expository sermons must then be applied to the situation in which we live. As preachers we are called to apply the truth of God's Word to the people around us. This requires an understanding of the Word of God and of our present world. If we as preachers are going to help others to find and follow the truth we must be carefully exegeting

the Scriptures and reading widely about the world we live in.

This is not an easy task, especially with all the pressures and distractions around us as ministers. Yet we can take heart from the immense benefits of good preaching. Such preaching will build believers to maturity in Christ and will also reach the lost. Both of these are important goals for preachers. God has given “some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13). The great goal of our work as pastors is to bring people to spiritual maturity in Christ. Preaching is a primary, God-ordained means of bringing this about, and is also a very efficient method. The pastor has most of his contact with most of his people via the pulpit. Even this makes it worth investing the time and mental energy into sermon preparation.

Furthermore, preaching is a primary means of reaching the lost. The Apostle Paul asks; “How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ...Consequently, faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:14-17). This is not to deny that most of the initial contacts in evangelistic work are made through the individual witness of Christians to those around them. But the Apostle Paul recognises the central role of preaching in bringing people to saving faith in Christ. We need to recognise this in our own day and give ourselves to this great task of heralding the good news of God’s salvation in Christ Jesus.

As we go about this double task of building up believers and reaching those who do not believe, we can take some instruction from John Bunyan’s picture of the pastor; “...as you see him with his eyes looking up toward heaven, the best of books in his hand, and the law of truth written on his lips, this is to show you that his work is to know and unfold dark things to sinners... as you see him stand as if he pleaded with men...”⁴⁶² To “plead with men” you need to “...devote

yourselves to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Timothy 4:13). We do this, confident of God’s promise regarding the Word that goes out from his mouth;

It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:11).

We do this expecting that “all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God” (Isaiah 52:10) for his ultimate honour.

How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
Who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
“Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7).

It is our task to proclaim peace; to bring good tidings; to announce salvation; to declare; “God reigns!”

APPENDIX

Appendix

THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

DIRECTORY FOR THE
PUBLICK WORSHIP OF GOD

OF THE PREACHING OF THE WORD

Preaching of the word, being the power of God unto salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the ministry of the gospel, should be so performed, that the workman need not be ashamed, but may save himself, and those that hear him.

It is presupposed (according to the rules for ordination), that the minister of Christ is in some good measure gifted for so weighty a service, by his skill in the original languages, and in such arts and sciences as are handmaid unto divinity; by his knowledge in the whole body of theology, but most of all in the holy scriptures, having his senses and heart exercised in them above the common sort of believers; and by the illumination of God's Spirit, and other gifts of edification, which (together with reading and studying of the word) he ought still to seek by prayer, and an humble heart, resolving to admit and receive any truthes not yet attained, whenever God shall make it known unto him. All which he is to make use of, and improve, in his private preparations, before he deliver in publick what he hath provided.

Ordinarily, the subject of his sermon is to be some text of scripture, holding forth some principle or head of religion, or suitable to some special occasion emergent; or he may go on in some chapter, psalm, or book of the holy scripture, as he shall see fit.

Let the introduction to his text be brief and perspicuous, drawn from the text itself, or context, or some parallel place, or general sentence of scripture.

If the text be long (as in histories or parables it sometimes must be), let him give a brief sum of it; if short, a paraphrase thereof, if need be: in both, looking diligently to the scope of the text, and pointing at the chief heads and grounds of doctrine which he is to raise from it.

In analysing and dividing his text, he is to regard more the order of matter than of words; and neither to burden the memory of the hearers in the beginning with too many members of division, not to trouble their minds with obscure terms of art.

In raising doctrines from the text, his care ought to be, *First*, That the matter be the truth of God. *Secondly*, That it be a truth contained in or grounded on that text, that the hearers may discern how God teacheth it from thence. *Thirdly*, That he chiefly insist upon those doctrines which are principally intended, and make most for the edification of the hearers.

The doctrine is to be expressed in plain terms; or, if any thing in it need explication, it is to be opened, and the consequence also from the text cleared. The parallel places of scripture, confirming the doctrine, are rather to be plain and pertinent, than many, and (if need be) somewhat insisted upon, and applied to the purpose in hand.

The arguments or reasons are to be solid, and, as much as may be, convincing. The illustrations, of what kind soever, ought to be full of light, and such as may convey the truth into the hearer's heart with spiritual delight.

If any doubt obvious from Scripture, reason, or prejudice of the hearers, seem to arise, it is very requisite to remove it, by reconciling

the seeming differences, answering the reasons, and discovering and taking away the causes of prejudice and mistake. Otherwise it is not fit to detain the hearers with propounding or answering vain or wicked cavils, which, as they are endless, so the propounding and answering of them doth more hinder than promote edification.

He is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers: which albeit it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant; yet he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that, if any unbeliever or ignorant person be present, he may have the secrets of his heart made manifest, and give glory to God.

In the use of instruction or information in the knowledge of some truth, which is a consequence from his doctrine, he may (when convenient) confirm it by a few firm arguments from the text in hand, and other places of scripture, or from the nature of that commonplace in divinity, whereof that truth is a branch.

In confutation of false doctrines, he is neither to raise an old heresy from the grave, nor to mention a blasphemous opinion unnecessarily: but, if the people be in danger of an error, he is to confute it soundly, and endeavour to satisfy their judgments and consciences against all objections.

In exhorting to duties, he is, as he seeth cause, to teach also the means that help to the performance of them.

In dehortation, reprehension, and publick admonition (which require special wisdom), let him, as there shall be cause, not only discover the

nature and greatness of the sin, with the misery attending it, but also show the danger his hearers are in to be overtaken and surprised by it, together with the remedies and best way to avoid it.

In applying comfort, whether general against all temptations, or particular against some special troubles or terrors, he is carefully to answer such objections as a troubled heart and afflicted spirit may suggest to the contrary.

It is also sometimes requisite to give some notes of trial (which is very profitable, especially when performed by able and experienced ministers, which circumspection and prudence, and the signs clearly grounded on the holy scripture), whereby the hearers may be able to examine themselves whether they have attained those graces, and performed those duties, to which he exhorteth, or be guilty of the sin reprehended, and in danger of the judgments threatened, or are such to whom the consolations propounded do belong; that accordingly they may be quickened and excited to duty, humbled for their wants and sins, affected with their danger, and strengthened with comfort, as their condition, upon examination, shall require.

And, as he needeth not always to prosecute every doctrine which lies in his text, so is he wisely to make choice of such uses, as, by his residence and conversing with his flock, he findeth most needful and seasonable; and, amongst these, such as may most draw their souls to Christ, the fountain of light, holiness, and comfort.

This method is not prescribed as necessary for every man, or upon every text; but only recommended as being found by experience to be very much blessed of God, and very helpful for the people's understandings and memories.

But the servant of Christ, whatever his method be, is to perform his whole ministry:

1. Painfully, not doing the work of the Lord negligently.
2. Plainly, that the meanest may understand; delivering the truth not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect; abstaining also from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues, strange phrases, and cadences of sounds and words; sparingly citing sentences of ecclesiastical or other human writers, ancient or modern, be they never so elegant.
3. Faithfully, looking at the honour of Christ, the conversion, edification, and salvation of the people, not at his own gain or glory; keeping nothing back which may promote those holy ends, giving to every one his own portion, and bearing indifferent respect unto all, without neglecting the meanest, or sparing the greatest, in their sins.
4. Wisely, framing all his doctrines, exhortation, and especially his reproofs, in such a manner as may be most likely to prevail; showing all due respect to each man's person and place, and not mixing his own passion or bitterness.
5. Gravely, as becometh the word of God; shunning all such gesture, voice, and expressions, as may occasion the corruptions of men to despise him and his ministry.
6. With loving affection, that the people may see all coming from his godly zeal, and hearty desire to do them good. And,
7. As taught of God, and persuaded in his own heart, that all that he teacheth is the truth of Christ; and walking before his flock, as an example to them in it; earnestly, both in private and publick, recommending his labours to the blessing of God, and watchfully looking to himself, and the flock whereof the Lord hath made him overseer: So shall the doctrine of truth be preserved uncorrupt, many souls converted and built up, and himself receive manifold comforts of his labours, even in this life, and afterward the crown of glory laid up for him in the world to come.

Where there are more ministers in a congregation than one, and they of different gifts, each may more especially apply himself to doctrine or exhortation, according to the gift wherein he most excelleth, and as they shall agree between themselves.

NOTES

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. The title of a recent book by Brian Carrell, *Moving Between Times – Modernity and Postmodernity: A Christian View* (Auckland: The Deep Sight Trust, 1998).

PART I: Chapter 1 - The State of Preaching

2. Gordon Miller, *Reflections*, Issue 17, (September/October 2000).

3. A special feature enclosed with the 1997 Annual Report of the Baptist Union.

4. They wrote: “Good leaders are invariably effective communicators, and even in this day of high tech communication, good biblical preaching still seems to be God’s primary method of imparting truth, igniting passion and motivating the will to action.” Ibid.

5. John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p.7.

6. Craig A. Loscalzo, *Preaching Sermons that Connect: Effective Communication Through Identification* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), p.31.

7. Frank Colquhoun, *Christ’s Ambassadors: The Priority of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), pp.19-20.

PART I: Chapter 2 - Is Preaching Effective?

8. Klaas Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), p.3.

9. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, p.67.

10. Steve Brown, Haddon Robinson and William Willimon, *A Voice in the Wilderness: Clear Preaching in a Complicated World* (Portland: Multnomah, 1993), p.16.

11. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.88, 102.

12. Ibid., p.45.

13. Ibid., p.89.

14. Richard Zoglin, “The News Wars,” *Time* (21 October 1996), p.55.

15. G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), p.89.

16. Ibid., p.89.

17. Ibid., p.92.

18. Bill McNabb and Steven Mabry, *Teaching the Bible Creatively: How to Awaken Your Kids to Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p.13.

19. Ibid., p.11.

20. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, p.60.

21. Colquhoun, *Christ’s Ambassadors*, p.22.

22. Aristotle said that one of the three important elements in effective communica-

tion is *pathos* by which he meant passion and fervour. The other two were *logos* – the verbal content of the message, and *ethos* – the perceived character of the speaker. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), pp.25-26.

23. Gerhard Friedrich, “kerusein,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol.III, Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p.703.

24. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV i 5, IV iii 2, John T. McNeill, ed., *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol.XXI (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp.1019, 1055.

25. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Vol.2, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp.58, 59.

26. Pierre Ch. Marcel, *The Relevance of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1963), p.18.

27. “Heidelberg Catechism,” Question and Answer 67, in *Forms and Confessions of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand* (Wellington: National Publishing Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, 1994), p.71.

28. J. I. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible* (Westchester: Cornerstone Books, 1980), p.84.

29. Colquhoun, *Christ’s Ambassadors*, p.12.

30. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), p.23.

31. Colquhoun, *Christ’s Ambassadors*, p.15.

32. D. Bentley Taylor, *Augustine: Wayward Genius* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), p.32.

33. M. Marshall, *The Restless Heart* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), p.110.

34. Allegorical interpretation occurs when a preacher jumps over the plain meaning of the text to a more ‘spiritual’ interpretation.

35. The cathedra was the seat from which Augustine preached while the people stood to listen.

36. Marshall, *The Restless Heart*, p.109.

37. Johannes Gutenberg developed the movable metal type printing press about 1445. The first complete book known to have been printed in the Christian world was the Bible in 1456.

38. Brian H. Edwards, *Shall we Dance?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1984), p.126.

39. Peter Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism* (Haywards Heath: Carey Publications, 1977), p.12.

40. This is not the place for an extended treatment of the Puritans and their preach-

ing. Readers wishing to do some more reading in this area would do well to read Lewis' book, *The Genius of Puritanism*; J. I. Packer, *A Quest For Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990); and Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth). Many of the writings of the Puritans have been republished by the Banner of Truth.

41. Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism*, p.20.
42. *Select Practical Writings of Robert Trail*, quoted in Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism*, pp.37, 39.
43. *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, D.D.*, 6 vols. Quoted in Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism*, p.36.
44. Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, with an introduction by J. I. Packer (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), p.9.
45. Packer, *A Quest For Godliness*, pp.44-45.
46. J. C. Ryle, *Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century* (1885. Reprinted in Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), p.28.
47. R. B. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids: The National Union of Christian Schools, 1951), p.356.
48. Ralph Turnball, *Jonathan Edwards: The Preacher*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), p.100.
49. *Ibid.*, quoting from *Works*, Vol.III, p.594.
50. Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), p.328.
51. B. Larson, *Wind and Fire* (Waco: Word Books, 1984), p.43.
52. Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), pp.190-192.
53. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, p.116.
54. Ronald G. Newton, "The Organ and the Organist in Reformed Worship, Part 1", *Faith in Focus*, Vol.24, No.2 (March 1998), p.6.
55. *The Westminster Confession of Faith in Forms and Confessions of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand*, (Wellington: National Publishing Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, 1994), chp.21.
56. *The Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed., s.v. "drama."
57. John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1996), p.94.
58. E.g. Isaiah's name (Isaiah 8:1-4); Jeremiah's waistband, yoke and field (Jer 13:1-7, 28:10, 32:7-14); Ezekiel's enactment of the siege of Jerusalem and the exile (Ezekiel 4:1-5:4, 21:1-7).
59. Edwards, *Shall we Dance*, pp.68-78.

60. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, p.111.

61. *Ibid.*, p.193.

62. Edwards, *Shall We Dance*, p.90.

PART I: Chapter 3 - Is Preaching Authoritative?

63. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible*, p.108.

64. *The Press* (Feb or March 1998).

65. Colquhoun, *Christ's Ambassadors*, pp.33-34.

66. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, p.52.

67. *Ibid.*

68. Loscalzo, *Preaching Sermons that Connect*, p.31.

69. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible*, p.135.

70. "Belgic Confession," Article V, cf. "Westminster Confession of Faith," Chapter I, in *Forms and Confessions of the Reformed Church of New Zealand*.

71. James Stewart, *Preaching* (London: English University Press, 1946), p.61.

72. *Ibid.*

73. "I am a Stranger Here," in *Trinity Hymnal* (Philadelphia: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1961), No.695.

74. Chapell, *Christ-centred Preaching*, pp. 28-29.

75. *Ibid.*, p.29.

76. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrims's Progress: An Outlined Study Manual with Accurate Text Revision by Barry E Horner* (North Brunswick: Horner, 1997), p.38.

77. Colquhoun, *Christ's Ambassadors*, p.40.

78. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p.29.

79. Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching*, p.88.

80. Stewart, *Preaching*, p.19.

81. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, p.24.

82. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p.18.

83. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (IV, xi, 1), p.1213.

84. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible*, p.86.

85. "The Ordination Service," *Book of Common Prayer*. Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

86. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp.9-10.

87. Chapell, *Christ Centred Preaching*, p.52.

88. *Ibid.*, p.53.

89. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, p.20.

90. *Ibid.*, p.33.

91. Colquhoun, *Christ's Ambassadors*, p.41.
92. This is one of G. A. Pritchard's key criticisms of Willow Creek's seeker services. He believes that in pursuing a topical approach Willow Creek has made too much use of psychological categories to explain the Bible. In a further criticism he believes that their emphasis on Christianity as a fulfilling way to live distorts the overall message of the Bible. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, Chp.17-18.
93. Stewart, *Preaching*, p.41.
94. Packer, *Beyond the Battle for the Bible*, p.79.
- PART I: Chapter 4 - Is Preaching Relevant?**
95. H. A. Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), p.81.
96. Colquhoun, *Christ's Ambassadors*, p.22.
97. Campbell Morgan, *Preaching* (London: Oliphants, 1964), p.11.
98. Marcel, *The Relevance of Preaching*, p.58.
99. Peter Berger, *Facing up to Modernity*, (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p.236.
100. M. Wilcock, *The Saviour of the World*, The Bible Speaks Today Series, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), p.196.
101. Morgan, *Preaching*, p.20.
102. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), pp.92-93.
103. Colquhoun, *Christ's Ambassadors*, p.90.
104. Loscalzo, *Preaching Sermons that Connect*, pp.21-22.
105. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, p.81.
106. *Ibid.*, p.88.
107. Loscalzo, *Preaching Sermons that Connect*, p.28.
108. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I vi.
109. Runia, *The Sermon Under Attack*, p.75.
110. Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), p.xii.
111. *Ibid.*
112. John Crawshaw and Wayne Kirkland, *New Zealand Made: Perspectives on Mission in Aotearoa* (Wellington: Signpost Communications, 1994), p.49.
113. Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What To Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), p.92.
114. Marcel, *The Relevance of Preaching*, p.59.
115. Brown *et al.*, *A Voice in the Wilderness*, pp.17, 116.
116. Morgan, *Preaching*, p.21.
117. Stewart, *Preaching*, p.111.
118. Stott, *A Preacher's Portrait*, p.28. Sometimes this has been described as

“contextualising” the gospel, although this term has so many different shades of meaning it is probably not particularly helpful.

119. Alister McGrath maintains that this is a classic approach: That we “identify what Scripture is saying, and apply it to new contexts” (McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, p.117.) Sidney Greidanus describes the necessity of keeping “two horizons” in view – the Biblical text must be taken seriously but the preacher will also take seriously the contemporary context and audience. (Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, p.137.) In my opinion the approach recommended by R. Middleton and B. Walsh is too open-ended; they reject a “blind submission to the text” which “treats Scripture (and God, its Author) as... a tyrannical authority to be imposed from the outside”. Instead they suggest a “faithful improvisation” which “does not mean blind submission to every text of Scripture, but the enactment of God’s redemptive purposes through discernment of the thrust of the entire metanarrative.” (Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), pp.185-6.) While it is true that we don’t have a script to follow word for word, we do have clear commands to obey and specific laws to put into practice.

120. Loscalzo, *Preaching Sermons that Connect*, p.86.

121. *Ibid.*, p.96.

122. Brown *et al.*, *A Voice in the Wilderness*, p.73.

123. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, p.277.

124. Crawshaw & Kirkland, *New Zealand Made*, p.22.

125. Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism*, p.47.

126. *Ibid.*, p.48.

127. David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). p.251.

PART II: Chapter 1 - A General Historical Overview

128. Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p.2.

129. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p.15.

130. Quoted in D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), p.552.

131. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.29.

132. Paganism and rationalism did not blend together well and there was an uneasy relationship between these two world-views in Greek society. This is illustrated in Socrates who rejected the mythological world-view arguing for one supreme God. He regarded the ‘gods’ as nothing more than the projection of human

vices. For his “atheism” he was forced to drink hemlock. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.29.

133. The gospels give us four accounts of the life of the Lord Jesus while the letters of the New Testament explain the significance of who he was and what he did. These writings form the basis of the New Testament church, being “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). The foundation of the church need only be laid once and so there has been no further need of apostles or prophets since the early church. The 66 books of the Bible form the complete revelation of God to his people giving us all we need to know for faith and life (2 Timothy 3:16-17), “unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, I vi). Cf. Luke 16:29-31, Revelation 22:18-19.

134. Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1987), pp.39-40.

135. The following two standard church history texts provide more detail for readers: Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 Volumes (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996); and Tim Dowley, ed., *Handbook to the History of Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

136. Brian Carrell, “Understanding our Western World Today, Part 2: The Church Beyond Christendom,” *Affirm*, Vol.5, No.1 (Autumn 1997), p.28.

137. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.31.

138. Quoted by Roberts, *To all Generations*, (Grand Rapids: Bible Way, 1981), p.138.

139. A number of writers date the modern period as the precise 200 year span between 1789 and 1989, that is, between the French Revolution and the collapse of Communism. However, the ideas that lay behind and define the modern period were in full sway before 1789. The French Revolution was the political manifestation of philosophies that had already taken hold in people’s minds.

140. Descartes’ leading work was *Discourse on Method*, published in 1637. Later we will take up the implications of his statement for the epistemology of the modern period.

141. Allen, *Christian Belief in a Post Modern World*, p.2, quoting from E. E. Evan Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, (Oxford; At the Clarendon Press, 1965), p.100.

142. The most consistent attempt to apply the rationalistic ideal is seen in Marxism. Believing that religion was the “opiate of the people” Marxists sought to eliminate religion with a vengeance. They replaced individualism with an enforced collectivism by abolishing private property and either oppressing or eliminating

property owning classes and native cultures.

143. Someone has observed; "Those who marry themselves to the ideas of this generation become widows in the next." This has certainly been true of liberal theology. Liberalism has identified itself with each new movement in modern thought only to find itself left behind as the modern world has rapidly moved on. Examples of this include the liberal alliance with science, existentialism, marxism, feminism, the sexual revolution and psychoanalysis.

144. Hauerwas & Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p.50, quoting Alasdair MacIntyre, *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, (New York: Columbia Press, 1969), p.24.

145. Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, p.4.

146. Hauerwas & Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p.98.

147. Although we use the word 'revolutionaries' the American Constitution was a conservative document for its times. The separation of church and state helped to define the roles of the church and the state more clearly and ended some of the terrible atrocities associated with a blending of church and state (e.g. seventeenth century England). The framers of the Constitution certainly did not envisage a secular state as is the case today.

148. Bruce Patrick, "Introduction: Envisioning Kiwi Church," *New Vision New Zealand*, Vol.II, Bruce Patrick, ed., (Auckland, Vision New Zealand, 1997), pp.25-26.

149. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis L. Okholm, *Christian Apologetics in a Postmodern World*, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), p.12.

150. Michael Novak, "Awakening from Nihilism," The Templeton Prize Address, *First Things* (Aug/Sep 1994), pp.18-19.

151. Hauerwas & Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p.50.

152. Thomas Oden, "The Death of Modernity," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, David S. Dockery, ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), pp.30-31.

153. Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, p.6.

154. *Ibid.*, p.17.

155. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.36.

156. James E. Miller, Myrtle J Jones and Helen McDonnell, eds., *Three Centuries of English Literature: 1625-1900*, (Glenview: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1973).

157. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.36.

158. Albert Camus, *The Plague*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1948), p.237.

159. *Ibid.*, p.136.

160. Mike Regele and Mark Schulz, *Death of the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p.88.

161. *Ibid.*

162. Murray Robertson, "NZ as a Mission Field: The Paradigm Shift," *The Vision New Zealand Congress 1993*, pp.46-48.

163. Brian Carrell, "Understanding our Western World Today, Part 2: The church beyond Christendom," *Affirm*, Vol.5, No.1, (Autumn 1997), p.28.

164. Oden, "The Death of Modernity," p.25.

165. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, p.103.

166. *Ibid.*, p.105.

167. Dockery, *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, p.11.

168. *Ibid.*, p.105.

169. Oden, "The Death of Modernity," p.26.

170. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, p.106.

PART II: Chapter 2 - The Influence of Christianity in New Zealand

171. Peter Lineham, *New Zealand Religious History*, Study Guide One, (Palmerston North: Massey University, Department of History, 1998), p.76.

172. Among the many books and articles describing this period is, William Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*, (London: Seely, Jackson and Halliday, 1867). This was reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1989.

173. Brian Carrell, "Understanding our Western World Today, Part 2: The church beyond Christendom," *Affirm*, Vol.5, No.1 (Autumn 1997), p.29.

174. Now 'secular' has come to mean non-religious. Some interpret 'secular' to refer to a non-religious education system but this is a misinterpretation of its original intent.

175. Allan K. Davidson and Peter J. Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity*, Third Edition (Palmerston North: Massey University Department of History, 1987), p.85.

176. Gordon Campbell, "Church v State", in the *Listener* (August 29, 1998), p.30.

177. Michael Blain, "Decade of Evangelism: The Secularisation of New Zealand Society" (Unpublished Paper), p.3.

178. W. P. Morrell, *The Anglican Church in New Zealand* (Dunedin: Anglican Church of the Province of New Zealand, 1973), p.26.

179. Michael Hill, "The Social Context Of New Zealand Religion: 'Straight' or 'Narrow'?" in *Religion and New Zealand's Future*, The Seventh Auckland Religious Studies Colloquium, Kevin J. Shape, ed., (Palmerston North, 1982), p.23.

180. Blain, "Decade of Evangelism: The Secularisation of New Zealand Society," p.4.

181. Cited in Davidson and Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity*, pp.95-96.

182. S. Eldred-Grigg, *A Southern Gentry*, (Wellington: Reed, 1980), pp.82-83.

183. *Ibid.*, p.81.

184. *Ibid.*, p.82.

185. Hill, "The Social Context of New Zealand Religion," p.24.

186. Davidson and Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity*, p.20.

187. *Ibid.*, p.65.

188. Neil N. Benfell, *Bishop Selwyn and New Zealand Education*, Occasional Papers No.1, (Waikato: Institute for Educational Research), p.5.
189. Morrell, *The Anglican Church in New Zealand*, pp.36-40.
190. *Ibid.*, p.117.
191. *Ibid.*, p.138, quoting from the *Church Gazette* (April 1911).
192. Hans Mol, "Religion and Churches," in *Tasman Relations, New Zealand and Australia: 1788-1988*, Keith Sinclair, ed. (Auckland: University Press, 1987), p.267. Statistics from Davidson and Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity*, p.177.
193. Lineham, *New Zealand Religious History*, Study Guide One, p.80.
194. Davidson and Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity*, p.110.
195. Quoted in John Dickson, *The History of New Zealand Presbyterian Church*, (Dunedin: New Zealand Bible, Tract and Book Society, 1899), p.297.
196. Rev. R. S. Miller, *The Evangelical Presbyterian*, Vol.XIV, p.737, quoted in G. I. Williamson, *Our Reformed Faith* (Auckland: 1965), p.30.
197. Allan Davidson writing in Dennis McEldowney, ed., *Presbyterians in Aotearoa (1840-1990)* (Wellington: The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1990), p.106.
198. *Ibid.*
199. P. B. Fraser was the minister at the Presbyterian Church at Lovell's Flat in the Clutha presbytery.
200. McEldowney, *Presbyterians in Aotearoa*, p.106.
201. *Outlook* (2 April 1966).
202. J. Veitch writing in McEldowney, *Presbyterians in Aotearoa*, p.154.
203. *Ibid.*, p.154.
204. Quoted from the Assembly speeches by G. I. Williamson, "I Saw It Happen," *Trowel and Sword* (December 1967), p.22.
205. *Ibid.*, p.154.
206. The music was composed by John Joseph Woods.
207. Brown, "Religion in New Zealand: Past, Present and Future," in *Religion and New Zealand's Future*, The Seventh Auckland Religious Studies Colloquium, Kevin J. Shape, ed., (Palmerston North, 1982), pp.15-22.
208. Brian Carrell, "Breaking through the Barriers to Faith Today," in Crawshaw & Kirkland, *New Zealand Made*, pp.65-66.
209. Patrick, *New Vision New Zealand*, Vol.II, p.23.
210. The motto of Medbury School in Christchurch.
211. Quoted by Brian Colless and Peter Donovan, eds., *Religion in New Zealand Society* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1980), p.27, from W. H. Oliver, *The Habit of Establishment*, Comment 12:4-5, 1962.
212. Carrell, "Breaking Through the Barriers of Faith Today," pp.68-69.
213. Murray Robertson speaking at the 1993 Vision New Zealand Congress.

214. Brown, "Religion in New Zealand", p.16.

215. This could be seen as another evidence of New Zealanders' lack of interest in religion. Ian Breward, "The Protestant Contribution," in *Religion in New Zealand Society*, pp.67-80.

PART II: Chapter 3 - The Secularism of NZ Society

216. Mol, "Religion and Churches," p.263.

217. Wells, *No Place for Truth*, p.80.

218. Ruth Smithies, "Gospel and Culture," in *The Vision NZ Congress*, Bruce Patrick, ed., (Auckland: Vision New Zealand, 1997), p.99.

219. Quoted by Blain, "Decade of Evangelism: The Secularisation of New Zealand Society," p.2.

220. Wells, *No Place for Truth*, p.87.

221. *Ibid.*, p.7.

222. Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), p.74. Chapter 4, "The Private-Zoo Factor," is an excellent discussion of privatisation. See also the insights of Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks – The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), pp.19-20.

223. *Ibid.*, p.81.

224. Alan J. Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p.46.

225. *Ibid.*, p.81, quoting Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p.449.

226. Hill, "The Social Context of New Zealand Religion," p.43.

227. A study in 1982 indicated that the average age for Presbyterian communicant members was 55 and for Methodists 55.1 with over two-thirds of the membership in both churches being female. Alan K Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa – A History of Church and Society in New Zealand* (Wellington: Education for Ministry, 1991), p.177.

228. Patrick, *New Vision New Zealand*, Vol II, pp.23-24.

229. Mol, "Religion and Churches," p.274.

230. Quoted in *New Vision New Zealand*, Vol II (1997), Bruce Patrick, ed., p.23.

231. Jane Simpson, "The forgotten role of religion in the drive for NZ women's rights," *The Press* (Monday, 19 September 1994), p.11.

232. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa*, p.176, quoting S. Crosbie, "Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?" in *The Dominion Sunday Times* (1 May, 1988).

233. Brian Carrell, "Addressing a Secular Society," *The Vision New Zealand Congress*, 1993, p.75.

234. Carrell, *Moving Between Times*, p.130.

235. Patrick, *New Vision New Zealand*, Vol II, p.21.
236. Julia Stuart and Mark Toomer, "Looking at the Media," in *New Vision New Zealand*, Vol II, p.301.
237. *Ibid.*, pp.294-295.
238. Carrell, *Moving Between Times*, p.19.
239. Quoted in *Envoy*, Vol.11, No.1 (March 1999), from *Evening Post* (12 March 1999), examining a submission by the Churches Broadcasting Commission to a parliamentary committee considering the Broadcasting Amendment Bill (No.2).
240. The Waikanae Declaration 1997, *The Vision NZ Congress 1997*, p.18.
241. Carrell, *Moving Between Times*, p.130.
242. Harold Turner, "The Gospel's Mission to Culture in New Zealand," in *New Zealand Made*, p.96.
243. Rosemary McLeod, "They're only doing it to offend," in *The Press* (26 March 1998).
244. "The Invasion Has Begun," *Time* (8 July 1996).
245. Hans Petrovic, Film Reviews, *The Press* (14 November 1998), p.35.
246. Paul Little, "Soul charge schools – Education with spirit," *Listener* (11 April 1998), p.7.
247. "Faith and Healing," *Time* (24 June 1996).
248. *Ibid.*
249. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.200.
250. quoted in *ibid.*, p.202.
251. Wells, *No Place for Truth*, p.263.
252. Turner, "The Gospel's Mission to Culture in New Zealand," p.93.
253. *The Press* (28 November 1995).
- PART II: Chapter 4 - Loss of Truth in NZ Society**
254. *Christian Research Journal*, Vol.19, No.2 (Fall 1996), p.35.
255. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be*, pp.32-33.
256. Regele, *Death of the Church*, p.63.
257. Stanley Grenz, "Star Trek and the Next Generation," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, p.92.
258. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, pp.60-64.
259. Grenz, "Star Trek and the Next Generation," p.95.
260. *Ibid.*
261. Regele, *Death of the Church*, p.66.
262. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.67.
263. *Ibid.*, p.70.
264. *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.
265. *Ibid.*, pp.71, 77.

266. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be*, p.147, quoting Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), p.183.

267. Philip Sampson, "The Rise of Postmodernity," in *Faith and Modernity*, Philip Sampson, Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden, eds., (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1994), p.37.

268. There is, of course, variation among postmodernists as to their epistemology. Some take a radical position and believe that there is no basis for truth – everything is relative. Others apply the rational methodology of modernity to the competing truth stories to see whether one surpasses the other "as a moral foundation and framework for positive human relationships." Regele, *Death of the Church*, p.78.

269. Gary Phillips, "Religious Pluralism in a Postmodern World," Dockery, ed., *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, p.255.

270. *Ibid.*, p.68.

271. Sampson, "The Rise of Postmodernity", p.37.

272. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, p.107, quoting Robert MacNeil, "Is Television Shortening our Attention Span?" *New York University Education Quarterly*, 14:2 (Winter, 1983) p.2.

273. *Ibid.*, p.108, quoting MacNeil, p.4.

274. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, p.79.

275. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than It Used To Be*, p.36.

276. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and The Future of Christianity*, p.103.

277. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat minds*, p.147.

278. Michael Novak, "Awakening From Nihilism," *First Things* (August/September 1994), p.20.

279. Brian Carrell, "Reaching out to the Ninety-Nine," *The 1995 Stubbs Memorial Sermon*.

280. "‘Ideologues’ capture NZ Education," *The Press* (1 December 1997), p.8.

281. Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.95.

282. *Ibid.*, p.112.

283. *Leadership* magazine is a popular journal designed for clergy that was launched by *Christianity Today* in 1980. *Ibid.*, pp.113-114.

284. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, p.59.

285. Four books worth reading on this subject are J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1956), Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Bromley: Marshall Pickering, 1967), Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, (Carlisle: Patternoster, 1985) and *The Practice of Godliness* (Singapore: NavPress, 1983).

286. Wells, *No Place for Truth*, p.4.
 287. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, p.38.
 288. *Ibid.*, p.23
 289. *Ibid.*, p.29.
 290. *Ibid.*, pp.32, 38.
 291. *Ibid.*, p.48.
 292. *The Press* (28 November 1996).
 293. Patrick, *New Vision New Zealand*, Vol.II, p.21.
 294. *The Press* (29 November 1996).
 295. *Salvation and Hope in the New Zealand of the 1990s*, Ephesus Series No.5 (Wellington: The Department of Communication, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand), p.22.
 296. *Ibid.*, p.23.
 297. Philip Matthews, "Searching for Jesus at Christmas" in *Listener* (25 December 1999), p.20.

PART II: Chapter 5 - Pluralism in NZ Society

298. Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.82.
 299. Guinness, *The Gravedigger File*, p.98.
 300. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.13. Carson describes this type of pluralism as 'empirical pluralism'.
 301. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, p.50.
 302. *Ibid.*, p.51.
 303. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be*, p.42.
 304. Regele, *Death of the Church*, pp.68-69.
 305. Guinness, *The Gravedigger File*, p.96.
 306. Matthews, "Searching for Jesus at Christmas," p.18.
 307. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, pp.18-19. Carson makes a further distinction between 'cherished pluralism' and 'philosophical pluralism'.
 308. Gary Phillips, "Religious Pluralism in a Postmodern World," Dockery, ed., *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, p.261.
 309. Paul Windsor, "Kiwi Kulture: Towards a Definition," in *New Zealand Made*, p.59.
 310. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, pp.195-196
 311. *Christian Research Journal*, p.36.
 312. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.32.
 313. Lance Morrow, "A Nation Of Finger Points," *Time* (12 August 1991), pp.15-16.
 314. Agnes-Mary Brooke, "Why do we let the barely couth set the standard for manners," *The Press* (4 June 1997), p.11.

315. D. A. Carson, *When Jesus Confronts the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), p.134.
316. Morrow, "A Nation Of Finger Pointers," p.15.
317. "Wrestling Over Right," *Time* (7 April, 1997), p.56.
318. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.180.
319. Josef Joffe, "The First Postmodern President", Essay, *Time* (14 October 1996), p.76.
320. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be*, p.13.
321. Regele, *Death of the Church*, p.80.
322. Guinness, *The Gravedigger File*, p.100.
323. *Ibid.*, p.106.
324. *Ibid.*, p.107.
325. Matthews, "Searching for Jesus at Christmas," p.18.
326. Gordon Miller, *Christian Leadership Letter*, Issue 143 (September/October 1996), World Vision of New Zealand.
327. Cited by Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, pp.52-53.
328. Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.9.
329. For an example of this see *ibid.*, footnote, p.263.
330. Blain, "The Secularisation of New Zealand Society," p.6.
- PART II: Chapter 6 - The Fragmentation of NZ Society**
331. Smithies, "Gospel and Culture," p.99.
332. Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation*, p.56.
333. Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.141.
334. "The News Wars," *Time* (21 October 1996), p.54.
335. Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and Its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900* (Auckland: University Press, 1989), pp.11-12.
336. Mike Riddell, "The Making of Kiwi Identity," in *Church and Society*, p.35, quoting Neil Darragh, "The Experience of Being Pakeha," (unpublished paper, May 1991), p.5.
337. Riddell, "The Making of Kiwi Identity," quoting from Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country, The Image of the Pakeha Male* (Auckland: Penguin, 1987).
338. Margo White, "Wizards of Id," *Listener* (30 May 1998), p.34.
339. Denis Welch, "The Manners Report," *Listener* (3 October 1998), p.34.
340. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.205.
341. Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.154.
342. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.404.
343. Jesse Birnbaum, "Crybabies: Eternal Victims," *Time* (12 August 1991), pp.16-17.
344. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.49.

345. Birnbaum, "Crybabies: Eternal Victims," p.17.
346. Yet we should remember that our Lord has called us to be faithful, not to be fulfilled. Final and complete fulfilment will come in heaven, not on earth. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, p.256. For a biblical perspective on the topic of fulfilment Pritchard directs readers to John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, iv, 6.
347. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.146.
348. Veith describes this as the "ghettoization of Christianity." *Ibid.*, p.148.
349. *Ibid.*, p.144.
350. *Ibid.*, p.188.
351. Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.82.
352. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.155.
353. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, p.120.
354. Mark Toomer, "Serving the Whole Church," *Christian News*, Issue 3 (December 1998), p.7.
355. Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.199.
356. Strobe Talbott, *Time* (20 July 1992), p.50.
357. Veith, *Postmodern Times*, p.145.
358. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Use To Be*, p.190.
- PART II: Chapter 7 - Relativism in NZ Society**
359. *Ibid.*, pp.65-67.
360. For further development of this point see Alasdair MacIntyre's books, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981) and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).
361. Regele, *Death of the Church*, pp.88-89.
362. Gordon McLaughlan, *New Zealand Herald* (12 November 1988), Section 2, p.3.
363. *The Press* (12 April 1997).
364. Paul Archbald, *Bulletin of the Reformed Church of Masterton* (27 April 1997).
365. Denis Welch, "Clever Devils," *Listener* (10 January 1998), p.32.
366. Bruce Ansley, "That Old-School Religion," *Listener* (11 April 1998), p.24.
367. Peter Luke, "A Question Of Responsibility," *The Press* (31 October 1998), p.11.
- PART II: Chapter 8 - Consumerism and Loss of Hope in NZ Society**
368. Carrell, *Moving Between Times*, p.108.
369. Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (London: Penguin, 1957).
370. Carrell, *Moving Between Times*, pp.108, 116.
371. Smithies, "Gospel and Culture," p.99.
372. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.463.

373. "Las Vegas, USA," *Time* (10 January 1994), p.40.
 374. *Ibid.*, p.41.
 375. *Ibid.*, p.45.
 376. Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be*, p.43, Quoting Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), p.138.
 377. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p.124.
 378. *Ibid.*, p.142.
 379. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, p.251.
 380. Health Ministry statistics, *Listener* (28 January 1995).
 381. David van Biema, "Does Heaven Exist?", *Time* (24 March 1997), p.47.

PART III: Introduction

382. Brian Smith, "Christianity: Learning a Second Language," *New Zealand Made*, p.48.
 383. Turner, "The Gospel's Mission to Culture in New Zealand," p.95
 384. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, p.20.
 385. Berger, *Facing up to Modernity*, pp.232-233.
 386. "New Zealand as a Mission Field: The Paradigm Shift," *The Vision New Zealand Congress*, 1993, p.53.
 387. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, p.150.
 388. Carrell, "Reaching out to the Ninety-Nine," *The 1995 Stubs Memorial Sermon*.
 389. Carrell, "Addressing a Secular Society," p.79.
 390. Bruce Patrick, Foreword, *The Vision New Zealand Congress*, 1993, p.7.

PART III: Chapter 1 - Preach the Reality of God

391. The title of a book by Francis Schaeffer (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).
 392. *True Spirituality* is the title of another book by Francis Schaeffer (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).
 393. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), p.53.
 394. R. C. Sproul, "The Object of Contemporary Relevance," in *Power Religion, The Selling out of the Evangelical Church*, Michael S. Horton, ed., (Praetoria: Moody Press, 1992), p.324.
 395. Peter Jensen, "The Teacher as Theologian in Theological Education," *Reformed Theological Review*, 50 (1991), p.83.
 396. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.489.
 397. John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), p.11.
 398. *Ibid.*, p.20.

399. Marva J. Dawn develops the implications of a God centred worship in her useful book, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

400. In Psalm 78:1-8 Asaph calls on the people of God to teach their children what God has done so that succeeding generations would come to know them; “Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.” (v.7).

401. Kuypers’ views on the sovereignty of God and the kingdom of Christ are developed in his fine book, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931).

402. Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, p.110.

PART III: Chapter 2 - Preach the Truth of the Bible

403. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.103.

404. Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of biblical interpretation. Three useful books to consult are: Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, (London: Scripture Union, 1993), Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, (Wheaton: Bridgepoint, 1994), and Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970).

405. Regele, *The Death of the Church*, p.205.

406. Wells, *No Place for Truth*, pp.259-260.

407. *Ibid.*, p.264.

408. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.132.

409. *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Question and Answer 21.

410. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.508.

411. *Ibid.*, p.509.

412. Those wishing to read a Biblical critique of these practices should consult Horton, *Power Religion*, chapters 3, 4, and 5; and John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996).

413. Berger, *Facing up to Modernity*, p.236.

414. *Ibid.*, p.237.

415. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p.149.

416. *Ibid.*, p.150.

417. Rick Gosnell, “Proclamation and the Postmodernist,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, p.386.

418. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.507.

419. The full statement reads as follows: “an endorsement of the classic framework curriculum (biblical studies, theology, church history) as long as it is done with a genuine mission orientation and in the context of a growing and authentic

personal spirituality complemented by a development in ministry/mission skills, particularly those associated with leadership.” “Consults – a summary of findings” (1998), p.15.

420. Ibid., p.12.

421. Ibid.

422. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.492.

423. James Emery White, “Evangelism in a Postmodern World,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, pp.365-366.

424. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), p.208.

425. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Early Years* (first published in 1897-1900; this edition, London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), p.388.

PART III: Chapter 3 - Preach the Uniqueness of Jesus as Lord

426. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.95, quoting from Max A. C. Warren, *I Believe in the Great Commission* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), pp.150-151.

427. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.276.

428. Ibid., p.279.

429. Wells writes: “The transition, then, from the way in which biblical authors thought about their world, with all its religious pluralism, to how we should think about ours, with all its competing religious claims, is shorter, less complex, and easier than it has been in centuries. Indeed, it involves no transition at all, despite our modernity, for religiously our world looks remarkably like theirs.” Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.264.

430. Ibid., p.263.

431. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.271.

432. Ibid., p.421.

433. Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.75.

434. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.422.

435. *The Belgic Confession*, Article 29.

436. Gordon Miller, *Christian Leadership Letter*, Issue 143 (September/October 1996).

PART III: Chapter 5 - Preach the Absolutes of God’s Law

437. Those wishing to consider further the challenges that pluralism offers to education should consult Carson, *The Gagging of God*, pp.389-397.

438. The most comprehensive explanation and defence of this position is by Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley: The Craig Press, 1979).

439. J. A. Haverland, “Theonomy: What Have We Learnt?” in *Trust and Obey*, D. G. Vanderpyl, ed., (Silverstream: National Publishing Committee, Reformed

Churches of New Zealand, 1994). p.476.

440. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, p.39.

441. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, IXX iv.

442. "Report on Theonomy" to the 1989 Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, *Acts of Synod*, Report 1, section 4-4.

443. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, p.209.

444. Wells, *No Place For Truth*, p.300.

445. The third part of the Heidelberg Catechism is entitled "Man's Gratitude". The opening question and answer of this section explain that a Christian must "do good because Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us, and so that he may be praised through us." Question and Answer 86.

446. Ted Tripp gives an excellent explanation of this in a fine book on raising children, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, (Wapwallopen: Shepherd Press, 1995).

PART III: Chapter 6 - Preach Contentment and Hope in Christ

447. This same point is expressed in Psalm 39:6, "Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it."

448. Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, p.123.

449. *Ibid.*, p.170.

450. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, pp.252-257.

451. *Ibid.*, p.256.

452. Gordon Miller, *Reflections Newsletter*, No.2 (Nov/Dec 1997; Auckland: World Vision).

453. The answer to the first question of the Westminster *Shorter Catechism*, "What is the chief end of man?"

454. "Heaven and earth" is a phrase describing the entire universe, just as the Psalms describe God as the "Maker of heaven and earth" meaning everything in all creation (Psalm 115:15, 121:2, 124:8).

455. Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p.274.

456. David van Biema, "Does Heaven Exist?" *Time* (24 March 1997), pp.47, 51.

457. *Ibid.*, pp.46-47.

458. *Ibid.*, p.51.

459. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*.

460. *The Belgic Confession*, Article 13.

CONCLUSION

461. A comment in a personal interview.

462. Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.40.

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FEED MY SHEEP

John A Haverland

This is a book about preaching, specifically written for the New Zealand context, but the analysis applies to other countries in our western world. Pastors will find this useful as it provides them with a theology of preaching and encourages them to devote themselves to this task. New Zealand Christians will also benefit from this book as it outlines some important features of our history as a nation and analyses key characteristics of our present society, illustrating these with historical and contemporary examples. The book provides many practical suggestions and applications for communicating the Christian faith in a post-modern New Zealand context.

Feed My Sheep is a plea for preaching - for sound, exegetical, expository preaching. It is also a plea for *relevant* preaching that explains where we have come from and where we are, and that applies the truth of God's Word to the situation around us today.

John A Haverland earned a BA from the University of Canterbury and has Theological degrees from the Reformed Theological College, Geelong; Calvin Theological Seminary, Michigan; and Westminster Theological Seminary, California. John grew up in Christchurch, has pastored a church in Auckland and is presently the pastor of the Reformed Church of Bishopdale in Christchurch. He has served as the editor of the magazine of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and has given occasional lectures at the Bible College of New Zealand in Christchurch. John is married to Harriet and they have four children.

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