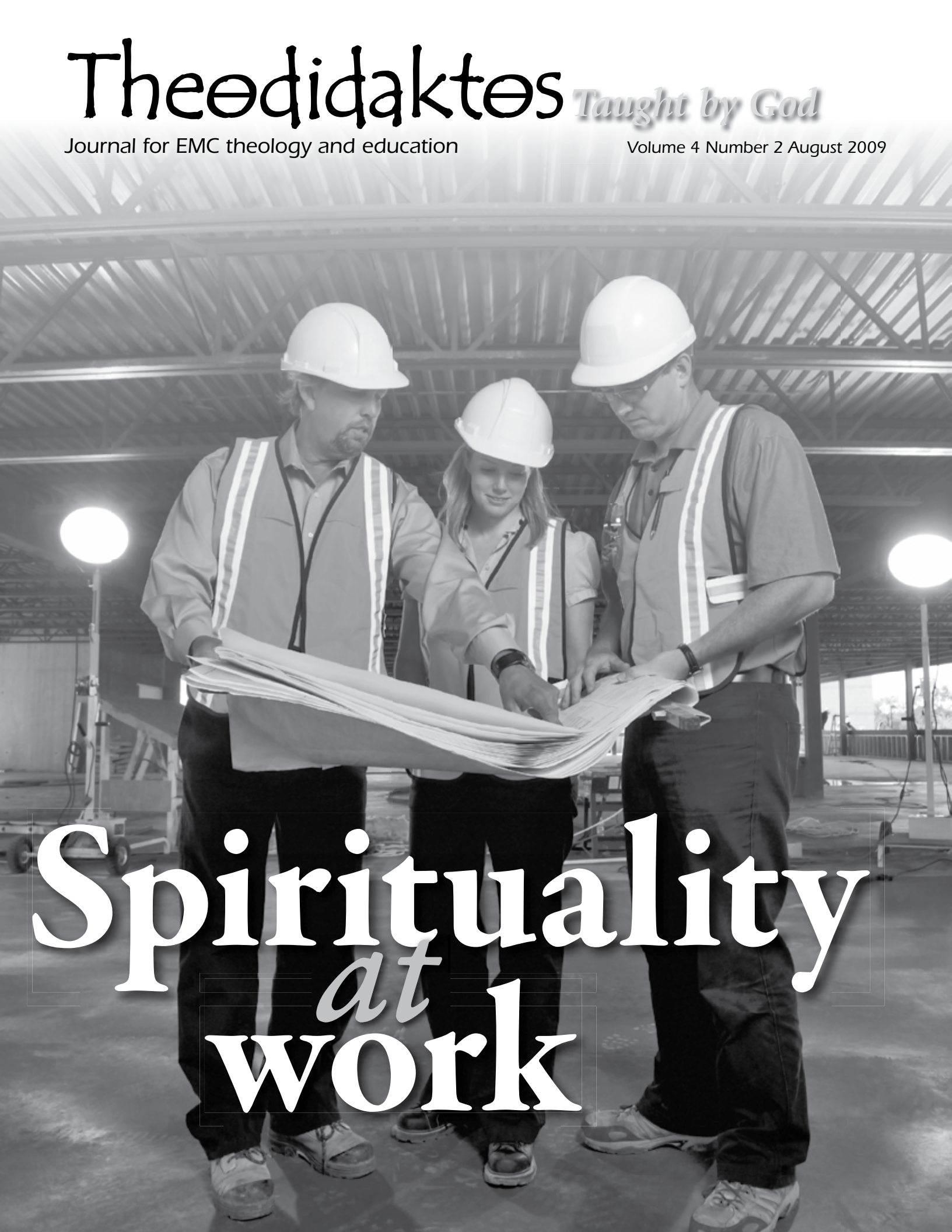


Theodidaktos *Taught by God*

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Spirituality *at* work

'Am I a spiritual person?'

What does it mean to be a spiritual person? Many believers do a quick evaluation of themselves and immediately assess that they are not spiritual enough to be considered spiritual. It can become a source of guilt and consternation, even stagnation of their faith.

Often this shortcoming is deduced in comparison to some "spiritual giant" that they know personally and admire or some historical figure of Christian renown that prayed three hours every morning and two hours before bed. Spirituality in all its loftiness has come to symbolize such piety and discipline that the average believer feels unworthy of its label.

The term *spirituality* is ascribed by some to Roman Catholic origins, though it has of late made its way into evangelical language as well. Perhaps it was coined to describe the ascetic monks who left civilization behind to climb a mountain and eke out a living in obscurity.

My own eyes have gazed upon such cliff dwellings in Greece up on the strange mountain range known as Kalambaka. There the peculiar saints would sit contemplating God while rejecting the pleasures of this life. Was it this denial of worldly benefits that first drew the title *spiritual* from the lips of ordinary people?

Martin Luther rejected this escapism and concluded that a spiritual life could not be lived in seclusion. The Christian life, he preached, must be lived in the midst of the world's business.

Extreme asceticism like that practiced by the Kalambakan monks removes a person from the battle and from the very arena that challenges our spirituality to make it stronger.

Henry David Thoreau said, "How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live." Of the Christian this is also true: How vain it is to withdraw to think about God while God invites us to engage in life.

Alister McGrath has said, "Spirituality represents the interface between ideas and life, between Christian theology and human existence." So spirituality is both the experience of communion with God that we long to have and the expression of that communion lived out in the presence of others.

Theological mumbling aside, we yearn to understand the practical side of spirituality. What we want to know is how much time we should spend reading our Bibles and praying. What must I do to be spiritual? How does a spiritual person talk? What activities do I refrain from? Are movies and TV corrupting my spirituality?

Ultimately, we want a formula that will tell us exactly how to be spiritual. And yet we still don't know what it means to be spiritual.

Some would say we are all spiritual beings. All have a spirit and therefore have a capacity for spirituality. To some extent this is true, but the Bible defines the spiritual person differently.

Paul wrote to believers when he said,

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

A spiritual person from a biblical understanding is someone who has professed to believe in Jesus Christ and has received the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we are able to discern what is true and right and moral and good and essentially Christ-like.

Spirituality is not something that is clean and sterile because it is hidden up and away in some cave where carnality cannot touch it. Spirituality is lived out in the messy world of the workplace, the home, and the neighborhood coffee shop.

It's messy because a spiritual person will make mistakes and discern incorrectly what God's will is. Resting in God's grace, that person will try again to make the correct decision based on prayer or God-given instinct. But the key is that this person "will try again."

Spiritual people do not necessarily pray for hours on end. Charles Spurgeon believed in short, concise prayers and then went about doing the Lord's business, whatever that was for him.

Spiritual people can however pick out truth from even the most boring sermon and rejoice in it. They can look at a problem and learn to see God's hand at work in it. They can find hope when we would just rather cry.

And sometimes spiritual people just cry too.

What I have come to understand through Scripture, prayer, and messy living is that average believers who imperfectly live the Christian life are much more spiritual than they think they are.

The next time you ask yourself, "Am I a spiritual person?" check your theology against your assessment. If your theology is based on the Word of God it will tell you who you are. ☹

Darryl G. Klassen



Ultimately, we want a formula that will tell us exactly how to be spiritual. And yet we still don't know what it means to be spiritual.

Table of Contents

- 2** Editorial: 'Am I a spiritual person?'
- 3** Letter to the editor
- 4** *Ministering Synergistically: A Model for Pastoral Ministry* – William K. McCaskell
- 11** Sickness and Death in the Psalms: In Relationship with God – Michael Doerksen
- 15** The Relation of Church and State in the Thought of Balthasar Hubmaier – David Funk
- 22** Feature Sermon: Work: A Curse or a Blessing? – Travis Thiessen
- 26** Book Review: With or Without God: Why the Way We Live is More Important than What We Believe – Terry M. Smith
- 28** The Final Word

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Letter to the editor

Review continues process of discernment

Dear Editor and Dr. Tiessen,

I recently received the copy of *Theodidaktos* reviewing *Stricken by God?* I was overwhelmed by the space it was given and the care that went into reviewing it. Please convey my thanks to the author for treating the book seriously and for joining us in bringing the Cross to the fore.

Dr. Tiessen should be commended for being fair and thorough. His sternest critique was that the project itself seemed fundamental flawed. I believe that depends on the purpose for which the book was written.

What I did not say in *Stricken?* was that for me, the project boiled down to testing my suspicion that our belief that God was punishing his Son on the Cross to satisfy his wrath may itself be a serious error. I asked, "Are there those in the Body of Christ who share this suspicion, and if so, what alternatives do they offer."

The cross-section of respondents from the whole spectrum of the Church confirmed from Scripture and from tradition, "Penal substitution is a theory of the atonement, not the Gospel itself. Here are its problems and here are some other approaches—ancient and modern—to consider."

Your publication and Dr. Tiessen's article provide the next layer of discernment from the broader Church. Many thanks for taking part.

Brad Jersak

Peace Sermons sought

If EMC pastors, ministers, or other leaders presented **peace sermons** in 2008, possibly around Remembrance Day, they are invited to forward them for possible inclusion in a *Peace Sermons by EMCers 2009 CD*. Older sermons are also acceptable. The payment is a copy of the CD.

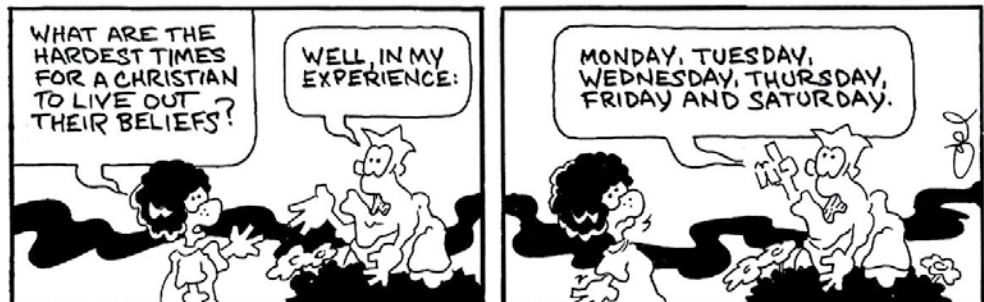
Send them to tsmith@emconf.ca or Terry Smith, 440 Main St., Steinbach, MB R5G 1Z5. Sermons should be submitted by August 29, 2009.

Copies of *Peace Sermons by EMCers 2008* are still available.

Education Committee
Board of Church Ministries



Pontius' Puddle



Ministering Synergistically: A Model for Pastoral Ministry

William K. McCaskell



Bill McCaskell is pastor of MacGregor EMC (Man.).

I entered the pastorate as a second career of sorts after ten-plus years in business. Serving as a pastor was difficult because I was initially unsure of my role. When do I say something? When do I stand up and lead, compared to sitting back and allowing others to lead? How do I relate to those in the church or to those on the board or ministerial? There were many questions and few answers.

Over the last few years I have had opportunities to reflect and articulate how I see myself as a pastor relating to my calling and to those I am called to serve. Those in the academic world call it a philosophy of ministry; I'd rather call it a working model or a tool that helps me create a mental picture of how a pastor can move within the myriad of relationships that exist in a local church. It comes from the experiences in my journey. I hope you will find it helpful in yours.

The search for relevant and applicable pastoral ministry models was discouraging—often leading to models or images that were frustratingly incomplete, causing more confusion than clarity in the search to know what a pastor is called to do.

Day One, Monday: *My first day as a pastor. Had that uncomfortable hugging feeling—the one I got when I was a kid and had to hug relatives I saw only once every five years. I am trying to embrace this idea of being a pastor—because I want to and because I really believe God has called me to be a pastor. It just feels strange, after running from something for so long, to be actually embracing it.*

Day Two, Tuesday: I feel as though I am travelling a very unfamiliar road. The scenery is very different, not what I am used to at all. I am not recognizing any landmarks that would have been familiar with other jobs I have had. I'm not even sure what feelings are normal for a new pastor....

Those were my thoughts—scattered as they were—during my first week as lead pastor of a small town church of which I had been a member for the past thirteen years. Though my geographical location remained the same, I felt a bit lost in this new territory, slowly trying to find my way without directions, and attempting to become familiar with my new role.

During this time I began searching for relevant and applicable ministry models that would prove useful in my ministry, metaphors to paint a picture in my mind of the type of role I was to play as a pastor. The search was discouraging—often leading to models or

images that were frustratingly incomplete, causing more confusion than clarity in the search to know what a pastor is called to do.

This essay attempts to address that frustration, and single out a relevant and biblically based ministry model that one can personally identify with. It will briefly look at the weaknesses of pursuing a single metaphor ministry model, and then outline in detail, a versatile ministry-sphere model, which provides rich and helpful imagery for the pastor in the various roles that he or she is called to serve, in addition to providing the necessary framework for an effective approach to ministry.

In the last thirty years a plethora of metaphors and images have arisen seeking to accurately describe a relevant minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He or she may lead as a servant-shepherd, politician-prophet, preacher-teacher, evangelist-charismatic, builder-promoter, manager-enabler, or liturgist-celebrant.

A minister has been described as a wounded healer, servant leader, political mystic, enslaved liberator, or practical theologian.¹ We are told that the 21st century pastor can be a scholar, a caregiver, or a leader-communicator;² he or she can choose to be the model disciple, the overseer, the guardian, the visionary guide, the global tactician or the team builder.³ As ministers, we can be managers or mystics, CEOs or conductors, gardeners or air traffic controllers⁴, purpose-driven or spirit-filled.

Adding to this collage of images is the fact that many of these metaphors claim to have a biblical foundation and a rich historical tradition; most claim

1 Erick Sawatzky, ed., *The Heart of the Matter* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2004), 168.

2 Aubrey Malphurs, *Dynamics of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 39-40.

3 James E. Means, *Effective Pastors for a New Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 94-98.

4 Leonard Hjalmarson, *Kingdom Leadership in the Postmodern Era* (Website: www.christianity.ca, accessed March 2005), 3.

to be meaningful because they are relevant to the time we live in.

Much of the writing on ministry models has concentrated on introducing new ministry metaphors at the expense of existing images being explained away as inadequate for lacking focus, or expired, for lacking relevance to the present-day minister.

This rationale gives the minister the impression that there exists one “perfect metaphor” to build his or her ministry model around and it must be found, so that a solid theology of ministry can be formed.⁵ The result is not only frustration that occurs in the process, but also the loss that occurs as ministers choose to disregard the less-than-perfect metaphors and end up paying no attention to the richness and helpful aspects of these “outdated” images.

One of the difficulties with a single metaphor describing the role of a pastor is the sheer scope of ministry the pastor is called to. In the course of a week one may celebrate with a newly wedded couple, grieve with a sorrowing parent, lead a meeting, preach a sermon, plan a worship service, counsel a troubled teen, file a conference report, give out a food hamper, visit a shut-in senior, and dedicate a baby.

During all of these tasks the pastor is called on to respond effectively and compassionately. Sometimes it means the pastor is to perform administratively and provide structure and organization; or at other times to show empathy by caring and walking next to those who are hurting. Often the pastor is expected to be the communicator of God’s Word to God’s people, and, because of this, he or she needs to spend time with others and time alone with God.

All of which causes the job description for many pastors to be so vague that it might as well be

If it is impractical to expect a single metaphor to encapsulate the ministry of a pastor, what model or method exists to help the minister effectively move through the various aspects of ministry life?

non-existent, or so detailed that it is cumbersome; both extremes illustrating that the minister is so overwhelmed with a variety of work that it is nearly impossible for a single metaphor to helpfully illustrate the pastoral task.

Another difficulty with a single-metaphor ministry model is that a metaphor can only be a useful and effective modeling tool once the minister identifies with the associations of the specific metaphor. It has been said, that to one degree or another, all theology is at its heart autobiographical,⁶ and in many ways the ministry metaphor that is chosen by the pastor will say as much about the minister as it will their ministry.

If searching for the “perfect metaphor” the pastor may disregard certain rich images because they do not fit into his or her personal experience (i.e., an urban pastor may have difficulty relating to an agrarian metaphor such as a shepherd), or the pastor may awkwardly embrace a metaphor that they do not relate with and attempt, often unsuccessfully, to adapt to the new ministry metaphor.

For a metaphor to “work” it needs to have as broad of an appeal as possible in order to “fit” as many pastors as possible. The pastor’s life and ministry experience needs to be able to find a home in the metaphor, yet an effective metaphor will also provide a framework for the pastor to structure his or her pastoral ministry around; all of which is difficult for a single metaphor to accomplish.

Therefore if it is impractical to expect a single metaphor to encapsulate the ministry of a pastor, what model or method exists to help the minister effectively move through the various aspects of ministry life?

Three spheres of ministry

I suggest a more appropriate response is to describe the work of a pastor as existing in three separate, yet overlapping spheres of ministry: the managerial, incarnational, and inspirational spheres.⁷

These three ministry-spheres as described below not only cover the various aspects of pastoral life, they also provide anchor points of understanding the ministry of Christ; and interestingly enough, all previously mentioned ministry metaphors fall under at least one of the three ministry-spheres.

The managerial sphere

Ministry within the managerial sphere is about *organizing the people*. It is concerned with setting goals and objectives with people, and then creating action plans to meet them. It measures success by predefined, quantifiable, visible results. It is not only the administrative duties of the pastor that fall under this sphere, but also the opportunities and responsibilities that exist for the pastor to contribute to the structure and framework of the church and its ministries.⁸ Often the pastor can be the impetus of organizational change or planning that can increase the effectiveness of the church. When operating from this sphere, the minister may relate to such ministry metaphors as overseer, global tactician or conductor.

The incarnational sphere

Ministry from the incarnational

5 An exception to this observation would be the approach William Willimon takes in his book, *Pastor* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002) in which he offers a number of helpful metaphors to describe a pastor’s ministry. The one drawback of this approach is that it does not provide a unifying theme to weave through the dozen or more metaphors, and one is left with an eclectic mix of images that are often best understood as independent of one another.

6 Sawatzky, *Heart of the Matter*, Page 165.

7 See next page for an illustrated diagram of the three ministry-spheres model.

8 Such as church-leadership structure, constitutional reform, process of elections, etc.

sphere is about *walking with people*. Ministry that operates from this sphere places a high value on the “being” of ministry, as compared with the managerial sphere, which placed a high value on the “doing” of ministry. Ministry from the incarnational sphere consists of coming alongside others to hear their hearts, and walk with them through the difficulties (and joys) of life. By the minister allowing oneself to “be” with others, God’s presence can become real to others.

Whereas ministry in the managerial sphere was primarily concerned about arriving at the destination (i.e., when can we expect our goal to be reached?), ministry from this sphere cares more about the direction of movement than the arrival time. Ministry metaphors that fall under this sphere are wounded healer, caregiver, and spiritual shepherd, to name a few.

The inspirational sphere

Ministry from the inspirational sphere is about *imagining with people*. It operates mainly with the ideas, thoughts, dreams, and imaginations of people. Ministry from the inspirational sphere is ministry that is concerned with “what can be” with God involved,

and how to communicate this new picture in a relevant way.

This part of ministry sees “what can be” before “what really is” and yearns to capture the imagination of the hearts and minds of the listener with this new reality in a way that is accurate in context, fresh in approach, and useful in application. Political mystic, visionary guide and preacher-teacher are but a few of the ministry metaphors that find their home in this sphere.

These overlapping ministry-spheres in themselves, separately and corporately, provide metaphoric value to the pastor as a picture of how one is to minister. It is important to realize that the pastor should not operate from only one sphere (the goal is not for the pastor to choose the one that is most comfortable) but rather learn to live at the intersection of all three ministry-spheres and yet minister uniquely from any of the three as the situation demands.

In other words, the pastor’s goal is to develop a dynamic, fluid, adaptive approach to ministry, being comfortable to move in and between the various ministry spheres, though at the same time keeping in mind that one will generally speak (or operate) from

only one sphere at a time (although it would be possible to speak from all three spheres at some point in the same conversation or operate from all three spheres during the same event—such as a council meeting).

Another way to approach this model is to view all three ministry-spheres as interacting with the gospel, each in its own unique way. The managerial ministry-sphere gives us a picture of *servicing the gospel*—placing necessary structure and organization into place so that the gospel may be more effectively modeled. The incarnational ministry-sphere helps us picture *living the gospel* in our own lives and walking next to people living it out in their lives. Finally, the inspirational ministry-sphere points us towards *sharing the gospel*—the Good News capturing the imagination of the people we minister to. The gospel of Jesus Christ is what ties all three ministry-spheres together and as pastors we are called to be ministers of this Good News.

Jesus and three spheres

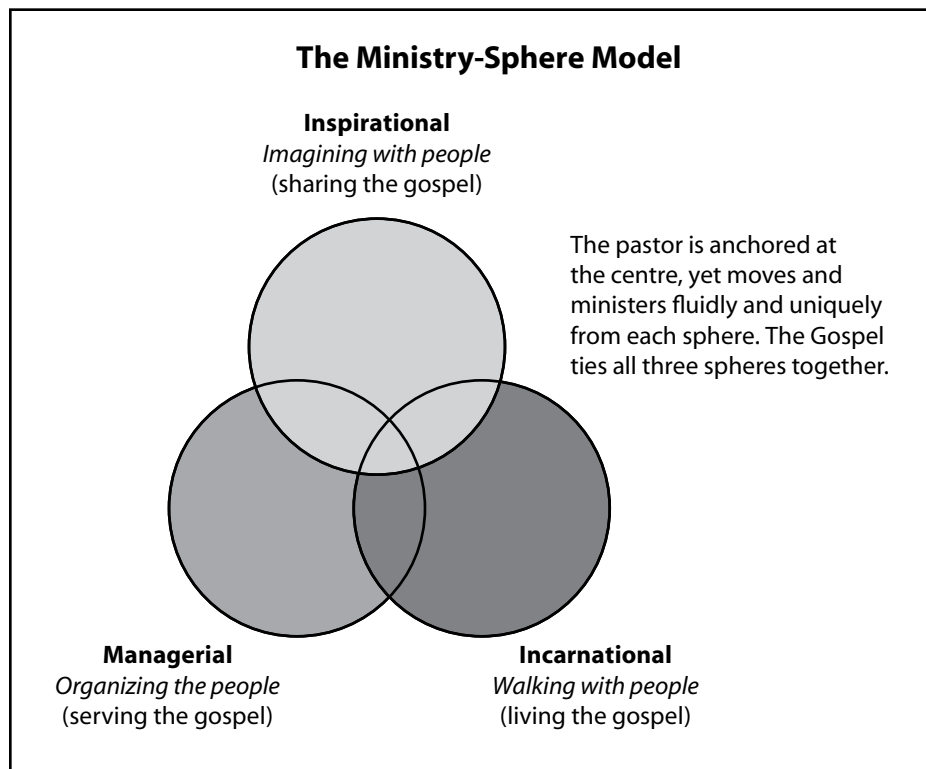
It is interesting to note that when one examines the ministry of Jesus, one sees Jesus operating from all three spheres.

Clearing the temple, choosing the twelve, sending out the seventy-two, and his deliberate steps to Calvary, all demonstrate Jesus’ ability to plan, prioritize and execute his objectives and minister from the managerial sphere.

The countless occasions when Jesus comes alongside a spurned social outcast, or visits a frightened religious leader or corrupt yet curious government worker, are but a few examples among many that show Jesus’ passion for walking alongside others and ministering from the incarnational sphere.

And, finally, one needs to read no further than the Sermon on the Mount to find a picture of a new reality—a new kingdom—that Jesus was painting for his listeners as he ministered from what we are calling the inspirational sphere.

Though these observations may be somewhat simplistic and overtly reductionist, it is helpful to realize



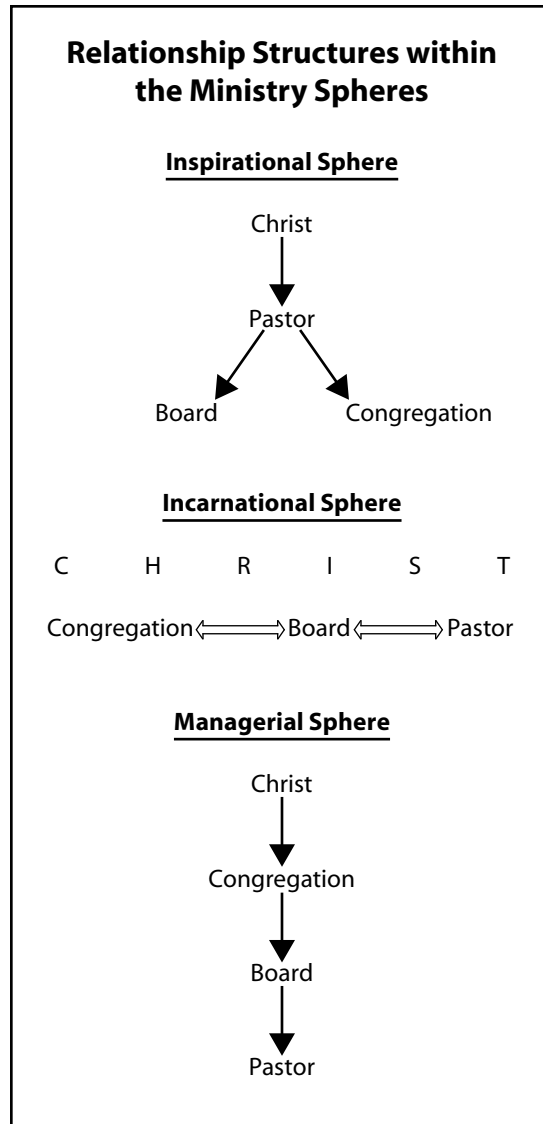
that the ministry of Jesus himself is not best described by a single metaphor. In fact, when one tries to attach a certain label to the ministry of Jesus, it is not long before one discovers that Jesus has outgrown the label.⁹ One can examine the ministries of the apostles, such as Paul or Peter, and reach similar conclusions.¹⁰

Relationship structures

The effectiveness of any ministry model is in providing a helpful picture of how one relates to others in any given situation. The ministry-spheres model gives one the necessary freedom to adapt to the variety of circumstances that will arise, and yet still equally provides the necessary structure of how to interact with others. Each ministry-sphere carries with it a particular relationship structure, and depending on which sphere one is operating from at the time, will determine the nature of one's relationship with others.

Relationships and the inspirational

Take, for instance, the inspirational sphere. One sees the relationship flow¹¹ within a church setting normally moving from Christ to the pastor, and then on to the board (or leadership) and congregation.¹² The pastor looks to Christ for the picture that he or she is to paint for both the leadership and congregation. This, of course, is accomplished mainly through the Sunday-morning teaching times (Sunday School and the message during the worship service), though other informal avenues may also



present themselves—such as leadership meetings, at times during committee meetings, or even in one-on-one conversations with church members.

Regardless of the setting, when the pastor is ministering from the inspirational sphere he or she takes a “driver’s-seat role” in the relationship. People expect and look to the pastor to

provide a portrait of a reality that is different than their own—a reality that has the marks of God’s design. Because of this, it is crucial for the pastor to spend time familiarizing and refreshing him or herself with the panoramic view of Scripture, for it is in the Word of God that the pastor will find the colour palette to paint a picture of the kingdom for his or her parishioners to envision.

In many ways when a pastor ministers from the inspirational sphere, he or she takes on the role of the Old Testament prophets who were called by God to communicate his reality to the people. Jeremiah was one such prophet who experienced a very direct call from God to communicate this reality:

“Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.¹³

Jeremiah’s source of encouragement and inspiration came from the word of God, “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight,

for I bear your name.”¹⁴ It was God’s word that gave Jeremiah the message to speak and the picture to paint for his listeners. Though as pastors we may not have the same Old Testament message for our people, we will nevertheless have a message for them based upon the Word of God, and, though at times it may be inconvenient or disruptive, it will be the picture that God wants his people to see, so that he may stir and realign their hearts towards him. This is the nature of ministry that happens from the inspirational sphere.

Relationships and the incarnational

In the incarnational ministry-sphere one sees a “levelling out” of the relationship structure.¹⁵ It still begins with Christ—however, congregation, pastor, and leadership are all relating

9 Ray S. Anderson’s book *The Soul of Ministry* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) is a helpful book in understanding the breadth of the ministry of Jesus.

10 See William R. Nelson, *Ministry Formation for Effective Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988).

11 See this page for a diagram of the different relationship structures within the three ministry-spheres.

12 Malphurs refers to this structure as the Church as a Cause, *The Dynamics of Church Leadership*, 86.

13 *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Je 1:17-2:1). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

14 *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Je 15:16). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

15 Malphurs refers to this structure as the Church as Community, *The Dynamics of Church Leadership*, 92.

to each other on the same “level.” There is no hierarchal flow of ideas or conversation and all people relate to each other on a horizontal plane as together we submit ourselves to Christ.

Pastors move in and through this sphere as we come alongside others as brothers and sisters. We realize that together we are on a journey of becoming more like our Saviour and at times we will fail or come up short, and we need each other to provide the support and encouragement to carry on.

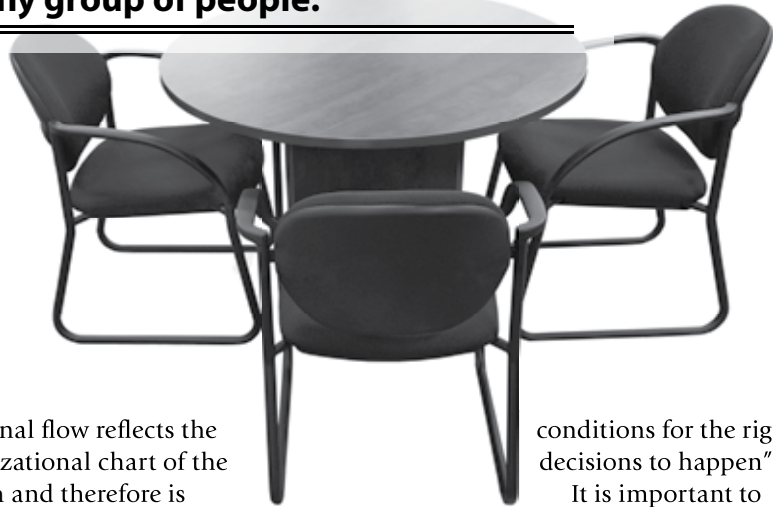
Relating from this ministry-sphere, of course, epitomizes the priesthood of all believers. According to Scripture all believers are ministers and nowhere is that more apparent than when brothers and sisters in Christ minister to each other from the incarnational sphere. Whereas it can be argued that ministry from the other two spheres—inspirational and managerial—require special gifting, ministry from the incarnational sphere only requires that one move with integrity, courage and grace alongside a fellow pilgrim and be willing to share one’s life with another.

Ministering from this sphere is also valuable because it tends to humanize the other two spheres. Without the incarnational sphere pastors can become demanding, idealistic and driven. Learning to walk with people, and feel with people, allows the pastor to see how God changes people and opens their eyes. Without the incarnational sphere of ministry the pastor can soon think that it is up to him or her to find bigger and better ways to paint the picture or communicate God’s truth so that people will listen. By ministering incarnationally, pastors see God at work in not only their parishioner’s heart, but also in their own.

Relationships and the managerial

Moving on to the managerial sphere one discovers that the

Though ministry in the managerial sphere may be considered by some as less spiritual than ministry in the other two spheres, structure and organization plays a vital role in any group of people.



relational flow reflects the organizational chart of the church and therefore is directly influenced by the church’s polity. In a church that has a congregational form of government, the relational flow would begin with Christ followed by the congregation, followed by the board (leadership), followed by the pastor. Though the pastor is at the “bottom” of the relational structure, it does not mean that the pastor cannot carry a degree of influence nor has an inability to “get things done.”

Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, draws a distinction between executive leadership skill and legislative leadership skill.¹⁶ A pastor in a church with congregational polity has very little opportunity to exercise executive leadership (leadership that occurs when decision-making is focused on one primary decision maker), however, the pastor does have significant opportunity to make things happen through the use of legislative¹⁷ leadership (leadership that “relies more upon persuasion, political currency, and shared interests to create the

conditions for the right decisions to happen”).¹⁸

It is important to remember that, though ministry in this sphere may be considered by some as less spiritual than ministry in the other two spheres, structure and organization plays a vital role in any group of people. This is seen in Scripture on a number of occasions: the early church in Acts was growing so fast that the structure was changed by appointing deacons; Moses was becoming tired and drained judging hundreds of petty issues among the people, and so with the help of his father-in-law, organized a system of judges; and we are given a glimpse by Paul of how he appreciated structure, by his listing of qualifications for church leaders, and his appointing of elders in each of the churches he planted.

Ministry from this sphere is also seen in the early church by such leaders as Cyprian of Carthage who during the Great Plague of 252 C.E. called the church together, organized prayer services and practical care ministries that covered the entire city. They raised funds, nursed the sick, and buried the dead; all of this being possible because Cyprian was ministering, at least partly, from what is described as the managerial sphere.¹⁹

So far we have seen that a single metaphor model for pastoral ministry

¹⁶ Jim Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, (privately printed, 2005), 11.

¹⁷ Arden Thiessen has suggested that perhaps a better term than Collins’ use of “legislative” would be the word “facilitative.” *Legislative* (and its verb form *legislating*) carries connotations of making and enforcing rules. Facilitating on the other hand describes action occurring through the group dynamics of the church.

¹⁸ Collins, 11.

¹⁹ Derek J. Tidball, *Skilful Shepherds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 151.

is ultimately unhelpful because it is too restrictive. In response we have examined a multi-faceted model upon which one can build a theology of pastoral ministry. The three ministry-spheres give us a picture of the various ways a pastor may relate to the same people in the church. But how does a pastor develop this adaptive approach in day-to-day ministry?

A conscious move

To begin with, I think it is important to remember that in order to appropriately and effectively minister in a variety of situations pastors must make a conscious effort to move between the three ministry-spheres, rather than remaining static. For example, if as a minister one were to relate only from the inspirational sphere, he or she could possibly be seen as “preaching all the time,” and limit the effectiveness of their ministry; or if the pastor chose to constantly minister incarnationally, the church may feel that the pastor relates well to the individual members, but leads the congregation poorly.

Obviously, in most cases, the minister’s gifting or personality will cause him or her to gravitate towards one or two ministry-spheres. For example, the pastor who is a gifted teacher or communicator will feel more natural ministering from the inspirational sphere than the others, and the minister with an extroverted personality will likely be attracted to minister from the incarnational sphere.

Regardless of the pastor’s gifts, however, the minister must realize that as a pastor, he or she is called to a balanced ministry. Ministers must learn how to move dynamically between the three

ministry spheres, while remaining firmly anchored at the intersecting centre.

To anchor oneself at the “intersecting centre” means that the minister sees him or herself as possessing or developing the qualities that are necessary for ministry in all three spheres. It is not sufficient for a pastor to simply say, “I can get by as long as I can teach. After all, it is the most important aspect of ministry.” Yes, a man or woman who has been called by God to pastor is a teacher, but she or he is also more—a cursory glance of the qualifications of an overseer in First Timothy reveals this.

In fact, Paul’s lists of characteristics for a minister reflect the importance of ministering from all three-ministry spheres.²⁰ In order for a pastor to “live” at the centre point of the three ministry spheres, the pastor, through the enablement of the Holy Spirit, must “grow” into these qualities, until they become a part of who they are as a person, rather than simply a list of characteristics to strategically exhibit.

As God develops this ministry nucleus within the pastor, the minister will begin to experience the freedom to move more easily between the ministry spheres. Knowing which ministry sphere to speak from in any

In order to appropriately and effectively minister in a variety of situations pastors must make a conscious effort to move between the three ministry-spheres, rather than remaining static.

given situation is at times difficult, but nevertheless necessary, in order to be an effective minister, and therefore it is important that the minister learn to follow the example of Jesus and the leading of Holy Spirit.

As we have noted earlier, Jesus of Nazareth ministered from all three ministry-spheres. He also moved seamlessly in the various aspects of his ministry, because his attention was not on the mechanics of ministry, but rather on the focus of ministry – he did nothing apart from the will of his Father. In response to Philip, who requested that Jesus show him the Father, Jesus replied:

Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, *it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work* (italics mine).²¹

Jesus was careful to point out on more than one occasion, that the work he did was not his own, it was the work of his Father. “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”²² The ministry of Jesus was not motivated by his own planning or strategy, or determined by his own personality or strengths, it was directed and led by his Father²³ and it was the pattern that he urged his disciples to follow. In the same conversation with Philip as noted above, Jesus turns to the other disciples and offers them this promise:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.²⁴

To enable his followers to carry on the ministry of his father, Jesus explains how they will be empowered to minister: “But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will

20 For examples: hospitable and gentle (Incarnational sphere); able to teach (Inspirational sphere); must manage his own family well, have the respect of others (Managerial sphere), (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

21 *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (John 14:9-10). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

22 *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (John 5:19). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

23 This is displayed with Christ regularly spending time alone with God, as we see on a number of occasions in the gospels.

24 *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Jn 14:12-14). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

remind you of everything I have said to you."²⁵ The gift of the Holy Spirit is for all believers. The Spirit is our advocate, counsellor, and comforter. The Spirit empowers the church for its mission and individuals for his service. It is the Spirit that will lead and guide the pastor to move in ministry as Jesus did.

This moving in ministry, as directed by the Holy Spirit, will lead the pastor to ask two questions as he encounters ministry opportunities: "Where is God working?" and "How does he want me (and the church) to be a part of it?"²⁶ As the pastor learns to ask these questions, and equally important, learns to hear the voice of God speak the answers, he or she will be empowered to adapt their style of ministry, moving from sphere to sphere, partnering with God's work and following God's direction.

There is also an intrinsic quality in this model that creates a direct connection between the pastor's ability to move and minister from the various ministry-spheres and the pastor's overall effectiveness. This *synergistic integrity* of the model means that effective ministry in each sphere is dependent upon ministry taking place in the other two; and, in fact, ministry is even enhanced in a particular sphere when the pastor has taken time to minister in the other two related spheres. In other words, the integrity of the pastor increases as he or she is able

to fluidly move and minister in all three ministry-spheres, creating a synergy between the various areas of pastoral ministry.

Conclusion

We know that pastors (especially of smaller churches) may be called on to perform many roles in ministry, and yet all of these roles are more easily fulfilled if they are practiced within the framework of a helpful ministry model. Attempting to find a single metaphor to accomplish this is impracticable. On the other hand, a multi-faceted ministry-sphere model provides the necessary structure and useful metaphors for the minister.

At the centre of this approach is the minister who embraces the biblical characteristics of a pastor, and from this understanding, moves freely between the ministry-spheres, effectively relating in a variety of ways to the people in his or her congregation. It is a model that I believe (and have found) to be helpful, practical and effective in providing an imaginative structure for the vast role pastors are called to in the twenty-first century. ☪



The integrity of the pastor increases as he or she is able to fluidly move and minister in all three ministry-spheres, creating a synergy between the various areas of pastoral ministry.

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25 *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996, c1984 (electronic ed.) (Jn 14:26). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

26 Henry Blackaby fully develops this theme in *Experiencing God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994).

Sickness and Death in the Psalms: In Relationship with God

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Death and sickness are two things that we all deal with at one time or another. As Christians, how are we to deal with these and in what ways are we to view them? In our current society, both death and sickness are seen as things to avoid at almost any cost. Yet there has been no “magic bullet” developed to accomplish this. The development of science and study of biology have pushed our thinking to believe that death and sickness are the result of purely physical and biological causes.

At a minimum, as Christians we believe that God interacts with His creation on both the spiritual and physical levels, causing us to believe that He could intervene in some physical manner. But, could there also be a relationship between our spiritual walk and our physical health? It would seem that we have created for ourselves a dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual aspects of our lives, not allowing one to influence the other. So where do we go to refocus ourselves on the issue?

Most would revert to the Bible and search for answers, with most people looking at the Psalms. Death and sickness are frequent topics for the psalmists. But reading the Psalms can be discouraging. It would seem, in reading the Psalms, that there is

no one specific causality of death and sickness identified, yet God is sovereign and uses death and sickness for His purposes. We are not in control when it comes to healing and health, this is God’s prerogative. In the psalms, health is not restricted to a properly functioning body, but is impacted by the complex of physical, social, and spiritual relationships. The fact that death and sickness are a part of life does not necessitate the statement that it is evil, for through the experience we can still praise God.

We have created a dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual aspects of our lives, not allowing one to influence the other. So where do we go to refocus ourselves on the issue?

Basis of Study

A study of the book of Psalms would indicate that Psalms 1 and 2 are a basic introduction to the book in its entirety.¹ They speak to the reality of our lives, even though “the opposite may appear to be true.”² The focus is on the relationship between people and God. Contrasted are those who follow God and those who strive against Him.

Results of following God include a life of blessing and security. The imagery in Psalm 1:3 is a strong visual example of what to expect when a person follows the way of righteousness. It speaks of health and vitality, especially in contrast to the chaff in verse 4. Psalm 1 ends with the statement that the wicked will perish or die, while Psalm 2 ends with the blessing of those who seek refuge in God. It would seem that since this is the introduction, the rest of the Psalms would follow suit, but they do not. Rather, they are filled with people of God who express their pain and suffering, wondering where or what God is doing.

The Psalms are filled with laments from psalmists in various situations. There are three, though, that deal specifically with suffering from an illness, Psalms 38, 41, and 88.³ These three Psalms will be the basis for much of this essay, but there will be mention of illness and death from other Psalms as well. There is a sense in which there is not much difference between death and sickness. Sickness is a precursor to death, something that a person goes through when death is imminent.⁴ Throughout this process, God is always regarded as being involved.

God’s Hand

An overarching theme in the Psalms is God’s overall rule over creation. Numerous times the psalmists recount His sustaining or saving power (Ps. 3:5; 16:10; 30:3; 31:23; 33:18-19; 34:19-20; 41:2; 56:13; 68:20; 86:13; 88:1; 107:6, 19; 119:153-6, 159; 121; 138:7; 143:11). This acknowledgement

1 Eric Ortlund, “The Psalms,” BT714 Psalms: The Poetry of Prayer class notes, Summer 2008.

2 Ibid.

3 C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 139.

4 Perhaps the strongest argument here is in Psalm 88:3-4, 15. The psalmist feels if he is not healed, he will go down to the Pit. Verse 15 shows that the psalmist’s affliction has felt as if he has been on the verge of death, if not experiencing death to a degree while living. Psalm 73:4 has a couple of different wordings. One wording could suggest that there is an expectation of sickness before death for the wicked.

of God's power and role in life is foundational to understanding the psalmists' perspective when it came to sickness and death. Another aspect that needs to be understood is that of the social structure of the day. As Klaus Seybold notes, "At this social level there was as good as no medical care. Indeed there was very little in Ancient Israel at all. Only later, with some misgivings, were 'doctors' permitted."⁵ With a deficiency in medical help, there obviously would be a greater reliance on something else when it came to sickness and death.

Both Psalms 41 and 88 begin with statements of certainty that convey belief that God is in control of the situation. The first three verses of Psalm 41 are a description of prior experiences of the psalmist.⁶ In both passages there is an expectation that God will act in a saving way in regards to the situation. Psalm 41 ends with praise, after the psalmist shares his afflictions and calls out to God once again. It would seem that the "event of answering and bestowing of healing has taken place"⁷ in verses 11-12. The psalmist in Psalm 88 does not seem to be as fortunate. It closes in darkness, conveying a sense of God-forsakenness, without a reassurance of healing. Yet verse 1 holds forth a beam of light in the assurance that God will save. This comes before the actual lament; it would seem that this is the reason why the psalmist can express this desperate cry for help. Obviously God has the power and authority to sustain or save the psalmist.

Not only does God have the power to heal and save, but He acts on this power to actually bring about health and salvation from death. Psalmists have experienced it in the past and recorded their experiences (Ps. 30:2;

Not only does God have the power to heal and save, but He acts on this power to actually bring about health and salvation from death. Psalmists have experienced it in the past and recorded their experiences.

41:3; 103:3; 107:20; 146:8; 147:3). In all but the last two passages the sickness that the psalmist was healed from was severe. In fact, the psalmist was sick to the point of death. The last two passages deal with what we would today call a medical condition, blindness and wounds. So when God heals in the Psalms, it usually coincides with salvation from death.

An explicit example of healing comes in Psalm 30. Verse 2 reads, "O Lord my God, I called to you for help and you healed me." Here the psalmist is not only sick, but sick unto death. To be this sick, in the Near East, meant to be in the sphere of Sheol.⁸ The psalmist has been saved from "harm's way in the nonworld, the underworld that devours life."⁹ What is the most terrifying part of this is the "soulless, shadowy existence which is far, far removed from God."¹⁰ The psalmist seems to be most concerned of his position in regards to God.¹¹

Psalm 41 speaks of healing as well. The one who is healed is called blessed. This harkens back to Psalm 1 in which the blessed is said to live a steadfast and flourishing life. Apparently this person was not immune from sickness, yet it is God who upholds and heals him. Verses 1-3 hold a promise that God will sustain him through the darkest times and this is what the psalmist holds on to in the rest of the Psalm. It is because of how the psalmist lived and related to others in life prior to the sickness that

God does this healing work.

An interesting passage is found in Psalm 35. Here the psalmist recounts a prior experience when someone else was sick. In verse 13 he mentions that his prayers for the individual came back unanswered. The passage does not go any further than that in explaining the situation but it would seem that God did not heal the individual. So prayer to God is not necessarily answered in the positive healing of someone—it is not automatic. Even though God has the power and authority to heal, He may still choose to withhold it.

Complexity of Sickness and Death

In reading the Psalms there are seemingly different causes or accelerators of sickness and death. Contributors to the situation include physical, spiritual, and societal aspects. Part of the difficulty is that, "in many of the descriptions of suffering, the reasons for the suffering remains unclear. It is understandable that no diagnosis can be made on the basis of the psalms; this also has a great deal to do with the lack of anatomical and medical data. However...it is often not even possible to tell whether the suffering victim is ill, oppressed, imprisoned, under attack or threat of attack."¹²

One of the recorded reasons why the psalmist was sick was the fact that he had sinned against God and God was disciplining him (Ps. 6:1-2; 32:3-5; 38:3, 5; 41:4; 78:31, 62; 103:3; 106:15, 29). Included in some of these passages are instances where the nation of Israel is punished for their sins, so this is not limited to an individual experience. A study of the Old Testament would reveal that "illness in the OT is thought of as the result of some offense. In physical suffering a sinful deed is manifest."¹³

Turning the focus to Psalms 38 and

5 Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd, 1990), 162.

6 Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59 A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 430.

7 Ibid. 433.

8 Ibid. 354.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid. 162.

11 Psalm 30:6-10.

12 Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd, 1990), 164.

13 Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150 A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 291.

41, "there is reason to believe that sin lies at the base of the poet's affliction, for he confesses his guilt."¹⁴ In Psalm 38 the psalmist admits or confesses three times that it is the result of sin that God has brought the sickness upon him (vs. 3, 4, and 5). The first ten verses speak about the individual's condition and his relationship to God. Sickness here, is the "herald of guilt; it announces a transgression which, so to speak, has erupted to the outside and become manifest."¹⁵ The extent of the sickness is also expressed, in that there is no health (vs. 3, 7), no soundness (v. 3), and utterly crushed (v. 8). There is nothing the psalmist can do; he is bowed down under the weight God has placed on him.

While Psalm 41 has only one admission of sin it is placed in close connection with his health. His request for health in verse 4 is inextricably linked with the confession of sin.¹⁶ There is a sense, though, in Psalm 41 that the psalmist is innocent of sin. In verses 5-9 there is a cry against others who have gathered to condemn him. Here the psalmist speaks of the false accusations and slander. This seems to put into question the strict relationship of sin and sickness, that every cause of sickness is the result of sin.

There is also a sense of judgement when it comes to death. A number of times the psalmists refer to God

destroying the wicked (Ps. 9:3, 5, 17; 18:40-2; 49:13-4; 63:9; 78:50-1; 91:5-8; 135:8-10). In some instances it is God who directly administers the judgement and at other times it is God's servant meting it out. Repeatedly, the Psalms "say that the wicked will go down to death, their memory will perish and they will be as though they had never been. The righteous on the other hand will be rescued by God from death and then will enjoy him forever."¹⁷ From the Psalms it is difficult to extrude a sense of whether there is a certainty in a resurrection, however.

Psalm 49 seems to be an example of what death is about, yet it is not an all encompassing definition or portrayal of death. Much of what the psalms relate about death is in regards to saving from death not the process of death and the afterlife. In verses 7-8 and 15 we see that God is the one in control when it comes to death, only "divine action, namely God's taking, can protect those facing death."¹⁸ Wealth does not help in this situation; rather it is the case of reliance on God and one's relationship to Him.

A number of Psalms speak about anguish but are written in a way that makes it difficult to distinguish the root issue. The psalmist may be suffering from an illness but his physical suffering and spiritual anguish merge in such a perfect way that it is difficult

if not impossible to separate them (Ps. 6:3; 13:2; 22:14 31:9-10; 39:2-3; 63:1; 116:8-9). Added to this is the aspect of society. Those in contact with the psalmist seem to heighten the feelings of anguish and isolation.

In Psalm 38, verses 11-20 speak to those people who have surrounded the psalmist. Klaus Seybold separates the people who surround the psalmist in Psalm 41 as: old enemies, curious visitors, and friends.¹⁹ Each of these groups of people can also be found in Psalm 38. The psalmist feels both attacked by the groups as well as rejected. For the person in pain, the distance "exacerbates the painful condition with loneliness and rejection."²⁰ His reaction to the attackers is to be silent (vs. 13-4) and to wait upon the Lord for an answer in regards to his sickness (v. 15).

Psalm 41 seems even darker when it comes to slander and attack. Some people come to visit him and while there, instead of caring for him, they "gather clues for disastrous results...and then they set in motion dark rumours and baleful slander in the alleys."²¹ All of this seems to place the psalmist outside of the faithful and righteous and into the place of the wicked. This is, it would seem, like the most hurtful and agonizing aspect of his situation, to be far from God. There is an aspect that closeness to God produces life and

The psalmist feels both attacked and rejected. His reaction to the attackers is to be silent (vs. 13-4) and to wait upon the Lord for an answer in regards to his sickness (v. 15).

14 C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 140.

15 Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59 A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 412.

16 Ibid. 432.

17 Edward Fudge, "The final end of the wicked," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (September 1984): 326.

18 J. David Pleins, "Death and endurance: reassessing the literary structure and theology of Psalm 49," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 69 (March 1996): 23.

19 Klaus Seybold, *Introducing the Psalms* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd, 1990), 162.

20 Kristin M. Swenson, *Living Through Pain* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 122.

21 Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59 A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 432.



health while distancing oneself from God brings sickness and death.

There are several things that point in other directions though. First of all, there is Psalm 73. In it, the psalmist points out that indeed the wicked are healthy. Some texts word verse 3 in a way to indicate that the wicked do not struggle at death, there is no anguish

There are many ways to approach sickness and there are many things that influence the experience of sickness, it is essentially complex and not easily explained.

associated. How can this be when people should show signs of sickness and anguish when they have sinned?

In his book, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms*, Fredrik Lindstrom posits the thesis that sickness is not "caused" by sin.²² His argument is that "God's wrath is not evoked by sin, but that it is present without causal explanation. Conversely, health or hope of healing is rooted not in virtue but in the mercy of God."²³ In doing so, Lindstrom counts verses that show a close link to sin and sickness as "intrusions through 'rereading' of a more 'pure' psalm of complaint and have been inserted in the rereading."²⁴ There are deficiencies in this route of coming to the conclusion, yet there is some truth in it. There are many ways to approach sickness and there

are many things that influence the experience of sickness; it is essentially complex and not easily explained.

Part of Life

It is of note that God does not despise the suffering individual. This is explicit in Psalm 22:24; unfortunately, it does not specifically state the cause of the affliction. The language used is very similar to that of sickness. A weaker example could be found in Psalms 88 and 89. In Psalm 88 the psalmist writes of his affliction from the time of his youth but still claims that God saves him. In Psalm 89 the psalmist writes of how blessed (vs. 13-8) are those who have acclaimed God. These individuals walk in the light of God's presence. This all points to the fact that to be sick or to die does not mean one is despised by God.

Death is just as much a part of life as is birth. Death is required by God of everyone; there is nothing that can be done to escape it (Ps. 49:8-9, 10, 14; 89:48; 90:3, 5). This is seen in relation to God; He is the one in control of death. His control supersedes the control death may have.

A matter of utmost importance is praise. In the Psalms, praise seems to be the reason for life. People live to praise God, and when they die, the praise stops (Ps. 6:5; 9:13-4; 18:49; 22:20-2; 30:8-10; 31:17; 88:10-2; 102:19-22). Praise is multi-dimensional; it speaks to God and it speaks to others about God. So when life seems to slip away, "physical deterioration and loosened social relationships have a profound spiritual significance, for they can separate a person from God."²⁵ Part of one's identity is found in the community of other people.²⁶

Psalm 88 is considered the lowest and darkest point in the Psalter. Yet even here there is mention of praise.

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26 Ibid. 447.

27 Marvin Tate, "Psalm 88," *Review and Expositor* 87 (Winter 1990): 94.

28 Psalm 107 is the best summary to our response.

In the Psalms, praise seems to be the reason for life. People live to praise God, and when they die, the praise stops.

Verses 10-2 hold four rhetorical questions about praise and death. Each of the answers to the questions is “no.” God does not benefit from His people dying because they cannot praise Him in that state. The only thing that is keeping the psalmist going is prayer. For, “prayer and speech form a lifeline human beings cannot do without.... The speaker is on the brink of death, but prayer is the lifeline which keeps him or her away from the Pit.”²⁷ It is after the answer to prayer that the psalmist can praise God.

Conclusion

If Psalms 1 and 2 are to be a pattern for our relationship with God, why

are the Psalms filled with stories of seeming contradictions? Perhaps it is that we do not see the depths of these situations but gloss over them with our own understandings. There is a very real sense that while sickness and death are the result of sin, it may not be the individual’s sin—sickness and death are in the world because of sin. It is interesting to note that Satan is never used as the reason for sickness and death; it is always in relation to God’s doing or withholding His protection. God is the one in control and it is for His purposes to build up His children.

Our response is to come to Him with our needs and rest in Him. When we are answered, our response then should

be to praise Him.²⁸ If an individual is experiencing sickness or passing through death, there is a response required of the rest of the Body. The psalmists share the negative response of others while they were in need, so the required response would be the opposite of this. We should not jump to conclusions or dredge the person’s life for sin or reasons for the sickness in order to judge. The state of our health cannot be used as a standard for spirituality, either for positive or negative standing before God. For God uses the circumstances in our lives to engage us and lead us to praise. ☉

The Relation of Church and State in the Thought of Balthasar Hubmaier

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Balthasar Hubmaier was one of the most significant leaders and theologians of Anabaptism in its earliest stages. Born in Friedberg, Bavaria, possibly in the year 1480 or 1481, he became a Catholic priest, was influenced by contact with Lutherans, and eventually aligned himself with the new Anabaptist movement though he differed from the majority of them on several points. Eventually he was burned at the stake on March 10, 1528, on the authority of Archduke Ferdinand.

Hubmaier was the only trained Anabaptist theologian of his time, and therefore one of the few that left substantial written material behind him. His influence on Anabaptism is most noticeable in Anabaptist ideas of the freedom of the will, the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s

Supper, and the importance of fraternal admonition as a mark of the church. One of his chief differences with other Anabaptists was on the relation of church and state, being the closest thing to a “magisterial Anabaptist” that the movement produced.

In the following pages we will examine (1) his doctrine of the church, (2) his doctrine of the state, and (3) his ideas on the relationship between the two. We will conclude with a short critique of Hubmaier’s contributions.

Hubmaier on Ecclesiology

Hubmaier understood the church to be distinct from the state. Both were of God, but were responsible for performing different offices. The word “church” denotes the universal community of saints, “all the people who are gathered and united in one

God, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, and have confessed this faith with their mouths, wherever they may be on earth.”¹ It also denotes a particular community of some believers in Christ. The universal church, assembled in the Spirit of God, cannot err, whereas the local church can.²

In speaking of the universal church, the local church, and their relationship to the members of the Trinity, Hubmaier consistently employs familial imagery. The universal church is the mother, the local church is the daughter, and Christ is the groom.

Hubmaier uses this imagery to explain his idea of authority in the church; the priest or ordained minister exercises authority given him by the local church (daughter), which is given to it by the universal church (mother), which is given to it by Christ (husband), which was given him by God, the source of all authority.

1 Balthasar Hubmaier, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin, John H. Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), 351.

2 *Ibid.*, 352.

Therefore, the daughter has equal authority with the mother, and to obey the priest is ultimately to obey God.³

For Hubmaier the universal and the local church are both visible entities. By asserting this he is reacting to the magisterial reformers, most directly to Zwingli whom he knew well, and to their emphasis on an invisible universal church. This is one of the aspects of his theology that shows the strong catholicity that he carried with him into his career as an Anabaptist.⁴ The visibility of the church is founded in Hubmaier's understanding of the marks of the true church, to which we now turn.

The marks of the true church for Hubmaier were the Eucharist, Baptism,

and Fraternal Admonition. The Eucharist is instituted by Christ as a reminder and a memorial. The elements are therefore not the actual blood and body of Christ, but reminders thereof. Christ himself is bodily in heaven where he sits at the right hand of the Father, as Stephen saw.⁵

Hubmaier's view on Baptism was one of his main contributions to the developing Anabaptist movement, and his "On the Christian Baptism of Believers" is counted as his best and most significant writing, used by Anabaptists in their own defense for centuries after.

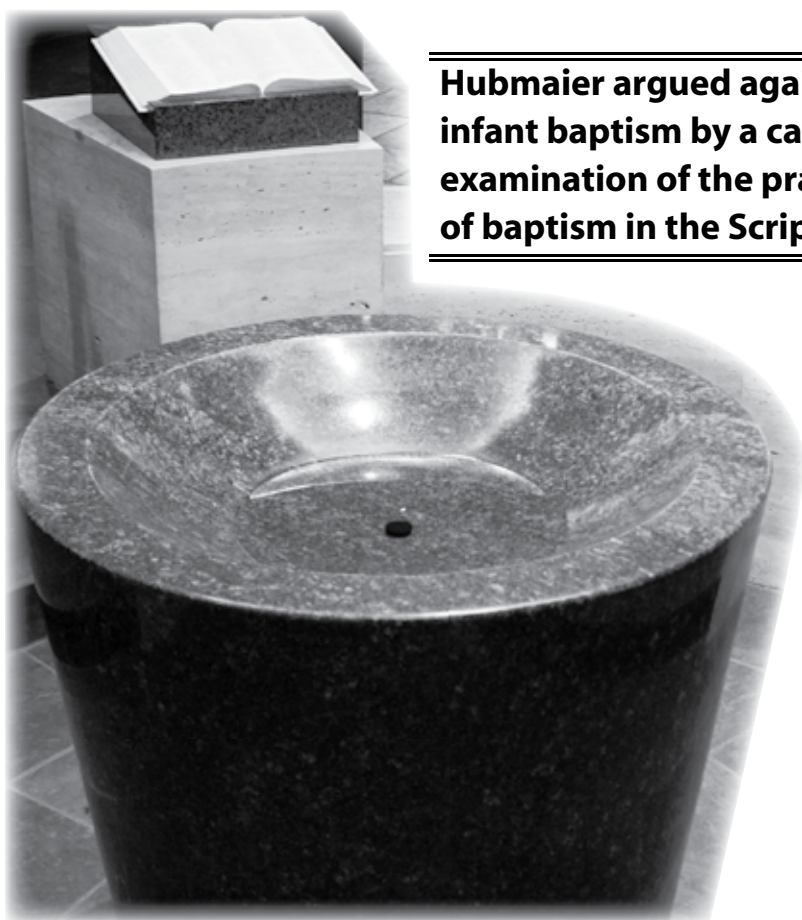
He argued for it and against infant baptism by a careful examination of the

practice of baptism in the Scriptures, noting especially that baptism was connected with faith, repentance, and the declaration of both as the new life is entered into.

Hubmaier believed in a three-fold baptism: of the Spirit, of water, and of blood. The first is "an inner illumination of our hearts that takes place by the Holy Spirit, through the living Word of God."⁶ The second follows directly from the first, and is a public and outward testimony of it. Water baptism was Hubmaier's primary concern and includes the confession of one's sins before all people, testifying to one's belief in the forgiveness of these sins through the death and resurrection of Christ, vowing publicly to live according to the Word of God by His strength, and submitting to fraternal admonition if one trespasses.⁷ It is this oral, public confession on which the church is built.⁸ The baptism of blood is the daily mortification of the flesh.

The third mark of the church, fraternal admonition, is the practice of discipline in the church as a means of dealing with the sin of members as taught by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20. It must be practiced in the church so that its outward life reflects the convictions which they have sworn to live out by the power of God, and must always be administered in love and not out of envy, hate, or wrath. The most severe expression of fraternal admonition is the Ban, used in the case of a member of the church who refuses to repent of ongoing sin, and is for the purpose of joyfully restoring that brother/sister into fellowship. The Ban is one of the functions of the Power of the Keys, which God granted the universal and local church to be exercised through the ordained minister or priest.⁹

Although fraternal admonition is technically a sub-point under Baptism, Hubmaier was so convicted of its importance that he had it stand independently as a third mark of the church, as indicated by the sub-title of his tract *On Fraternal Admonition*: "Where this is lacking, there is certainly no church, even if Water Baptism and the Supper of Christ are practiced."¹⁰ Here again we encounter his strong



Hubmaier argued against infant baptism by a careful examination of the practice of baptism in the Scriptures.

3 Ibid., 547.

4 James McClendon, Jr. "Hubmaier, Catholic Anabaptist" in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 75.

5 Hubmaier, 415.

6 Hubmaier, 349.

7 Ibid., 349.

8 Ibid., 352.

9 Hubmaier, 546.

10 Hubmaier, 373.

convictions on the Church as a *visible* entity which makes of the life of faith a concrete, though incomplete, reality.

This conviction is a reaction to (1) the state of the Roman Catholic Church in his day and especially to (2) the Lutheran emphasis on (a) Salvation by faith alone, (b) a person's inability to do any good, and (c) the providence of God.

Hubmaier saw these emphases together resulting in lives in which the gospel is but a facade behind which nothing is seen but "tippling, gluttony, blaspheming, usury, lying, deceit, skinning and scraping, coercing, pressing, stealing, robbing, burning, gambling, dancing, flattery, loafing, fornication, adultery, rape, tyranny, strangling, murder."¹¹

Basing the content and exercise of fraternal admonition on Scripture, and especially Matthew 18:15-20, Hubmaier saw himself as calling for a *recovery* of what was originally part of baptism and the Christian life, but had been lost and corrupted for the last thousand years. His call for the practice of fraternal admonition was fed by a hope and a vision: "Where this happens, here God will stand powerfully and wonderfully by his Word in such a way that the Christian brethren and the fellowship will be able to reconcile and conciliate such great causes and disunities as could not have been judged in many years at great cost and with great damage."¹²

Hubmaier on the State

Much of the information we have about Hubmaier's thought on the State comes from his pamphlet *Von*

The sword was hung by God at the government's side so that it can fulfill the function He has given it. God intends the State to facilitate the living of a godly life.

dem Schwert (On the Sword), which was organized as a commentary on fifteen of the Scriptural texts used by those who defended the nonresistant position, followed by an exposition of Romans 13:1-6.

All of the arguments and examples of the Schleithem Confession come up for refutation in it, with the single exception of Jesus fleeing the Jews who attempted to make him a king, which would have been accounted for by arguments Hubmaier had already made.¹³

Hubmaier composed this refutation of the Stähler (staff-bearers) nonresistant position in Nikolsburg because of an increasingly tense situation between him, Hans Hut, and their respective followers.¹⁴ One of the issues that concerned Hubmaier was Hut's unequivocal rejection of the use of force, and his apocalypticism, which caused the eye of the government, whose protection and endorsement Hubmaier enjoyed, to fall with suspicion on the Anabaptists in general.¹⁵

Hubmaier saw government as given by God to Adam after the Fall, when God said to Eve that she would be under the authority of the man, and he would rule over her. God later gave the authority and the sword to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and Samuel.

After Samuel, because of the request of the people for a king, God gave them a king and today we must continue to bear the burden of supporting government as a consequence of our sin.¹⁶

Although government was made necessary because of our sin, it is a servant of God used by Him to do His will. The sword was hung by God at the government's side so that it can fulfill the function He has given it. God intends the State to facilitate the living of a godly life. It is to use its sword not to fight or brawl, to conquer land and people with force, but to watch over the orphans, protect the widows, care for the righteous, and free all those who are threatened and oppressed by power.¹⁷ Although God could have done this without the aid of people, he wants to use us so that we serve each other and are not idle.

For Hubmaier the defining characteristic of the state as it should be is its *attitude* towards those under its authority. Its intentions are to be good, in line with God's will, even though the carrying out of that will is always in an imperfect, limited manner.¹⁸

Since the main tool of the state is the sword, its work often looks similar to that of the devil's. The difference between them again is one of attitude, so that the government has a special compassion for those who have erred and wholeheartedly wishes that it had not happened, whereas the devil and his followers want all people to be miserable.¹⁹ In fact, the government actually has no enemy, for it hates and envies no one. Its use of the sword is motivated not by envy and hate, but by the mandate of God.²⁰

Hubmaier sees the rule of the tyrant(s) primarily as God's punishment of our sins and disobedience, since there is no government which does not come from Him.²¹ However, he is quick to

11 Hubmaier, 376.

12 Ibid., 382.

13 James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1972), 142.

14 For a brief account of the conflict between Hubmaier and Hut, see Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*, trans. Irwin J. Barnes and William R. Estep, ed. William R. Estep (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1978), 361-77.

15 Henry C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: The Leader of the Anabaptists* (New York: AMS Press, 1971), 172.

16 Hubmaier, 505.

17 Ibid., 506, 517, 519.

18 Stayer, 143.

19 Hubmaier, 500.

20 Ibid., 511.

21 Ibid., 506.

encourage his readers to take up the responsibility of testing thoroughly the spirit of their government, to discover the motive of its use of the sword, before they blindly obey its commands.

If they discern that the government is moved to use the sword out of arrogance, pride, hate, or their own advantage instead of out of a love for the common good and for territorial peace, this government does not use the sword according to the order of God. This is sufficient cause for the people to escape its rule and to accept another government, provided this can be done lawfully and peacefully, without much damage and rebellion. If this is impossible, the tyrannical government must be endured as that given us in God's wrath as punishment for our sins.²²

In his emphasis on the importance of the attitude of the state and his high estimation of the role of the state in God's work, Hubmaier followed those like Luther and Zwingli who internalized the ethical absolutes of the Sermon on the Mount, making them something to be practiced inwardly, in a spiritual way, instead of literally and outwardly in all circumstances.

Where he differed from Luther, however, was in his insistence that power was only legitimate when exercised with good intention.²³ This conditionality was coupled with an awareness of the high calling of the magistracy and the account it will have to give to God on the last day about how it has used that sword.²⁴

Relation of Church and State

Hubmaier's position on the relation of church and state was far from the apoliticism which came to be predominant in the Anabaptist movement shortly after his passing. Hubmaier sees them as parallel ministries, both established by God,



Hubmaier's position on the relation of church and state was far from the apoliticism which came to be predominant in the Anabaptist movement shortly after his passing.

and both used to punish sins. They each wield a sword, but different kinds; the spiritual sword of the Church, and the external sword of the state.

The state and the church help each other by carrying out faithfully the office that they are given, and not presuming to encroach on the other's territory by doing things they are not called to do. On an individual level, this means that, though all Christians have a spiritual sword to use against the godless, not all have been given a sword against the evildoers.²⁵ Neither should the state stray from its use of the external sword to using the spiritual sword.

Since both Church and State are of God, performing parallel ministries, they have certain obligations to each other. The most important duty of the state to the church is to facilitate the living of a Godly life. This is achieved by the prudent use of the Sword to suppress the evildoers and to maintain order. The government best suited for this task is "pious, righteous, and

Christian."²⁶ Hubmaier's reformations of Waldshut and then Nikolsburg were carried out in close cooperation with the magistracy, and with their consent and endorsement.

Whereas the duty of the state to the church is to create an environment in which a godly life may be lived, the duty of the church to the state is to aid it in those things that are justifiable, and to help create godly citizenry.

This is a far cry from the views of other Anabaptists such as Conrad Grebel, who rejected the idea of *corpus christianum*, the general European Christian culture. Hubmaier assumed and defended it, seeing adult baptism and its intended result of a visibly Christian life as a fundamental step in the purification and reformation of the *corpus christianum*.²⁷

Hubmaier held that individual subjects of a state are obligated to help the government in all justifiable things. If the government needs help in wielding the sword effectively and calls on its citizens for this help, then they should "sustain and help their superiors so that the evil ones are annihilated and rooted out according to the will of God."²⁸

It seems that this obedience was very important in Hubmaier's thought. Obedience is to be performed "for the sake of the salvation of their souls."²⁹

22 Ibid., 521.

23 Stayer, 143.

24 Hubmaier, 511.

25 Ibid., 63.

26 Ibid., 506.

27 Stayer, 105.

28 Hubmaier, 520.

29 Ibid., 520.

Those who resist the command of the government in a legitimate use of the sword “will receive over himself the eternal judgment.”³⁰

While obedience is important to Hubmaier, he is quick to ensure that his readers do not understand this as an absolute, unconditional act. He reminds his readers that they are obligated to first test the spirit of their government, to discern the motive behind the use of the sword. The Christian also has the responsibility to carry out fraternal admonition to those in power, whether bishop, king, prince, or lord.³¹

This assumes, of course, the *corpus christianium* in which those in power would likely be baptized members of the church. Hubmaier also reminds his readers that it is the individual citizen who is ultimately responsible before God for whatever actions he/she has done, even if they were done on behalf of and at the behest of the state.³²

He also mentions several times that, whether the state is good or bad, the Christian is always responsible to pray for it “seriously and with great diligence”³³ so that a peaceful and quiet life might be led.

Following from Hubmaier’s distinction between the office of church and the office of the state and his insistence that they each stick to their own functions is the principle of religious toleration found in his writings.

Whereas the Catholics believed that the sword of the state ought to be used against heretics, Hubmaier argued against this in his *On Heretics and Those Who Burn Them*. He defines heretics as “those who blind the Scripture, and who exposit it otherwise than the Holy Spirit demands.”³⁴ The evildoers who cause bodily harm to the defenseless should be given over to the sword of the state, but the heretic or the

Hubmaier contends that the failure to assist the government in the punishment of the evildoer is tantamount to transgressing the command not to kill, since one is thereby not protecting the righteous and is really causing his/her death.

unbeliever should be overcome “with holy instruction, not contentiously but gently...with patience and supplication, whereby we patiently await the divine judgment.”³⁵

As mentioned above, the primary source of our knowledge of Hubmaier’s thought on the relation of church and state is *Von dem Schwart*, his rebuttal of the rejection of the Sword espoused by the Anabaptist *Stäbler* (staff-bearers). A close reading of it is helpful in seeing how Hubmaier based his ideas on the relation of church and state on Scripture.

Four main kinds of argument can be discerned in Hubmaier’s interpretation of these passages. The first is that there is a distance between Christ and those who follow him. When Christ says that his kingdom is not of this world, he is referring to himself only (John 18:36). There is a great degree of difference between the head of the body and the members of the body. Since we are not perfect, and our kingdom is obviously therefore at least partly of this world, we must bear the sword. This principle is also used in his interpretation of Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23; Col. 1:18; and 2:9-10.

The second argument for use of the sword by Christians is derived from the distinction between offices that we have noticed earlier in Hubmaier’s idea of the relation of church and state. When

Christ says “Whoever takes up the sword shall perish by the sword”, he refers to those who “take up” the sword, who use it without calling and on their own authority (Matthew 26:52-54).

When Christ says that he came not to judge, condemn, or punish people, he is referring to the fact that his office was that of Saviour, not of Judge (Luke 9:54-56). Christians who are called into the magistracy must carry out the duties of that office,

while those who are not should not take up the sword. Hubmaier also interprets Luke 22:25f; Matthew 5:40; 18:15ff, and 1 Corinthians 6:7f in this way.

Because of this reading of Scripture, Hubmaier contends that the failure to assist the government in the punishment of the evildoer is tantamount to transgressing the command not to kill, since one is thereby not protecting the righteous and is really causing his/her death.

The third kind of defense that Hubmaier employs in his interpretation of the passages is fascinating from a hermeneutical point of view. In his discussion of Matthew 5:21, Hubmaier notes that, together with the command not to kill, there is the command of God to kill, a command connected to governmental authority. These commands seem to contradict each other, but are really simultaneously true.

Hubmaier then lists thirty-three other examples of antitheses in Scripture that seem contradictory but are not, all backed up with many Scripture references. Hubmaier contends that, where there is an apparent contradiction in Scripture, it is really a matter of them both being simultaneously true.

A fourth kind of defense that Hubmaier employs here is the internalization or spiritualization of the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount and other moral teachings of the New Testament. When vengeance is forbidden, the emphasis is on personal vengeance. It is a matter of one’s attitude and motives. When the government puts to death an evildoer

30 *Ibid.*, 515.

31 Hubmaier, 383, 309-10.

32 Hubmaier, 309-10.

33 *Ibid.*, 98, 506.

34 *Ibid.*, 59.

35 *Ibid.*, 59, 62.

according to the law of an eye for an eye, it can do so while remaining true to the command to love one's enemies, since it uses the sword not out of personal vengeance, but with sadness for the person (Romans 12:19ff).

In sum, the relation of church and state in Hubmaier's thought is quite similar to that of the magisterial reformers of his day.³⁶ Church and state are parallel ministries ordained by God, both wielding a different kind of sword for different, but complementary, purposes. The state wields the sword to create space for the living of a Godly life in peace and order, and the church wields its sword to do its part in creating people that are good citizens of the state and good disciples of Christ. Christians are individually responsible for whatever acts they commit for the state, so they are responsible to discern for themselves whether those demands contradict the law of God and must maintain a prophetic witness to the state by means of fraternal admonition. This vision of the relation of church and state is grounded in Hubmaier's interpretation of the relevant passages of Scripture.

Critique of Hubmaier's Thought

Hubmaier's thought on the issues discussed above demonstrates a number of strengths and weaknesses. First of all, it must be said that Hubmaier's vision for the relation of church and state is remarkably comprehensive, amounting to an almost total plan for the creation of a society shaped by the living out of its commitment to Christ.

Secondly, his concern for the "outward" nature of the church and the necessity of fraternal admonition was biblically sound and proved influential in subsequent generations of Anabaptists. The heirs of the Anabaptist

heritage today have largely retained the emphasis on this outwardness of the church, but have neglected fraternal admonition. We would do well to recover this rich baptismal theology and the genuine concern and hope for the church (and society at large) that it was evidence of.

A consequent strength of Hubmaier's thought on this is the preservation and encouragement of the prophetic role of the church to the state. Although this ingredient was not entirely absent in the other Reformers of his day, the accent was generally on submission to the government, since there is no government that is not from God.

Hubmaier seems to have been rather quicker to encourage the critical examination of the state's motives before unquestioning obedience. His insistence that the power of the temporal sword was only valid if exercised with good intention preserves the tension of the relation of church and state in the New Testament where they were "Uneasy Neighbours," at best.³⁷

Hubmaier is also to be applauded for the religious liberty that he espoused on the basis of the separate roles of the church and the state. *On Heretics and Those Who Burn Them* is a seminal

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document in the promotion of religious liberty by the Anabaptists.³⁸

Hubmaier's view of the good that the state could do was (to this author's mind) surprisingly optimistic and possibly naive. However, the consistent emphasis on the individual's responsibility to critique her/his government's motives for its use of the sword probably accounts for his optimism, especially since Hubmaier assumed a government which was Christian and baptized.

This optimism about the state is parallel in tone and in its basis to Hubmaier's optimism regarding the possibility of the church being able to visibly live out a life of discipleship. In contrast, Luther was much more critical of the people in the magistracy and its capacity for good, being of the opinion that they were "mostly of the devil," and he had a much stronger sense of the divine authority behind all secular rulers and the Christian's strong obligation to full obedience.³⁹

Hubmaier's thought does betray several weaknesses. Due to limitations of space in this paper, we will examine only the most important one here, leaving the quibbling over interpretation of specific texts for some other day. One of the foundations of Hubmaier's thought seems to be an implicit rejection of the idea that Jesus is in any way *normative* for social and political ethics. It is this that lies behind his internalization of the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount and Romans 12. It also finds expression in the distinction between offices and the conclusion that different offices require different sets of ethics.

This is not to say that behind Hubmaier's work lies some sinister anti-biblical agenda. Rather, it is typical of most Protestant thought today, and was typical of Protestant thought then, too. An example is Luther's location of the righteousness of God and the righteousness of people exclusively on the level of the individual, precluding it also having cosmic or social dimensions.

In all these, Jesus' teachings are assumed to have direct and literal relevance for the realm of relationships between individuals only. This is not to

36 It should be noted that the Hutterite *Great Chronicle* indicates that towards the end of his last imprisonment he became aware that he had improperly resisted Hans Hut on several points, including on the use of the sword. That text may be found in Hubmaier, 567-8. However, the *Great Chronicle* is the only source for this tradition and it clearly has altered some historical accounts for ideological ends. Stayer, 165, argues against the veracity of this account.

37 See the introduction in Walter E. Pilgrim, *Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

38 Thomas G. Sanders, *Protestant Concepts of Church and State* (New York: Hold, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), 93-4.

39 William A. Mueller, *Church and State in Luther and Calvin* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954), 55.

say that Hubmaier or Luther conceived their thought on the relation of church and state apart from revelation; it is simply assumed that Jesus and his teaching do not concretely speak to the ethics of the social and political realms. They must always be passed through a filter of some sort—spiritualization, internalization, distinction between roles—before they are brought to bear on the social or political realm.

Would that our congregations today would again taste the beauty and hope on which were built Hubmaier's baptismal theology.

Systems of thought that believe that Jesus' teaching or behaviour are not finally normative for ethics must then find some other bridge between theology and ethics.⁴⁰ Since it cannot be based directly on revelation, it must also be based on the common sense study of the realities around us, on what "works," what is "relevant," what is "effective." John Howard Yoder holds that all of these means of discerning the right in social ethics are to some degree based on natural theology.⁴¹

In his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth noted in what way the demands of the Third Reich to the state church were actually a natural theology, and warns that "[t]he logic of the matter demands that, even if we only lend our little finger to natural theology, there necessarily follows the denial of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. A natural theology which does not strive to be the only master is not a natural theology."⁴²

Does Yoder's definition of natural theology match Barth's? Is it possible that Barth's warnings against natural

theology apply also to the manifestation of it in the majority of Protestant doctrines of the relation of church and state? The answering of these questions exceeds the knowledge of this author and the limits of the paper, but it needs further investigation. In any case, this implicit rejection of Jesus as normative for social ethics is a part of the foundation of Hubmaier's thought that the reader needs carefully to examine before accepting.

Conclusion

In the writings of Balthasar Hubmaier we see a person who thought long and deep on what it means to live as a Christian in the church and under the state. Although his teaching was probably least typical of the Anabaptist position on the

Sword, his contribution to Anabaptist theology and congregational life has been considerable.

Would that our congregations today would again taste the beauty and hope on which were built his baptismal theology, including his call for the recovery of the practice of fraternal admonition. May this happen to me where I will serve, and may I be used in it, and in it may God "stand powerfully and wonderfully by his Word in such a way that the Christian brethren and the fellowship will be able to reconcile and conciliate such great causes and disunities as could not have been judged in many years at great cost and with great damage."⁴³

And finally, at the end of all things, may we all together experience the truth of Hubmaier's constant declaration: *Die Wahrheit ist untödlich!* (Truth is Unkillable!) ☹

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40 This and the following material is mostly from John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1995), 8-9.

41 Yoder, 8.

42 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 2, translated by G.T. Thomas and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 299-303, 307-308, cited in William C. Placher, *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Volume 2: From the Reformation to the Present*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 160.

43 *Ibid.*, 382.

Work: A Curse or a Blessing?

Travis Thiessen



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Some of our feelings about work have been brought out by various cartoons and jokes: *Hard work has a future payoff. Laziness pays off now; I pretend to work. They pretend to pay me; Ambition is a poor excuse for not having enough sense to be lazy; Work is for people who don't know how to fish; All I want is less to do, more time to do it, and higher pay for not getting it done.* Ed Silvoso in his book *Anointed for Business* writes that there are four unbiblical misbeliefs that churches have promoted about work:

- There is a God-ordained division between clergy and laity.
- The church is called to operate primarily inside a building.
- People involved in business cannot be as spiritual as those serving in full-time Christian ministry.
- The primary role of marketplace Christians is to make money to support the vision of those in the ministry.

As I looked at these four false beliefs about work and the working class, I had to admit that to some degree we have bought into these lies and the church to some extent is at fault for promoting these beliefs.

A History of Attitudes about Work

Before we look at a biblical view of work let's take a brief historical look at the way work has been viewed over the ages. This historical look is summarized from *History of Faith and Work* by Alistair Mackenzie.

If we start back just before the Christian era we find two sharply contrasting views of everyday work among the Greeks and the Jews. In the Greek world, work was considered to be a curse. Aristotle said that to be unemployed was good fortune because



it allowed a person to participate in political life and contemplation.

For the Greeks, society was organized so that a few could enjoy the blessing of "leisure" while work was done by slaves. Everyday work was a demeaning occupation that one should try to avoid.

The opportunity to think about issues and engage in contemplation was also valued by Jews. And when Jesus came on the scene he was only one of many Jewish rabbis or teachers on the block. However, it is very significant to note that Jewish teachers were not expected to live off the contributions of their students, but were all expected to have a trade through which they could support themselves.

Far from being avoided, work was to be embraced as part of God's purposes in creation. Theological reflection would be engaged in by people who were daily engaged in everyday life in

the world. Jesus was known as a carpenter long before he was known as a rabbi. Paul worked at making tents to support his ministry. The disciples were a collection of fishermen, farmers, and businessmen.

New Testament Christians, it seems, had a positive outlook on work, and most of those involved in ministry did this alongside their everyday work.

During the Medieval period this positive view of work gave way to a much lower view. This is reflected in the view of Eusebius who wrote about his doctrine of two lives. He says:

Two ways of life were given by the law of Christ to His Church. The one is above nature, and beyond common human living; it does not allow marriage, child-bearing, property nor the possession of wealth, but is wholly and permanently separate from the common customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone...such then is the perfect form of the Christian life. And the other, more humble, more human, permits man to join in marriage, and to produce children...it allows them to have minds for farming, for trade, and the other more secular interests as well as for religion...a kind of secondary grade of piety is attributed to them.

In a similar way Augustine distinguished between the "active life" and the "contemplative life." While both kinds of life were good and Augustine had praise for the work of farmers and craftspeople and merchants, the contemplative life was clearly of a higher order. Very soon it was this view that dominated Christian thinking, until only those people pursuing the contemplative life or a priestly role in the church were said to have a truly "religious" vocation.

It was initially through the work of Martin Luther that the 16th century

reformers recovered a sense that all of life, including daily work, could be understood as a calling from God. According to Luther we respond to the call to love our neighbour by fulfilling the duties that are associated with our everyday work. Work is our call to serve. This work includes domestic and civic duties as well as our employment.

In fact, Luther said we can only truly serve God in the midst of everyday circumstances. Luther said attempts to elevate the significance of the contemplative life are false. In fact, it is the monastic life that has no true calling. It is an escape from the true obedience that God calls us to.

Luther said we can only truly serve God in the midst of everyday circumstances.

The teaching of the Reformers was carried on by the Puritans who are today credited for bringing this Protestant work ethic to North America. The Puritans stressed diligent work in some legitimate vocation to which one has been called. This he does to glorify God as an obedient servant, provide for his own needs, and for the public good. One humbly depends on the sovereign God as the one who gave him the skill and opportunities to work, and blesses the work of his hands. The Puritans commended industriousness and profit in moderation.

The Enlightenment brought about a secularizing of the Protestant work ethic. The work ethic was separated from the biblical values upon which it was founded. The ideals of the original Protestant ethic became perverted into "a creed of personal success." In the secularized version there was no central purpose to glorify God, no concept of stewardship or servanthood, and no moral duty to help the needy. In place of these was personal success.

These secular work values were assimilated by the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries as both owners and labourers were driven by self-interest. The work ethic was divorced from its biblical foundation.

Resentment in the workforce grew as did cynicism, apathy, and shoddy workmanship. Autocratic labour unions rose to counteract insensitive owners and managers. Exploitation of workers and injustice were a natural result.

Where are we today? Lee Smith writes, "Western civilization is confused about work. Some have made work an idol. Particularly among the professional class the ethic of success and career prevails. Careerism is an attitude, a life orientation in which a person views career as the primary and most important aim in life.

"This search for success measured by income and professional status requires immense dedication to one's work. Values championed are self-denial, ambition, winning and self fulfillment. Instead of working to please God and serve humanity success addicts work to satisfy themselves."

This has led to workaholism, where people compulsively work 16 to 20 hours a day, sacrificing all other values including family on the altar of work. Workaholics often destroy their physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual health. Many see work as the way to acquire as much money as possible in any way possible.

On the other hand, for many working class people, work is seen as a distasteful but necessary evil. Work is merely the necessary means for getting the resources needed to be happy and entertained. This could be called the leisure ethic. Non-working time is spent self-indulgently in self-interest and pleasure seeking. Leisure became a big business. We see leisure as a constitutional right.

Charles Colson says, "The aim became not to produce goods for the common welfare but acquiring things for one's own pleasure." Unfortunately, many Christian attitudes reflect societal attitudes more than biblical values. We would say we reject the tenets of the secular success or leisure ethics, but we tend to live by modified versions of them. Thus it is important to revisit the

topic of work in Scripture to rebuild a consistent theology of work.

A Biblical View of Work

God is the first worker. The Bible depicts God as actively carrying out his plan. From Genesis to Revelation God is at work. The Bible says that what God does is glorious. Psalm 111:3-4: "Everything he does reveals his glory and majesty. His righteousness never fails. He causes us to remember his wonderful works. How gracious and merciful is our Lord!"

God's work is sovereign. Ecclesiastes 3:14: "I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him."

God's work is perfect. Deuteronomy 32:4: He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he."

God's work is for our good. Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

God Created Mankind to Work

Work is a blessing. It is clear from Genesis that God intended mankind to work. Genesis 1:28: "God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Churches tend to focus very much on the great commission to go out and evangelize the world, but here we have the first mandate or job description that was given to humanity.

Before the fall, Adam and Eve were blessed by God to have families and to fill the earth with children. They were to govern the earth and to reign over all the animals that God created. This work is considered a blessing from God—it is humanity's way of taking part in God's creative work.

Being created in the image of God means that, like Him, we will be creative and seek to oversee the world

that God has made. We will raise our families and provide for them; we will seek to live in harmony with nature and yet we will reign over it. This work that God gave to Adam and Eve was filled with meaning and purpose; they were working in harmony with their Creator—in intimate relationship and in complete cooperation with Him.

Work is the natural course of life.

Psalm 104 is a story of God's creation. It explores the wonders of all of God's work. Psalm 104:19-24:

The moon marks off the seasons, and
the sun knows when to go down.
You bring darkness, it becomes night,
and all the beasts of the forest prowl.
The lions roar for their prey and seek
their food from God.

The sun rises, and they steal away; they
return and lie down in their dens.

*Then man goes out to his work, to his
labor until evening.*

How many are your works, O Lord! In
wisdom you made them all.

The psalmist gives us the sense that work is part of God's creation—it is part of the natural order of life.

The book of Proverbs condemns laziness and commends work. Proverbs 6:6-11:

Take a lesson from the ants, you
lazybones. Learn from their ways and
become wise! Though they have no
prince or governor or ruler to make
them work, they labor hard all summer,
gathering food for the winter. But
you, lazybones, how long will you
sleep? When will you wake up? A little
extra sleep, a little more slumber, a
little folding of the hands to rest, then
poverty will pounce on you like a
bandit; scarcity will attack you like an
armed robber.

The New Testament teaches us that failure to work and to provide for one's family is sin. It teaches that a responsible Christian will work hard.

Ephesians 4:28: "If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give

generously to others in need."

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12:

"Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before.

Then people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others."

2 Thessalonians 3:11-12: Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people's business. We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living."

Hard work according to the Scripture is the natural course of life. The Scriptures clearly portray work as the natural course of life for humans on this earth.

A Summary of a Biblical View of Work

Work is good. Work is a blessing from the hand of God. It is good for the worker and for society. Colson, in his book *Why America Doesn't Work*, shows that people deprived of meaningful work lose their reason for existence and may actually go "stark raving mad." Why? This is because, "Meaningful work is a fundamental dimension of human existence, an expression of our very nature." It is an integral part of God's created order.

Work is the means God has ordained for the meeting of human needs. The Scriptures clearly teach that without work we will not eat. It is God divine provision for us so that we can sustain our own life and the lives of our families.

Work is a divinely-mandated responsibility, a moral imperative. Stevens in his book *The Other Six Days* writes,

"To dream of a workless paradise is to seek something other than the purpose and plans of God. Ryken in his book *Redeeming Time* says, "The common denominator among people who have what we call a strong work ethic is not that these people enjoy

Although having a family and working for their provision is God's blessing to us, it has become tainted through the fall of mankind in sin.

their work (which they may or may not) but that they accept it as their duty."

Work is a social responsibility, a social necessity for a stable and just society.

In a society where there is a lot of unemployment there is an increase of alcoholism, of, crime, political instability, mental health problems, and diminished health standards. Society cannot function without meaningful work.

Sin Has Distorted Work

The effect of the fall: "The Fall" distorted work and thwarted its original purpose. This is clearly seen in Scripture (Genesis 3:17-19):

And to the man he said, "Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return."

God's original blessing on work is still there and humanity is still to carry on the work of filling the earth and governing over it. As a result of sin, however, man's work is hampered by thorns and thistles. Work now becomes hard labour in order to produce the rewards that before the fall came easily.

Before the fall God said (Genesis 1:29-30): "Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life."

There is a picture of abundant

The book of Proverbs condemns laziness and commends work. The New Testament teaches that a responsible Christian will work hard.

provision when creation was in its original state. But after The Fall the picture is one of thistles, thorns, and a crop that produces only by the sweat of the brow.

So, although having a family and working for their provision is God's blessing to us, it has become tainted through the fall of mankind in sin. So is work a curse or a blessing? Work is God's blessing to us, it brings meaning and purpose, and through work we cooperate with God in His creative activity. However, for the time being the ground is cursed and making a living will be hampered by the thorns and thistles of life. Work can be difficult and unpleasant.

In a cursed world the great efforts we make to survive are difficult and often defeated. Resources are diminished. Natural disasters destroy. There is corrosion, disease, and deterioration. Our capacity to work diminishes with the passing of the years both physically and mentally. Our work may not be adequate to meet our needs.

We tire of the effort and stress of work, the problems, the pain, and the disappointed expectations. Sin also warps our motives for working. When we do not see our work as the God-mandated means of meeting our own needs and benefiting others, our motives become skewed.

We may begin to despise work and seek to avoid it. We may become greedy and begin to see work only a means to enrich ourselves at the expense of others. We may turn work into a god, an addiction. Other important values (worship, family, Christian service) are neglected. Relationships suffer. We may become dishonest and unfair in our dealings with others, resorting to theft or fraud.

We futilely try to find the meaning of life in our work. However, the success ethic promises more than it can deliver. Apart from a relationship with God and the priority of spiritual values, work becomes empty and futile. Because of sin we must continually seek to keep work in its proper God-ordained place in our lives.

So what is a godly perspective on work?

Good workmanship brings glory to God and is a reflection of God's image in us.



A Godly Perspective on Work

So what is a godly perspective on work for the average working person in our society?

The ultimate purpose and motive for working is to glorify God. Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

I believe it brings glory to God when we work hard using our talents and abilities making the most of every opportunity that God gives us. Good workmanship brings glory to God and is a reflection of God's image in us.

We work to meet personal and family needs. Of course, it is necessary to distinguish between actual needs and selfish desires. It is easy for us to fall to the temptation of materialism, greed, and the selfish satisfaction of our appetites.

We work so that we have the means to help others who have legitimate needs which they are unable to meet. It is biblically clear that God cares about the poor and our treatment of the poor. Opening up our hearts and pockets to the needy is a mark of a Christian who is in tune with God.

We work for the benefit of society at large. Working is part of creating and maintaining a stable society in which ministry can proceed. In a society where people refuse to work or where work is unavailable, economic and social deterioration takes place.

We work in order to facilitate the Great Commission. Work facilitates the Great Commission in two ways: It enables us to give of our resources. Providing for those who give their lives to evangelism and the spiritual nurture of Christians is clearly valid and expected in the New Testament. It is also legitimate to contribute to provide facilities and materials needed for ministry. Second, work is a good testimony to the working world, a witness in action.

We work to find personal fulfillment. Using our God-given abilities and opportunities to be useful and to accomplish tasks is rightly satisfying. Work meets needs for self-esteem and a sense of personal worth. There is a sense of satisfaction found in constructive work to meet our needs, help others and support the work of the ministry locally and globally.

We work because we understand biblically that this is God's will and plan for meeting human needs. Thus, we work out of a desire to be obedient, as servants or stewards of God.

In this life work will never be all God created it to be in the Garden. Yet, work is God ordained and we need to make the most of all the talents and abilities God has given us. The following Scripture is one I used at the end of the slide show at my father's funeral. I felt that to a great extent this described his perspective on life.

Ecclesiastes 5:18- 19:

Even so, I have noticed one thing, at least, that is good. It is good for people to eat, drink, and enjoy their work under the sun during the short life God has given them, and to accept their lot in life. And it is a good thing to receive wealth from God and the good health to enjoy it. To enjoy your work and accept your lot in life—this is indeed a gift from God. ☺

Editor's note: Alistair Mackenzie's article *Vocation: Historical Survey of Christian Understandings* (June 1997), drawn upon in this sermon, is available at www.faihatwork.org.nz/godswork/vocation.htm.

Book Review



***With or Without God: Why the Way We Live is More Important Than What We Believe*, Gretta Vosper (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2008), 384 pp., \$29.99, ISBN 9781554682287. Reviewed by Terry M. Smith, an EMC minister with United Church roots.**

Much of the EMC likely considers the United Church of Canada as a liberal denomination. Gretta Vosper might make you reconsider that. Compared to her, much of the United Church is, indeed, conservative.

Vosper, an ordained United Church minister with a Master of Divinity degree from Queens Theological College, directs the *Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity* in Toronto, Ont. She's erudite, is capable of a skilful phrasing that an editor can appreciate, and is out to change your worldview.

What needs to be tossed? A view of a personal God, divine revelation, and the Bible as "the authoritative word of God for all time." Forget much of the biblical record about Jesus, his virgin birth, divinity (his humanity's okay), atoning death (the symbol of the cross should be removed), resurrection, and second coming. Gone is any certainty of an afterlife (though hell is rejected), sin, divine answers to prayer, and more. And she would say the same for other world religions with sacred texts.

She sees the Jewish faith and the Christian Church as human constructs. Much of the Hebrew Bible and Christian Scriptures is self-serving and self-justifying; they provide a humanly-constructed rationale for superior status, eternal security, and the destructive decision to exclude others.

Vosper seeks to replace it with a humanist perspective that continues to lay claim to being *Christian*, because the "original purpose of the movement" was "not the man called Jesus. The focus is on how to live" (192-193). The Christian Church should die a noble death, but its skills at networking and community-gathering should be retained as congregations shift into non-theistic thought and action.

The Progressive movement is to draw

Vosper is capable of a skilful phrasing that an editor can appreciate, and she is out to change your worldview.

upon, she says, what we and others know innately and through critical thought, using ethics and values increasingly uncluttered by religious perspectives, while being assisted in this by the best of "contemporary scholarship." Individuals can share their insights, gather for support, and by ethical living seek to influence the world.

The message, as you might realize, isn't a new one, but it's repackaged for our time under the title of *Progressive Christianity*. That her book is endorsed by Tom Harpur (*The Pagan Christ*) and John Shelby Spong (*The Sins of Scripture*) might be considered the kisses of death in some circles; but Spong is considered a leader in the movement and his support "did more for me and for this book than he will ever know" (359).

But don't call Vosper a heretic: "A heretic is someone who does not ascribe to what is considered the accepted norm. Every instance of progress in human history has been the result of heretical thinking. Think about it" (192).

There are various strengths in Vosper's writing. She confronts the liberal and evangelical segments of the Christian Church with their sins within history (including a preoccupation with heaven that ignores the state of the Earth, the mistreatment of women), an overly-selective use of Scripture (that does not highlight its ugly parts), and too much of a division between being and doing.

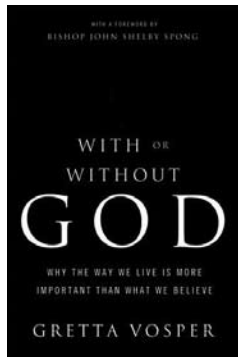
However, her presentation contains serious weaknesses. She has lost faith in divine revelation within history and the historical content of Scripture: "... contemporary scholarship strips Jesus of his uniquely divine status and leaves him only as a Middle Eastern peasant with a few charismatic gifts and a great posthumous marketing team" (255).

She quotes Spong to list Scripture passages she finds brutal and exclusionary (131-135); using these verses, stripped of their context, provides the sort of proof-texting reaction that she might deplore if done by others.

She also has a capacity to add to Scripture only to mock it: "The first thing we learn about him [God] is that he tires easily. After uttering a sentence or two a day for six days, he needs to take a whole day off" (227 or see 198-200). In treating Scripture this way, she moves beyond fair presentation. This act conflicts with her stated belief: "I want you to think for yourself when you approach it and not fall back on preconceived notions" (227).

Vosper defends her handling of Scripture by saying it was written to serve the Church in a self-serving way, yet she ignores how Scripture often points to a confrontation with the divine that is anything but self-serving. Look at Jesus' struggle with Jewish leadership (which she refers to inadequately), in the Garden, on the Cross; the struggles of the disciples before Easter; the struggle of the Early Church after Easter to include Gentiles; and elsewhere.

Or consider Amos's experience of the divine. Responding to a critic, he said, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" (Amos 7:14-15). He said, "The



It's ironic that, while castigating the Church for its lack of critical thought, Vosper doesn't acknowledge the struggle for faith evident within Scripture.

lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken—who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8).

Amos expressed being uncomfortably confronted by a personal God who communicated divine will (revelation) that was to be proclaimed; people were expected to live in response (belief in action) to that proclamation. His experience with the divine wasn't self-serving; it was confrontational, worldview changing, and vitally concerned about ethical living. At its root was an encounter with God who is much more than *god* (note on 20), *it*, or *absence of being* (236) by Vosper's choosing. Amos's "authentic memory" (219) challenges the foundation for her faith.

While Vosper can be a crisp writer, her rationale becomes repetitive and dismissive, rather black-and-white; ultimately, her book exhibits a dogmatic form of agnosticism: "The New Testament, our ecclesial history, canonical law, the whole shebang—all of it is nothing more than the history of the victors" (219). Tell that to Christian martyrs!

Or, "We look at how little astronomic, geographic, anthropologic, and scientific knowledge is affirmed in our religious institutions, scratch our heads, and wonder if those institutions have ever advanced at all" (207).

Or, "It's that we can't say that anything those stories [in the Bible] say or imply is factually true. It *may* be (her emphasis), but all we can really say about it is just that; it may be. There are no definitive answers" (225).

When it comes to Jesus, she says "there is little left for us to get a good hold on" (238). She struggles "to understand the power that caused his [Jesus'] life, his words, to cast

reverberations through two thousand years to us" (339), and her portrayal of Jesus is stunning for its lopsidedness (242-243).

While her best of "contemporary scholarship"—including John Shelby Spong,

Elaine Pagels, and members of the Jesus Seminar—can be benefited from in certain ways, their views on the historical integrity of the New Testament's picture of Jesus aren't beyond serious historical and intellectual challenge.

For what Vosper asserts overall, her level of argumentation is inadequate. She doesn't explore enough of the connection between what we believe and what we do. She doesn't spend much time dealing with Christians who are concerned about doing as a proper response to Jesus, nor does she seem well-versed in evangelical scholarship.

Her limits are clearly seen. Knowing "we aren't going to make it out alive" (6), Vosper offers little about life after death other than to say that the idea of it distracts us from focusing on responsible living now (122-129). Noted by more than me, in responding to a basic human need, she falls silent. Not believing in "moral absolutes" (280), her self-chosen values for the well-being of self, others, and world rest on a shallow foundation.

It's ironic that, while castigating the Church for its lack of critical thought, Vosper doesn't acknowledge the struggle for faith evident within Scripture: The experience of the Psalmists, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Job, and more. While saying believers have a faith "perfectly laid out to handle any of life's big questions" (263), she ignores that Apostle Paul said "we know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9).

Would Vosper consider me a misguided evangelical? I was raised an adherent in the United Church and am indebted to its critical thought, social justice, and more. Yet I am convinced there is more historical integrity and witness to divine revelation within the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Gospel

than Vosper sees.

Yes, the examination of Scripture, biblical history, and our response gets messy. That's the risk God took by engaging in revelation within history, rather than dropping a complete book from heaven.

What happened within history, and the evidence for it, remains important. The Apostle Paul said that if Jesus (the historical person) wasn't raised from the dead (an actual event), the Early Church's preaching and faith were useless, they were false witnesses about God, and their hope in the afterlife was empty (1 Corinthians 15:12-18).

Paul did not say that each Corinthian is free to reinterpret Christian teachings. Rather, Paul said, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20). Was Paul just being controlling? Rather, he was uncomfortably confronted by the risen Christ who changed his worldview (Acts 9).

First Corinthians is commonly seen as written in the early 50s, earlier than the gospels that Vosper seems to dismiss by saying they were written "at least a generation following Jesus' death" (364, n. 27). In it, Paul listed Christ's resurrection appearances (1 Corinthians 15:3-11) and referred to eyewitnesses who are still alive. He presents a basis for faith in Christ, his resurrection, and our eternal life. There is more here than mere human constructs that, Vosper says, distract us from our responsibilities here and now.

Does Vosper, as minister, remain in "essential agreement" with UC statements of faith? One hopes that the United Church's answer is no.

Suppose the next director of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity is hired and, within a few years, comes to see Jesus as reliably revealed in the New Testament, human and divine, who died an atoning death, rose from the dead, and has a rightful claim on each person's life. Would Vosper say that the director is free to reinterpret Progressive Christianity in such a way and that these changed views in no way make the individual unfit to be the Centre's director?

One can only hope that she and the Centre have to face that situation. ☹

The Final Word

I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the centre of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; on a cross-roads so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew and Latin and in Greek...; at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where he died and that is what he died about. And that is where churchmen should be and what churchmen should be about.

–George F. MacLeod
Only One Way Left,
(The Iona Community, 1956), p. 38

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