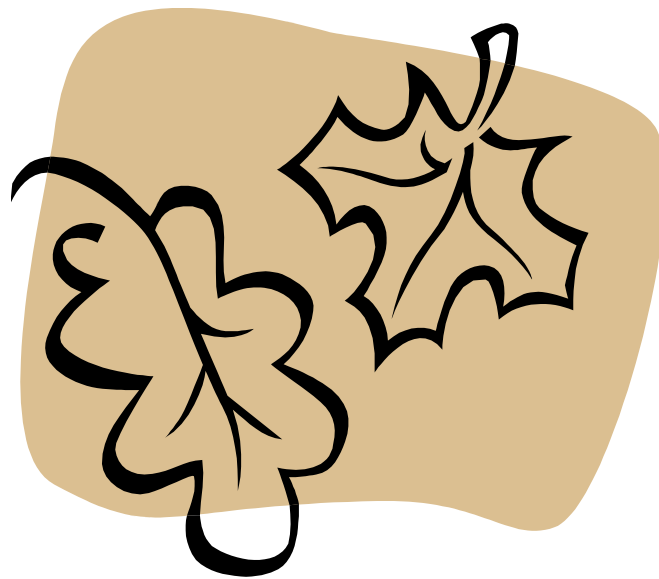


AUTUMN LEAVES

Volume 4



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Foreword

I have much pleasure in presenting the fourth volume of my *Autumn Leaves*, consisting of items that I wrote as a younger man and which I am now re-issuing in my own “autumn” years. The only exception is *Reforming of Borders* which was written in 2013.

As always, I trust friends will enjoy these contributions from my younger self and will also forgive their many shortcomings.

It is especially interesting for me to have re-read “Redeployment of Ministry” (page 37) and to see how some things in the pattern of ministry have changed and others have not.

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Naboth's Vineyard

Some expository thoughts on 1 Kings 21: 1 - 14 ¹

Our passage is a revealing one since it gives us much detail of the characters involved. A king and one of his subjects have a talk on a matter of business which leads the queen to plan the subject's death; a simple account perhaps, but full of spiritual significance.

We are told that Naboth owned a vineyard "hard by the palace of [king] Ahab". This means, in fact, that Naboth's vineyard was virtually next door to the royal palace. We need not assume that the king actually objected to having Naboth as a neighbour. It was simply that he wanted to have the vineyard for himself. He was like a spoiled child who, when he sees something that appeals to him can only say "I want it".

But let us be fair to Ahab where fairness is due; originally he only wanted to have the vineyard so that he could turn it into a vegetable garden to serve the needs of the palace. The fact that it was so near obviously made it more attractive. So, the king explained this to Naboth and promised that if he would hand over the ownership of the vineyard, then in exchange he would be given a better vineyard somewhere else or, if he preferred its cash value.

On the surface the whole offer seems so very reasonable perfectly and fair. Naboth had a piece of ground that could be very handy for the king. He is being given what seems like a fair and reasonable offer. Is Naboth's peremptory refusal not a little bit churlish?

¹ Slightly edited version of an article published in "The Gospel Magazine" June 1970 page 270.
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The clue to this really lies in the view that the Israelites took of their own private property inherited from their forefathers. To them their property was not just something to be owned for a while and then sold at will. Rather, it was part of their religious heritage, part of the land of promise that the Lord had given their forefathers and which would be passed down from father to son from generation to generation. The God-fearing Naboth would not - could not - sell his land or even exchange it for something better, no matter how attractive the offer might seem. Their inheritance was given by God and, as such, could not be alienated. As the invaluable Matthew Henry puts it: "Canaan was in a peculiar manner God's land; the Israelites were His tenants; and this was one of the conditions of their leases that they should not alienate any part of that which fell to their lot unless in case of extreme necessity and then only till the year of Jubilee, Lev 25: 28."

There is an interesting illustration of this point in the book of the prophet Jeremiah. Jerusalem was about to be overthrown by the Chaldeans when the prophet heard that a plot of ground in his native village of Anathoth which belonged to a kinsman named Hanameel had come up from sale. Jeremiah had the right of both inheritance and redemption and as such he was religiously obliged to buy it to prevent it going out of the family, which would have been seen as a disgrace (Jer. 32: 6 - fin). He did this at a time when Jerusalem was in great danger.

Now, it would seem very foolish to buy land just at the time when the city was about to be overrun by the enemy, but Jeremiah did buy it and publicly - almost ostentatiously - took possession of the title deed to the land and had it placed in a sealed jar for preservation. This was a sign - a sign that no matter how dark things appeared, the Lord still had a purpose for his people. The day would come when once again they would

be able to work and inherit their own land (verse 43) which was part of the promise of God.

It was for such reasons that Naboth was so emphatic when he declined to sell his vineyard even to such an important person as the king. "The Lord forbid," he said, "that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." Of course, as Ahab was himself an Israelite, he knew that Naboth was right and so he made no attempt to argue. He went back into his own house, vexed and angry. He lay down on his bed with his face to the wall and refused to eat any food. He was frustrated because his plan for the vegetable garden had been thwarted and there was nothing that he, even as the king could do about it. Naboth was quite within his rights - indeed his attitude in the circumstances was the correct one - so all that Ahab could do was sulk.

The story might well have ended there. Ahab would have got over his chagrin and no more might have been heard of the matter. However, at this point in the drama there enters the formidable figure of Ahab's wife, Jezebel. She was not an Israelite by birth. She came from the Phoenicians - a brilliant pagan race. Jezebel had inherited this brilliance and, along with it, all the ruthlessness of an oriental despot. To her, the religious tradition of Israel, with its firm belief in the one true and living God, was something to be stamped out at all costs and replaced by the Baal gods of her own country; and she certainly did not spare herself in the effort. It was so sad that her efforts were not directed towards the truth. Had Divine Providence made Jezebel an ally of Elijah instead of an adversary, they would have been a formidable force in the Lord's cause. But, as it was, Elijah and Jezebel were destined to be sworn enemies. In fact, Elijah prophesied that the dogs would eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel and in due time this

shocking and terrible event came to pass. There was no happy ending for Jezebel.

The point that Jezebel could not - or would not - see was that for Naboth this piece of ground was not just any old piece of property to be bought and sold at will, nor was it an investment; it was part and parcel of his religious faith and life. To sell or exchange this vineyard would be, in fact, a subtle way of selling out not only his personal faith but also the faith of his forefathers. Such action could not even be considered.

Sometimes we can be caught in a similar situation. We can be given what seems to be a reasonable offer to sell out for an apparently attractive price or to exchange for something that seems superficially equivalent or perhaps even better. Perhaps that is why so many people have, often unthinkingly, sold out on the spiritual values of the eternal gospel in favour of some bogus "modern" theology or in favour of a purely secular type of social concern or involvement.

It is very tempting for many who are not mature in the faith to forget that Christianity is, in the very best sense, exclusive. It is the claim of the Christian Gospel that it - and it alone - gives a unique solution not only to the problems of the individual, but to the history of the whole world.

Christians would not want to deny the value of social action and witness. Indeed, evangelicals were frequently pioneers of reform in former days. But ultimately even our finest and bravest works come under the judgment of God, before whom we are all unworthy servants. We do not and cannot justify ourselves to God but rather we come empty handed, clinging only to the Cross of Christ and pleading his eternal sacrifice. As the Apostle Peter

said "... there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

We have, as Christians, the most precious of all heritages but that does not mean that we can be content to pull up the drawbridge and sit in the ivory tower. It certainly does not mean that we can be content with a mere status quo as if that is all that matters. We must remember that being called a "Christian" is a costly thing and that if we call ourselves such, then we need to be ready for all the consequences.

The church naturally wants to bring people in. When we look at the life of Jesus, we see that he mixed with ordinary people in all the circumstances of life, from weddings to funerals, from work to picnics. Jesus was inclusive and certainly not exclusive. Yet, there are lines that need to be drawn and this is not always easy.

There is an important dividing line between accommodating and compromising. Given the forces of secularism and the marginalising of Christian values, there is always a real temptation to compromise. But if we are to speak of "moving with the times", we have to be careful not to dilute the Christian message so much that people cannot tell the difference between the church and the world. It is one thing to move with the times; it is quite another to be moved uncritically *by* the times. Put it another way - if you or I were in a country where Christianity is suppressed and we are on trial for being Christians, would there be enough evidence to convict us? (I say that to myself more than to anyone else.)

Like Naboth, we have received a great heritage and we have received it only through the grace of God. Through that grace, we have been chosen to be heirs of what we do believe to be the

one true faith. Of course, the church has not always got it right and there are things that have happened in the past that we could wish had never taken place or had been handled differently. Yet through that Christian faith, we have received some of the greatest traditions and noblest aspirations made known, by the grace of God, to man.

We did not create our heritage; it is something that has been passed down to us and which we aspire to pass on to the next generation, hopefully strengthened and renewed. Like Naboth, we are expected to look after, protect and defend this precious heritage and not to trade it in for anything else, no matter how pleasing and attractive it might seem at a superficial level.

Again, like Naboth, although we want to keep and guard our heritage we do not do this out of greed or selfishness. It is our hope that the great message of the Gospel can be passed on to others in the best possible state. The Christian Gospel is not something to be passed on and presented as something that is worn out, shabby, second rate - something that we only half believe in. The Good News of the Gospel is something that is living and true, grounded in Jesus Christ as the incarnate crucified and risen Lord. Indeed, throughout the history of the Christian church, it has always been most effective when it presents Jesus Christ to the world.

The great covenanting leader, Samuel Rutherford, often felt that he had to preach quite politically about the situation in Scotland as he saw it. But one morning he was preaching on Jesus Christ and one man in the congregation shouted out in encouragement - "Ye speak o' Jesus Christ. Haud ye to it!"

It is in this sense that we can talk about the Gospel being exclusive - not as something that we want to keep to ourselves in

some holy huddle but as treasure of which we are called to be stewards and evangelists.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust my sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name
On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand.

Reforming of Borders ²

I have been reading, with a mixture of interest and anguish, some of the recent and well-written articles referring, directly or indirectly, to two Church of Scotland congregations - Saint George's Tron (Glasgow) and Gilcomston South (Aberdeen) who have decided to leave the Kirk over matters of Biblical interpretation and authority.

Like Ian Petrie (7 March 2013) and others, I do not doubt their sincerity. It strikes me, however, that the issues raised will affect more than just the dwindling and ageing membership of the Kirk. Scottish Presbyterianism, with all its many faults and failings, has played a major and mainly positive role in the history of our land. The break-up of the Kirk into many separate factions, draws new boundaries between people but does not extend existing boundaries any wider.

It seems that some of the younger generation of Scottish ministers do not recognise that, for generations the Kirk has been a coalition. In the 18th and 19th centuries the "moderates" and the "evangelicals" jostled for dominance. Yet, they managed to cohabit and, until the Disruption of 1843, could do so reasonably amicably. The 20th century saw the various stands once again coming together.

I was a minister in Aberdeen for more than ten years, including three of these as Presbytery Clerk. I was a "known" evangelical (but not a fundamentalist), operating within the mainstream. I did not feel threatened by colleagues of a different theological persuasion, nor were they threatened by me. We were professional colleagues and offered each other the normal

² Brief comment to the "Scottish Review" in 2013
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courtesies. Even if we approached some issues differently, we were still on the same side.

Based on the New Testament emphasis on oneness and reconciliation, the outsider might reasonably believe that the Christian church would lead the way on matters of conflict resolution. Alas, no! We seem to be experts at quarrelling among ourselves and this may be part of the "dark side" that Walter Humes referred to (14 February 2013).

The church throughout the world seems to be currently obsessed with the "gay issue" as though this is all that matters. Already the two prominent congregations referred to above have decided to leave the Church of Scotland at immense financial cost to themselves. In taking such a step, they are actually giving those with whom they disagree, enormous power over them.

But the cost goes wider than either of these congregations. It is a further weakening of the established church in our land. To some, this will be a matter of indifference. To others, it will be source of great loss.

The Old Testament as Interpreted by the New ³

No one requires to be told that this subject opens up some great difficulties for us. The science of hermeneutics is perhaps one of the thorniest, yet one of the most basic, areas of “practical” Christian Theology and will, no doubt, grow more important in our present theological climate.⁴

One of the most basic of interpretations which would be accepted by most people is that the Old Testament *must* (at least to some degree) be interpreted by the New. This is perhaps only too obvious, but still important to state. Indeed, it is following the legitimate and necessary principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture. It is also in harmony with the general (and frequently misunderstood) principle that God's revelation, whilst not in any way contradictory, is nevertheless progressive. Saint Augustine's often quoted dictum that “*The New Testament is latent in the Old; the Old is patent in the New*” is both valid and theologically sound. The outcome is that since now, by the grace of God, we live under the New Covenant, we cannot occupy the standpoint of the Old. To put this in another way, I suggest that every sermon based on an Old Testament text or passage must always be, in fact, a New Testament sermon.

We are all well aware of the general perception of many people that the Old Testament is full of law and wrath and the New Testament full of grace, love and good example. Of course, such a superficial view discloses a woeful ignorance of the Bible. However, let us not be too quick to congratulate ourselves as we are liable to fall into one of two traps in our interpretation.

³ A paper delivered at a meeting of the *Scottish Church Theology Society* (Aberdeen Branch), October, 1969. It was not very well received at the time, which was good for my humility!

⁴ See J A Balchin's articles on hermeneutics in the *TSF Bulletins* of Autumn 1961, Summer 1962 and Autumn 1962. See also the masterly article *The Interpretation of the Old Testament by the Old Testament* by Klaas Runia in the *TSF Bulletin* of Autumn 1967.

- We may indulge in a kind of Old versus New Testament “one-upmanship” and plump for the Old Testament as against the New as if we were entitled to choose between the two. Of course, the Old Testament is full of wonderful accounts of God's grace and is a real quarry for exegetical preachers.
- We may get so tied up with the fact that the New Testament has given us the light that we may form the idea that the Old Testament can be discarded as so much “Jewish old clothes”. If we go for this option, we actually discard a considerable part of the Scriptures.

I suggest that the key to this difficulty lies (as it should in the science of biblical hermeneutics) within the pages of Scripture itself. We must look at how the New Testament actually deals with the Old Testament before jumping to too many conclusions. Probably the first thing we should notice is that much use is made of the Old Testament both in direct quotation and in direct or indirect reference. For example, there are over six hundred direct Old Testament quotations alone.

Next, I suggest that that we should remind ourselves that although the Old Testament is the Jewish Scripture, under the New Covenant we read it as a post-messianic book. It is not intended to be disrespectful to Jewish people to say that we Christians regard the Old Testament as a book that does unequivocally point to Jesus Christ.⁵

So far, this all seems very simple but, of course, there are many potential problems. There are some quotations which seem almost too good to be true and some might even suggest that they are somewhat strained. For example, Matthew 1: 23 quotes

⁵ See, for example, the genealogies of Christ in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.
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Isaiah 7: 14 – *Behold a virgin*⁶ *shall conceive and shall bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel* which is applied directly to Jesus. Or take Matthew 2: 6 quoting the prophet Micah 5: 2 where the town of Bethlehem is quoted as destined to be the birthplace of the messiah – and Matthew seems to quote the Old Testament passage somewhat differently from its original. Again, Matthew 2: 15 quotes Hosea 11: 1 *Out of Egypt have I called my son* applying this to the return of Joseph, Mary and Jesus from Egypt after the death of Herod whereas, in the Old Testament context itself, originally it referred to the Exodus experience.

These few examples may help to highlight the difficulties. What, for example, do we make of the *Out of Egypt have I called my son* quotation? How does it stand up to the so-called scientific exegesis of the form-critics? Do we even think of taking the view of Rudolph Bultmann⁷ that this is no more than reading New Testament doctrine into the Old? Bultmann's view is that the New Testament writers were, no doubt, well intentioned in what they did, but were quite mistaken, being motivated by apologetic or even polemic interests. It is, of course, well known that Bultmann sees little or no value in Old Testament interpretation because, for him, the Old Testament is merely a pre-Christian book. Also, Bultmann does not believe in the pre-existence of Christ or in the cosmic effects of his death and resurrection.

There is no doubt that we are dealing with a difficult area and so we must be careful at which end of the argument we begin. We will not get very far if we think that by some process of deductive logic we can either prove or disprove the authenticity or value of the Old Testament. Rather, we must begin with the

⁶ Or *young woman*.

⁷ See Bultmann's contribution to *Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, Ed, C Westerman (1963) *ad loc*

question of authority and work our way back from there, apologetically.

*The authority of scripture for which it ought to be believed and obeyed dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof and therefore is to be received, because it is the word of God.*⁸

In other words, the *starting* point is with a principle of authority and not with some kind of radical distinction between Old and New Testaments. But the problems still remain; we may agree that we must preach from the Old Testament and that without it the New Testament is incomplete (and *vice versa*). The crucial question that we still come back to is whether or not we follow the interpretive tradition of the Old Testament that we find in the New?

Now let us be clear: if we do *not* follow in that tradition, by implication we seem to be suggesting that the New Testament writers were mistaken or that somehow they twisted the evidence (possibly out of the best possible motives) to suit their own presuppositions.

Whilst this kind of approach may sometimes be heralded as *brave, radical or far sighted*, it is actually an easy way out which, at the same time, creates more difficulties than it solves.

Most of the scholars agree that the main Old Testament quotations in the New fall into three main categories

1. Messianic prophecies

⁸ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter I: 4
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2. General non-messianic statements made in the Old Testament and are applied to Jesus Christ in the New

3. Typological passages

In the case of category number 1, there are relatively few difficulties. Some passages are messianic and obviously so. Others are also messianic but perhaps less clearly so. It would seem (to me) to be pointless to go behind the New Testament and try to delve into what might have been the pre-Christian Old Testament interpretation of the messianic hope on the assumption that this interpretation must be preferred. We live under the New Covenant, so why go back to the Old?

The New Testament writers believed - as do we - that Jesus of Nazareth was the Lord's Christ and Messiah. The New Testament passages concerning the Lord's Servant are many and clear.⁹ Other Old Testament themes taken up in the New include the important New Covenant (Hebrews 8: 8-12, Jeremiah 31) and Bethlehem as the place of the messiah's birth (Matthew 2: 6, Micah 5: 2). Matthew 11: 10 applies the passage in Malachi 3: 1 that speaks of the messenger who comes before the Messiah as being fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist. Yet again, Matthew 21: 5 speaks of the humble king of Zechariah 9: 9. In these passages, there are few real difficulties, if one accepts that, indeed, Jesus was the Messiah. God had not fully revealed himself in the Old Testament but with the coming of Christ, all things were transformed.

Category 2 is much less straightforward and some scholars would suggest that the New Testament interpretation is arbitrary. Let us look at an example that we have already mentioned - Matthew 2: 15, speaking of the holy family's safe return after the death

⁹ See R T France *The Servant of the Lord in the Teachings of Jesus* in Volume 19 of the Tyndale Bulletin.

of Herod, applies Hosea 11: 1 ...*out of Egypt have I called my son*, which refers to the Exodus, to Jesus. Is that just a case of the Gospel writer simply getting carried away and shifting the evidence to suit the conclusion? A possible answer to this lies in the concept of personality. Christ was (and is) a man but he is also a representative man. Indeed, that is a very important aspect of our understanding of the incarnation. Jesus Christ is himself in his own right yet he is also the personification and representative of the people of God before God.

The very personality of Jesus was accommodated for some years to our finite world which, being tainted with the sin of fallen mankind is passing away. The true fullness of this personality lies outside our finite human concepts of space and time. As Saint Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 10, the spiritual rock that followed the children of Israel in the wilderness was Christ.

Once we can grasp this nettle quite firmly, we see that the problem is not so great after all. Jesus Christ was the servant of the Lord as an individual yet, by his being such, he was also the representative of God's people. Take this a stage further and we see that the spirit-filled *ecclesia* is the Body of Christ in a very real sense. This is more than mere figurative speaking, for the true church (which is not always the same as the visible church) and the people of God are called to be a continuation and a pledge of Christ's personality here on earth (again within our finite concept of space and time) until he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead.

As such, the people of God who make up the true living church of Jesus Christ are called upon to suffer as he did, to take up the Cross daily and bear in their own bodies - both individually and corporately - the marks of his passion and rejection. Thus, to look at it from the other side, what is true of Israel as the

elect people of God is surely also true of the Saviour Messiah. The *only* authority the New Testament writers would have for their interpretation must have been Christ himself.¹⁰

It is surely quite absurd to say that this kind of interpretation was the invention of Paul and the early church, including the disciples. Could the early church have set out on what could only be described as a gigantic confidence trick? Could they have squeezed in the many fulfilments of Old Testament Scripture in the passion and death of Christ by pure invention or literary dexterity? Is it not rather that ...*the Scripture cannot be broken* (John 10: 35)?

In category 3, we come to (what is for me) one of the most fascinating areas of Old Testament interpretation, namely typology.¹¹ Put at its simplest, it is the interpretation of certain people, places, items and events in the Old Testament as types or prefigurative symbols of the New Testament. This is a method of interpretation that should and indeed must be employed, where appropriate.

I am bold enough to say *must* because typology is used in Scripture itself. Of course, there are possible pitfalls and it is a tool that must be handled with care. In the wrong hands, typology can be a dangerous weapon, leading us into many flights of fancy.

There must be much more than a vague similarity between the "type" and the "antitype"; it must either be obvious or at least clear by reasonable implication. And, of course, opinions will vary, as they do on most areas of theology. Some will see

¹⁰ See John W Wenham *Our Lord's View of the Old Testament* (2nd ed. 1964) for a scholarly examination of this matter.

¹¹ See Balchin *supra cit* TSF Bulletin, Autumn 1962; also Louis Berkhof *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (1957) pp 145 ff

profound symbolism in the description of the furnishings of the tabernacle or the robes of the high priest. Others will be dismissive of such an interpretation.

So, to know what *is* clear by reasonable expectation is not always easy. Interpretation of a text or passage does not give us a free ticket to read anything we like into it, to state the painfully obvious. For example, it is clear that the Genesis flood is a type of Christian baptism¹² even if there are minor difficulties in matching the two exactly. In both cases, people are saved by the grace of God.

Again, the exodus experience can reasonably be taken as a type of the new exodus of the people of God in Christ of which Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10. This same new exodus was foretold in Isaiah and other prophetic writings. The clearest example of all is the (Old Testament) law which is seen as a type of Christ.

Alan Richardson¹³ gives a helpful and basic interpretation of Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament: *Jesus is baptised in the Jordan as Israel had been in the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10: 2); he sojourns in the wilderness forty days, being tempted, as Israel was tempted (or tempted God) forty years long; on a mountain he calls a New Israel, appoints the Twelve (Mark 3: 13-19) and gives a new Law (Matthew 5 - 7; Luke 6: 12-49); on a mountain he stands transfigured with Moses and Elijah, who each had in old time encountered God on Horeb; he gives the signs of the bread from heaven, as Moses and Elijah had once done. Finally he goes up to take his Kingdom, passing as the old Joshua¹⁴ had done through Jericho; and before he departs, he ratifies a new covenant in his blood and institutes a new Passover which his disciples shall keep until his return in glory.*

¹² 1 Peter 3: 20-22

¹³ *New Testament Theology* (1958) page 22

¹⁴ The old equivalent of Jesus

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But, of course, there are many potential problems of interpretation where the points at issue are not so clear. Take, for example, the sacrifice of Isaac. Is Isaac a type of Christ? It is tempting immediately to answer in the affirmative, but there are some difficulties involved. Isaac, after all, was not actually sacrificed. It was the ram that was substituted and Isaac was spared. So, it could possibly be said that, in this context, Isaac was definitely not a type of Christ - and even to suggest that the ram was! On the other hand, Abraham did receive Isaac back, even although he had given him up, in his own mind, for dead (Hebrews 11: 19). Could we then say that this receiving back was, in itself a type of the resurrection and that, in a real sense, Isaac *is* a type of Christ?

Beware of being too dogmatic! I say that to myself as much as to anyone else. We all crave for certainty but even with an open Bible and an open mind, we cannot always be certain about everything. It is possible that the reference is typological. However, a safer view might be that it is *illustrative*, it shows by a kind of metaphor or analogy and, as its meaning is perfectly clear, it does not need to be pulled apart.

Saint Augustine famously perceived the wood on which the ram was placed as a prefigurement of the Cross of Calvary. Opinion will differ as to whether or not this, in turn is typological. Possibly the better view is that the wood is a symbol, just as the bread and wine of Melchizedek has probably more of a symbolic connection with the bread and wine of the New Covenant than a typological one.

That is not to downplay either of these examples. Symbols can be - and are - very potent and can convey more meaning than a thousand words. The Cross itself is an extremely powerful symbol of sacrifice, death, forgiveness and resurrection (among

other factors). At the other end of the scale, the Nazi Swastika is another potent cross symbol. The fact that something is symbolic does not for a moment cut it off from reality, historical or experienced. Indeed, you could even argue that parables are a kind of mental symbolism.

In any event, both typology and symbolism take full account of the value of history. This is almost the opposite of allegory (which does appear in Scripture as well). Allegory seeks to iron out historical space time happenings and events in a search for "deeper" meanings.¹⁵ It is generally accepted rule of thumb that the parables of Jesus basically contain one main message, whereas an allegory can contain many.

I suggest that it is really only open to us to interpret Scripture allegorically in cases where it is clear beyond reasonable doubt that this is what is intended, although there are traditions that can be found at various stages of church history when parables have been interpreted allegorically by theologians whom we would consider "respectable".¹⁶

There seems to be at least a trace of allegory in the parables of the Marriage Feast¹⁷ and the Ten Virgins.¹⁸ There is clearer allegory in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen.¹⁹ Paul also uses allegory in his account of Sarah and Hagar²⁰ and the Olive Tree.²¹

In the Old Testament there are two simple allegories in Judges 9: 7-15 and 2 Kings 14: 9. Some interpreters would also

¹⁵ See J Stafford Wright *Interpreting the Bible* (second edition 1958) pages 8 – 12.

¹⁶ For example *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* by R Chevenix Trench (1867 and many subsequent editions)

¹⁷ Matthew 22: 1-14

¹⁸ Matthew 25: 1-13

¹⁹ Matthew 21: 33-46; Mark 12: 1-12 and Luke 20: 9-19

²⁰ Galatians 4: 21-31

²¹ Romans 11: 13-24

identify Isaiah's parable of the vineyard²² as, in fact an allegory. Controversy hangs over the exact classification of the Song of Solomon and the Genesis creation account. It goes without saying, of course, that the Old Testament is full of symbolism of all kinds and shades.

In short, allegory only has a limited part in our interpretation of Scripture. I have heard preachers "spiritualising" or providing "devotional thoughts" on a text. I do not mean to condemn this - far from it. This has been practiced since the early days of the Christian church. But it is a devotional and not an exegetical tool. In some cases, it can take a text or passage right out of its historical and theological context.

In contrast, typology does take history seriously, does no exegetical violence to the text. We should not be afraid to use it provided this is justified by the Scripture itself. In other words, the antitype must transcend the type in the light of the fuller revelation we are given in the New Testament. After all, Scripture itself works in cycles of prophecy and fulfilment with a continual tension between God breaking into human history in the present and the future. *And all these, although well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*²³

Thus, in conclusion, I suggest that in interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, we seek to keep the following in mind:

- Interpret Scripture by Scripture always bearing in mind that revelation is progressive (but not contradictory)

²² Isaiah 5: 1-7

²³ Hebrews 11: 39-40 RSV

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- If the New Testament appears to misquote or contradict the Old Testament, we accept this as “something better”²⁴
- Interpret the Old Testament in a Christocentric way.

²⁴ 1 Peter 1: 10-12

The Old Testament and Christian Ethics ²⁵

It is strange how many people - and even some educated Christian people - have a firm belief that it is all but impossible to reconcile the Old Testament and the New. Their perception is that there is a rigid dichotomy between Law and Gospel, between judgment and love, so that the Old Testament can safely be rejected, apart from being a document of historical interest, in favour of the New.

I will not waste time this evening by trying to justify my conclusion that such a view is clearly superficial. I suggest that we can take that as a starting point. What I want us to look at is the actual key that will open the door. It is one thing to be dismissive of the perceptions of others. It is another thing to come up with a satisfactory explanation.

A reasonable starting point might be that interpretation of Scripture by Scripture itself is a sound basis; furthermore, all Scripture directly or indirectly, points to the person of Jesus Christ. Let us also remember that God is a God of order and not a God of chaos; that he works in love and power in his purposes of creation, judgment and redemption of men. We do not have a God who says one thing and then perversely says or does another.

Let me put this in another way. Someone recently asked me the question as to which was greater, Jesus or the Bible? Now, without intending to sound harsh or superior, I suggest that this question came out of an immature understanding of the nature of God himself. To the young man who asked me this question, God

²⁵ This paper was given at a meeting of the Aberdeen branch of the Graduates' Fellowship in 1971. It has been lightly edited and a number of paragraphs omitted that seemed out of date.

was not a God of order but actually a God of chaos whose revelations were seen to be in contradiction to one another.

My response to him was along these lines: as Christians it is our faith and belief that Jesus is very God and very man. As "very man" he is himself subject in his life to Scripture as the Word of God as the Servant of God and as the chosen Messiah to whom the Old Testament itself pointed with hope and expectation. As God's Son and Servant, Jesus was obedient and, indeed, he had to learn obedience. As my former teacher, Professor Tom Torrance puts it (far better than I ever could!):
²⁶ *He learned obedience by that which he suffered, for that obedience from within our alienated humanity was a struggle with our [my emphasis] sin and temptation; it had to be fought out with strong crying and tears and achieved in desperate anguish and weakness under the crushing load of the world's sin and the divine judgment ... that we might be redeemed and reconciled to him.*

As such, he was subject to Scripture (*Scripture cannot be broken*)²⁷ just as when he was a human child, he learned obedience to his parents and was subject to them. But then there is another side to the coin for Jesus is also God incarnate. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and, as such, he is the Lord of Scripture itself. Accordingly, when Jesus interprets Scripture his interpretation must always be taken as absolutely normative.

Those of you who remember your church history will recollect that at the Council of Chalcedon it was declared to be orthodox belief that Christ has two natures - human and divine - but that these two natures were without change, confusion, division or separation. This is, in fact, the real and eternal mystery of the

²⁶ *Theology in Reconstruction* (1965) page 132

²⁷ John 10: 35

whole person of Christ, the fact that he was (and is) God and man, Lord and Servant, Priest and Sacrifice. This, to me, is not only very important but also highly relevant to our study today. I make no apology for appearing to labour the issue.

In other words, when we look at Jesus' interpretation of Scripture we must not yield to the temptation of asking whether he was interpreting it in a human or divine way, for to do so, is to drive a coach and horses through his finished person and work. I do, of course, accept that Jesus born at a particular time in human history and, as a man, speaks within the received knowledge and culture of that time. If we can keep all of this in mind, then it is not difficult to see the whole of Scripture - Old and New Testaments - as the wonderful unfolding of God's great and mighty plan of creation, redemption and sanctification.

If we understand and believe that Scripture really *is* a unity, then we will not have the same problem with the so-called purple passages of the Old Testament. And let us remember that, even if this makes us uncomfortable, there is also quite a lot "Hell and damnation" in the New Testament!

Let us look at an example: suppose you were asked to read from Psalm 137 which, as you will remember, begins with the famous words: *By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion*. So far so good! But you will also remember that the same Psalm ends with the less famous words: *Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rocks*. Now, the question I want to raise with you is - would you after reading right through that Psalm in church, including the ending, be able to say *Amen and may God add his blessing to this reading of his Holy Word?*

I hope I do not sound arrogant when I suggest that I probably could now, although I am not suggesting it would come easily. Certainly, as a younger Christian I would not have been able to do so. I had a mixed up view of revelation, of the meaning and purpose of Scripture, of the person of Christ and even of the nature of God. It is when the penny dropped that Scripture really is a unity that I began to see the way through the mist. I understand now that in so many respects God's revelation is progressive and that, although the plan of redemption unfolds, grows, blossoms and flourishes, it is not self contradictory since (as already stated) God is a God of order, not chaos, who moves steadfastly from promise through judgment to fulfilment.

Well, some of you may be wondering when this young fellow ²⁸ is going to climb off his theological pedestal and get down to some more basic examples. In particular when, if ever, is he going to get on to the subject of Christian ethics? If we look at the New Testament, we see that many of the great spiritual and morals issues were put to Jesus by both his friends and his enemies, for entirely different reasons; but they all had to be faced in the same. One thing on which his friends and enemies agreed was that if they wanted to know God's will, they must search the Scripture.

But, in the eyes of Jesus, some of those he encountered tended towards one fatal mistake. The mistake was not that they applied the Law of God too strictly but that, in fact, they had left undone its weightier matters.

They literally carried Scripture around in their hands, in other words, and they revered it and held it in great esteem; yet they did not apply it to their hearts. Therein lay the problem. *Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.*²⁹

²⁸ Please remember that I was still in my twenties at this time!

²⁹ Matthew 5: 17

Jesus without doubt taught his disciples that the Law had been given to be obeyed both in letter and in spirit. *The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the gospel is preached and everyone enters it violently. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void.*³⁰ So, it is clear that Jesus is not an antinomian. He did not, as some people perceive, consign the Old Testament to the dustbin of history. Saint Paul uses the analogy of the Law being a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.³¹

Also, Jesus is not revolutionary in the sense that some today would like to see him, as someone who overturned everything in the old order and generally behaved like a bull in a china shop. The truly revolutionary aspect of the life and work of Jesus was that he was able to confront his enquirers and opponents on their own ground. He was able to show them that although they believed (no doubt sincerely in many cases) that they were obeying the Word of God in every detail, in fact they were only obeying the letter of the law³² and not the letter and the spirit. It is a case of "both and" and not "either or".

Now some people have suggested at various times that Jesus actually said very little that was new. Sometimes that has been said in order to shock. The trouble with this statement is that it is half true and half truths can sometimes be more misleading than untruths. However, it is certainly both true and clear that Jesus spoke and acted using Old Testament language and concepts. It is said that the New Testament contains over six hundred direct quotations from the Old, many of them in the recorded speech of Jesus in the Gospels. If Jesus had not referred frequently to the Old Testament, I suggest that the

³⁰ Luke 16: 16-17

³¹ Galatians 3: 24-26

³² There were, of course, also a great many rabbinic interpretations, making up a considerable body of teaching.

early church would not have done so. It is also said that there are over a thousand clear allusions in the New Testament to the Old.

You remember that famous occasion when one of the Pharisees, a lawyer, came to test Jesus. *Which is the greatest commandment in the law?*³³ In response, Jesus stated: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This he said is the greatest commandment.*

Now, was this something new and revolutionary? Was this at odds with the teachings of the Old Testament? Well, if you turn to the Old Testament you would find that this is a direct quotation³⁴ from the Law of Moses as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy ...*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.* Indeed the context (to me) seems clear, namely that it is a summary of very important verses that have preceded it, including the Ten Commandments.

So, this first quotation was a direct quotation from Scripture itself. Then Jesus goes on to a second commandment and we can sense that it too is crucial but also that it depends on the previous commandment, which is the greater. The second commandment is: *You shall love your neighbour as yourself.* Again, if you were to turn to the Old Testament³⁵ you would find these identical words: *On these two commandments (said Jesus) depend all the law and the prophets.*

Notice then that Jesus was not saying that these two quotations entirely summed up the entire spirit of the Law in the Old

³³ Matthew 22: 34-40

³⁴ Deuteronomy 6: 5

³⁵ Leviticus 19: 18

Testament. What he is saying is that they give us the basic essential message of the Old Testament. The law still stands. The Law has not been abolished.

There is a very interesting saying in the Sermon on the Mount ³⁶ where Jesus says - *You have heard it said "Love your friends, hate your enemies."* He then goes on to tell the crowd that they should love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. In fact Jesus is referring to a popular (at the time) misquotation from the Book of Leviticus. ³⁷ People *thought* that their Scripture said one thing, whereas in fact it said quite another. Misquotation of Scripture is nothing new! It is as popular today as it was in the time of the New Testament.

However, although the Gospel could be seen in the Old Testament, it was veiled in sacrifice, type, symbol and allegory until the coming of the One who was promised. It is certainly true that Abraham was justified by his faith ³⁸ but it was not yet (obviously) a fully developed faith in God through Jesus Christ. Now, with the coming of Christ the Gospel is not veiled in the same sense: it is now only veiled ³⁹ to those who are perishing.

Having then agreed that the New Testament in no way abolishes or belittles the Law of God - but, indeed, that Jesus interprets it very strictly in comparison with the Judaism of his day - let us be careful not to go in the other direction. What I mean is that there could be temptation to see the New Testament imposing on us a higher Law as a means of grace. Now, we can certainly say that the New Testament applies the Old Testament Law but, most important of all, it gives us the Gospel of Jesus

³⁶ Matthew 5: 43

³⁷ Leviticus *supra cit.*

³⁸ Hebrews 11: 8 *et seq*

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 4: 3

Christ. The Law is not there just to be passed over; it is there to lead, convict, instruct and lead us to Christ, foretold in the prophets, and to the New Covenant mercies of God.

Having laid this foundation without (I hope) labouring too many points, I want to pass on the second and briefer part of this modest paper. I have not forgotten that we are supposed to be looking at some of the problems of Biblical ethics as we understand them. Now there are almost as many kinds of ethics as there are pebbles on the beach - naturalism, idealism, existentialism and what have you - yet for the Christian these alone are not good enough systems. Their first great fault is that they are all subjective to some degree or another. To be fair, I doubt if there is really any system of ethics that does not include some degree of subjectivism. Maybe that is no bad thing, since it would be very rigid to deny that circumstances can alter cases. Not everything can be seen in black and white terms.

For the Christian ethics must be something much deeper and longer lasting and, I suggest, more closely related to Scripture. The Christian when he is thinking of what God is like does not (or should not) start with man and then magnify that image 1,000 times to get to the finished result (although I suppose we all do that to some degree). That is man centred and not God centred thinking. Also, it is only fair to say that there is a very real difficulty in knowing how far Christian ethics are meant to be applied to non-Christians. Are they rules for Christians alone whilst society can do as it pleases?

Of course, whatever tradition we belong to, it is the case that much of the law and the moral code of Scotland developed in the way that it did because it was a Calvinist society. In Scotland, the church has never been part of the state or even connected

with the state ⁴⁰ but in our Calvinist culture, the church is (or was) part of society. Thus, even today, a great deal of what we take for granted in Scottish life and culture has been moulded by a strong Christian influence. There are signs that this process of influence has weakened in recent years and will continue to do so. I also suggest that our debt to the influence of Christian teaching and values will become much more clouded and may even be denied.⁴¹

In our own time, society has become more fixated on the highly elusive concepts of "good". Well, good cannot be bad, can it? The difficulty is to know which standard to apply. "Good" is an almost meaningless word unless it has some point or points of reference. What, for the Christian, is the ultimate concept of "good"? Discuss! That could be the basis for a whole year of Graduates' Fellowship meetings and even then the subject would not be exhausted nor would everyone be in agreement. At the risk of seeming over-simplistic I would suggest that the ultimate good is obeying God and seeing God's will being done. If God wills something, then because God cannot be other than he is - all just and all loving - his purposes cannot be other than good.

If we are shocked by the command of God to go and slaughter such-and-such a tribe (and I confess that I find this really quite difficult to handle) then possibly we are not allowing a truly sovereign God to confront us. I say that more to myself than anyone else. God does not act in accordance with some standard laid down by men. He acts according to his own standards of justice, love and mercy.

Thus as Christians, our primary concern in ethics is to discern God's will and the truly objective way of doing so is to look in

⁴⁰ The fact that the Church of Scotland is the established national church does not make it part of the state. This is in contrast with the constitutional position of the Church of England.

⁴¹ There are strangely prophetic words!

Scripture. But that is easier to say than to do because there are many issues on which Scripture is not as clear as we might like it to be.

The Bible is not a collection of proof texts that gives us simplistic answers to every possible problem under the sun. It is so easy to fall back into the legalistic way of thinking and resort to arbitrary text jabbing. We can so easily forget that we live in the days after Pentecost. We can easily forget too that the Christian Gospel is a Gospel of freedom and not of bondage. I suggest to you that even two thousand years on from the events of the New Testament, we as the church still are unsure about the true bounds of freedom. Freedom, to me, also means using a wee bit of good old fashioned common sense. To suggest that the will of God is antithetical to common sense is surely perverse.

Paul points out that he is free to eat meat offered to idols, as the idols have no reality. But he is also aware that he must consider the feelings and sentiments of others.⁴² Under the new order, the law of God still stands and it is perfectly true that any society that does not live according to its own laws is in a statement of lawlessness. But there is now a freedom that never existed under the old order. It is not legalism in disguise. We are given a choice and it is a positive choice.

The evangelist D L Moody was once asked why he never went to the horse races. His reply was that he went to the races as often as he chose; he simply made a free choice not to.

Even as Christians, we are, not unreasonably, fearful of the "must", "should" and (especially) "must not". The law, whether it is Old or New Testament, reminds us of the high standards of

⁴² 1 Corinthians 8: 1-11, Romans 14: 14 and 21

God. But in the pages of the New Testament we encounter a Jesus who was very much aware of how hard it is for ordinary people to live up to these standards. If anyone understands the ways of ordinary people, it is God in the person of Jesus Christ. That is what is so unique about the Christian message.

Let me put this in another way; since Jesus was himself the perfect man who did not break the law but fulfilled it, there is the distinct possibility of feeling a degree of discouragement. How can anyone live up to these standards? Paul certainly urges us to be imitators of Christ ⁴³ but I suggest that it is easy to take that encouragement as instruction and to use it instead as a source of discouragement when we fall short. How far we do fall short of Jesus! But the other side of the coin is that this same Jesus is the Christ we also know as the crucified and risen Lord who assures us of his pardon and calls us to radical and joyful obedience. *My yolk is easy and my burden is light.* ⁴⁴

I am aware that I am dealing with a very big subject. I am also aware that such a short treatment is bound to be superficial and disjointed. However, in drawing to a close I would like to commend to you for your own private reading and meditation the "...but I say to you" saying from the Sermon on the Mount. ⁴⁵

In these sayings, Jesus does not seem to restrain himself in any way. Was he at this point in time deliberately taking parts of the Old Testament ⁴⁶ and rejecting them in favour of his own new and radical interpretation? I suggest that a careful reading of the passages in question shows that Jesus is actually setting the Old Testament on the highest possible place and then (and this is the really important point) he sets himself above this.

⁴³ I Corinthians 11: 1

⁴⁴ Matthew 11: 28-30

⁴⁵ Matthew 5: 38-48

⁴⁶ Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 19: 2, 18 and 24:20, Deuteronomy 18:13 and 19:21

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So, to seek the mind of Christ, we must set the Law similarly high, yet as followers of Christ we place him even higher. We are back to where we were before, interpreting through the Person of Christ.

Now there is one very obvious distinction that I have not really touched on and that is the division of the Law into two aspects - worship and ethics on the one hand and ceremonial law on the other. There are times when the distinctions are easy to make and times when this is less so but, on the whole, it is easy enough. Now I have to be honest and say that in the Gospels, Jesus is not recorded as spelling out with all clarity that his followers were free to cease Levitical worship and tradition. This is spelt out with much more clarity in the Book of Acts ⁴⁷ and also by Saint Paul and the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews.

In the passage in Acts, Peter has a vision in which he sees clearly that there is now no distinction between clean and unclean foods. That distinction had been necessary at one time in the religious development of the people of God. However, it had now served its purpose and was no longer needed. That did not imply that it had been wrong.⁴⁸ What had been given to Moses by God so many years before was true. What had been given by God through a vision provided by the Holy Spirit was also true and marked a development of God's revelation and the understanding of his people.

Scripture has to be read as whole and in context. It must never become a scrap book or a lucky bag. And I conclude by suggesting that our understanding of obedience and of true Christian freedom is still developing and incomplete. May we all be given grace and discernment as we seek to do his God's will.

⁴⁷ Acts 10: 9-16

⁴⁸ I commend a fascinating book *None of these Diseases* (S I McMillen, 1966 and subsequent editions which looks at the health benefits of following certain Old Testament practices.)

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Redeployment of Ministry ⁴⁹

This evening, I do not intend to lecture to you nor would I want to give the impression that I am here to tell you all the answers. In particular, I do not wish to give the impression that I am pretending to be as knowledgeable or insightful as Professor Ian Pitt-Watson who was due to lead this seminar. Tonight I want to ask and share opinions and to allow you all to discuss and share. I do not want to pontificate and presume to tell you what to think or do!

I think we all know that there are challenging times and over the next twenty five years important decisions are going to be required. Of course, the church has always lived in "challenging times". When the church become complacent and self satisfied, blowing neither hot nor cold, it loses not only its edge but also its general usefulness.

I do not have exact statistics to hand but I do know from the Church and Ministry Department that the average age of a Church of Scotland minister is now over fifty. You do not need to be a mathematical genius to realise that in twenty year's time this will begin to bite. The question is surely this: is this a crisis or is it an opportunity?

- No one knows all the answers

There are so many factors involved. That should not discourage us since complicated situations often require a range of solutions. There is, I suggest, no one magic bullet. I mean no disrespect when I say that many office bearers in the Kirk and a

⁴⁹ This is the outline of a seminar that I led in Aberdeen on 19 January 1976, deputising for Professor Ian Pitt-Watson who was temporarily indisposed. It was one of a series of six, all led by different presenters under the generic title: *The Shape of the Church for Tomorrow*. It was not a lecture and there was considerable participative discussion throughout the evening. Only my basic notes are reproduced here.

surprisingly high proportion of ministers are Type A people who look for quick and easy solutions to all issues. "Don't bring me problems; bring me solutions!" Let us not assume that there is only one button to be pressed.

- **Committee of Forty**

At the moment we are still living under the shadow of the work of the Committee of Forty. I am cautious as to how far this is going to change anything in particular. It is not the first time that the Kirk has engaged in the (perfectly valid) exercise of self examination. From what I have seen so far, the work of the Committee may actually cause more divisions in the church rather than solve problems. To be fair, the Committee will almost certainly give us some ideas on which to work. Without intending to sound ungrateful or dismissive, I doubt if it will do much more than that.⁵⁰

- **Historically, ministers enjoy remarkable freedom**

Although subject to Presbyterian discipline, our ministers currently enjoy considerable freedom. People vary, of course, and congregations have their own traditions as well. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the ministry was basically divided between "moderates" and "evangelicals" with one or other party being in the ascendant. Neither of these labels is particularly helpful. At the moment I would cautiously suggest that the Kirk is likely to become rather more evangelical and probably theologically conservative.⁵¹

- **Team Ministry**

In fact, this is not entirely new. Many larger parish churches in Scotland had first and second charges. How this worked in

⁵⁰ I doubt if many people today remember much about the Committee of 40. There have been and continue to be many initiatives on the part of the Kirk to bring its message to the people of Scotland. The *Church without Walls* initiative is but one very worthy example.

⁵¹ Well, I got that badly wrong!

practice varied considerably. Of course, two people do not always make a team! If the two men worked as colleagues, this could be a good arrangement. When there was strife between them, it could be a nightmare. The minister of the first charge might have a certain status, but that did not give him direct authority over the holder of the second charge. In the eighteenth century, Rev Ralph Erskine, minister of the first charge of Dunfermline Abbey made an agreement with his colleague, Rev Robert Wardlaw (of the second charge) that neither would listen to criticism of or gossip about the other - or (perhaps more particularly) the other's wife. The big problem in a team ministry is who is going to be boss. Of course that can be taken in turns, at least on paper. That has a certain Presbyterian ring about it. There are other possibilities in the existing structure, e.g. to have an Associate Minister who has full status as a minister of Word and Sacrament but is not inducted.⁵² Associates have tenure only for a stated period of years. Many medical practices are moving towards working as group practices and people are getting accustomed to the idea that they may not always be able to see their "own" doctor.⁵³ How far is that a good model for our churches?

- *Ad Vitam aut Culpam?*

Traditionally, ministers were inducted for life unless removed by something of a blameworthy nature. In theory, we all have equal status although it would be naive to think that the minister of a run-down mining village would actually have the same status as the incumbent (say) of Glasgow Cathedral. There have been some inroads into this, including the introduction of a compulsory retirement date for ministers inducted after a certain date. But by and large, a Presbytery can only take out a minister if he gets on the wrong side of the law or if his charge is in an

⁵² Terminable appointments were still in their early stages. They are now common.

⁵³ That cautious comment now seems very dated!

“unsatisfactory state” due largely to his fault.⁵⁴ The latter is difficult to prove.⁵⁵ The people of Scotland fought long and hard for the right to call “their” minister. Is that now a help or a hindrance? How is it possible to have a more mobile and flexible ministry? Do people want a more flexible ministry? What do you think of the Methodist system whereby ministers are regularly moved round? What are advantages and disadvantages of such a system? Is the Presbyterian system of courts and church government a sacred cow?

- How viable in the parish system today?

As the established church, the Church of Scotland accepts responsibility for everyone on the entire mainland and islands of Scotland, irrespective of their faith, through a settled parochial ministry. This is a system which has served Scotland very well in the past. It still operates best in the country or in residential areas. But it is creaking in the towns and cities and has, if the truth be told, been doing so since the Industrial Revolution. People are often unaware of which parish they live in, if they ever consider the question at all. The fact that people live in the same street or even under the same roof does not mean that there is any sense of community. The local minister may seem a remote figure. He may have to spend a disproportionate amount of his time raising funds to keep his Victorian building (almost empty on Sundays) wind and water tight.⁵⁶ Is the concept of national responsibility dated and/or unrealistic? Are we moving - should we move - in the direction of gathered congregations? What might we gain and lose? Is the “establishment principle” outdated?

⁵⁴ This comment would now need some updating.

⁵⁵ As Aberdeen Presbytery subsequently discovered when they attempted to dislodge the incumbent of Saint Clement's Footdee. This led to a change in Church Law.

⁵⁶ This took place before the “Church without Walls” initiative.

- **The church is not a building**

Well, we all know that the church is not the building. Indeed, someone has said that the true church is what is left after the building has burnt down. Yet the building often has a strong emotional pull through association through weddings, baptisms, funerals of loved ones, to name just one or two factors. If there is to be a union, it is unusual for the building not to be one of the main issues. It can be heartbreaking to see one's former church converted into a pub or a nightclub.⁵⁷ To return to the previous point, too much of ministry time may be taken up with looking after a building. Is there anything that can be done to soften the blow of losing a building? Do we need to have permanent buildings? When I was assistant at Garthdee (former Church Extension), older members used to tell me that the best days of the church were when the congregation worshipped in Kaimhill School.

- **"Union and Readjustment" has a negative connotation**

When a minister leaves, for whatever reason, inevitably the question of U & R will be raised. The concept that two neighbouring churches would willingly unite to strengthen witness in the area is not unknown but would be rare.⁵⁸ If the charge is strong and financially viable, the chances as that Presbytery will give the go-ahead to call a minister. If it is small and struggling, the position may be different. Is this a good or fair way to use the entire resources of the church?⁵⁹

- **Training for the ministry**

Traditionally, the ministry in Scotland has been seen as a "scholarly" profession, although the quality has been more uneven

⁵⁷ Many Aberdeen churches suffered this fate. The centre of the city now looks scarily like Moscow in the day of the Cold War, with its many closed churches.

⁵⁸ The voluntary union of two Aberdeen congregations – West Church of Saint Andrew and Saint Nicholas (Union Grove) – to form the Langstane Kirk was a rare example. The united congregation (standing at over 1,800 members at the time of union) subsequently shrunk considerably. It was eventually dissolved and the building became a public house.

⁵⁹ This is before the concept of "priority areas" was adopted.

than we might like to think. But in the nineteenth century, the intellectual training for ministry grew more rigorous and basically remains so. Younger people coming in to ministry generally have to think in terms of six years of study ⁶⁰ followed by a probationary year. (This was the pattern I myself followed, although I was employed for a couple of years between degrees.) In past times, training in "practical" theology (an oxymoron?) was somewhat slight. There was plenty of instruction in theology and Biblical texts; yet instruction on such basic skills as to how to prepare for a baptism or how to conduct a funeral were unknown. What kind of training would you like to see offered to aspiring ministers in the future?

It was up to one's "bishop" ⁶¹ during the probationary year to give instruction on such matters. Of course, much depends on the individual "bishop". I was extremely fortunate in my own time at Aberdeen: Garthdee. I know of contemporaries who were considerably less fortunate. Even so, after a year as an assistant, being plunged into a ministry of one's own, moderating a session (usually consisting of older people), being responsible for a congregation and a building can be quite daunting, especially if there is little or no support. What kind of support could be given to encourage ministers in their first charges?

- Role of the minister

Many congregations operate almost as though they were missionary societies. There is nothing wrong with missionary societies. Over the years they have been a great influence for good. They give financial and spiritual support to missionaries in many different ways and uphold them in regular prayer. The church is different. The minister is not the sole missionary. That role is shared with the congregation and the minister's role

⁶⁰ Please be aware that I am speaking of the position in 1976.

⁶¹ This is a popular title for a minister who is responsible for a probationer.

is to lead, teach and encourage. Well, that's the theory. How do you think people perceive their role viz-a-viz the minister?

- How congregational are we?

Actually, the Church of Scotland, in spite of being Presbyterian, operated surprisingly congregationally from its inception in the sixteenth century. Things began to change as result of re-unions with other Presbyterian churches, all of these offshoots from the Church of Scotland. Our complex bureaucracy (and I don't mean to use the word pejoratively) of a central office and many committees and officials is really the result of the way in which the old Free Church and to a lesser extent the United Presbyterian Church operated. Actually, in my experience as Presbytery Clerk I find that many - perhaps even most - office bearers think congregationally. Some even see the Presbytery and General Assembly as annoying and interfering bodies. Do you think that the average person in the pew has a positive or negative perception of the courts of the church? How can any negative perceptions be addressed?

- Size matters?

There is a current tendency to move towards larger congregations as a result of unions. Yet every time there is a union, membership of the united charge seems to fall and many members seem to be permanently lost to the church. Do you think there is more commitment in a smaller church than a larger one - or does it make no difference?

- Teaching

The minister is a teaching elder as well as a ruling elder. What do you think that means in practice? Is the pulpit a valid teaching medium? How well taught are the people in the pew? (I would suggest not very well, on average.) What is the role of Bible or similar study groups? Is there enough leading in how to

pray and what to pray for? What about gifts of the Spirit? ⁶²
 What about house groups where people can actually discuss
 issues of faith in a supportive and in a non-judgmental
 atmosphere? ⁶³

- Lay Ministry

So far, I have been speaking as though "ministry" must always be exercised by a "professional" minister. (We are back with our missionary society model!) But if there will be fewer ministers in the future, more will have to be done by lay people and through some form(s) of auxiliary ministry. This opens the way for part-time ministers and non-stipendiary forms of ministry. ⁶⁴ What kind of work could be undertaken by lay people e.g. sick visiting, conducting funerals ⁶⁵ [maybe even weddings], conducting services, leading groups, officiating at meetings? What kind of training would be required? Where (if anywhere) do Readers fit in to this picture? I suggest too that ministers will need to get used to letting go of some of their control in certain areas.

This can all be quite scary. Change often is and I am not advocating change for the sake of change. The church needs to respond to the present and future challenges. That is quite different from a knee jerk reaction. I would like to finish by saying how important it is to maintain our confidence in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is easy to get discouraged and downhearted. It is easy to get bogged down in detail and not see the wood for the trees. Remember the promise of Jesus that *...I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* ⁶⁶

⁶² At the time there was an increased interest in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Since then, the evangelical tradition in the Church of Scotland has shown an almost obsessive preoccupation with doctrine.

⁶³ Quite a number of churches have such groups. Alpha courses have also been very successful.

⁶⁴ Various types of ministry have developed since this was written. At the 2014 General Assembly, the Kirk was warned that it might have to adjust to a permanent 20% vacancy level in parish ministry.

⁶⁵ The increasingly common humanist funerals and weddings were not a factor at this time.

⁶⁶ Matthew 16: 18