

## THE NATURE OF MINISTRY: PRIESTLY OR PROPHETIC?

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In his penetrating volume *The Genius of Puritanism*, Peter Lewis draws a fascinating distinction between the priestly model and the prophetic model of public worship.<sup>1</sup> This distinction seems to me to be pertinent to the current debate over the nature of ministry.

It is obvious we are in a time of exciting spiritual visitation. Many significant developments make it plain that the nineties will go down in history as a period of revival. The final years of the twentieth century began as a Decade of Harvest. International groups like GCOWE and ICCOWE<sup>2</sup> coordinated major conferences and prayer gatherings. We saw the rising up of a worldwide prayer movement. Undeniable visitations occurred in Argentina, Indonesia and China. Bible Colleges throughout Australia reported record enrolments. Evangelists such as Reinhard Bonnke are leading millions to Christ.<sup>3</sup> Thousands of people were involved in aspects of what has come to be called the 'Toronto blessing' and subsequently the 'Pensacola revival.'

Praise God for the many people whose lives have been changed in some way. There have been some wonderful testimonies of God's great grace. Both individuals and churches have been positively affected. The attention of the media has been attracted by revival phenomena and churches have made headlines as a result.<sup>4</sup> Good and godly people from all denominations are enthusiastic participants in what is happening.

On the other hand, equally good and godly people have also raised concerns, in some cases very strong ones.<sup>5</sup> Sadly, the result, at times, has been an unhelpful degree of acrimony. In the following discussion, I have oversimplified two ministry models for the sake of clarity, but I hope this paper will focus on the major issues in a way that will help clarify them in a charitable manner and enhance mutual understanding.

### THE PRIESTLY MODEL

The priestly model of ministry is one in which there are two major underlying concepts. *Firstly, the minister sees his primary ministry as to God, not to the people.* So the major purpose of a service of worship is to offer praise and prayers to God.

Once, with a group of Australian Christians, I visited an ancient Orthodox church building in Jordan. We arrived while a service was being conducted. The surprising thing was that the only people in the church were the priest and a lay reader. There was no congregation. But the priest continued with the liturgy, the reading of Scripture and the intoning of prayers, apparently unconcerned that there was no one else present. It appeared that for him an empty building was not a problem, because his major task was to offer acts of worship to God. This is not an unusual occurrence in some churches.

The second major concept of a priestly approach is that *the minister's role is to represent the people before God and to be their spokesman*. So it is through him that they find acceptance and receive blessing.

Anyone with even a casual acquaintance with the Scriptures will realise that this is an Old Testament approach to ministry. The people come to the Temple, offer their gifts to God and then rely on the priest to represent them before God and to secure their forgiveness. The day of atonement is the outstanding example, when the high priest goes into the most holy place, taking blood and splashing it on the altar, as an expiation for sin both for himself and for the people (Leviticus 16:1ff).

While we now live under the new covenant, many people feel that some aspects of Old Testament ministry are still applicable today. The priestly model is followed in most liturgical churches, where the title 'priest' is used for pastors<sup>6</sup> and where only an ordained priest can dispense the communion elements, so that through his administrations, the members can approach God. Then, in return, it is through the minister that the grace of God is bestowed on the people.<sup>7</sup> It is also common in such churches for the majority of the service to be devoted to confessions, prayers, readings and communion, with only a few minutes, if any at all, given to preaching. This is a time-honoured approach which has been followed by thousands of churches for hundreds of years.<sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, among Pentecostals and charismatics, there are also elements of a priestly approach. This is particularly evident in the strong emphasis on prayer lines where there is laying on of hands for healing and blessing. There is an unspoken but plain message here that it is through the ministrations of the pastor, or his appointed assistants, that blessing is received. Phrases like 'altar call' carry suggestions of old covenant thinking. Similarly, the

strong emphasis on tithing and, in some cases, of seeing the minister as 'the Lord's anointed' reflect a priestly approach.<sup>9</sup> The popular but unscriptural idea that the father is 'the priest in the home', the only one who can properly represent his family before God, is another example.

In the New Testament, however, the word 'priest' is used of all believers. We are 'a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 2:5). Christ has made us 'priests to serve His God and Father' (Revelation 1:6; 5:10). As believer priests, all God's people have the privilege of ministering to each other by praying for one another (Ephesians 6:18f; Colossians 4:3; James 5:16) and encouraging one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18; Hebrews 10:25).<sup>10</sup>

## THE PROPHETIC MODEL

The prophetic model of ministry also sees the minister as standing between God and people. But there is a significant difference. Instead of bringing the people to God, the minister's task is to bring the word of God to the people.<sup>11</sup> His duty is not primarily to gather up the people's worship and present it to God, and then, in turn, to be the bearer of grace. Rather, it is to proclaim the great and eternal truths of the gospel, so that the people discover the grace of God for themselves, through the Word of God.

We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing, says Paul (Ephesians 1:3) and we are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). Peter points out that God's divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3f). Prophetic ministry teaches these things so clearly that people find all their longings realised in Jesus and rest in the fulness of His grace which they have already received (John 1:16).

Fundamental to the priestly model is the idea that the proper way to deal with God is through the priest. Fundamental to the prophetic model is the concept that Christ is the great High Priest and that every believer is a priest under Him. Hence, the minister's task is to be a faithful herald of the Word, preaching Christ in all His fulness and teaching believers how to cultivate their ongoing, living relationship with Him.

Of course, in many cases, both functions are blended, so that although the priestly model is followed, say, for communion, there is nevertheless a strong proclamation of the gospel.<sup>12</sup> In many ways, this is the ideal. Although, in this paper, I am arguing strongly for the prophetic model, it is clear that there are aspects of the priestly model that should be implemented, especially, the mutual ministry of believer-priests to one another. Overall, however, there is no doubt where the biblical emphasis lies.

In his ground-breaking *The Sociology of Religion* (1922), Max Weber wrote —

Preaching, which in the true sense of the word is collective instruction concerning religious and ethical matters, is normally something associated with prophecy and prophetic religion. Indeed, wherever it arises apart from these, it is an imitation of them. But as a rule, preaching declines in importance whenever a revealed religion has been transformed into a priestly enterprise by routinization, and the importance of preaching stands in inverse proportion to the magical components of a religion.<sup>13</sup>

Weber goes on to point out that in Christianity, the 'magic' elements of the faith have declined proportionally as preaching has been emphasised. In other words, the higher the level of preaching, the more rational faith becomes. In Protestantism, he argues, 'the concept of the priest has been supplanted altogether by that of the preacher.' While this may have been true of the rigid and

cerebral Protestantism of 19th and early 20th century Germany, it is less applicable to the Pentecostal/charismatic renewal, where priestly ministrations have come to the fore once again. Consequently, we have what Weber calls some of the 'magic' elements of the faith. By this he means an approach where ministry 'in all its forms is the priests' real instrument of power' and where the pastor or priest or rabbi or guru influences people to an unhealthy degree. Where there is strong prophetic preaching, however, the faith of the people is wrenched from 'its bondage to tradition based upon magic.'<sup>14</sup>

Weber's study ranges across many religions, and he sees a variety of ways in which priestly power expresses itself. In some cases, he argues —

The manner in which this divine grace is distributed depends in considerable measure on whether certifying proofs of the personal possession of charismatic gifts of grace are required of these earthly intermediaries between man and saviour.<sup>15</sup>

This is clearly pertinent to any consideration of ministry in the Pentecostal/charismatic movement. Although Pentecostals teach and preach that there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5), *in practice*, the model too often presented is that other mediators are also required — usually people with special gifts or power. So we emphasise the repeated need to respond to altar calls, to have hands laid on us, to be prayed for, to be 'slain in the Spirit,' and so on, in order to receive the blessing of God. We say one thing, but we model another. So Weber goes on to suggest that the sinner knows salvation is his because he can always engage 'in some occasional religious practice' or carry out some religious rite.<sup>16</sup>

This is strong stuff and many in the Pentecostal/charismatic tradition would want to argue equally strongly against it. Yet an ob-

jective consideration of what has been happening in recent years cannot avoid the conclusion that the essence of Weber's argument is true.

### **PREACHING CHRIST**

In the New Testament, there are scores of references to preaching and proclaiming the Word of God. There are hardly any to ministers leading people in worship or to regularly praying for the congregation in a mediatorial sense. There are specific instances of laying on of hands for the fulness of the Spirit or for healing (Acts 8:17; 9:17; Mark 16:17f) or for the impartation of a spiritual gift (1 Timothy 4:14) but *there is nothing to suggest that laying on of hands for blessing was a general practice as a basis for Christian living* (cf 1 Timothy 5:22) or that it should be normative for the church. It is walking by faith in the Spirit every day that is important (Galatians 5:16), not through 'blessings' received week by week through mediatorial ministry.

It is the consistent evidence of Scripture that is important here. It is not enough to pull out one or two texts to justify a particular manifestation or method of ministry. What we need to observe is the whole counsel of God (cf Deuteronomy 19:15). And the overwhelming focus is prophetic. For instance, in the Great Commission, Jesus' major command was to preach and teach (Matthew 28:19f; Mark 16:15ff) and to bear witness to Him (Acts 1:8). The record of Acts shows clearly that the primary thrust of the apostles was preaching and teaching (Acts 2:46; 4:33; 5:42; 7:2ff; 8:4; 13:15ff; 14:21ff; 17:2ff; 18:4ff etc). The result was that the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power (Acts 19:20).<sup>17</sup> Even when the early apostles and evangelists healed people, they often did not pray. They just pronounced healing in the authority of God's word (Acts 3:6; 9:34,40; 14:10).

In the letters, the major focus is on the proclamation of the gospel. When Paul prays for people, more often than not, it is for them to have greater understanding of the glorious truths of Jesus Christ and to develop Christian character in their lives (eg Ephesians 1:17ff; 3:14ff; Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:9). When he asks them to pray for him, it is that he might be more effective as a preacher of Christ (Ephesians 6:19f; Colossians 4:3).

In the pastorals, where Paul gives specific instructions to two young men in the ministry, it is remarkable to observe that there are no verses which refer to music, only three which mention spiritual gifts, only five which deal with worship and only nine with prayer — but 58 verses deal with teaching, preaching and learning.<sup>18</sup> This emphasis on God's Word is remarkable. For Paul, the prophetic model was clearly paramount.

Paul makes it plain to both Timothy and Titus that the proclamation of God's Word is of top priority. It must be treated seriously and presented in a self-controlled fashion, with integrity and soundness of speech (1 Timothy 4:12f; Titus 2:6-8). Timothy is to maintain the preaching of sound doctrine, no matter what other popular preachers may be saying or doing. He is 'always to be sober' and to 'keep his head' in all situations (2 Timothy 2-5).

How do we relate this to situations where ministers are so lacking in self-control that they cannot even stand on their feet or speak coherently, or when there is so much 'holy laughter' or other similar behaviour in the congregation that the message cannot be heard?<sup>19</sup> The model of ministry described in the Pastoral letters, and in Titus chapter two in particular, and the model presented in some 'revival' meetings have little in common. After watching one television program in which, among other things, the preacher blew on people and repeatedly caused people to collapse

to the floor, I found myself asking the question, '*Would Jesus have behaved like this?*' The answer was not hard to find.

What do we do with the Scriptures, in these cases? This is a serious question which has yet to be seriously addressed by those concerned. Again, it is not enough to pluck a text or two from the New Testament that may, at a stretch, suggest such behaviour. It is the plain and consistent teaching of God's Word that must be heeded.

### REVIVAL PHENOMENA

There is currently widespread talk of 'revival.' As this word does not occur in the New Testament, it is difficult to deal with it biblically. In fact, there is a good case for arguing that it is not a biblical concept at all. Certainly, most of the justification for 'revival' is drawn from recent church history rather than from Scripture. The reasoning is circular. Having decided that events such as the Great Awakening were 'revivals,' whenever similar phenomena occur, we call these 'revival,' too. Some of the commonly recognised features of such a revival are to be found in Scripture — such as repentance, conversions, prayer, enhanced fellowship and the like. Some are not — especially phenomena like falling to the ground, laughing, jerking, animal noises and so on. When these things also occur as the result of laying on of hands or of going to a certain place, there seems good reason to suggest that we are slipping back into a priestly model rather than a prophetic one.

For example, it was widely claimed that the 'Toronto blessing' was infectious. You got it from someone else who already had it.<sup>20</sup> Numerous conferences were held with the theme 'Catch the Fire,' as if the fire of God was contagious.<sup>21</sup> While it would be foolish to say we cannot bless one another, or pray for one an-

other, some questions are raised by this approach, such as the extent to which this impinges on our rights and privileges as believer priests.

Secondly, sometimes, in some conferences or services, preaching was abandoned or abbreviated so that more time might be devoted to 'ministry'.<sup>22</sup> In other words, it was more important to 'impart the blessing' by laying on of hands and prayer than by preaching the Word of God.<sup>23</sup> It was not unusual for there to be no significant preaching of the Word at all in the meetings of one of the 'Toronto blessing's' major exponents.<sup>24</sup> Further, he frequently encouraged people not to use their minds in trying to analyse what is happening<sup>25</sup> — an approach that is foreign to the New Testament.<sup>26</sup> People were told to 'leave their brains at the door,' or warned against being 'stiff-necked' like the scribes and Pharisees. Recently, a speaker from Pensacola told an Australian audience not to be critical. A critical spirit, he said, would 'damn them to hell.' No attempt was made to distinguish between such a critical spirit and honest questioning. What was important was to accept everything that was happening without examination. Such a manipulative approach is regrettable in any context — and particularly so in a Christian gathering. The same speaker told people who felt they had backslidden or somehow fallen away to be rebaptised — a view which is clearly contrary to Scripture.<sup>27</sup> The sad thing was that so many people seemed to have no problems with these statements.<sup>28</sup>

Generally, if there are physical manifestations recorded in Scripture, they result from receiving a message from God — the word precedes the experience (cf Acts 9:3f; Revelation 1:17) — and we are encouraged to use all our faculties in studying the Word and ways of God (Mark 12:30; Romans 12:1f; 2 Timothy 2:15).<sup>29</sup> This includes questioning and testing what is being practised and taught (1 Titus 5:19-21; 1 John 4:1ff).



The Puritan writer Richard Baxter (1656), whose classic volume *The Reformed Pastor* is still widely read today, urges ministers themselves to be diligent in study —

Some men have no delight in their studies ... and are glad when they are from under the yoke. Will neither the natural desire of knowledge, nor the spiritual desire of knowing God and things divine, nor the consciousness of our great ignorance and weakness, nor the sense of the weight of our ministerial work — will none of these things keep us closer to our studies, and make us more painful in seeking after truth? O what abundance of things are there that a minister should understand! and what a great defect it is to be ignorant of them!<sup>30</sup>

That people sit in church with eager longing for the Word and then go home and live a morally upright life seems to count for little. Unless there is some identifiable experience or manifestation, we are not impressed. Yet are not a passion for Christ, a delight in His Word and an upright life genuine signs of revival? Indeed, this is the major thrust of Jonathan Edwards' writings. Edwards was widely quoted in support of the 'Toronto blessing'.<sup>31</sup> Yet his final, most mature comments, point out that the only sure signs of revival are that the Scriptures are taken as an absolute guide and that people live morally upright lives.<sup>32</sup> For him, the moving of the affections was only valid when it was the result of the preaching of the Word of God. This is clearly also Paul's emphasis in the pastoral letters. In his instructions to the young apostles Timothy and Titus, he says nothing about emotion or experience, but 65 verses specifically focus on Christian lifestyle. What Paul considered important is very plain.

Thirdly, there is a widespread weakening of the preaching of the cross. In some meetings, the redeeming work of our precious Saviour and the forgiveness that is ours through His atoning sacrifice is virtually overlooked. I have personally sat in several

gatherings where people were invited to receive the 'blessing' but little or no mention was made of the fundamental teaching that all blessings are ours only through Christ.<sup>33</sup> Even a cursory glance at the New Testament makes it plain that the preaching of the cross was the major message of the early church. It is found on virtually every page. There can be no argument about the priority of the proclamation of this wonderful message (eg 1 Corinthians 1:23ff; 2:1ff). It is always central.

Fourthly, we now seem to have a new means of grace. Whereas once we would come to God, by faith, trusting only in the merits of His Son, our Saviour (Romans 5:1ff; 8:1ff), now we come to God by having an experience of being 'slain in the Spirit' or 'holy laughter' or some other bodily extravagance which is normally administered to us by someone else. Do we now have a third sacrament?

Again, this is not to say it is wrong for us to pray for each other. Nor is it to deny God's blessings. I personally know many who have been greatly refreshed through 'revival' meetings. I know ministers who say their whole calling and commitment has been revolutionised. Whereas before they were weary and sluggish, they feel rejuvenated and testify to a new intimacy with God. I know others who have been healed or helped in various ways. Praise God for these. But it is to ask a serious question about where our emphasis lies. Is this current form of ministry fundamentally priestly or fundamentally prophetic? And if it is basically priestly, are we heading in a dangerous direction?

Of course, it may be argued that I am mistaken in my understanding and that the priestly approach is an equally valid one. But if it is, then a consistent biblical case needs to be presented. It is not enough that the 'fruit' be attractive; the 'root' must also be sound.

## NOT IN A VACUUM

‘Revival’ phenomena do not emerge in a vacuum. There is always a religio-cultural setting of some kind. In Australia, several trends have helped to prepare the way. Briefly, here are some of them —

*Christless worship.* For some two decades now, there has been a move away from testimonial, gospel-centred songs to more aspirational, experience-centred music. This has been a subtle shift. A preliminary study carried out recently suggests that whereas in the 1970's, some 23% of songs made specific reference to the cross, today the figure is nearer 6%. Another exhaustive study suggests the current figure is nearer 3%.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on power, victory, blessing, overcoming, ruling the nations and the like. While none of this is wrong in itself, and while it is not essential that every song should be about the cross, it is significant that so few of our current songs have a gospel-centred emphasis. In such a worship climate, it is easy for us to slip into an overall mode of ministry which gives slight recognition to the redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus.

This is not to say that the gospel must be preached in every gathering of believers. Clearly, some of the people who have been blessed in services where there has been little or no preaching of Christ have heard the message elsewhere and have acted upon it, even though it was not actually spelled out on that occasion. Nevertheless, where blessing is consistently promised without due recognition of the central message of redemption, the ministry is out of balance.

*Pastoral pragmatism.* In Australia, especially in Pentecostal and charismatic circles, there has been a widespread emphasis on church planting and church growth. Obviously, this has much to commend it. Biblically, we have a mandate to plant churches

wherever and whenever possible. There is also an ongoing stress on getting ‘results’ in public gatherings — healings, ‘slayings,’ emotional experiences and the like. But along with these emphases runs the dangerous and subtle pressure of performance expectancy. If we are truly successful, we will grow a big church or attract large crowds or organise huge rallies or have dramatic ‘results.’ The obverse is plain: if we do not see such ‘results’ our ministry is unsuccessful. The temptation to pursue models of ministry which will achieve these goals is clearly very great.<sup>35</sup>

Douglas McBain writes —

The heart of the gospel is no longer to do with the gracious action of God in Christ for our salvation, to which our response is to be made with repentance and faith inspired by the Spirit, it is to do with whether our presentation of these truths is effective in the growth of our churches, the planting of new churches, or the attractiveness of our charismatic ministry. No one doubts the worth of such results, but when we succumb to pragmatism we are in serious danger of concluding that any means that produces these desirable ends are justifiable for us.<sup>36</sup>

This actually indicates an even deeper problem of theological shallowness. A comprehensive theological framework through which to screen new phenomena seems either to be lacking or, perhaps worse, ignored. Too often, there is a tendency towards an eclecticism of randomly picking and choosing methods and techniques that appear to work, without due reflection on the biblical justification for them.

Ian Jagelman laments —

The fact is that, for the present, many Pentecostal pastors are greatly reluctant to abandon the authority of ‘what works’ in favour of what may be true but which has not [been], or cannot, be seen to ‘work.’

Before Pentecostal pastors abandon the authority of what they have been presently taught 'works' they will need to be persuaded that what they are being offered in the way of new doctrine works just as well, if not better.<sup>37</sup>

An extreme case is that of a well-known pastor who, when asked why he opened his platform to a certain itinerant minister, replied, 'I know his teaching is questionable in many areas, but he always brings a crowd and we always have many conversions.' Such an ends-justifies-the-means philosophy dangerously compromises the integrity of the gospel.

*Experientialism.* The positive contribution of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement has been its reawakening of people to an experience of the power of God. This is, in fact, its strength. In the face of an emotionally sterile evangelicalism and a spiritually empty liberalism, Pentecostals have opened the door for people to respond emotionally as well as intellectually to the Word of God. But the danger has always been of a preoccupation with experience and the seductive nature of power. So when any new minister or movement emerges which seems to demonstrate the power of God in a new way, it is welcomed, often uncritically. The history of the movement in Australia has been marred by too many examples of this.<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately, when people are blessed in a particular context, they often fail to evaluate the rest of the context. They can too readily assume that because a part is right, the whole is also right. On his basis, almost anything can be seen as valid. Every week, two hundred thousand people visit the Marian shrine at Lourdes and many claim wonderful blessings. By comparison, the gatherings at Pensacola, for example, are relatively insignificant. Does this mean that what happens at Lourdes is right? Large crowds and exciting, even miraculous, phenomena prove nothing. In 1973, I wrote, 'The danger is ... that people may associate the

blessing with the message; thus, where there is no blessing, there is no truth ... This has ever been the weak spot in Pentecost ... Experience speaks louder than truth'.<sup>39</sup> Today, 25 years later, the point is still valid.

Sanctification may also be seen in terms of experience. People have sometimes been encouraged to find Christian victory through the prayers and ministry of others rather than through their own understanding of the completeness of the work of Christ.<sup>40</sup> The clear teaching of the New Testament is that we only live godly lives by such things as putting on Christ, walking in the Spirit, renewing our minds, consistent prayer and obeying God's Word (eg Romans 6:1ff; Galatians 5:16ff; Ephesians 1:1ff; Colossians 3:1ff). There is hardly a NT reference to achieving holiness or overcoming sin by having someone pray for us or lay hands on us.<sup>41</sup> When we know the sanctifying power of God through the name of Jesus and the power of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Peter 1:2), we are less likely to be attracted to or moved by some other means of achieving this.

Again, it must be stressed that this is not to argue against the place of emotion or experience. There is no doubt that genuine Christian faith always touches the emotions. So if people want to shout, sing, dance, lift their hands, weep, laugh or rejoice, there can be no proper objection. Such actions are normal and natural human responses to intense excitement or emotion. The problem lies in placing a priority on such emotions or on making them an end in themselves.

A further difficulty occurs when we fail to distinguish between natural and unnatural responses. For example, when people at an exciting sporting event shout, cheer, weep, jump, lift their hands and so on, this is seen as a normal response to an exciting stimulus. But if those same people were to drop to the ground, roll



around, faint, jerk uncontrollably, make animal noises and the like, there would be serious concern, to say the least. This behaviour would be seen as unnatural and excessive. The same kind of distinction needs to be made in gatherings of God's people. Some behaviour is genuinely human; other behaviour actually demeans our God-given humanity.<sup>42</sup>

*Future-tense faith.* There is a common tendency to see the Christian life in terms of 'becoming what we ought to be' rather than 'becoming what we already are'. The idea is common that the blessings of God are out there ahead of us somewhere and that we need to struggle to find them. Of course, some blessings *are* future — our hope in heaven is an obvious one. But the writings of the New Testament clearly point to the fact that God has already blessed us with all the blessings we need for this present life (Ephesians 1:3). Every blessing is ours now in Christ Jesus. We are complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). We have already received His grace (John 1:16). We have been washed and sanctified (1 Corinthians 6:11). It is because of what God has already done for us that we can live the life of faith (Colossians 3:1, 9). To put it differently, the indicative precedes the imperative. When we accept what we are, we can do what we have to do.

So because the joy of the Lord is already ours, we can rejoice in Him. Because we are already filled with His love, we can love others. Because we have been made new, we can live as new people. Because we are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6), we can exercise authority over sin and all the works of the devil.

There seems a general lack of appreciation of these truths in many quarters as reflected in the continuing number of believers who have over recent years followed the latest charismatic phenomenon — whether it be singing in the Spirit, dancing before

the Lord, inner healing, being 'slain in the Spirit' or the 'Toronto blessing'. As James Wong put it recently, 'If your life is already in revival, you have no need to chase after revival phenomena.'<sup>43</sup> If believers are clearly taught their standing in Christ, they will not be shifted and moved by every wind of doctrine. If, however, they are taught that spirituality and Christian maturity come from a succession of 'blessings' or from 'the coming revival' they will always be unstable and insecure. Where the New Testament emphasis lies is plain.

*Ministerial dryness.* There is increasing evidence to suggest that the demands and pressures on the ministry in recent years have taken their toll. It has been claimed that as many as 10,000 former pastors have left the ministry in Australia.<sup>44</sup> While this figure may be too high, the number of ministers who visited Toronto in 1994-1997<sup>45</sup> and the large numbers who have been to various conferences and conventions in Australia over the last couple of years suggest that among those who are still in the ministry, there is an ongoing sense of lack, of sterility, of frustration, of dryness and of weariness.<sup>46</sup> This is a serious situation. Of course, it is also reflected in the people who make up the congregations.

These five trends provide fertile ground for a priestly model of ministry. When our focus is taken from Christ — even partially — it is easy to look to human resources to supply our need. When we are motivated more by pragmatism than by the essential truth of God's Word, it is appealing to see apparent success as more important than faithfulness to the truth. When experience becomes the standard by which we evaluate ministry, it is easy to see those who offer the greatest experience as having the greatest ministry. When we do not realise the blessings that are already ours, we will inevitably search for them somewhere else. When we are dry and thirsty at heart, it is tempting to look to someone else's prayers to refresh us, rather than to the time-honoured New

Testament emphasis on being found in Christ, walking in the Spirit and trusting God's Word.

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

So if there are questions about some current 'revival' phenomena, how is it that so many people are testifying to new encounters with God, to emotional healing, to spiritual rejuvenation, to a closer intimacy with the Lord?

As we have noted, there is an important place for praying for each other and for ministering love and care to those around us. Many people need an experience with God to refresh and renew them. For them, an emotional experience is the best way to open up to Him. God, in His great grace, always honours the prayer of faith and richly blesses those who reach out to Him. He has always used vessels of clay, even if flawed, to achieve his purposes.

But if the priestly model is all we have, we stand in danger of long-term dissatisfaction. Only the prophetic model of ministry can sustain us. We do not live by short-term experience alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). Only regular, steady, consistent, Christ-centred proclamation of the gospel, in all its richness and fulness, will uphold us day by day, month by month and year by year. This is the crux of the whole debate.

All great Christian movements have been built on a solid biblical foundation. From the days of the early church onwards, where a significant awakening has occurred, it has been grounded on God's Word. Obvious examples spring to mind — Lutheranism and justification by faith; the Anabaptists and believers' baptism; Pentecostalism and baptism in the Spirit. On the other hand,

movements where there has been little or no distinctive biblical foundation and where the Word of God has been made secondary to worship and prayer, such as the Welsh Revival of 1904-1905, have soon faded away, leaving little to show for the heights reached. As Edwards frequently notes, seed on stony ground springs up quickly, but it does not endure.<sup>47</sup>

Because it is not primarily prophetic in its thrust, the current emphasis on 'revival' may also languish. There has been an almost frantic hunt for biblical texts to justify much that has happened, but this kind of proof-texting is not enough. It is the whole fundamental fabric that is at risk. It is more priestly than prophetic and this is its inherent weakness. Unless some way can be found to undergird it with a strong biblical foundation, and to set it on the rock of the gospel of Christ, like the house built on sand, it will not stand the storms. Ironically, if such a foundation can be found, and people are taught to trust only in Christ and to be utterly caught up in Him, then there will be little need for such 'revival' anyway.

### **PRIORITY OF PREACHING**

To go back to the beginning, the Puritans certainly had no doubt about the priority of preaching. In fact, in spite of popular opinion, this was Puritanism's distinguishing quality. William Perkins puts it simply —

They therefore are thoroughly deceived who think a minister to discharge sufficiently his duty though he preach not ... for if a minister hath not this virtue [of preaching] he hath none ...<sup>48</sup>

Robert Trail (1682) makes things very plain —

Art thou a minister? Thou must be a preacher. An unpreaching minister is a sort of contradiction.<sup>49</sup>

Richard Baxter (1656), pleads with his hearers —

I earnestly beseech you, in the name of God, and for the sake of your people's souls, that you will not lightly slubber over this work, but do it vigorously and with all your might; and make it your great and serious business ... Study, therefore, beforehand, how to do it, as you study for your sermons ...

... How few ministers do preach with all their might ... in such a manner as to make men believe they are in good earnest! ... Alas! we speak so drowsily ... that sleepy sinners cannot hear ... O sirs, how plainly, how closely, how earnestly, should we deliver a message of such moment as ours, when the everlasting life and everlasting death of our fellow-man is involved in it! .. In the name of God, brethren, labour to awaken your own hearts, before you go into the pulpit ...<sup>50</sup>

Interestingly, the early Pentecostals placed a similar priority on preaching. The proclamation of the gospel was primary. Experiences such as baptism in the Holy Spirit were justifiable because they were firmly and plainly taught in Scripture. Anything that was not biblical was roundly rejected.

### **WHAT SHALL WE SAY TO THESE THINGS?**

So what conclusion shall we reach? That ministry should be only prophetic? Clearly, no. As the Church is 'a royal priesthood' and 'a kingdom of priests' (1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10) there is undoubtedly a need for a priestly ministry. As all believers are priests, so priestly ministry is for all believers. It is our privilege to minister to one another. So it is right and proper for us to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24,25), to pray for one another (James 5:16), to use spiritual gifts such as healing and prophesying for one another (1 Corinthians 12:7ff) and to help one another

(Galatians 6:9,10). In practice, different people will minister in different ways (Romans 12:6ff).

Never, however, will this be in a mediatorial sense. Never will we approach ministry with the idea that other people can only receive grace through us.

It is through the prophetic model that the balance is achieved. The proclamation of God's Word, as we have noted, is the primary focus of ministry. Through preaching the gospel, men and women are brought to a place of faith and obedience. This is more important than receiving so-called 'blessing.' Indeed, the greatest, true blessing is turning away from sin and obeying the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 3:26; 5:32; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

The great Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon (1834-92) put it very well. To young men training for the ministry, he said —

We have a fixed faith to preach, my brethren, and we are sent with a definite message from God ... As for me ... I am certain there is a God, and I mean to preach it as a man does who is absolutely sure! ...

We claim no priesthood over and above that which belongs to every child of God; but we are successors of those who, in olden times, were moved by God to declare His word, to testify against transgression, and to lead His cause. Unless we have the spirit of the prophets resting upon us, the mantle which we wear is nothing but a rough garment to deceive.<sup>51</sup>

### **About Dr Barry Chant**

Barry Chant is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and

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<sup>1</sup> P.Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism* Haywards Heath: Carey, 1979, 53.

<sup>2</sup> Global Consultation on World Evangelisation and the International Charismatic Consultation on World Evangelisation. The 1997 GCOWE conference in Pretoria, South Africa, attracted over 4000 delegates from more than 150 countries.

<sup>3</sup> Reinhard Bonnke's organisation, Christ for All Nations, reports that over five million people completed inquiry cards during the first half of the decade.

<sup>4</sup> For example, 'Drunk on God: the 'laughing revival', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 February 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Those who have been seriously worried about aspects of the 'Toronto blessing' include such significant charismatic ministers as David Wilkerson, Clifford Hill, Harry Westcott, David Pawson, George Wood and Johannes Facius. Many outside the charismatic movement have also expressed reservations.

<sup>6</sup> Historically, the title 'priest' came to be used as a result of Jerome's use of the word in the Vulgate as a translation for the Greek *πρεσβυτερος* (presbyter, elder) and did not necessarily have sacerdotal connotations in its original usage.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in the Service for Morning Prayer in *The Book of Common Prayer*, the following statement occurs —

*'The Absolution, or Remission of sins, to be pronounced by the Priest alone, standing; the people still kneeling.* Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather

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than he may turn from his wickedness and live; and hath given power to his Ministers, to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins; He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel ...'

In the Communion Service, before the communicants come to the table, the priest prays on behalf of the people — 'Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him; Have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

<sup>8</sup> The funeral service for Diana, Princess of Wales, on 6 September 1997, was an example. There were prayers, hymns and a Scripture reading, but no proclamation of God's Word.

<sup>9</sup> In extreme cases, the injunction 'Touch not mine anointed' (1 Chron 16:22; Psalm 105:15, AV) has been used in an authoritarian fashion to parry criticism or disagreement (cf 1 John 2:20,27). 1 Samuel 15:23 has also been used in some quarters to crush question or discussion.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that most of the New Testament references to praying for one another seem to apply to circumstances where we are absent from each other, rather than a physical impartation of grace or blessing.

<sup>11</sup> In this context, the word 'prophetic' is used in the broadest sense of proclaiming the word of God.

<sup>12</sup> This is generally true, for example, of the Sydney Diocese of the Anglican Church in Australia.

<sup>13</sup> M.Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* London: Methuen, (1922), 1965, 74f. Weber's approach is sociological, not theological, and his view of Christianity is not always consistent with Scripture. Nevertheless, his knowledge of religions generally was extensive and his observations cannot be lightly dismissed.

<sup>14</sup> Weber, 1965:75ff. The use of the word 'magic' here might be seen as inflammatory; it is not intended to be. 'Magic' basically refers to any dramatic action which either impresses for its own sake or in some way exercises a manipulatory influence on others. Biblical miracles were not 'magic.' They were never just tricks to impress; they always resulted in some obvious, definable benefit for the people concerned and

they always left people with a free choice whether to accept or reject the message. The life and ministry of Jesus clearly demonstrates this.

<sup>15</sup> Weber, 1965:186.

<sup>16</sup> Weber, 1965:188.

<sup>17</sup> The wording here is significant. It is the 'Word' which spreads widely and grows in power.

<sup>18</sup> Another 65 verses refer to Christian lifestyle.

<sup>19</sup> The phrase 'drunk in the Spirit' is often used to justify such behaviour on the basis of Acts 2:13. However, there is nothing to suggest 'drunken' behaviour in this passage. The disciples were *sitting* when the Spirit came, not staggering around, and the Twelve *stood up* (apparently from being seated) when Peter preached. In any case, it was only a minority who accused them of drunkenness. The charge was clearly laid only on the basis that they were all speaking, apparently at the same time, in strange languages — a charge which was made on an earlier occasion for a similar reason against Hannah (1 Samuel 1:12ff).

<sup>20</sup> 'A number of observers have noted that this particular blessing is being spread somewhat like a virus. It is infectious! Those who have been exposed to the "bug" in Toronto or elsewhere have returned to their own churches and it has broken out there.' John Davies, *Arma Sydney Newsletter* #30, November 1994, 2. Note also the frequent use of terms like 'transmit', 'channel' or 'act as an instrument' for the anointing.

<sup>21</sup> See also G.Chevreau, *Catch the Fire* London: Marshall Pickering, 1994. It is worth noting that Chevreau's use of the writings of Jonathan Edwards to sustain his argument offers a useful example of special pleading. It should also be pointed out that the vast majority of biblical references to the fire of God concern either holiness or judgement eg Matthew 3:11f; 1 Corinthians 3:13; Hebrews 12:29; 2 Peter 3:7-12.

<sup>22</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>23</sup> 'I do wish that the teaching component in the [Airport Vineyard] meetings were stronger ...' C.Pinnock, 'Catch the Fire: No Small Feat', *Spread the Fire* Vol 1, #1, January/February 1995, 16. My greatest personal concern about many of the 'Toronto' meetings I have attended is in this area.

<sup>24</sup> I refer to Rodney Howard-Browne who rarely read or expounded Scripture except for lengthy exhortations at offering-time about giving.

<sup>25</sup> J.Dunn, 'New Wine', *Charisma*, August 1994, 26.

<sup>26</sup> See 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 14:29.

<sup>27</sup> Paul's advice to Roman Christians who were sinning was not to be baptised again but to live in the light and power of the baptism they had already experienced (Romans 6:1ff).

<sup>28</sup> When I raised this issue with a group of pastors a couple of years ago, they did not seem to understand the nature of the problem. It occurred to me afterwards that they might also — unwittingly, I hope — use a similar approach. If this is so, the problem is dangerously widespread.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Edwards emphasises these two points over and over again in his writings, especially in his final great work on revival, *The Religious Affections* Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984, which he completed in 1746.

<sup>30</sup> R.Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983, 146f.

<sup>31</sup> eg Chevreau, 1994; P.Dixon, *Signs of Revival* Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1994.

<sup>32</sup> This is a brief summary of Edwards' conclusions in *The Religious Affections*.

<sup>33</sup> This is also true of most of the books which have been published so far about this issue.

<sup>34</sup> A.Clark, *What Are We Singing?* Sydney: Tabor College, 1995.

<sup>35</sup> Hence, there are widespread reports of people being pushed or coerced so they fall down when prayed for.

<sup>36</sup> D.McBain, 'A Dance on some Eggshells: New Millennium Priorities' *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, April 1995, 24.

<sup>37</sup> I.Jagelman, 'The Role of the Teacher/Historian in Contemporary Pentecostalism,' *Barsabbas*, #4, January 1994, 1.

<sup>38</sup> See my *Heart of Fire* Plympton: Tabor, 1997.

<sup>39</sup> B.Chant, *Heart of Fire*, Fullarton: Luke, 1973, 200.

<sup>40</sup> At a major youth rally, a few years ago, young people were invited to the front to be prayed for so they could overcome temptation.

<sup>41</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:7 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23 approximate to this, but only in a very general way.

<sup>42</sup> Compare Genesis 1:26,27 and Ephesians 2:10 which both refer to God's children being made in His image.

<sup>43</sup> James Wong made this comment in a panel discussion at Vision 95 in Sydney, January, 1995.



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<sup>44</sup> R.Croucher, John Mark Ministries leaflet, Heathmont, n.d. 'There are 10,000 ex-pastors in Australia.'

<sup>45</sup> By the end of 1994, a reported 10,000 clergy had visited the Airport Vineyard at Toronto. *Charisma*, February 1995, 21.

<sup>46</sup> I have spoken personally to several pastors and their wives who have confessed to feeling drained or wrung out or 'running on empty' before going to Toronto or to a 'Toronto blessing' meeting. In a tape presented by Richard Riss, his wife testifies to the fact that she had been regularly visiting a Jewish psychoanalyst seeking help for emotional problems in her life when she found a large degree of release through 'carpet time'. The question must be asked as to why she found it necessary to undertake psychoanalysis in the first instance.

<sup>47</sup> eg J.Edwards, *Distinguishing Marks*, in *Works*, Vol II, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986, 263.

<sup>48</sup> Lewis, 1979:38

<sup>49</sup> Lewis, 1979:39

<sup>50</sup> R.Baxter:1983, 46, 146.

<sup>51</sup> C.H.Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954, 220f, 186f.