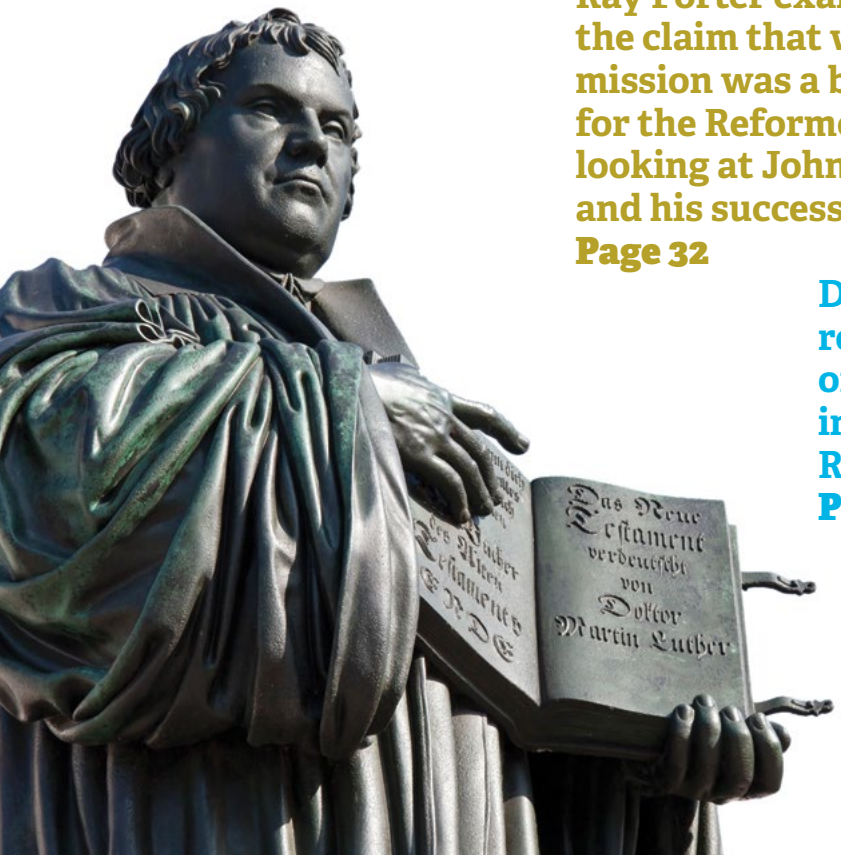
Commentary

WINTER 2016/17



Oak Hill College

So who are we anyway?

Mike Ovey introduces this edition of Commentary by linking questions about cultural identity to the Reformation, which turns 500 this coming year.

As the dust continues to settle on the outcome of the US election, one question that emerges from the fog of electioneering war is that of who America is. Come to that, this has been an issue in recent British politics as well – not just Brexit, but the discussion of what counts as 'British values', as that is applied to migration policies and extremism and so on. What makes us 'us'? And how do we keep on being 'us'? Should we stop being 'us'?

Of course, one of the ways that we are 'us' is because of the way we share something from the past. And that brings us to the question of the Reformation, which was in many ways a seismic moment not just in this island's history, but western Europe's as a whole. We are about to enter the 500th anniversary of one of the key events of that Reformation, as we recall Luther publishing his theses. They fired a salvo against a late mediaeval theology which had obscured how God alone saves through Christ alone by grace alone.

For better or worse, western Europe is defined in some ways by, and defines itself in some ways by or against, that Reformation. Frankly, the confused voices I hear about the Reformation both inside the UK churches and in the UK's cultures more widely are only to be expected at a time when we find our own cultural and church identities so difficult to handle. It is pretty clear that some in the Church of England, which is a Reformation denomination, have deep misgivings about the Reformation. It is also clear that some of our political classes find it embarrassing that so much of our civic structure is the outworking of Reformation principles.

Now, no doubt the Reformation had its imperfections, and no doubt in some areas the Reformers failed to live out their own principles. But increasingly I wonder whether the UK's under-enthusiasm and 'don't mention the war' denial strategies will end up sawing off the branches on which we have been sitting.

So it's inevitable we want to spend some of this edition of *Commentary* dealing with Reformation-related issues. What was it about? (which is the question asked by Matthew Barrett on page 4). Did it in fact have blind spots, for instance on mission? (as Ray Porter asks on page 32). Are we still the kind of clear-sighted believers the Reformers were? (see my own article on page 26). Would something like the Reformation be a good idea in the belief-system that exercises the West so much, namely Islam. Rob Scott tackles this hot potato with characteristic clarity on page 9. And if the Reformation is about the re-claiming of biblical Christianity from distortions and parodies, what about the

current problem of counterfeit religion? Lee Gatiss deals with this abiding problem as it affects us now on page 29.

However, we want to spread our coverage more widely and follow down, if you like, some of the less obvious issues discussed in connection with the Reformation. Thus, the Reformers have been charged (unfairly, I think) with a lack of concern for ethics. Hence Kirsty Birkett (page 23) tackles the utterly central ethical question of promises and promise-keeping. David Shaw (page 17) reflects on the high-profile ethical and pastoral matter of transgender, while David Potter (page 39) looks at biblical ethics surrounding the screening of unborn children.

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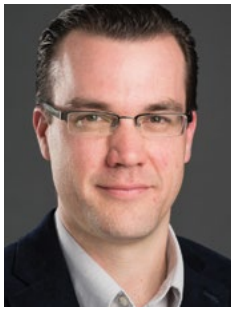
On a directly mission-related theme, Phil Tinker (page 20) opens up the themes to be tackled at the upcoming the Local Church & Global Mission conference at Oak Hill, while David and Maura Baldwin (page 12) reflect on what the Bible says about 'loving the foreigner living among you'. Appropriately, Gabrielle Samuel (page 36) meditates on ministry in Brixton, a neighbourhood representative of a far more ethnically diverse Britain than the one the Reformers lived in, but which needs the same biblically-obedient Reformation gospel.

Commentary


Das Neue
Testament
verdeutscht
von
Doktor
Martin Luther

What was the Reformation really about?



Was the Reformation simply one giant misunderstanding? You'd think so, listening to media commentary on the Pope's recent visit to Lund, commemorating the Reformation. Matthew Barrett thinks through the issues.

On the last day of October 2016, in Lund, Sweden, the Pope commemorated the Reformation. Now that is news that most Protestants, until the late 20th century, would have been absolutely shocked to hear. But it's true; the Pope commemorated the Reformation in the very birthplace of the Lutheran World Federation, now 70 years old.

To most observers, that raises a serious question: Was the Reformation, then, just a big misunderstanding? That's the question Sylvia Poggioli, senior European correspondent to Rome for the American National Public Radio, recently asked. Perhaps the Reformation was a tragic case of two parties talking past each other, or two sides unwilling to appreciate what the other side brought to the table.

At least that's what Gerald O'Connell, Vatican correspondent for *America*, the Jesuit magazine, thinks: There's now a 'recognition, perhaps, that both sides missed something at the time of the Protestant Reformation'. How so? 'The Catholic Church missed ways of reforming itself. Luther and those around him pressed in a way that just couldn't be taken on board, so, in a way, both sides misspoke.' Apparently communication was the real problem.

Yet according to Poggioli, all that misunderstanding is now behind us, because both sides are currently talking, and not just talking, but understanding each other quite well. The result? 'One of the greatest rifts in Christianity – between Catholics and Lutherans – isn't what it used to be.'

If you're not convinced, just consider Francis's recent appreciation of Luther. On his trip back from Armenia, Francis praised Luther to reporters: 'The church [in the 16th century] was not a role model, there was corruption, there was worldliness, there was greed, and lust for power. He [Luther] protested against this. And he was an intelligent man.'

From these comments, one would never have known the church condemned Luther as a heretic. But more to the point, Rome needed a good moral scrub down, and that's what Luther was all about. Too bad the authorities in Luther's day didn't take Francis's new perspective into consideration.

If Luther's Reformation was merely intended to give the church a moral bath, we must admit then that Luther was late to the bathtub party. Yes, the church did need moral cleansing, and desperately so. But moral reformers were nothing new. Numerous forerunners of the Reformation had cried out against the immorality they saw within the church.

So what areas of division remain today? According to Poggioli, not many. She lists three: 'the Universal Church and papal primacy; the priesthood, which includes women in the Lutheran church; and the nature of the Eucharist or Holy Communion.' But Poggioli is not worried, nor is Francis. 'Pope Francis says that while theologians iron out their differences, the two churches can work together on social issues like caring for the poor, migrants, and refugees, and combating persecution of Christians.' According to Jens-Martin Kruse, Protestants and Catholics today can join hands and walk together; let's call it, says Kruse, a 'walking ecumenism.'

If Poggioli, and Francis, are right, one might walk this road of ecumenism with great optimism. It would appear the Reformation was but one giant misunderstanding. Or was it?

One big misunderstanding?

Let's start with Francis. Is Francis right? Was Luther's protest just one bold Bible teacher's frustration with moral corruption in the church? Without being overly dramatic, I cannot stress enough that whether or not you (or Pope Francis) understand what the Reformation was really about depends on the answer to this question. Despite the good intentions Francis may have, the Reformation was not most fundamentally or even primarily about moral reform.

If Luther's Reformation was merely intended to give the church a moral bath, we must admit then that Luther was late to the bathtub party. Yes, the church did need moral cleansing, and desperately so. But moral reformers were nothing new. Numerous forerunners of the Reformation had cried out against the immorality they saw within the church. We would be historically mistaken to think, then, that Luther simply cried out the loudest.

No, what distinguished Luther was that his reformation was not different in degree (as if all that was needed was a greater outcry against immorality in the church), but different in kind from those who came before him.

Reformation historian Alistair McGrath makes this very point. 'For Luther, the reformation of morals and the renewal of spirituality, although of importance in themselves, were of secondary significance in relation to the *reformation of Christian doctrine*.' Though this may come as a surprise, Luther even criticized forerunners such as Wycliffe and Huss 'for confining their attacks on the papacy to its moral shortcomings, where they should have attacked the theology on which the papacy was ultimately based.'

McGrath concludes: 'For Luther, a reformation of morals was secondary to a reformation of doctrine.' In other words,

at its core, the Reformation was not a social, political, economic, or even a moral reform. Yes, each of these were a factor in what led to 16th century reform. But the essence of the Reformation was doctrinal. The Reformation was first and foremost a theological movement. It was, says Timothy George, 'essentially a religious event; its deepest concerns, theological.'

The crux: Gospel rediscovery

Yet much more needs to be said. Certainly the Reformation was a religious event, but let's be honest, Luther was not the first one to push 'religious' reform. So what, then, distinguished Luther's religious reformation? To be precise – and this is the point Pope Francis misses in his comments to reporters – what distinguished Luther's reformation was that his deepest religious and theological concern was the gospel itself. Yes, doctrinal reform was the central priority, but the doctrine at the center was the unmerited grace of God in the gospel of his Son.

In his well-known book *The European Reformations,* Carter Lindberg gets this: The 'crux of genuine reform', he says, 'is the proclamation of the gospel of grace alone. This requires the reform of theology and preaching but is ultimately the work of God alone.' The crux of genuine reform was quite simply this: the gospel was in desperate need of rediscovery.

Luther was convinced that this gospel had been lost thanks to the influence of certain types of medieval Catholicism. As Luther came into conflict with Rome, which was repeatedly unwilling to listen to his case, it became more and more obvious to Luther that the abandonment of the gospel meant that justification *sola gratia* and *sola fide* had been lost as well. And this was no small matter for Luther. 'If the doctrine of justification is lost,' Luther lamented in his 1535 Galatians lectures, 'the whole of Christian doctrine is lost.'

Therefore, if real, lasting reformation was to take place, then there had to be a rediscovery of biblical doctrines such as *sola fide* and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the ungodly. Luther knew this, so he set his mind to preaching the gospel, lecturing on the gospel, and writing out the gospel again and again until those around him understood that man is only justified through faith alone. 'I teach that people should put their trust in nothing but Jesus Christ alone,' Luther told Staupitz, 'not in their prayers, merits, or their own good deeds.'

In his new biography of Luther, Scott Hendrix concludes that it is this one sentence that summarizes the essence of Luther's reforming agenda. For that reason, if we could only choose one word to describe the Reformation, it would have to be the word 'rediscovery'. The Reformation was a rediscovery of the gospel, and therefore it was an evangelical reform movement at its nucleus.

What type of unity are we really after?

If we are right, that the crux of genuine reform was the rediscovery of the gospel, then we should revisit Francis's words with fresh eyes and a discerning spirit. Theology isn't something to be left to the 'theologians' until they iron out their differences, leaving the rest of us to focus on the 'real' issues, which are social. Nor can we join this 'walking ecumenism,' as if there was just a big misunderstanding and now we can gladly unite together. I may not have 95 theses in my back pocket, but Luther's voice still whispers in my ear: true, authentic, biblical unity – the kind scripture speaks about – can only take place around a shared gospel.

Unfortunately, Rome to this day continues to reject the gospel Luther taught. Despite the best intentions of ecumenical movements, Rome still rejects the imputation of Christ's righteousness. It's hard to miss imputation's curious vacancy from the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999). Not only that, but just as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) says justification includes not only the 'remission of sins' but 'sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man,' so does the Joint Declaration similarly say justification includes both 'forgiveness of sins and being made righteous'. Undoubtedly, this is a Catholic view of justification, not a Protestant one, yet the Lutherans

Jesus did not teach unity at the expense of the gospel. The unity he shared with his disciples, and the unity he prayed would characterize his future followers, was a unity around doctrine, specifically around the good news he spilled his blood to ensure.

who signed this declaration somehow 'confess together' this doctrinal statement.

In this case at least, it would appear that it's not the Catholic who has shifted but the Protestant. As Korey Maas points out in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*: 'It is not entirely unwarranted, then, to believe that the Joint Declaration does speak accurately when it says that "the teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent" – but only because the Lutheran teaching 'presented in this Declaration' *is not that of Luther himself, the Lutheran confessions, or Reformation-era Protestantism more generally*' (emphasis added).

A pinch of (biblical) optimism

It would be tempting to end this article with total pessimism. But Luther himself would not have done so. On the one hand, Luther groaned that if justification *sola fide* 'is lost and perishes, the whole knowledge of truth, life, and salvation is lost and perishes at the same time.' But that was not Luther's last word: 'If it flourishes, everything good flourishes – religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all things and of all social conditions.' Be not mistaken, Luther recovered this gospel in his own day when he reclaimed justification by grace alone through faith alone on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ alone. Yes, the Reformers struggled to unite around lesser doctrines, but let this be clear: they did unite around the gospel of free justification – Lutheran and Reformed alike. And Trent knew this. There was no ambiguity in their condemnation of imputation – an anathema that still stands today by the way.

Therefore, we Protestants can wholeheartedly agree with Francis that unity is key – no, we can go further and say it is taught by Jesus himself! Yet Jesus did not teach unity at the expense of the gospel. The unity he shared with his disciples, and the unity he prayed would characterize his future followers, was a unity around doctrine, specifically around the good news he spilled his blood to ensure.

It's 2016, one year shy of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Let's commemorate this event, but let's do so without compromising the crux of the Reformation itself. Then, and only then, will everything flourish as it should.

Matthew Barrett is the author of God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture. *He is Tutor of Systematic Theology and Church History at Oak Hill, as well as founder and executive editor of* Credo *magazine. Read more about Matthew Barrett at matthewmbarrett.com.*

Does Islam need a reformation?

Does Islam need a reformation? Is reformation too western as a concept? Or is reformation already happening in the form of ISIS? Robert Scott looks at the questions and why they matter to Christians.

It is a truth almost universally acknowledged (outside of Trumpism) that not all Muslim people are violent extremists. My British-Bangladeshi neighbour has given me samosas laced with chilli, not poison. The Muslim guys I play football with have kicked me, not because I am an infidel, but because they are as clumsy and as slow as I am.

However, some Muslim people do claim to be acting in the name of Islam as they fly planes into buildings, blow themselves up on tubes, kill cartoonists or massacre all kinds of people in Syria. In view of their claims to be following Islam and their supposed attraction to some young Muslim people in the West, is there a problem with Islam? Does Islam need a reformation?

In her book, *The Trouble with Islam Today*, the erudite and liberal Muslim, Irshad Manji, argues that 'Muslims are the trouble'. She argues that Muslims in ISIS and conservatives across the world have captured Islam. Their violence and extremism is Islamic because they are quoting the Qur'an and the actions of Muhammad in the *Hadith*. Their actions done in the name of Islam *are* Islam. However, rather than accept what they or what previous scholars closer to the time of

Left: Worshippers pray at a mosque in Doha on the eve of Ramadan. Photo: Omar Chatriwala http://flic.kr/p/f6Pj7c

Muhammad have said, Muslim people should reinterpret their scriptures in a more liberal way. They should reform.

Dr Taj Hargey said something similar earlier this year at the Muslim Debate Initiative event 'Does Islam need a Reformation?' He advocates women-led and gay-friendly mosques. He sat alongside Tom Holland and Theo Hobson, and against more conservative Muslims who argued for restoration rather than reformation. The latter argued that 'reformation' was a western category – a tool being used by western liberals to privatise religion just as it had done to Christianity in separating Church and state. They, instead, envisaged a restoration of perfect obedience to God, because nowhere was Islam being practised properly.

So what? Do I care whether Islam needs a restoration or a reformation? Do I care what true Islam is? In a sense, no. It is not my religion. It is not for me to say what true Islam is – beyond pointing out that it is not ultimately true because it refuses to recognise biblical truth. However, discussing what an Islamic reformation might look like is helpful, because it contrasts with gospel truth and can give us positive things to talk about with Muslim people and secularists.

For many, ISIS is not Islam. Mehdi Hasan makes this point forcefully in the New Statesman, having interviewed security experts and scholars. Islam may have a role in why people join ISIS, but it is a justifying

YOUTUBE DEBATES

What is Wrong with Islam Today? Mehdi Hasan debates Canadian author Irshad Manji at the Oxford Union, covering the reform of Islam, the concept of jihad, and the problem of Islamophobia. http://bit.ly/2ejHVNi

Does Islam need a Reformation? Taj Hargey, Tom Holland, Theo Hobson and others debate the question of whether Islam needs a reformation in this video posted by the Muslim Debate Initiative. http://bit.ly/2eK6v8W

role, and not the prime motivator. For the girls who left Bethnal Green Academy for Syria, it was more about politics, perceived oppression and a search for identity than Islam *per se*. Hasan points out that a couple of Syria-bound UK jihadis bought *Islam for Dummies* shortly before they left. So maybe their understanding of Islam did not play a massive role in their walk to extremism.

Hasan also notes that various Islamic scholars have condemned ISIS as not Islamic. It is as Islamic as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is democratic. Just because ISIS quotes the Qur'an and Muhammad doesn't make it Islamic. Anyone can quote scripture, even Satan. The Islam practised by our peaceful Muslim neighbours is the right Islam. Therefore, no reformation is needed.

Tom Holland responded to this briefly and insightfully. ISIS is the reformation. If we can draw parallels between the Reformation and today (and without saying that Islam must be reformed and 'conform to a liberal paradigm'), ISIS are going back to their scriptures in a Reformation-like-way. Like Luther, Calvin and the other Reformers, ISIS are saying they can interpret their book. Like the Reformers, they are going back to how their religion was practised by the earliest followers of their founder. And, as at the time of the Reformation, this creates much turmoil and violence.

Like the Roman Catholics' Tridentine response to the 16th century Reformers, Hasan and the scholars are saying that ISIS are not allowed to interpret the Qur'an as they are doing. Why? That is not apparent, beyond 'you're not qualified'. I recently picked up a copy of *The Conquest of Syria* in an Islamic bookshop, expecting it to be all about ISIS. However, it was written 1,200 years ago and was about the first Islamic conquest of Syria. ISIS seem to be copying the first followers of Muhammad pretty closely.

Furthermore, just as the printing press enabled the spread of 'non-authorised' interpretations in the Reformation, so the internet today is spreading non-authorised views of Islam. Such spreading is not without roots, however. Different Muslim people have argued that it is not Muslim enough to just do the five pillars, or follow the six beliefs of Islam. They have argued that all of life should come under Islamic law, and that this needs to be pursued vigorously by all Muslim people. Their books have been available in Islamic bookshops for many years, but the internet has enabled their take-up much more rapidly.

Some people are arguing that ISIS is the Islamic reformation. Others are arguing that reform is needed to counter extremism. Others reject the reformation premise as yet another western project seeking control of the Other.

So what? While it is an interesting piece of socio-religious history, this also gives us something to talk about with our Muslim friends. It gets us talking about texts and interpretation. To both Manji and Hasan we can ask why does the Qur'an and *Hadith* advocate violence in the name of Islam, which was then followed by the closest companions of Muhammad. To MDI and ISIS we can ask why they think people can perfectly obey God, when it seems so elusive.

To all, we can recognise excesses done in the name of Christianity, pre and post-Reformation, but more importantly point to Jesus the Messiah. He, as the second Joshua, will return, bringing perfect justice to his world and rightly condemning those who have not acknowledged him.

Through him now, corrupt hearts can be changed and true restoration with God and others can take place. What Muslim people want cannot be found within Islam. It comes from the Prince of Peace who truly understands what reformation we need. He also enables us to live without fear among Muslim people and to love them, whether they are our neighbours or our enemies.

Robert Scott teaches the one term Islamic Studies course at Oak Hill and is on staff at St Helen's Bishopsgate, where he is involved in outreach to Muslim people.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Love the foreigner living among you

Does the Bible have anything to say about migration? At first sight, it seems to be totally silent. But look more closely, and the Bible is full of migratory themes. Dave Baldwin sketches the outlines of a theology of migration.

What a mess! Mission seemed much easier when everybody stayed where we thought they should be. Missionary sending nations, the universal donors, transfused their brightest and best down predetermined flight paths to the receiving nations, the universal recipients. But this migration business isn't only upsetting *Daily Mail* readers, its muddying the waters of mission.

Left: Syrian refugees trek through Slovenia, seeking asylum in Germany. Photo: Janossy Gergely / Shutterstock.com

In 2015, more than 3 percent of the world's population was on the move; that's 244 million people. Most came to Europe, while many others sought new lives in Asia, North America and Australasia. People have always moved around, of course, but this is something different. This is international migration on an unprecedented scale.

Am I imagining it, or does everybody seem to want to come here? The Office of National Statistics predicts that migrants, and the children born to them here, will add 10 million to our population over the next 25 years. Here's a question: Does the Bible have anything to say about migration? At first sight, as viewed through the lenses of contemporary United Nations terminology, the Bible is totally silent. It has absolutely nothing to say about migration controls, the Calais Jungle, internal displacement, unaccompanied minors or reception centres. It doesn't even mention Brexit.

But you've already guessed what's coming next. Scratch a little deeper and you'll find honey oozing from the honeycomb: a Bible dripping with migratory themes.

In the Old Testament

Our esteemed Principal has some catchphrases, my favourite being, 'Now shoot me down in flames.' So I'll start in Genesis 3 (where I invite you to shoot me down in flames),

by asking: Weren't Adam and Eve forced migrants from the Garden of Eden?

Pleading an Old Testament migrant theology moves to much firmer ground with the patriarchs. Abram's father Terah started out on the first recorded failed migration, from Ur to Canaan, only getting halfway, to Haran. God called Abram to finish the journey, which he did either as a voluntary migrant or a forced migrant, depending on whether or not your theology follows the Reformers in assuming a limited role for human freedom. That's a moot point once famine in Canaan settles the issue: Abram flees to Egypt.

Rather than list all Abram's divinely led migrations, shoot me down in flames, but isn't it fair to say that he never really settled anywhere? Not in a way that you and I would call settled and acceptable for our families. The same goes for his descendents. Casey Strine spots that Isaac, a second generation migrant, again faced famine and wandered within Israel as an internally displaced person. Jacob, a third generation migrant, fled from Esau's violence as an externally displaced person, but returned to Canaan over 20 years later as a voluntarily repatriated, and doubtless reverse culture-shocked, returning migrant. And let's not even bother with Joseph.

But jumping straight to Genesis 12-50 is a little too easy, and means we have probably missed treasures in the most boring chapter in Genesis, chapter 10. The table of nations is the sort of chapter we're tempted to skim read in our devotions, confident that there are Bible geeks out there somewhere capable of wringing from those endless lists and silly names some drops of spiritual nectar. But pause in the right places and you'll notice that Noah's descendents were already migrating, 'spreading out' into their 'territories', each with cultural distinctives and different languages, even before the Babel narrative gets started.

Let's pause with Moses, not because he's another great example of a multi-cultural migrant, moving effectively between Hebrew, Egyptian and Midianite societies, in 40 year chunks, but because through Moses came the Law. Jewish rabbis often comment on a 37:1 ratio in the Law. Only once are God's people commanded, 'love your neighbour as yourself', but 37 times God reminds them to 'love the foreigner living among you'. Why is this? Because Yahweh is their God, and he's that sort of God.

Did other Ancient Near Eastern societies have laws such as that? Even if migration was in their roots, Yahweh just wasn't their God. It's shocking that Yahweh doesn't ask Israelites to tolerate migrants, but to love them, as their own. There's something going on here. Settling strangers were living reminders to God people of what they themselves were. Migration was part of their identity; it was in their spiritual DNA. Feeling settled and nicely comfortable? Enjoying your earthly heritage a bit too much? 'Love the foreigner... for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.'

And it wasn't all a one way street! There are clear obligations for assimilating aliens as well as host Israelites. The table above shows, in broad brush strokes, how

RESIDENT ALIENS AND FOREIGNERS

Gēr (Gērim)

'Resident alien', 'Sojourner'
More integrated
Often vulnerable
Welcomed and supported
Trusted like native Israelites

Nokrî (Nokrim)

True 'foreigner'
Not integrated
Financially independent
Treated with caution
Limited protection

foreigners were categorised, by looking at how the two main Hebrew words for non-Israelites in the Old Testament were used. Unlike the Nokrim (foreigners who weren't settling in Israel), the Gērim (who were settling) were to be loved. In response to being brought into Israel's religious life and enjoying rights and privileges, they were clearly expected to adapt wherever necessary, fitting themselves to Israelite life, such as not working on the Day of Atonement.

As modern readers, perhaps we assume that the famous examples of foreigners being welcomed into Israelite society, such as Rahab and Ruth, are unusual and exceptional characters. I think, actually, that they were the norm. Why wouldn't it be normal for pagan people to be drawn to Israel's loving God? It was expected, and the legal framework was there from the outset. These incoming aliens, far from being swallowed up without trace or burnt up like moths round a candle, bring their distinctive contributions to Israelite life.

Jumping to Jeremiah, who insisted that fair treatment of migrants was a yardstick for just governance, and who later advised deported Israelites on the nuts and bolts of immigrant life in Babylon, we find a prophet whose personal journeys ticked just about every migrant category in the UN handbook. For more manuals on coping with the inevitable disorientation and confusion which accompanies repatriation, look no further than Haggai and Zechariah. For a gripping migrant yarn, try Esther.

In the New Testament

The answer to all the questions at Sunday School was always 'Jesus', so I'll let you reflect on Jesus' personal migrations, his deliberate identification with outsiders, and who exactly he might include as 'neighbour' in a modern telling of the Good Samaritan. I will content myself with two New Testament observations.

Firstly, Christian hospitality, which New Testament believers are commanded to practise in three separate places. Something like fish scales descend on our eyes as we read these verses; we pay about as much attention to them

as frequent flyers to air safety leaflets. I'm not quite sure what the mental block is. Perhaps we confuse hospitality with entertaining, or wrongly assume it's a spiritual gifting. Either way, many of us are quite happy to leave it to others.

The Greek root is a surprise. The word *philoxenos* literally translates as 'love of strangers', or 'love of foreigners'. What kind of strangers and foreigners did these New Testament writers have in mind? There don't seem to be any restrictions. Might migrants be included?

Secondly, Christian identity. For Christians, geopolitical labels and cultural markers have limited relevance. On my conversion to Christ, while I remain a 21st century Englishman, with a UK passport and the rights and responsibilities of British citizenship, my primary loyalties have shifted onto a higher plane.

Being 'foreigners and exiles' on earth – belonging to a new chosen race and holy nation – has deep theological implications for us, and certainly impacts how we should weigh the relative importance of national and ethnic allegiances.

The people in Syrian Antioch didn't know what to call the jumble of Jews and Gentiles in their city who were following Jesus together. The previous identity markers no longer worked, and so 'Christians' or 'Christ people' was what they came up with. I'd like 'Christian' to be the most obvious thing about me too. I should ask questions of myself if my Englishness tries to wrestle back pre-eminence. If I'm more excercised about preserving my cultural heritage than 'loving the stranger', then maybe, just maybe, I've got a new god and I've slipped into cultural idolatry.

Plain-speaking Peter reminds us that as Christians we mustn't see ourselves as permanent residents, but as aliens and sojourners in this world. Being 'foreigners and exiles' on earth – belonging to a new chosen race and holy nation – has deep theological implications for us, and certainly impacts how we should weigh the relative importance of national and ethnic allegiances. I'd argue, by extension, that it should also affect my thinking on 21st century migration to Britain.

Concluding thoughts... for now

Reading my daily paper through the lens of the Bible, I become far less the annoyed English observer, pontificating from the sidelines, hoping the unwelcome hordes don't get much further than Germany, ready to mount my trusty steed to defend some vague notion of Christendom. I begin to see myself clearly as one of the migrants on the unforgiving road, seeking an end to my troubles and a permanent place to rest and call my home.

M Daniel Carroll is right that the biblical material on migration forces us to engage with migrants as individuals: 'The text gives a human face to the migrants... These immigrants and refugees are people above all else, people caught up in the trials, tribulations, and joys of life.'

Bible readers are not permitted to view migrants dispassionately, remotely or generically. Migration is a human story and, all things considered, it's our story. In the next issue oif *Commentary*, I will tell one migrant's story, and make some recommendations for UK churches wanting to find practical ways to 'love the strangers' coming to live in our communities.

In addition to their involvement at Oak Hill College, David and Maura Baldwin direct a SIM (Serving in Mission UK) ministry, two:nineteen, that helps local churches engage with people from the nations living in their communities (visit twonineteen.org.uk). Part of this ministry involves running an annual English language and outreach forum designed to help churches using, or thinking of using, English teaching for outreach (visit englishandoutreach.com).

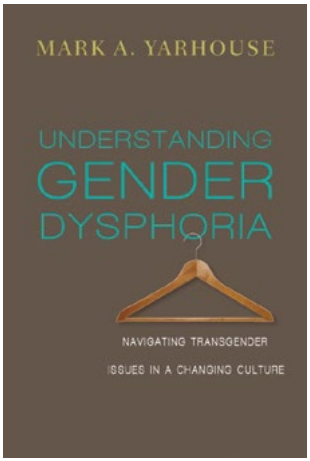
Responding to transgender

From gender surgery to mixed bathrooms, issues surrounding transgender are increasingly making the headlines. David Shaw unpacks a 'must read' book for pastors offering a Christian perspective.

As I write this, the *Today* programme on Radio Four is debating the pros and cons of promoting transgender issues to children. I suspect that whenever you find yourself reading this, there will have been a different story about the same issue on the news in the last week. It's everywhere.

Consequently, one of the pressing challenges of the day is to think about how scripture addresses the experience of gender confusion; a culture that promotes gender fluidity; and Christians living in that culture, seeking to win it for Christ, and trying to navigate the complicated question of gender for themselves.

For help, many have turned to Mark Yarhouse's *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* (IVP, 2015). Several of the commendations call it a 'must read', and it is that. Since it was published, for many pastors it has also been a 'the only thing out there' read, although it is now joined by Vaughan Roberts' *Transgender*, and *Primer* issue 03: 'True to Form', both available from *The Good Book Company*. In this brief article, I'd like to outline the basic shape of Yarhouse's book, and reflect on some of the issues it raises.



Describing his aims, Yarhouse rightly identifies the need for 'a resource that is written from a Christian perspective and is also informed by the best research we have to date, as well as seasoned with compassion for the person who is navigating gender dysphoria.'

At one level, that is quite a comprehensive aim, but there is a particular focus here. As a professor of psychology and a licensed clinical psychologist, Yarhouse has significant experience of counselling those who are diagnosed with gender dysphoria. A clear burden of this book is to open our eyes to the severe distress those people experience and to urge a more compassionate response.

This means the title *Understanding Gender Dysphoria* is probably a better guide to the content than the subtitle:

Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture. There is relatively little here on the wider transgender movement, and there is little reflection on the changing culture, and what a Christian response might be to the various secular ideologies that are driving those changes. It would, of course, be a much longer book if it attempted a full answer to those things, but this does mean Yarhouse's book cannot be an 'only read' book, nor does it claim to be.

The structure of the book is shaped by that desire to share the best research and to construct a compassionate biblical response. Chapter 1 defines many of the key terms (biological sex, transgenderism, gender incongruence, gender identity concerns and gender dysphoria) and helpfully conveys the pastoral complexity.

Having laid that foundation, the focus of the book narrows to the question of how best to understand life when a sense of incongruence with one's biological sex causes (sometimes profound) distress. With that question in mind, Yarhouse sketches out three current approaches (see the box).

In the remainder of the book, Yarhouse does two main things. First, he surveys the best of what little research there has been into the causes, prevalence and treatment of gender dysphoria, helpfully highlighting the diverse ways in which the different frameworks interpret that data. Secondly, He argues that the best approach to caring for people experiencing gender dysphoria is to adopt an integrated framework, combining the strengths of the three existing frameworks.

This probably comes as a surprise, given how opposed the frameworks are at the level of presuppositions. One simply cannot uphold distinctions of sex and gender as created boundaries (the integrity model) and seek to deconstruct them at the same time (the hard form of the diversity model).

Of course he's alert to that. Instead, what Yarhouse wants to do is to learn something from each framework. He wants to preserve a commitment to the view that 'God had a purpose in creating humankind male and female' (integrity), while recognising that the person navigating gender confusion 'has not chosen to experience dysphoria' (disability), and is in need of a community that will support them and provide them with a secure sense of identity within a plausible narrative (emphases that characterise the weak form of the diversity model).

To this I think I'd want to give at least two cheers. Greater clarity on a few of the details would clear my throat for that third cheer:

First, the way the three frameworks are described seems to imply that the disability framework alone allows me to see someone suffering gender confusion 'with empathy and compassion', and only the diversity framework is capable of offering community and identity. While it's surely and sadly true that some evangelicals have adopted a very combative stance towards LGBT issues, I don't see why an integrity model can't also involve those things – indeed, it must! But the way it is set up implies I somehow need to trade in or soften my commitment to a created gender binary to have them.

Secondly, it is also somewhat simplistic to present a choice between the integrity framework emphasising human choice (and so condemning violations of the created order) and the disability model which sees gender dysphoria as a 'nonmoral reality'. When Yarhouse comes to present his integrated framework, it's clear that he's closest to the disability framework, and so is willing to countenance quite a few ways of 'managing' dysphoria, albeit in the least invasive ways.

But the Bible's account of the human moral situation is more complex than this kind of analysis allows. Inherited predispositions to sin generate temptations and sinful desires, and there can be either sinful or godly responses to those things. That a condition was not chosen does not make all subsequent decisions morally neutral. A more nuanced answer is needed here.

Thirdly, when Yarhouse turns to the Bible, he eschews the

MAKING SENSE OF GENDER CONFUSION

Mark Yarhouse identifies three current approaches to gender incongruence:

The integrity framework – this approach, which is generally embraced by conservative evangelicals, emphasises the created distinction between male and female and so is concerned to preserve the distinctions and apply them to questions about transgenderism and same-sex relationships, seeing both as a rebellious impulse against the Creator.

The disability framework – approaches gender dysphoria 'with reference to the mental health dimensions', and sees it as an aspect of life in a fallen world, sharing in a condition we did not choose and for which we are therefore not morally culpable.

The diversity framework – by contrast with both of the above, the diversity framework celebrates transgender experiences. Within this, Yarhouse describes a strong and weak form. The former 'calls for the deconstruction of norms related to sex and gender,' while the weak form 'focuses primarily on identity and community'.

usual proof-texts (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Deuteronomy 23:1 and 22:5, Matthew 19:12) and offers a brief Bible overview around the headings of creation, fall, redemption and glorification. I'm convinced this is a helpful approach, but there are some quirks here.

There is, for one thing, very little Bible. Yarhouse rightly observes that humanity is created male and female, but this point is rather muted. Some more attention to the text of Genesis 1-2 and those 'proof-texts' would help establish a clearer pattern from creation.

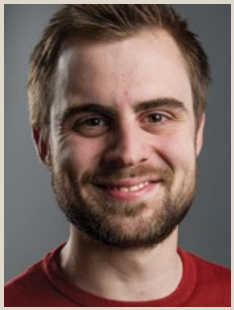
As to the fall, there is the same lack of engagement with biblical material and a foregrounding of a medical perspective: the fall principally affects our biological and psychological health; we are 'broken, incomplete and disordered'; examples of fallen reality are depression, schizophrenia, anxiety. The only mention of sin comes in a quote from Oliver O'Donovan.

The discussion of redemption also feels like a missed opportunity. The final chapters of the book very helpfully urge the church to reckon with the power of identity, community and narrative. To be redeemed 'in Christ' offers all three, but this is not really developed under the redemption heading.

In summary, Yarhouse's book is a vital eye-opener on the distress people can experience navigating issues of gender today. A culture that simultaneously elevates and destabilises gender categories is bound to produce more confusion in the short and medium term. So we will do well to heed Yarhouse's call to distinguish the cultural campaigners from their casualties, and to seek to offer the latter both compassion and a more compelling vision for what life will look like, lived God's way. For that, however, I suspect we need a more robust biblical theology of gender. That's probably the next 'must read'.

David Shaw teaches New Testament Greek at Oak Hill, and is the Theological Adviser of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches.

Local church & global mission



Next February, the Local Church & Global Mission conference at Oak Hill will focus on the biblical vision for the church's role in reaching the nations. The conference is now taking bookings here: localchurchglobalmission.org. Phil Tinker introduces the conference agenda.

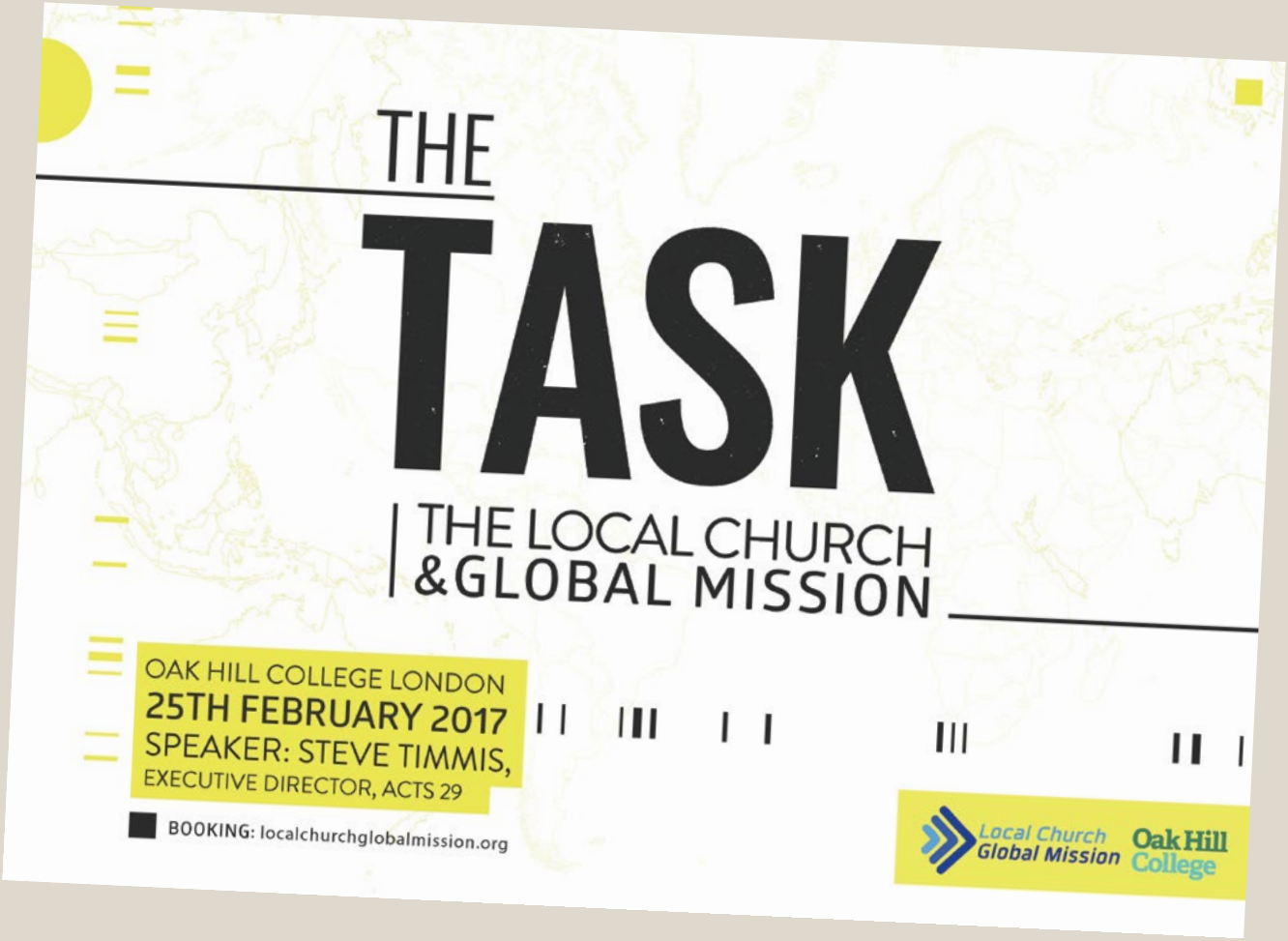
One of the highly prized values at Oak Hill is 'joined-up theology'. When I was a student, this sounded like a nice enough idea, making sure each department kept the conversation open with the others, with systematics talking to pastoral counselling, and so on. Now that I'm in church ministry, on the other side of college, joined-up theology is so much more than an academic ideal or a prospectus buzzword. It's a ministry game changer. In particular, I am convinced that the thoughtful, biblical and practical joining up of missiology with ecclesiology is vital to the advance of the gospel in our day.

It's all too easy for a church's mission vision to fall into fractured division like that which can plague theology departments, not least when it comes to world mission. With much ministry to do, we can so focus on what's right in front of us – outreach to a needy United Kingdom – that a fault line appears between the local church mission vision and world mission. It can be a real challenge to give world mission the same kind of leadership attention, prayer and strategic thinking that other areas of church life receive.

The New Testament connection

However, a thorough joining up of our missiology and ecclesiology, our mission vision and understanding of church, compels us to put world mission in the centre of the DNA of our churches, and the attention of our leadership. There is no room here for a full length treatment of the connection, but even a cursory reading of the New Testament shows a proactive, involved church in reaching across cultures with the red-hot, good news of Jesus Christ.

Catapulted by Jesus' expanding horizons of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, Christians *took* the gospel outwards. Jerusalem was *filled* with the teaching of the apostles. God worked a revolution in Peter's understanding of the kingdom and led him *out* to the Gentile, Cornelius. The church in Antioch sought God in prayer, the leaders were led by the Spirit, and Paul and Barnabas were commissioned and *sent* to Cyprus, only for them to return to 'where they had been *committed* to the grace of God for the work they had now completed' (Acts 14:26). The Philippian church prayed effective prayers for Paul, whose ambition was to name Christ where he had not been named (Romans 15:20). They



expressed gospel concern for him with supporting money and were true stake holders in his ministry.

We can be absolutely sure that the gospel didn't make its way from the lips of the apostles to the shores of the UK by world mission being a side project for the interested few. It came because churches, captured by the outward-propelling motion of God's love, actively sent workers to the harvest fields beyond their own. We can be absolutely sure that the gospel will not advance to the 6,700 unreached people groups of this planet if world mission remains a side project for the interested few. Only when we recapture the UK church's mandate to identify, raise up, train and send workers, engaging positively with mission agencies, will the gospel continue the spread from our shores to those not yet touched. And only until our world mission vision is soaked in the prayers and devotion of our leaders will our whole churches engage with this mission.

PRACTICAL SEMINARS

The UK church has a wealth of experience in world mission to be shared and The Local Church & Global Mission conference is designed to pool this for you to access. Four practical seminars will explore different dimensions of local church engagement in global mission.

The Workers Are Few
Raising up cross-cultural workers from the local church
Andy Lines, Mission Director, Crosslinks BCMS

Two Way Mission
Receiving missionaries in the UK
Peter Ozodo, CAPRO missionary to the UK

Youth Mission
Giving youth and children a global vision
Rory Bell, TnT Ministries

Unexpected
What happens when it 'goes wrong' for your missionaries?
Sheila Stephen, Visiting Lecturer at Union School of Theology and former trustee of AIM

Come to this year's conference!

What does it look like for our UK churches to be actively involved in reaching the nations for Christ? That's a question that doesn't have a quick answer, not least because our churches come in all sorts of different shapes and sizes.

Local Church Global Mission is a ministry of Oak Hill to help church leaders and students to devote serious prayer and thought to our role in world mission. We run day conferences designed to be a time set aside for church leaders and mission committees to have the much needed space to think, learn, pray, and plan.

We invite you to join us for this year's conference, *The Task: The Local Church & Global Mission*. This will be the third Local Church & Global Mission (LCGM) conference and will take place at Oak Hill on 25 February 2017. Our goal will be to explore the fundamentals: What is the biblical vision for the church's role in reaching the nations? And what does that mean for the 21st Century UK and world contexts?

Our main talks, from Steve Timmis of The Crowded House, Sheffield, and Acts 29 church planting network, will open up the Bible to seek God's voice to shape our vision of the task before us. We are convinced that long-term, sacrificial world mission can only be sustained by robust engagement with God's word.

We're delighted to have a range of mission agencies represented at the conference. We are absolutely committed to building fruitful partnerships between local churches and agencies and there will be time for you to engage with these groups. Also, for the third year, 10ofThose will be providing a bookstall full of resources to serve you and your church in your walk with God in world mission.

Jesus' assessment of his world remains true: the harvest is plentiful, the workers are few. Please join us for what promises to be a precious day to plead with the Lord of the harvest to send out workers from our churches into the harvest fields of his world.

Phil Tinker previously studied at Oak Hill and is now assistant pastor at The Globe Church on the Southbank, London.

Promises, promises

Promises are central to a functioning society, but why do we make them, and what makes us think we should keep them? Kirsty Birkett looks at the flimsy foundations offered by secular philosophies for promise-keeping.

Promises are a funny thing. Every major ethical theory recognises that promises are central to a functioning society. It seems to be a basic part of human relationships that if you say you will do something, you should do it. As a strategy for running a society, promises work.

Moreover, there is a very deep sense that promises ought to be kept. This is such a fundamental part of understanding morality that any ethical system is expected to be able to account for it. Whether an ethicist follows a consequentialist system of ethics, or a natural law system, or any other system, you will find the demand somewhere along the line that the system should be able to explain why we have an obligation to keep promises.

David Hume struggled with this. In his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he wrote: 'Since every new promise imposes a new obligation of morality on the person who promises, and since this new obligation arises from his will, it is one of the most mysterious and incomprehensible operations that can possibly be imagined, and may even be compared to *transubstantiation* or *holy orders*, where a certain form of words, along with a certain intention, changes entirely the nature of an external object, and even of a human creature.'

He eventually explained promises as a convention that arose out of the need for financial transactions. At an individual level, I know that if I do not keep my promise, no one will trust me in the future, so I will be hampered in my business. So that is where the ethical force of a promise comes from: my own advantage.

Most ethical theories base the obligation of promises in the advantage of the promiser. Promise-keeping is rational because of some benefit to the promiser, given the kind of society we live in.

In a utilitarian ethic, this works if we consider a society as a whole. Having a general rule that promises should be kept demonstrably brings greatest utility to the system. But when it comes to an individual reasoning whether to keep a promise or not, it becomes more problematic.

As an individual utilitarian, I decide what I should do on the basis of what gives greatest utility right now. Often, breaking a promise – failing to pay money or do some deed – is to my benefit. Yes, I might consider Hume's maxim that if I break my promise, no one will trust me in future.

But what if no one knows that I am going to break my promise? What if it is a promise to someone who cannot tell anyone else? What if I think that the benefit to me in breaking the promise is actually far greater than the inconvenience to the person I am letting down? In that case, since a utilitarian theory says the action with the best outcome is the moral thing to do, I *should* break my promise.

The fact that, on the general level, promise-keeping helps society run better does not inform why I should keep this particular promise right now, if breaking it right now seems to bring greater utility (especially to me). So how would a society ever find out that promise-keeping works?

There are other ethical theories, and other accounts that try to explain the obligation of promise-keeping; but in a naturalistic framework, promises always have problems. It is very hard to justify why we should keep promises; why there appears to be a moral obligation to do so. We can perhaps explain why we feel that we should, in terms of social conditioning; but subjectivity aside, is there any reason why we actually should keep promises? We can demonstrate that a society that keeps promises works well, but why did we start believing this in the first place?

More generally, promises make no sense in liberal philosophy. The point of liberal philosophy is that it is liberal. It is about freedom, and in true Enlightenment

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spirit the freedom (meaning autonomy) of the individual is paramount. It's a philosophy that has come to fruition in our contemporary individualistic culture. It says the essence of being adult, of being a mature and true human being, is to be free to decide for oneself. Whatever that choice is, about whatever topic or act. The point of being human is to have freedom.

Why, then, would anyone make a promise? The nature of making a promise is to restrict one's own freedom. It is saying, in this particular matter, I will no longer be free to do as I choose in the future. I will be bound by the promise I am making now. I am deliberately choosing, in a free act of will, to limit my future free acts of will. That simply makes no sense in a liberal philosophy. Why would I do that? How can it even be possible that I do that? How can a choice of mine be to restrict choices?

It seems to me that now we are facing an even greater challenge to promise-keeping. Our society is facing a new reason why promises are hard to justify. That is, all the ethical rationales mentioned above, for all their difficulties, still assume that the individual making the promise is the same person from day to day. If I make a promise today, I should keep it tomorrow – it may be difficult to explain precisely why, but that is the generally recognised rule. I am the person who made the promise, so I should keep it.

But what if I am not the same person from day to day? As our society increasingly comes to experiment with fluidity of identity, this is going to become a greater issue. Promises bind my future self to something. However, do I even have a future self? What if my future self decides to be someone different? What if my future self decides that the self I am today was completely mistaken in her identity? Will I even be the same person who made the promise?

Our sense that promises can be made, should be kept, and that that matters, is actually based on God. God keeps his promises: this is something fundamental to his character. He binds himself by his word, and we can trust him. It is a consistent theme of the Bible. The fact that we can live at all depends upon his ordering of the cosmos, providing nature which will have reliable patterns so we can plant crops and reap the benefits. More specifically, God has promised salvation and he kept that promise. God is faithful and consistent. In keeping promises we are following God.

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That is precisely why we are people who can relate to others. In big promises such as marriage, or smaller promises for shorter times, faithfulness is a key part of being able to form and keep relationships. It is no accident that a society with a rule of promise-keeping is a society that functions. It is because we are in the image of God, the God who keeps his word.

Without God in the picture, promises don't actually make sense, even though they work. The more we deny God, however, the more difficult it will be to keep them – to society's detriment. If a person can change from moment to moment, if we cannot rely on people to keep their word or even recognise that they have given it, then we cannot have real relationships. Which is what happens if people are fluid; if identity does not have some consistency. It leads to momentary relationships only.

We cannot function that way. Let us hope that the loss of promises is something that is recognised as a consequence of the loss of consistent identity. It sounds like the ultimate freedom to say that I define myself and who I will be: but that is in fact the ultimate destruction of society, which is no freedom at all.

Kirsty Birkett lectures in doctrine, philosophy and ethics at Oak Hill.

Here we stand?

'Here I stand, I can do no other,' are the famous words attributed to Martin Luther. But what reformation would we stand for today, asks Mike Ovey.

'Son, you're on your own.' – Local pastor to a black sheriff facing racist lynching, in the film *Blazing Saddles*

Where would I have stood? It's a revealing question on lots of issues. Where would I have stood as a German in 1932? Would I have seen Hitler for what he was? Where would I have stood as things heated up in the France of 1789? Would I have foreseen the way the Revolution would become the Terror?

What about Nicaea in AD 325 when orthodox believers were contending that it was not enough to call Jesus the Son 'God' in a purely honorific way? Would I have stood with them or thought all the stuff about anathema and deposing bishops was overkill? And, with the 500 year centenary of the 95 Theses fast approaching, where would you and I have stood on the Reformation?

This has become an increasingly acute question in our time for a number of reasons. First, there is the obvious question of *rapprochement* with Roman Catholicism. Is it 'forgive and forget' in the face of a secular culture that is hostile to both Protestants and Roman Catholics? Secondly, there is the related question of whether the Reformation was a tragic necessity or a tragic mistake – and if a mistake, on whose part? Thirdly, would today's Protestant denominations ever think it worthwhile having a Reformation on these issues in the way Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Tyndale and Cranmer did? Fourthly, would today's Protestant denominations ever think it worthwhile having a Reformation on any issue?

Let me be a little provocative here. Most contemporary western Protestants (I'll come to some of the exceptions in a minute) would not support either Luther's Reformation or any other, and this is because of a profound shift in what counts as the gospel. The saying so often attributed to Luther is, 'Here I stand, I can do no other.' I suspect he might be a bit lonely today.

Our problem emerges in and around the topic of the day: human gender and sexuality. This is not, by the way, yet another article specifically dealing with that question. What we need to see is how the way we deal with this is symptomatic of something deeper. So, let me broadly outline what is going on in the major Protestant denominations of the UK.

There is a highly activist lobby both arguing in denominational fora and creating facts on the ground – living outside pastoral guidelines, appointing North American bishops who are pro same-sex liturgies, as in Liverpool. There are official calls for dialogue between the parties who disagree, although the credibility of these as serious attempts in good faith to seek God's will together evaporates to vanishing point given the new 'facts on the ground' that the pro same-sex marriage lobby continues to create.

The apparent official aim across the denominations is for 'good disagreement', which in practice looks like accepting that others disagree on this issue, but not breaking 'fellowship' because of it. The rhetoric tends to be along the lines of, 'I think what you're doing is wrong, but it is not so significant that I think you are not within the same broad tent of Christian belief.'

Clearly, this has some considerable strengths. Yes, there are some disagreements which may be close to our hearts and yet not central to the gospel (such as the eating of vegetables in Romans 14 and 15). Contentiousness between believers is a grievous thing. And it is certainly true that in

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some phases of Protestantism's history, the inability to differ on non-essentials has been deplorable. However, I doubt that this is our most obvious problem at the moment.

What fascinates me about the 'same broad tent' approach is how far it is from the thinking of the Reformation – both Protestant and Roman Catholic. In some ways, both Luther and the vast majority of his opponents shared a common theme: humans were not automatically and inherently in a good relationship with God. Rather, they said, we are estranged. But this is a far more alien pre-supposition today. Instead, we live in a time when a common pre-supposition is that basically things between us and God are fine deep down, but may need a little sorting.

The way the 19th century theologian Henry Scott Holland put this in the *Lux Mundi* essays of 1889 was to say, 'Faith is the discovery of inherent sonship'. Faith, then, is emphatically not believing that Jesus is the unique saving Son through whom I am adopted. Adoption means there has been change of my status, from non-son to son. Faith, rather, is believing something about me and what I already am. For, if my sonship is inherent, I do not need adoption and my relationship with God as a child of God is already there.

Naturally, this idea that deep down things are fine between me and God plays extremely well in a therapeutic culture in which my problems are what the world does to me ('I'm the victim here'), rather than what my heart wants to do to God.

On this kind of view, I am inclined to adopt a 'same broad tent' approach, because at the end of the day I think all of our relationships with God are basically fine. You may be wrong to be pro same-sex marriage, but ultimately not too much hangs on that, so I should not do something 'extreme' such as refuse you admission to the Lord's table because you are unrepentantly in a same-sex marriage. I should not do something such as that, runs the argument, because it would suggest that deep down things are not automatically and inherently hunky-dory between humans and God.

For as soon as I admit that things may not be OK between you and God because of same-sex marriage, I admit in principle that the problem of God-human relations is not just victim-centred and therapeutic. I have to admit I am not automatically and inherently a child of God. Do not misunderstand me here. The position I am criticising may well affirm that the Bible teaches same-sex marriage is 'wrong'. But it does so from within a 'same broad tent' framework that does not see humanity and God as fundamentally estranged and alienated from each other after the Fall. Unlike Paul, it does not see humans as 'by nature, children of wrath' (Ephesians 2:3).

The position I am criticising would not have stood where Luther would – even if it thought him right on what justification by faith was – because it would not share his 'children of wrath' starting point. To that extent, it is a different gospel from that of the Reformation, which emphasised a gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ.

Would no one now press for a Reformation, then? I imagine many evangelicals like to think they would, but the most obvious group at the moment which presses for a Reformation, at least of a kind, is the pro same-sex marriage lobby. After all, it is their insistence on the acceptability of their views and practices that has now divided denominations in Scotland, has led to the expulsion of dissident ministers and congregations in North America (including Jim Packer) and has divided the global Anglican Communion.

Clearly, the pro same-sex marriage lobby think this is all justified and ethical. A value of such a high order must be at stake that it is worth splitting churches over, disciplining their ministers and expropriating their property. This is a 'here I stand' moment for them, and is, for want of better terms, a gospel issue for them. The difficulty, of course, is that it is the wrong gospel. For the greatness of Luther was not just that he was a determined man who stood for what he believed – that is hard enough. More than that, he stood determinedly for the right gospel, not the wrong one – and that is even harder. If we want to re-create Luther's courage, perhaps we start best by re-appropriating his gospel and stop buying cheap 19th century knock-offs.

Mike Ovey is the Principal of Oak Hill.

Living in dangerous times

'But mark this: there will be terrible times in the last days,' says Paul in his second letter to Timothy. Lee Gatiss reflects on how Paul's words speak in a fresh way in our uncertain and dangerous times.

There is a website online which tracks 45 signs of the end times, called 'The Rapture Index.' It claims to provide a 'prophetic speedometer of end-time activity' so that users can be aware of how close we are getting to the climactic moment. This autumn, with hurricanes, floods, economic turbulence and ongoing war in Syria, it hit a record high rating of 189, which indicates a fasten your seatbelts moment as we speed towards the pre-tribulation rapture (apparently).

This index tracks various things Jesus mentions in the Gospels, although I am not convinced this is necessarily the best way for us to apply what he says. But many of these indicators are features of our world today: wars, insurrections, earthquakes, famines, plagues, and a multitude of messiahs full of empty promises and lies. And worse than that, the persecution of believers (see Luke 21:5-19). With the uncertainties of Brexit, the polarisation of politics on both sides of the Atlantic, and a persistent terrorist threat – not

Right: Brexit protest march in London following the result of the UK referendum, July 2016,

to mention the alarming decline in church attendances recently reported by the press, the shocking nature of victimisation experienced by Christians in many parts of the world, and the appalling spectacle of sexual politics in the church – it is tempting to say that we live in peculiarly terrible times.

The times in which we live

Some people have likened our current situation to the days just prior to the evangelical revival of the 18th century. So they hope and pray for another great awakening to revitalise the church as happened in those heady days. Others see a better comparison with the church in the early years of the 16th century, before Luther came along and split Western Christendom in two. Are we not seeing another division of this magnitude today?

Many who also take into account the increasingly anti-Christian bias of the western world, see our situation as more akin to the churches of Northern Africa before the sweeping victories of Islam wiped them out in the 7th and 8th centuries.

History never precisely replicates itself, and so we cannot pretend that the past is an infallible guide to the future. The historian GM Trevelyan once wrote that 'we never know enough about the infinitely complex circumstances of any past event to prophesy the future by analogy.' Yet there may also be wisdom in the famous rejoinder that those who forget the lessons of history are doomed to repeat its mistakes. Sometimes there are patterns in history which do repeat themselves, simply because humanity in all its sinfulness has remained consistently the same.

Ministry in terrible times

Are there lessons for us to learn in the Bible, about how to respond and behave when we find ourselves in difficult times?

In what was possibly one of his last letters, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about this very issue. 'But mark this,' he warned, 'there will be terrible times in the last days' (2 Timothy 3:1). And in such a context, he wanted to equip his younger colleague to distinguish faithful ministry from the corrupt self-serving of others which would not advance the cause of Christ.

He speaks about false teachers who have 'swerved from the truth', and the effects of their gangrenous teaching. He goes on to talk about those who worm their way into households to scratch itching ears with their attractive messages, because 'the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching'.

This seems to me to have been the universal experience of the church

Right: A Syrian refugee walks through war-damaged Homs, Syria. Photo: Chaoyue Pan http://flic.kr/p/rRuB2G

throughout the last 2,000 years, not something restricted to the 1st century. Having said that, if there is an intensification of such corruption immediately before the return of the Lord, that would not be a surprise. If Paul thought Timothy needed to be on guard here, can we afford to ignore his warnings? Who is he warning against? 2 Timothy 3 begins with what sounds like a general condemnation of 'people' in the last days. But it quickly becomes apparent that he has his eye especially on leaders who creep insidiously into the homes of the vulnerable.

They seek to capture their unguarded prey for never-ending programmes of false teaching and pastorally cruel deception. Their agenda is centred on the passions – those who are 'burdened with sins and led astray by various passions', and accumulate teachers to suit those passions. They wander away from the truth into mythical superstition and potted, this-worldly wisdom.

Counterfeit religion tries to help people fulfil their desires, and avoid any tensions or suffering in the here and now. Yet it gives its devotees chewing gum for food, so that they are always learning but never able to swallow a knowledge of the truth. We were designed, someone once taught me, to open our minds for the same reason that we open our mouths – to close them again on something solid. But keeping the conversation going, always stimulating but never satisfying, is the hallmark of those who intrude themselves like cuckoos into the household of the God of eternal truth.

Standing firm in the sufficient scriptures

Timothy, on the other hand, must fulfil his ministry, which will most certainly involve the endurance of suffering, until the arrival of God's heavenly kingdom. In a series of contrasts, Paul urges his young colleague to stand out from this sickening ecclesiastical culture he has described. First, he is to stand out by remembering that a godly life is not one free from pain. It involves suffering in this world as we long for the next: the suffering of persecution, the agony of putting to death our disordered desires, and the nauseating necessity of confronting and refuting the decadence of heresy.

Second, it involves standing firm in the faith of the scriptures. This is the faith which teaches us to live differently to those described in 2 Timothy. Even though Timothy has known this since childhood, Paul realises that the temptation to drift into a piety which acknowledges the Bible in some way, but does not bow meekly to its supreme, God-breathed authority, is a very real danger.

Even Timothy, it would seem, was not invulnerable to the temptation to slip anchor and wander away from his moorings in the scriptures. He was not to let the world set the tempo for his discipleship; nor must the flesh set the agenda for his ministry.

The Bible is not only supreme as the voice of our master, but also utterly sufficient. It was sufficient for Timothy's salvation, said the apostle, and sufficient also for his ministry in terrible times. He doesn't require the tricks of the false teaching trade to win a hearing or wean people onto healthier doctrine. He is not to veer off in a new direction, but preach that life-giving, unerring word, even when it doesn't seem to be trendy or palatable.

A sober-minded view of the impending arrival of the judge of all is more than enough to make our evangelism 'relevant', and make us stand out in a world that loves pleasure rather than God, and a church that has the form of godliness but rarely its reality.

'Evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse,' says Paul. We shouldn't be surprised when false religion spreads its noxious fumes in the wake of any authentic work of God. But we are to keep our heads, not buying into the idea that Christianity is inevitably doomed in the sulphuric atmosphere of our contemporary culture.

We must persevere in the work of the gospel, whether we see the fruit of our faithfulness immediately or not. For we know in the end that there is nothing more certain than the safety and joy of God's heavenly kingdom, beyond the temporary turmoils of our time.

Lee Gatiss is the Director of Church Society.

The Reformers' blind spot?

Is Reformed theology hostile to world mission? Ray Porter, writing on Reformation Day 2016, looks into this often repeated claim by critics of the Reformers and their successors.

Ralph Winter, a well-known American missiologist, writing about the Baptist missionary William Carey, says, 'Protestantism finally became aware of the great commission. But Protestants had been blind to missions for over two hundred years. Their coveted Reformed theology did not help them.'

Such a remark can be found in a lot of missionary literature. It claims, first, that the Reformers had no missionary vision, and then takes a swipe at all Reformed theology as being hostile to missionary activity. Is it really true that the early Reformers had no theology of world mission?

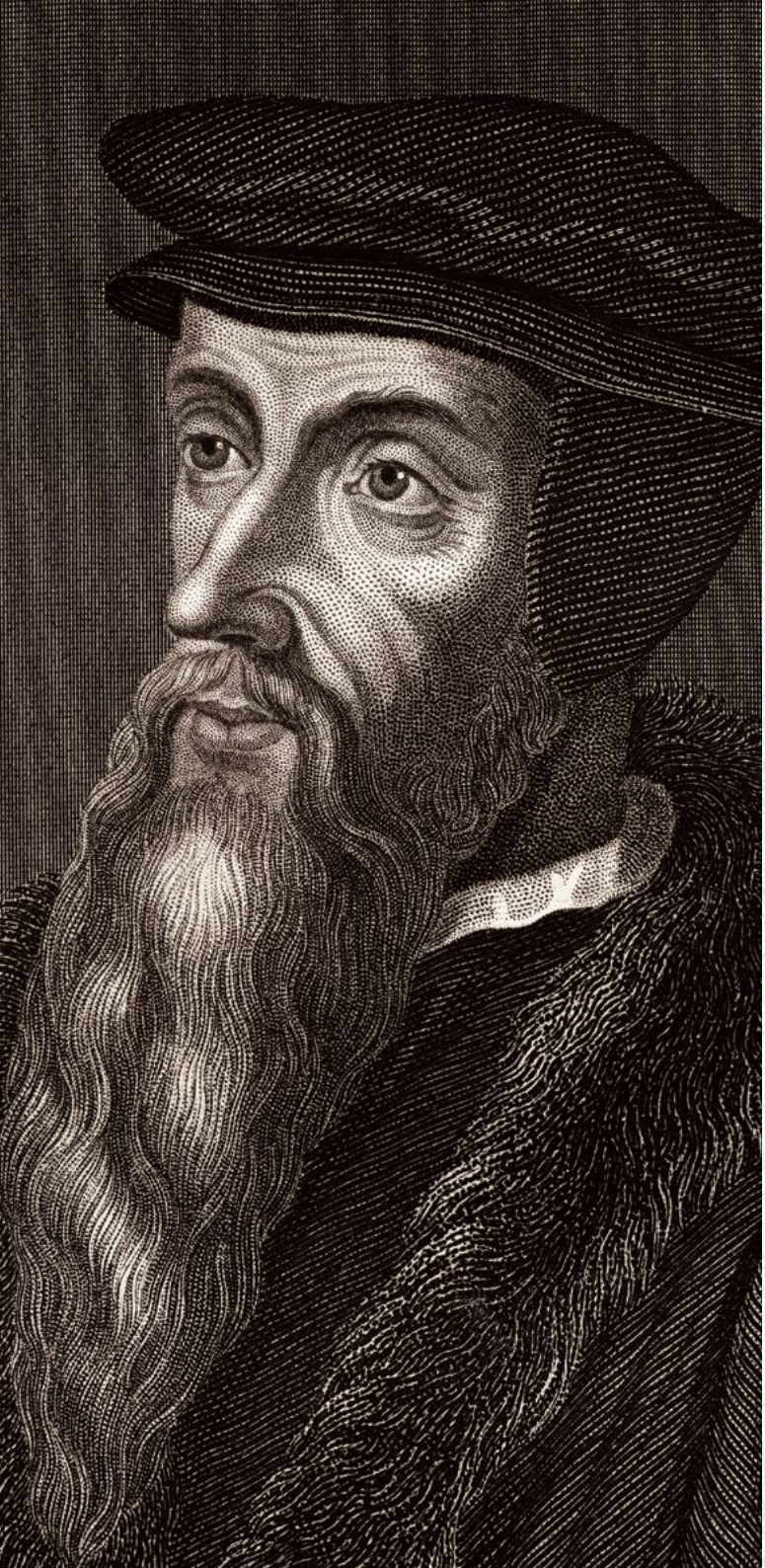
Looking at the context

We view the past through the spectacles of our own time. Often that gives us a distorted vision and leads to false judgments on the activities of those who have lived in different places under very different circumstances. If the Reformers ignored the needs of the non-European world, it would not have been surprising. They were fighting for the advancement of the gospel in the face not only of the Roman Church, but also the political machinations and power struggles of petty princelings.

There was no country of Germany or Italy at this period. Even the union of Scotland and England was a distant dream. Each state wanted to establish its own hegemony and, at a time when the prince determined the religion he would allow within his borders, the Reformers' engagement with the political system was necessary.

If you were starting from France, a German state or landlocked Switzerland, to get anywhere outside Europe was not easy. The powers which had established colonies in the New World, and which controlled the seas were Spain and Portugal. They were strongly attached to Rome, and it was for them that the Pope had divided the world into their spheres of influence in 1493. When France began a small colony in what is now Brazil, John Calvin used the opportunity of a French sea captain who appeared to be sympathetic to the Reformed faith, to send out two missionaries Pierre Richier and Guillaume Chartier, together with Huguenot settlers, to bring the gospel not only to the colonists, but also to the native people. Sadly, the mission ended with the martyrdom of the missionaries.

But does this one example of transatlantic mission prove that Calvin was committed to world evangelism? He argued (in *Institutes* IV.3.4) that the apostolic office was only for



Calvin's concern to see the gospel preached throughout Europe, which he shared with Luther and the other Reformers, was very evident. He sent out men year by year from Geneva to pioneer church planting in the hostile districts of his native France.

the foundation of the church in the 1st century, and that their task was 'to establish his Kingdom everywhere by the preaching of the Gospel'. He believed they had largely accomplished that task. The foundations of a worldwide church had been established. There was no longer a need for that foundational work. However, he also writes (in *Institutes* IV.3.6): 'There is the holy, inviolable, and perpetual law imposed on those who took the place of the apostles, by which they receive the command to preach the gospel.'

Calvin's concern to see the gospel preached throughout Europe, which he shared with Luther and the other Reformers, was very evident. He sent out men year by year from Geneva to pioneer church planting in the hostile districts of his native France. Others returned to their own countries in similar manner. In the year 1561 alone, 142 men were sent out to risk their lives that the gospel might be heard.

Calvin ensured that they were well prepared for the task. If they were not yet pastors, they were taught Latin, Hebrew and Greek so that they could accurately exegete scripture. They had to know their church history and systematic theology. But it was on the character training that Calvin put most stress. These mission workers had to be ready to face martyrdom and it was only when Calvin decided that

Left: The Reformer John Calvin.

Outside the English-speaking world, the real pioneers of Protestant world mission were Dutch Calvinists. Their ministry in Taiwan is largely forgotten, but during the 38 years of Dutch occupation, missionaries translated parts of the Bible into some of the tribal languages, and received at least 5,000 adults into the Reformed church.

they would stand firm in such a situation that they were sent into France to preach the gospel and plant churches.

The planting of churches in France was very successful. As people came to believe the gospel, they began to worship in a home. It was only when the group began to show the marks of a fully disciplined church that it was acknowledged as a 'dressed church'. In 1555, there was only one 'dressed church' in the whole of France. By 1562 there were 2,150 such churches. It is reckoned that there were eventually 2 million Protestant church members out of the French population of about 20 million.

The myth that Calvin was not concerned about world mission feeds from a conception that evangelising Europe (and, for some, that preaching the gospel to Roman Catholics) is not 'real' mission. Europe is a mission field today. We face the same situation as the Reformers faced – a Europe that has forgotten and opposed the gospel, and needs to be re-evangelised.

Calvinist pioneers of world mission

Why then is there the assertion that Reformed theology and world mission are strangers to each other? It partly springs out of the opposition William Carey (1761-1834) faced

READ MORE

In this article, I write mainly about John Calvin. Evidence of Luther's concern for world evangelism is harder to find, although Charles Chaney has tried to argue for this. See: http://bit.ly/2fy4J8m

Fuller details of the mission sent by John Calvin to Brazil can be found in a lecture by R Pierce Beaver, 'The Genevan Mission to Brazil' in John H Bratt (Ed), The Heritage of John Calvin: Heritage Hall Lectures 1960-1970 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

For Calvin's planting of churches in France, see Erroll Hulse for more detail: http://bit.ly/2fvLoZ1

when he called 18th century Particular Baptists to become involved in world mission. There was an anti-missionary hymn in vogue at the time:

Go into all the world,
The Lord of old did say,
But now where He has planted thee,
There thou shouldst stay.

And one of Carey's fellow ministers, John Collet Ryland (1723-92), is reputed to have said to him: 'Young man, sit down. When God chooses to convert the heathen, he will do so without your help or mine'. This reflected the hyper-Calvinism that sprang up in the 18th century, rather than the true teaching of Calvin. Carey confronted this belief in his great call to world mission, the essay, 'An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens'. The essay also argued against the belief that the great commission of Jesus in Matthew 28 had already been fulfilled by the apostles, and did not need to be undertaken by subsequent generations. Carey himself was an authentic Calvinist, sharing the restored evangelical theology advanced by his friend Andrew Fuller (1754-1815). But he was not unique as a Calvinist in wanting to take the gospel to the people of other lands. The Puritan John Eliot (1604-90) had gone from Hertfordshire to the colony in Massachusetts and not only preached to the Native Americans, but also translated the scriptures into the Algonquian language. This was the first Bible printed in the Americas. The support given by Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) to the ministry of David Brainerd (1718-47) was another example of Calvinists engaging in mission cross-culturally. Brainerd became an inspiration to many generations of missionaries.

When we look outside the English-speaking world, we discover that the real pioneers of Protestant world mission were Dutch Calvinists. Their ministry in Taiwan is largely forgotten, but during the 38 years of Dutch occupation (1624-62), missionaries translated parts of the Bible into some of the tribal languages (inventing a script in the process), and they received at least 5,000 adults into the Reformed church.

It was in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) that the foundations were laid in the 17th century for the Reformed churches that are still there today. There also the Dutchman Albert Cornelisz Ruyl in 1603 produced a translation of the Gospel of Matthew into Moluccan Malay. This was the first translation after the Reformation of any part of the scriptures into a non-European language.

Historically, Calvinists have been in the forefront of world mission. Calvinism, or Reformed theology more generally, is not a barrier to missionary work. The conviction that there are people, elect in Christ from before creation, who have yet to hear the gospel and respond to it, is in fact a stimulation to mission. From Calvin's Geneva onwards, there have been Reformed missionaries. Do their theological successors today have the same zeal? Do we have the willingness to sacrifice our lives, as Calvin's pastors did, that the gospel of a sovereign Saviour might be proclaimed to the ends of the earth?

Ray Porter is former Director of Theology for Crossing Cultures at Oak Hill.

A city of two tales

What are the challenges and opportunities for the gospel in Brixton? Gabrielle Samuel reflects on her ministry in one of the most pluralistic areas of modern London.

In recent history, the main constituents of Brixton have been the migrant Caribbean community of the 60s, affectionately known throughout the UK as the Windrush generation – this being one of the first ships to dock in Britain with economic migrants from the Caribbean. Large numbers of this first generation settled in Brixton, bringing with them the food, music, fashion, literature, humour and community spirit of the West Indies. Though invited they faced innumerable challenges, with stories told of public establishments having strict 'no dogs, no blacks, no

Irish' entry policies, and with entry to higher education, public services and career routes blocked. Yet Brixton is a testimony to the fortitude, resilience and creativity of these settlers.

While the remnants of oppression and deprivation continue to result in all the issues we know to affect inner city communities, Brixton has simultaneously become a cultural hub. It is increasingly considered one of *the* places to live in London. Many now flock to enjoy the energy, vibe and culture of Brixton.

So today, Brixton exists as a city of two tales: classic 'old' Brixton, with predominately black, working class families; and 'new' Brixton, with young, white, middle class professionals. It is within this tension that it is my pleasure to work for the London City Mission in Brixton Local Church (BloC), a year-old Co-mission church plant. I'm privileged to seek out and reach out to Brixton locals, sharing life, time, cups of tea, and most importantly, the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified.

Brixton is lively, creative and vibrant, and it is also a deeply religious place. Religious organisations, whether they are churches, mosques, Rastafarian communities, or 'other', are an undeniable and important part of the social fabric here. This thriving pluralism makes Brixton a very difficult and a very exciting place to be on mission. You rarely find anyone who is a blank slate in regards to their thoughts towards Jesus, the gospel or the church. Many have had significant exposure to Christian morality, thought and history – sometimes for better, but most often for worse.

In Brixton, the two most common responses to the gospel, while giving much to be concerned about and even mourn over, also give us massive opportunity to bring truth to bear on people's hearts and minds.

The first response is a polite, consenting apathy. The church in Brixton (as in many impoverished communities) gives practical support to struggling families, runs the local youth clubs, provides community and friendship for the elderly and is generally a hub of community spirit and involvement. Many (my own mum included) take their children to church in the hope that they make the right sort of friends and imbibe the implicit moral framework. And we say 'amen' to all these things, praising God for churches that engage with their communities and are known places of support and community.

But we mourn if these things are the sum total of what the church has come to represent, if this is all the church holds out. For many in Brixton, this is the church's sole role and function. That means that many people I meet are happy to congratulate me for my commitment to community, but glaze over at any movement of the conversation towards Christ or his gospel.

Indeed, Brixton does need better leisure facilities, investment in housing, after-school activities, earlier mental health interventions, and the rest. Yet it remains my pleasure and duty to hold out the thing I know Brixton needs above all else – the gospel of a crucified, redeeming Saviour, with all the love and compassion (of both word and deed) possible.

The second response to the gospel in Brixton unapologetically wears its hostile heart on its sleeve. Any attempt to speak of Christ, the gospel or the church is met with deep, deep disdain and offence, as it brings to mind the holocaust of Africa – the transatlantic slave trade and the years of colonisation and subjugation that followed. Many people in Brixton hold Christianity to be a religious noose, forced upon their ancestors by chaplains aboard slave ships.

Religion was used to justify and provide cover for the forced extraction of millions of Africans, as the 'Christian' west sought to civilise and enlighten the 'dark continent'. Religion was used to promote passivity, submission and obedience, with the aim of persuading black slaves to accept that this was their estate assigned by the sovereign hand of God, and that they should therefore be thankful for their condition, subhuman though it was.

With the resurgence of interest in African history within the African-Caribbean diaspora, the injustice of the slave trade is felt with ever increasing fervour. The constant refrain is that

In listening, we earn the relational capital to speak. If we are privileged enough for someone to be willing to show us their heart, what an amazing opportunity we have to unwrap the glories of the gospel in our shared nearness.

Christianity is the white man's faith, a tool of our oppressors. Speaking with a local pan-African Rastafarian leader, he described the famous image of Jesus, with blond hair, blue eyes and European features, as an 'act of war'.

Images such as this, he said, taught black people to worship whiteness and hate the colour of their own skin and kin. Further, it was an idol the west had created in its own image, thus breaking the 10 commandments or offending the God they purport to worship. For his group to entertain the legitimacy of Christianity would be to give credence to the historical fact of Christianity's tacit and explicit involvement in the destruction of Africa. It would therefore be a denial of their African blood and a betrayal of the millions that were murdered, tortured, raped and enslaved.

And yet as I write this – and I'm sure as you read this – everything within me wants to shout that these evils were not the work of Christ or remotely worthy of his name; that indeed the hearts of men are depraved beyond all recognition; that we long for the coming of the just and wrathful judge who will do right; that Christ has come to redeem, heal and take our burdens; that he himself knows the deepest and most unjust suffering known to mankind; that he is more angry with the sin in the world then I have capacity to comprehend, and his anger is righteous and efficacious.

But because I long to speak gospel truth into this situation, first I must listen. The people I work with, and that you work with, have to know that we have heard them. This is not listening while internally constructing my rebuff, or listening to join them in wallowing, but listening so that we can hear them.

They need to know that I feel it with them; that my heart tightens thinking what women like my mum would have had to endure; that I recoiled with them at the Diary of Thomas Thistlewood, a brutal and inventive slave owner; that I watched *Roots* far too young and read the works of the politician Marcus Mosiah Garvey far too late; that conversations about hair are never just conversations about hair; and that I feel the weariness that comes from the account of lives from Emmett Till (1941-55) to Tamir Rice (2002-14). The people I work with need to know I can hear them, that I can hear their hearts.

I can be under no illusions. Even those we give time to hearing continue to reject and malign the gospel. There are no guarantees apart from the sovereign work of God. Yet the value of hearing remains, because by acknowledging the other person's innermost thoughts, desires and pain, we create genuine compassion. In listening, we earn the relational capital to speak – even if what we speak are truths that hurt, confuse and offend. If we are privileged enough for someone to be willing to show us their heart, what an amazing opportunity we have to unwrap the glories of the gospel in our shared nearness.

Brixton is not an easy place. But it is a very exciting place for the gospel. We pray and teach here in hope that God will graciously work among us, remaining confident in his all-sufficient word and the all-sufficient work off his Son. With that, we keep going.

Gabrielle Samuel is a London City Mission Youth and Women's Outreach Worker in Brixton Local Church, south London.

Love and chromosomes

A new prenatal screening test may soon be introduced to the UK, which has resulted in a 100 percent abortion rate in Iceland for unborn babies testing positive for Down's syndrome. David Potter MBE looks at the ethical and biblical issues.

A recent and challenging documentary, 'A World Without Down's Syndrome?' raised life and death issues which await us just around the corner. Sally Phillips, who presented the documentary, is a Christian, an actress and the mother of a lively 12 year old son with Down's syndrome. The Guardian somewhat sneeringly regards her efforts as, 'too impassioned to be impartial'. But she took us effectively into the strange underworld occupied by families with sons and daughters with Down's, where the often strained and patronising response of society is magnified a thousand times. Through the prism of this syndrome we saw wider questions about the nature of society and how the choices that ordinary people make and the attitudes they express will shape the future.

The reason Phillips made the programme for BBC Two at this time lies in the in-tray of Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Health. The advisory body on prenatal screening has recommended to him that the Non-Invasive Prenatal Test (NIPT) for Down's syndrome be introduced in the United Kingdom. This test, unlike those currently in use, has a success rate of 99 percent.

Also in that in-tray is a petition from people with Down's syndrome and their friends asking that the test should not be introduced. As Sally Phillips says, 'We have the most expensive state-of-the-art Down's syndrome detection test and the ability to terminate right up until birth. But no allowance is made for the point of view of the other side. The families of people with Down's syndrome are not consulted. People with Down's syndrome are not consulted. There has never been an ethical debate about it.'

An urgent issue

What makes this so important is that, with the present level of screening, nine out of ten mothers opt for an abortion when given a positive diagnosis of Down's in their unborn baby. In countries where the test is already in use (for example, Iceland) that rises to 100 percent. It is official policy in Denmark to eradicate Down's syndrome. As Sally Phillips says, 'All the pregnancy books refer to Down's syndrome as a "defect". All you get is this information that says, "High incidence of leukaemia, high incidence of deafness"... It's totally overwhelming and unhelpful.'

The medical profession is largely negative towards the condition, as the programme demonstrated repeatedly. This is a 'condition', but frustratingly for the medics, it is not treatable and therefore challenges their utopian view of what is normal.

Janice Turner, a columnist for *The Times*, was clearly moved by the programme, but is of the opinion that it would be no bad thing if Down's was eliminated. She notes that other 'health conditions' have been eradicated and mentions polio, from which her father had suffered as a child. Isn't this a good thing? she asks. Which goes to show how even the socially liberal elite can miss the point: Down's is not a 'health condition', or a disease, or a disability per se. The extra chromosome which is the distinctive hallmark of the syndrome is present at conception, in the very first and every subsequent cell of the body.

It results in several common features – diamond shaped eyes, a small mouth, a flat area on the back of the head – and it usually results in some degree of learning disability. And it is also true that people with Down's syndrome are typically cheerful, able to form strong relationships, but not always. Beyond that there is huge diversity.

RESOURCES

'A World Without Down's Syndrome' was broadcast on BBC Two on 5 October 2016. It is available to buy from the BBC and is available on YouTube. Also on YouTube is the BBC Moral Maze discussion about the programme.

A video of people with learning disabilities reading Genesis chapter 1 can be found here: https://vimeo.com/132942583

The question of human worth is considered fully in David Potter's book, *Love is the Reason*.

The Don't Screen Us Out campaign is a grass-roots initiative supported by people with Down's syndrome, families and Down Syndrome advocate groups. Visit their website: dontscreenusout.org

Among the telling interviews Phillips conducted in the documentary was one with an American geneticist. Screening, we discovered, can now detect a huge range of potential conditions in the unborn child, including Huntingdon's disease, dementia, diabetes, schizophrenia and depression. At the moment, the science cannot tell us how severe the condition will be.

Within ten years, he predicted, we will all be able to screen our baby's genetics on our own laptop! 'Science has no morality', he declared, so who will decide what should be done with this information? But it will raise the question: Should such pregnancies continue? This being so, how we respond now to what is happening in respect of Down's syndrome becomes the more significant.

Who knows how soon this will be in your in-tray: a call from a parishioner, or a friend telling you of test results, even your own expectant wife, sister or self, faced with news you feared? What will you say, and how will you respond? There are biblical principles which suggest a way forward.

Biblical principles

In the first place, we have to challenge the desire to control our own future. James helps us here: 'Listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there... Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow... Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will we will live and do this or that"' (James 4:13-16).

This is wise advice. It does not rule out a serious assessment of what might happen on the basis of past experience, but that is history, not certainty. So when the doctor tells the expectant mother that the baby in her womb will have this or that limitation, he speaks what he cannot know. And faith looks for something better.

Right: A letter from 900 people with Down's syndrome and their families is delivered to the office of Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt in October 2016.
Photo: Don't Screen Us Out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www.dontscreenusout.org
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When our daughter was diagnosed as having Down's syndrome, our pastor came to see us and shared verses which, for us, proved prophetic: 'The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God' (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). We have been promised grace that is equal to our need, a strength that will only be apparent in weakness. The sovereignty of God is a very practical doctrine!

In the second place, it is time we raised a question about 'freedom of choice', which is surely the mantra of 21st century western culture. It is the last remaining absolute of an otherwise relativistic society, written deep into our DNA by a century of existentialism. We are no longer expected to accept what nature ordains for us. We can choose. We are the 'captains of our fate'.

Now, for the first time in human history, we are offered choices affecting the lives of generations yet unborn. What will we do with these choices? However, the fact that we are able to choose does not mean that we are free to do so. Many of the choices we make on a daily basis are constrained by factors beyond our control: such as, which side of the road we choose to drive, whether to pay at the supermarket checkout, whether to work. Choose wrongly and we end up in hospital, in prison, or in debt!

Adam and Eve were unique in that they were the first and only humans – apart from Jesus – who had genuine freedom of choice, but their exercise of it did little to benefit the human race. They surrendered it on our behalf when they chose to disobey God. Now, as Jesus reminds us (in John 8:34), those who sin are its slaves, and Paul reminds us of the struggle that creates in us (in Romans 7:21).

Do we really want to live in a society shaped by decisions we and others make as to what is acceptable, a society subject to our fears and selfishness? Will we find, as Sally Phillips says, that we have 'imperceptibly flipped into a situation where the woman is under societal pressure to have that termination. Where does it lead? If you choose to have that child, should the government help you? After all, it was your choice. Why should anyone else help you?'

Finally, do you want to be part of a society where you are valued and one that values everyone else as well? Ours is a privileged position in God's world. We human beings are unique in creation in that while the rest is made to reflect God, we are made to be like God.

How often Jesus underscored this in his words and actions. The very fact that God stooped to take on human nature dignifies humanity to a unique degree. And this includes people with learning disabilities too. Just how much we are valued by God is most dramatically demonstrated by the cross of Christ.

Enough love?

Secularism struggles with this question of worth. It is uncomfortable with the idea that we are simply units of production, but has no other rational basis for valuing people. How then can it say that a person with Down's syndrome is worth less than, say, a neurosurgeon, airline pilot, or politician? Left to humanism, we might find our world as interesting as a Madame Tussauds waxworks, devoid of laughter and tears, creativity and spontaneity, a world of perfect, beautiful people. Do we really aspire to such sterile, formulaic predictability? Eliminating people with Down's syndrome could be the first step along that road.

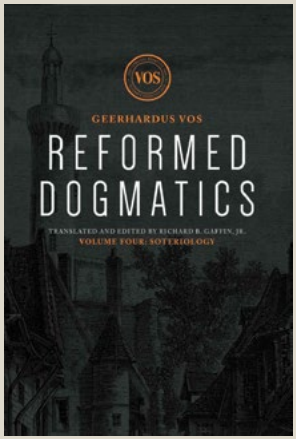
Janice Turner, writing in *The Times*, implies that the future is already decided: 'Technology cannot be uninvented.' While that is true, must science therefore – which has no morality, remember – decide by its very 'successes' the shape of our future? The question hangs in the air: What kind of society do we want to live in and who should be allowed to live in it?

A campaign by people with Down's syndrome, Don't Screen Us Out, held a demonstration at Westminster. Among the banners was one bearing the slogan: 'Love doesn't count chromosomes.' Do we have enough love to care?

David Potter MBE is the founder of Prospects, a Christian charity which supports people with learning disabilities. Prospects is part of the Livability Group.

Books

Brad Bitner has been reading two very different books. Each relates to rooted identities, cultural landscapes and the passing on of inherited knowledge and skills.



Reformed Dogmatics
Volume Four: Soteriology
Geerhardus Vos
Lexham Press, 2015

My students know Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) is one of my theological heroes. Like many, I was first struck by his biblical theology. Vos helped me see and preach the Bible more clearly. He highlighted the one, biblical, coherent story of God's redemption centred on the Lord Jesus Christ. In this country, authors such as Graeme Goldsworthy (*According to Plan*) or Vaughan Roberts (*God's Big Picture*) are perhaps better known. Like Vos, these men handle the Bible more like an unfolding drama than merely a doctrinal handbook.

One unfortunate result of my early enthusiasm for Vos was a scepticism of doctrine. Surely biblical theology was much closer to the text, much more lively, more narrative, less given to abstraction and logical hair-splitting than systematic theology? Yet the more I learned of Vos, the more I saw this false dichotomy emerged from my own thinking and experience, rather than from his own approach. Vos was both a biblical and a systematic theologian. In fact, his biblical theology was rooted in his Reformed confessional identity, with its robust historical and theological inheritance. Yes, Vos was doing something new and creative. But his biblical theology was framed by his doctrine as much as it flowed from his exegesis.

This is even clearer now with the recent publication of Vos's *Reformed Dogmatics* (five volumes, thanks to

Vos loved an arboreal analogy for the theological task: the bole and branches of the biblical-theological tree grow into a spreading canopy of doctrinal truth.

Richard B Gaffin and Lexham Press). These are translations of adapted (Dutch) lecture notes on doctrine given in Grand Rapids from 1888-93. The dates are crucial. Just after this, in 1894, Vos delivered his Princeton inaugural, famously defining his vision for biblical theology. In other words, his work on doctrine *preceded* his work on biblical theology.

Vos loved an arboreal analogy for the theological task: the bole and branches of the biblical-theological tree grow into a spreading canopy of doctrinal truth. But in light of these volumes, the metaphor may need reworking. Doctrine was also, manifestly for Vos, the very soil and root system from which the biblical-theological tree grew.

Especially with the release of Volume Four on soteriology, we witness the future champion of a redemptive-historical approach to the *historia salutis* (history of salvation) setting his mind to the careful distinctions of the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation; see Romans 8:28-30). Vos summarizes the *ordo* (chapter 1) as the 'series of acts and steps in which the salvation obtained by Christ is subjectively appropriated by the elect.' Thus the *ordo* is not the revealed story, but the revealed logic of the application of God's saving work. Both are – or ought to be – thoroughly biblical.

In the *ordo*, Vos notes, the Bible reveals 'a multiplicity of relationships and conditions to which all the operations of grace have a certain connection.' As such, without careful distinctions, the 'fullness of God's works of grace and the rich variety of His acts of salvation would not be prized and appreciated.' So, not only is the *ordo* biblical; getting it right is critical to preserving a faithfully biblical account of the glory of divine grace.

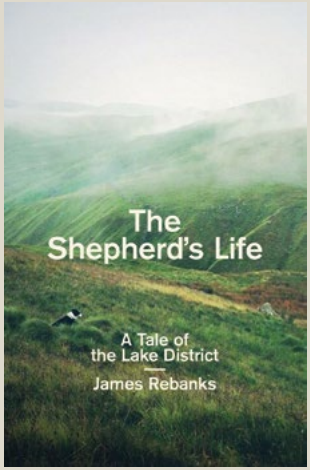
Vos deals with the *ordo* under five headings: Regeneration and Calling, Conversion, Faith, Justification, and Sanctification. In each, he begins with the key biblical terms and texts and builds his treatment stepwise, always with further definition and distinction, and always aiming for a clearer view of God's glory, chiefly revealed in the gracious application of the merits of Christ the mediator to the believer.

Vos employs a question-answer format throughout. Some are brisk and catechetical ('What is regeneration? Regeneration is an immediate re-creation of the sinful nature by God the Holy Spirit and an implanting into the body of Christ.'). Others are hard work, requiring patient concentration. The answer to 'What is the connection of conversion to faith?' carries on over three pages.

Repeatedly, we see a teacher modelling dogmatic method for his students and making them work hard. Vos asks incisive questions, describes fairly views with which he disagrees, exposes assumptions and discerns entailments, and – crucially – makes careful, logical, and biblically-warranted distinctions that matter. 'It is necessary,' Vos avers, in discussing justification in relation to the merits of the mediator, 'to make these distinctions, which for many will perhaps appear subtle, since at present the danger of a confusion... is especially great.' Such distinctions, careful definitions of terms, and concern for contemporary theological debates and pastoral implications are characteristic.

We sense that in Vos's classroom was a set of hard-won intellectual and spiritual skills that was being handed down as a precious inheritance.

We sense that in Vos's classroom (even more than in the book) there was a set of hard-won intellectual and spiritual skills – practical wisdom and evaluative judgement, rooted in historical and theological context – that was being handed down as a precious inheritance. The father of Reformed biblical theology was passing on a way of thinking to these future gospel ministers, training them in a biblically faithful, historically informed, and robustly confessional form of life that would shape them and their ministries.



The Shepherd's Life
James Rebanks
Penguin, 2016

If the Vos book resists linear summary, so does James Rebanks's book about life as a Cumbrian shepherd. It, too, tells of the handing down of traditions, skills and identity in a way that is faithful and adaptively sustainable. Rebanks's book is engrossing and beautifully written, spare in its prose and worth lingering over. Many of us love the 'natural beauty' of the Lake District, experienced as we go fell-walking or visit Keswick. But Rebanks challenges the Wordsworth-Ransome, holiday-maker accounts of the region.

He offers a different version that highlights the intricate connections between communities, families, land, labour and flocks in order to depict the mud-spattered struggles and sunlit glory of his form of life. Rebanks does so as a local shepherd, but also as an expert in the economics of historic places, and as an advisor to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (just how he manages to become both is one of the many surprising delights of the book).

It is thus a view of one who has inherited and embraced the life into which he was born: 'My idea of this landscape is not from books, but from another source: it is an older idea, inherited from the people who came before me here.' In northern dialect, shepherds such as Rebanks (and especially their sheep) are referred to as 'hefted', that is, accustomed and attached to the physical contours and way of life in the fells.

In four sections roughly framed by the seasons of the year, Rebanks weaves his own story of being hefted together with the tale of a much larger cultural landscape and its history. Shepherding is physical work in every way. Its skills are learned on the job in relationship with earlier generations and, of course, with sheep. Rebanks recounts learning how to clip from his grandfather and father: 'I was awkward and clumsy... I had no stamina... [My father] was always faster and fitter than me. I felt like giving up, walking away. It is cruel work for men. I got tired and the sheep felt it and fought the process. But tough work knocks the silliness out of you when you grow up in places like ours.'

Much of the tough work of which Rebanks writes also clearly brings him a kind of pleasure. He describes evaluating sheep at auction, making careful distinctions that might appear overly subtle to outsiders, but might well save the buyer significant sums. Attention to details such as the teeth and mouths of ewes is critical: 'I was taught to do this by my father over many years, until he decided I was a good judge. Now he takes my word for it, and sits across the ring from where he can see the sheep and bid if he wants to. Because of their age, these ewes' mouths will be mature, but the art is to judge from the teeth whether they will last several years, or just a year or so. Our judgment of their value is in many ways an assessment of their age and durability largely based on their teeth.'

He highlights the intricate connections between communities, families, land, labour and flocks in order to depict the mud-spattered struggles and sunlit glory of his form of life.

First rule of shepherding: it's not about you, it's about the sheep and the land. Second rule: sometimes you can't win. Third rule: shut up, and go and do the work.

A similar kind of skilful judgment is required in selecting 'tups' (rams) who will mate with the ewes: 'There are dozens of little things I am looking for: practical things like the size, healthiness, alertness, mobility, legs, fleece and teeth. Without these, the sheep cannot live on the fells. But because sheep are cultural objects, almost like art, I'm looking for style and character as well, and finer breed points, like how white their ears are... I know exactly what the perfect Herdwick tup looks like because it struts around in my head. I measure all my real ones against it and know exactly how far short of it they fall, all too often.'

In spite of – or, more likely, as a result of – the constant work, exposure to weather and attention to detail, Rebanks revels in his labour and its links to the land: 'There is a kind of light-headedness that comes with spring. The whole valley echoes to the sound of ewes calling their lambs, and the older lambs start racing each other across the hillsides. Our work shifts from supervising lambing to looking after hundreds of young lambs and keeping them alive and out of trouble... I see frogspawn in the wet bits of land where I pass each morning. The heron folds down the wind heading downstream.'

At one point, Rebanks reflects: 'My job is simple: get around the fields and feed and shepherd the different flocks of ewes – dealing with any issues that arise. First rule of shepherding: it's not about you, it's about the sheep and the land. Second rule: sometimes you can't win. Third rule: shut up, and go and do the work.'

Those are confronting and compelling rules, for shepherds of many kinds. Shepherds of Christ's church, and not only Cumbrian sheep farmers, will benefit from and, I think, enjoy both of these books exemplifying hard work, historically rooted identities and inherited skills of evaluative judgement. There are glories that arise as a result of such labour.

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Production

Produced for Oak Hill by House Communications Ltd

Editing and design: Simon Jenkins
Print: Buckland Press

All comments on *Commentary* to: davidk@oakhill.ac.uk

Edition: December 2016

Images

Oak Hill faculty portrait images: Eleanor Bentall and Richard Hanson

p. 36: Ralph Hodgson

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