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Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God

J.I. Packer

InterVarsity Press (1961).

126 pages, paperback, \$7.99.

When the sovereignty of God in the saving of sinners is set forth to those who have previously had no exposure to it, almost without exception a deluge of questions begins. Among those most commonly asked are, "If all this is true, why be concerned about evangelism? What about the great commission? What about missions?"

It was to address questions such as these that J.I. Packer spoke at the Pre-Mission Conference of the London Inter-Faculty Christian Union on October 24, 1959. This original address was expanded and two years later made into a book titled *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*.

In the forward Packer sets forth his purpose:

It is a piece of biblical and theological reasoning, designed to clarify the relationship between three realities: God's sovereignty, man's responsibility, and the Christian's evangelistic duty (p.7).

Of these three, his major emphasis is on the latter, the Christian's evangelistic duty. Packer aims to put to rest the unbiblical thinking that belief in the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation will paralyze evangelism "by robbing one both of the motive to evangelize and of the message to evangelize with" (p.10). He in fact goes beyond this to show that faith in the sovereignty of God, so far from inhibiting evangelism, "is the only thing that can sustain it" and without it, "evangelism will inevitably be weak and lack staying power" (p.10). This Dr. Packer has done in his typical fashion.

Chapter one sets forth very simply the fact that God is sovereign. Packer contends that this truth is believed by all Christians by the very fact that they pray, especially regarding the conversion of sinners. Concerning God's sovereignty he writes, "On our feet we may have arguments about it, but on our knees we are all agreed" (p.17). This then becomes his starting point for chapter two: "Our aim in the present study is to think out the nature of the Christian's evangelistic task in the light of this agreed presupposition that God is sovereign in salvation" (p.18).

This might be one area where too much is presumed. Most people I have dealt with will gladly acknowledge and affirm God's sovereignty to a point. Yet, these very same ones will argue vehemently against God's sovereignty in the application of salvation. Although it was not his main purpose, some further development might have been given to chapter one for this purpose.

In chapter two Packer brings side by side the two biblical truths of sovereignty and responsibility. As he begins he clearly acknowledges that dealing with this subject is no easy assignment and there are pitfalls into which we can fall in either direction.

The reason for these difficulties arises because we are dealing with an antinomy, which Packer defines as "an appearance of contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable or necessary." What appears to us to be irreconcilable at the same time is set forth as the teaching of Holy Scripture.

This is where Christians often stumble, for "our minds dislike antinomies. We like to tie up everything into neat intellectual parcels, with all appearance of mystery dispelled and no loose ends hanging out" (p.25). The end result is that we move to either side and thus become unbalanced in our thinking and practice.

Packer gives some wise counsel in light of this antinomy:

What should we do, then, with an antinomy? Accept it for what it is, and learn to live with it. Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real; put down the semblance of contradiction to the deficiency of your own understanding; think of the two principles as, not rival alternatives, but, in some way that at present you do not grasp, complementary to each other (p.21).

Whether young in the Lord or a seasoned saint here is helpful wisdom to keep a healthy, biblical balance in this vital area. Certainly no progress can be made in truth unless one can come to this point. In so doing he will find himself in good company with the likes of the apostle Paul who confessed, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and His paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33).

Chapter three is titled "Evangelism." This makes up what is really the heart of the book in length and subject matter.

The first sub-section deals with a careful explanation of the essence of evangelism. A warning is first given against narrowly defining evangelism in terms of an effect produced, namely converts, as opposed to a message delivered. From here the apostle Paul is set forth as an example of one whose life exhibited the true essence of evangelism. In Paul we see: 1) one who was a commissioned representative of the Lord; 2) one whose primary task in evangelism was to teach the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ; 3) one whose ultimate aim in evangelism was to convert his hearers to faith in Christ. In summary he states:

Such was evangelism according to Paul: going out in love, as Christ's agent in the world, to teach sinners the truth of the gospel with a view to converting and saving them. If, therefore, we are engaging in this activity, in this spirit, and with this aim, we are evangelizing, irrespective of the particular means by which we are doing it (p.53).

The second sub-section deals with the nature of the message that we are called to communicate. Packer gives four essential ingredients that make up the gospel: God, sin, Christ, and a summons to faith and repentance.

Those concerned for evangelism that has a clear and biblical message will find these pages especially helpful. An example of this is found in his discussion about sin. He warns against a message which focuses upon sin in terms of one's failures and inadequacies to meet life's demands.

To preach sin means, not to make capital out of people's felt frailties (the brain washer's trick), but to measure their lives by the holy law of God. To be convicted of sin means, not just to feel that one is an all-round flop, but to realize that one has offended God, flouted His authority, and defied Him, and gone against Him, and put oneself in the wrong with Him (p.61).

If more careful attention were given to a clearer presentation of these essential ingredients of the gospel, there would no doubt be an end to much of the foolishness of present day evangelism.

The third section of this chapter deals with the motives for evangelizing. Our motives should be twofold. First our love for God. Herein is a means by which we can glorify Him and tell what great things He has done in saving sinners.

Second, our motive should be love for our neighbor. What greater way could love be expressed than a concern for his eternal soul?

If we ourselves have known anything of the love of Christ for us, and if our hearts have felt any measure of gratitude for the grace that has saved us from death and hell, then this attitude of compassion and care for our spiritually needy fellow-men ought to come naturally and spontaneously to us. It was in connection with aggressive evangelism that

Paul declared that "the love of Christ constraineth us" (p.76).

Here, as in many other places, Packer brings the truth to bear upon the reader's conscience.

The final section of this chapter discusses the means and methods by which evangelism is to be practiced. The only method of evangelism must be the faithful explanation and application of the gospel message. The means then must be subservient to the message:

The test for any proposed strategy, or technique, or style, of evangelistic action must be this: will it in fact serve the word? Is it calculated to be a means explaining the gospel truly and fully and applying it deeply and exactly? To the extent to which it is so calculated, it is lawful and right; to the extent to which it tends to overlay and obscure the realities of the message, and to blunt the edge of their application, it is ungodly and wrong (p.86).

In the final chapter the two themes of God's sovereignty and human responsibility in evangelism are brought together. Herein is set forth what effect these two lines of biblical truth have on one another.

Packer begins by demonstrating that God's sovereignty in grace does not affect the nature or duty of evangelism. Belief in God's sovereignty does not adversely affect the necessity or urgency for evangelism or the genuineness of the gospel invitations. The responsibility of the sinner for his response to the gospel is likewise unaffected by this truth. Each of these points is elaborated upon with biblical proof texts.

The second point developed in this chapter sets forth the encouraging effect that God's sovereignty has on the work of evangelism. Because salvation is a supernatural work of grace it is our only hope for success in evangelism.

Packer concludes this final chapter with the practical effects God's sovereignty should have in our evangelistic endeavors. Confidence in God's sovereignty should cause us to be bold, patient and prayerful in our evangelistic endeavors. Packer concludes with these words showing that when we begin to see the absolute sovereignty of God in saving sinners,

Not only does it undergird evangelism, and uphold the evangelist, by creating a hope of success that could not otherwise be entertained; it also teaches us to bind together preaching and prayer; and as it makes us bold and confident before men, so it makes us humble and importunate before God. Is not this as it should be? We would not wish to say that man cannot evangelize at all without coming to terms with this doctrine; but we venture to think that, other things being equal, he will be able to evangelize better for believing it (pp.125-26).

What makes this book especially attractive is that it is relatively short (126 pages); it is rather inexpensive; and although it is very theological it is, at the same time, very readable, Christians at all levels can easily profit from it. Finally, it is an excellent resource for Christian workers who want to help others think through some of the inevitable questions that arise as they grapple with the absolute sovereignty of God in the saving of sinners.

When I first read this book in my seminary days I found it to be very helpful. I have since referred to it numerous times in my pastoral ministry. With this, my second thorough reading, I was impressed with its general benefit. Even beyond the weighty theological issues dealt with there are many other benefits to be gained from it by all. Not only will first-time readers be profited by it, but those who may read it for the second or third time will have their

hearts enriched in new ways.

Kevin Landis
Cincinnati, Ohio

A Layman's Guide to the Lordship Controversy

Richard P. Belcher

Crowne Publications, P.O. Box 688, Southbridge, MA 01550 (1990).
106 pages, paperback, \$6.95.

Are you too busy to keep up with the current debate in American Christianity? Scores of Christian radio stations have dropped programs that stand on one side of this issue. Certain Christian conference centers have replaced the speakers they invite because of their views on this matter. Church boards have shifted their support from one ministry to another in response to this controversy. Likewise, many books have also been written on this very point of contention: the place of the Lordship of Christ in the salvation of sinners. Indeed, Christians should be concerned. For, as Richard Belcher has stated, "the nature of the gospel itself is at stake."

In this book, Belcher has simplified and defined this Lordship debate for busy pastors and laymen in the local church. This comes as no surprise, for he had also clarified and expounded the inerrancy issue in two of his earlier books in the 1980s. Because this debate affects the decisions they make and the ones that are made for them, Christians need a readable account such as this in order to understand the current theological shuffling and realignment in Christian ministries, organizations, and churches.

This short book clarifies the two sides of the Lordship issue into basic principles taken from two books that kicked

off the present controversy: John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* which teaches Lordship salvation, and Zane Hodges' *Absolutely Free* which defends nonlordship salvation. Each chapter ends with a summary of each side's principles for an easy comparison by the reader. In a short time, the reader will understand the key differences between the two schools of thought. Furthermore, these two positions are compared in the areas of theology and in their handling of Scripture. In the remaining chapters, Belcher critiques the theological straw men built on logical fallacies, the theological weaknesses, and the Scripture-twisting of the nonlordship position.

The structure of this work could hardly be improved. It is a well-written, fair, and gracious handling of a difficult issue. Nevertheless, this kind and fair approach does not prevent Belcher from clearly defending the historic Christian faith. Jesus is Lord, and His Person cannot be divided to make salvation more attractive to men and women who are still in love with their sins. Likewise, the author's fairness does not prevent his wit from surfacing at times, and this adds significantly to the flow of the book.

However, there is one warning regarding this work. It will whet your appetite to read the aforementioned book by John MacArthur—an excellent work on this important subject. The gospel is truly at stake. Make sure your gospel is the same as Christ's, Peter's, Paul's, and all those who have followed the Word of God for the last 2,000 years.

Ted Manby
Valois, NY

A Journey in Purity: A Theological Novel

Richard P. Belcher

Crowne Publications, P.O. Box 688, Southbridge, MA 01550 (1990).
215 pages, paperback, \$10.95

Church discipline: these words bring many different reactions to the average member of a local church. Dr. Belcher's novel cuts to the heart of the issue as the story of First Baptist Church of Colletown unfolds. Pastor Ira Pointer accepted the call to this church with deep concern that only 60 of the 1000 members were active. While he is faithfully teaching the obedient remnant, the sleeping giant of 900 inactive members awakens and tries to swallow both the pastor and the faithful members. Seventy of the inactive members form an opposition party with the ability to draw 300 other inactives to any business meeting. The struggle for survival is on.

This exciting novel is full of surprises with many twists and turns. Once I began reading it, it was one of the most difficult books to put down of any I have read. In the midst of his struggle, Pastor Pointer takes his deacons through an expositional study of a number of New Testament passages on church discipline. In reading this book you will not only enjoy an exciting story and become acquainted with the personal pain carried by all faithful pastors, but you will also be very familiar with biblical church discipline.

This is a book for everyone. Pastors and their wives will devour it and identify with the Pointer family. New Christians will enjoy it and learn some needed truths. Even older Christians who would be unwilling to read even a pamphlet on church discipline will read this work from cover to cover. Mature Christians will read it with tears of concern over the ruthless tactics of lost church members towards God's people and with tears of joy as they see God, in His sover-

eign grace, reach down and save sinners who are the least likely candidates to human eyes for grace.

With our local churches being filled with unregenerate and often hostile inactive members, this is a needed book for our undisciplined age. Our churches need to begin and/or continue on their journeys in purity. May God raise up a host of Pastor Pointers who will pay the price to follow the Scriptures in shepherding God's flock.

Ted Manby
Valois, NY

Words to Winners of Souls

Horatius Bonar
New York: Calvary Press,
P.O. Box 805, Amityville, NY 11701(1993).
Phone Orders: (800) 789-8175. Will be available, Fall, 1993.
100 pages, paperback, \$5.95.

Lead, follow, or get out of the way!" This well-known marketing slogan aptly summarizes the expectations placed on church leaders by a society increasingly caught in the grip of the "bigger is better" mentality. Every day's mail brings to us pastors another opportunity to learn techniques or implement technology designed to move our churches to the next level. But the question that begs an answer is this: Do the products of our modern society help or hinder the work of the gospel minister? Two books, written over 100 years apart, offer insightful commentary on the means and marks of successful ministry, as well as the life and responsibilities of the minister.

Horatius Bonar, a nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyte-

rian best know for his hymns ("What a Friend We Have in Jesus" and more than 600 others), wrote *Words to Winners of Souls* in 1866 upon his arrival to pastor Chalmers Memorial Church in Edinburgh. This small volume, long out of print, is now available from Calvary Press.

From the title, *Words to Winners of Souls* may at first be considered as for use only in an evangelism class. Actually, the title sums up Bonar's philosophy of pastoral ministry: the foundational activity in the life of the pastor is the salvation of the lost through the gospel. It is this burning concern that forms the backbone of the whole book, and especially the first chapter, "The Importance of a Living Ministry." Here he challenges those who call themselves ministers of the gospel to measure their ministry by their zeal for souls:

We take for granted that the object of the Christian ministry is to convert sinners and to edify the body of Christ. No faithful minister can possibly rest short of this. Applause, fame, popularity, honor, wealth—all these are vain. If souls are not won, if saints are not matured, our ministry itself is in vain (p.9).

Bonar in the same chapter stresses that the only mechanism capable of saving souls is the truth. In a section called "Meet Opinion with the Truth" he speaks as though a citizen of the 1990s:

Let us, then, meet this "earnestness" which is now the boast, but may ere long be the bane, of the age, with that which alone can bring down its feverish pulse, and soothe it into blessed calm, the gospel of the grace of God. All other things are but opiates, drugs, quackeries; this is the divine medicine; this is the sole, the speedy, the eternal cure. It is not by "opinion" that we are to meet "opinion"; it is the Truth of God that we are to wield; and applying the edge of the "sword of the Spirit" to the theories of man (which he proudly calls

his "opinions"), make him feel what a web of sophistry and folly he has been weaving for his own entanglement and ruin (p.11).

After having laid the foundation of the minister's message, the rest of this small book sets about to identify the essentials of the minister's life. The next three chapters were, for this reviewer, excruciating. When the life and heart of a modern minister is held up to the light of God's expectations through the insights of a gifted nineteenth-century pastor, the end result is humbling. However, Bonar is a surgeon, not a butcher. He not only knows how to cut, he knows how to anoint and bandage. He points most strongly to the hearts of ministers who have long ago been hardened against the needs of sinners. He castigates those whose heads are full of statistics but whose hearts are cold:

They can tell you the population of their parish, the number of their congregation, or the temporal condition of their flocks; but as to their spiritual state, how many have been awakened from the sleep of death, how many are followers of God as dear children, they can not pretend to say. . . . And yet they have sworn, before men and angels, to watch for their souls as they that must give account! But oh, of what use are sermons, sacraments, schools, if souls are left to perish; if living religion be lost sight of; if the Holy Spirit be not sought; if men are left to grow up and die unsplit, unproved for, unwarned! (p.20).

Perhaps the most helpful, and hurtful, chapter is the fourth, on "Ministerial Confession." In addition to a lengthy and searching list of ministerial transgressions drawn up by the Church of Scotland in 1651 (most of which I found intensely current!) Bonar adds 14 common areas of pastoral neglect. Especially helpful were the sections on the study of God's Word and prayer. Bonar forcefully reminds us that the equipment of eternity, not modernity, are the necessary

tools for transforming sinners into saints.

The final chapter, "Revival in the Ministry," is Bonar's challenge to the ministers of his day and ours. He correctly points out that those who pray for revival, and will be called upon to lead revival, must experience revival. Earlier in the book he quoted Baxter's plea for ministerial urgency:

O Lord, save us from the plague of infidelity and hardheartedness ourselves, or else how shall we be fit instruments of saving others from it? O, do that on our souls which Thou wouldst use us to do on the souls of others! (p.12)

In this final chapter, he expands on the necessity of "preaching as dying men to dying men." He singles out unbelief as the worm which shrivels the core of the minister, and speaks dramatically against it:

It is unbelief that makes ministers so cold in their preaching, so slothful in visiting, and so remiss in all their sacred duties. It is unbelief that chills the life and straitens (*sic*) the heart. It is unbelief that makes ministers handle eternal realities with such irreverence. It is unbelief that makes them ascend with so light a step "that awful place the pulpit," to deal with immortal beings about heaven and hell.

In *Words to Winners of Souls* Horatius Bonar calls the minister back to the gospel, back to preaching with a broken heart, and back to a radical concentration on personal holiness and diligence. This booklet will lift you up, knock you down, and pick you up again renewed to stay in the race. It is so full of hard hitting truth that I found myself underlining something from every paragraph. Take my advice: buy two copies. Bonar's work here deserves to be worn out through frequent use.

David W. Hegg
Corona, CA

Selling Jesus: What's Wrong with Marketing the Church?

Douglas D. Webster

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press (1992).

165 pages, paperback, \$9.99.

“What’s wrong with marketing the church?” According to Douglas Webster, a Presbyterian pastor in Colorado, almost everything. This book stands as a rebuttal to George Barna’s *Marketing the Church* and presents a forceful, yet fair, assessment of the central tenets of the church growth movement.

Webster’s central thesis is that the church growth movement has erroneously distinguished between confession and commitment. Confession, to Webster, is the task of the church to uphold the truth about Christ and, in so doing, stand against the culture. Commitment is seen as the church’s responsibility to live out its confession in a manner which impacts the world for the kingdom. The problem arises when confession seems to hamper the activities of commitment, when the truth alienates rather than attracts unbelievers to the church. Those who seek to market the church have made the conscious choice to prefer commitment over confession, and according to Webster, this has left them with a relevant image, but not a relevant message.

But Webster is quick to agree that the complexities of modern society resent special challenges to the church. He admits that the purpose of the book is to answer the question:

How do we present Christ to a consumer-oriented, sex-crazed, self-preoccupied, success-focused, technologically sophisticated, lighthearted, entertainment-centered culture? How do we strategically present the Savior’s message, as

Jesus did with the disciples, distinguishing between popular opinion and Spirit-led confession? And how does the confessional church, as a community of Christian disciples, engage the world? (p. 21).

Webster does not make us wait long to get the answer, at least in seed form:

I wonder whether our quest for relevance needs to be in greater tension with faithfulness. Perhaps our preaching of the gospel has become too smooth, too predictable. We have tried so hard to package it for easy consumption that it no longer sounds like Jesus. We have become so practical that we no longer have anything to practice (p. 23).

Webster begins with a thorough discussion of the concept of marketing the church. In chapter 2 he quotes Barna and others in an attempt to identify just what they are advocating when they suggest that the church must learn to modify its processes and package its product in the same way as the corporate world. This chapter is quite objective and fair, and it sets the stage for the arguments of the following chapters.

In his chapter on “The Traditional Church” Webster unravels the fabric of much of modern church life to expose its shallowness and inability to carry out the mission of the church. He concludes that the “traditional church is insensitive, unintelligible, impractical, inflexible, and ingrown” (p. 42). He quotes other well-known church growth advocates and agrees with their assessment of the modern church. The primary problem is that the traditional church “has lost its vision for growth and outreach” (p. 42). The church is plagued by “paradigm paralysis,” the “we’ve-always-done-it-this-way” attitude which strangles churches and keeps them from making any meaningful impact on society. Yet, most churches continue to find contentment in

playing church, rather than taking radical steps to be the church.

But unlike those he opposes, Webster does not find solutions in the realm of corporate marketing, or technology. Rather, he sees this as dangerous:

We do not want to excuse the traditional church from a true test of its spiritual character, but neither do we want to transform the church into something the world finds impressive, like the Vatican or the Crystal Cathedral. Judging from the apostolic tradition, the church was never meant to compete with IBM or Disney World on the world's terms, but on God's terms. The church that tries to impress the world falls into the temptation of trying to prove its identity by changing stones into bread. It bows before a secular standard and forfeits its true character (p. 53).

Webster presents a different model, taken from the book of Hebrews. He states that "Hebrews corrects the problem of the traditional church with a strong theological appeal to refocus life in Jesus Christ" (p. 54). He contrasts this with the view of the church marketers whose "prescription for a church stuck in the past and muddling through the present is not spiritual renewal involving forgiveness, prayer, and a deeper insight into the Word of God, but a practical sociological transformation" (p. 54).

In chapters 4 and 5, Webster takes aim at the two key concepts in minds of church marketers: targeting an audience, and meeting their needs. The chapter on targeting an audience is perhaps the best in the book, for it deals with the root of the church growth system. Against the idea that success for the church comes only to the extent that it can define its market and modify its product, Webster brings opposing arguments founded on the inherent dangers of consumerism. He quotes from secular social scientists who conclude that the underlying problem with Western society

is its preoccupation with consumption. Given this, Webster argues that the church, instead of helping people out of the bondage of a consumerist mindset, may actually be contributing to the problem by treating people as religious consumers.

A second problem with audience targeting is that the target audience then shapes the mood and method of the market-driven church, "calling for consumer sensitivity, practical relational teaching, and an optimistic belief in the future" (p. 66). This leads Webster to ask two very penetrating questions:

A critical question for the market-sensitive church is whether insight into the mind and culture of the baby boomer generation leads to a prophetic penetration of this market niche with the gospel or promotes a culturally compatible affirmation of the culture. Does the gospel of a market-driven church redeem the lost or reinforce trends, deliver from sin or affirm the self, reconcile people to God or appeal to religious consumers? (p. 66.)

Webster answers the questions by pointing to the prophets and their ministry in which they "resisted the religious powers' accommodation efforts to reassure people that their greedy consumption, entertaining worship and striving for success met with God's approval."

Webster's final salvo at the concept of a target audience is that it destroys the biblical mission of the church. "Discovering your market niche to be the upwardly mobile, success-driven, child-centered baby boomer may not require focusing on a target audience as much as ignoring the church's mission" (p. 69). He contrasts this with Jesus' activity while on earth.

It is difficult to imagine Jesus responding favorably to market segmentation, for He refused to categorize people. Jesus was the best example the church has ever had of how

to contextualize the gospel; that is to say, He maximized the impact of the gospel on a person's life without compromising the integrity of the gospel. Jesus proved that discerning how best to present the gospel was different from defining a target audience. His evangelistic effectiveness was tied to sensitivity, not segmentation.

Webster's arguments go to the heart of the issue. Is the church called upon to define those to whom it will minister? Market research and audience targeting may be acceptable in the corporate world. But then again, they do not have the promised presence of the Holy Spirit and the regenerating power of the gospel. Webster has correctly pointed out that the "whosoever" of the gospel appeal has been left behind in favor of the growth techniques of church marketers.

The second aspect of church marketing strategy, the meeting of felt needs, is ably critiqued in chapters 5 and 6. Using discussion and ample documentation, Webster makes three points: 1) The challenge for the church marketers is not felt needs, but to define man's real needs. 2) In spite of the revealing perspective of church marketers, felt needs may be a barrier rather than a bridge to meeting spiritual needs. 3) The basic needs of man can only be met by the powerful proclamation of the gospel. As an illustration, Webster offers the teaching of Jesus on the Bread of Life (John 6):

The needs that Jesus met never trivialized the gospel. . . . He persisted in using their felt need as a "bridge" to a great truth. "Do not work for the food that perishes," He said, "but for the food that endures to eternal life. . . ." Judging from the negative feedback Jesus received, His insistence on proclamation was not an effective marketing strategy (pp. 100, 105).

The case for sensitivity to the hearer is a strong one, and the case against religious jargon, pedantic and doctrinaire

sermons, and history lessons in the pulpit is a necessary corrective. But an uncritical acceptance of an "accessibility strategy" can dilute the truth rather than develop the truth in penetrating ways. Jesus took up the challenge to provoke the minds and penetrate the hearts of a reluctant and distracted audience, not through a performance but through the proclamation of the Word of God (p. 107).

Webster closes out his critique with a chapter relating to the pressures which the "success strategy" of church marketers puts on pastors. He aptly describes the "Fortune 500" pastor who conforms beautifully to the needs of the church marketers, but may, in reality, be the undoing of the church. This chapter is a must for any pastor considering taking the market-driven approach.

The last chapter, along with a very useful appendix, gives Webster's view of the church as God designed it. He sounds the call for a return to spiritual direction and discernment, which he defines as "a discipline of faithfulness" (p. 139). Here he summarizes his whole argument:

Holy ambition discerns the difference between targeting a market niche and discovering Christ's mission for the church. It distinguishes between consumer-oriented felt needs and deep-seated spiritual needs. Holy zeal knows the difference between corporate excellence and the beauty of holiness. It warns against a pastor-centered church and favors a ministry-centered church. It resists the temptation to substitute attractive peripherals for penetrating fundamentals. Spiritual maturity knows that "when misdirected zeal replaces holy ambition, we embark on a long obedience in the wrong direction" (p. 141).

Throughout the book I kept feeling that something was missing. And on the second to last page I found it. In dealing with Psalm 127 and its insistence that man's work is peripheral while God's is central, Webster finally uncovers the central deficiency with the market-driven theory:

I agree with Lesslie Newbigin's observation: there is an "underlying Pelagianism which lays too much stress on our own activities and is too little controlled by the sense of the greatness and majesty and sufficiency of God" (p. 12).

This deserves more space and fanfare. The central problem with most of the church growth movement is that it is Pelagian in its view of both man and salvation. It must be clearly stated that the church growth theories are not merely some new management theory or growth strategy. They undermine our message because they are derived from a substandard soteriology. They begin with a man-centered gospel, build a man-centered church, and then try to convince unbelievers to put their trust in God. It comes as no surprise, then, when national pollsters report that 72 percent of Americans claim to have had a "born-again" experience, while the news is full of the decline of America's morals and value system. Perhaps the church marketers should begin paying more attention to quality control, and less to sales. Their product is dangerous, because their theology is defective.

Douglas Webster has done a great service to the church, and to pastors in particular. He has fairly set out the places where church growth advocates have had clear vision in their view of the church. But he has also correctly pointed out their blind spots, where their zeal has carried them beyond the bounds of the biblical mission of the church.

David W. Hegg
Corona, CA

God Centered Evangelism

R.B. Kuiper

Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust (1961).

216 pages, paperback, \$7.95.

While much has been written in recent years on the proper focus of evangelism, few books have surpassed R. B. Kuiper's for thoroughness. First published in 1961, and now reprinted again in a nice edition from Banner of Truth, this publication still addresses powerfully one of the most relevant theological issues haunting the modern church: the *proper focus* for our evangelism.

Kuiper contends that evangelism today is almost entirely centered on man and his response rather than on God and His plan, purpose and methods for bringing lost men and women to Himself. Kuiper writes in the introduction:

Sad to say, much of present-day evangelism is man-centered. Far too often the limelight is turned full upon the evangelist—his personality, his eloquence, his ability as an organizer, the hardships he has endured, the number of his converts, in some instances the number of miracles of healing allegedly performed by him. At other times attention is focused on those who are being evangelized—their large numbers, their sorry plight. . . . And how often the welfare of man, whether temporal or eternal, is made the sole end of evangelism!

In this process, Kuiper contends, we have lost sight of the theology of evangelism. We have minimized God's role in salvation and evangelism and thus developed approaches that honor man rather than God.

Kuiper's book is most impressive in that it is quite comprehensive. It deals with nearly every important theological truth that can be properly related to evangelism. In

19 short chapters, he examines God's love, the covenant, the election of grace and the great commission. He discusses evangelism's scope, its urgency, motive, means and message. He includes chapters on zeal for evangelism, resistance to evangelism, and the ultimate triumph of a sovereign God in the work of evangelism.

Each chapter provides not only sound theological insight but many practical ideas for those who wish to return to the practice of God-centered evangelism. For example, in the chapter "God's Sovereign Election and Evangelism," Kuiper reminds us that the "sovereignty of God may not be construed so as to rule out the responsibility of man." It is our responsibility to share the good news; it is the responsibility of the lost to repent. Election does not eliminate these human responsibilities. Using the example of how Paul and Silas responded to the question of the Philippian jailer, Kuiper notes, "They did not advise him to seek to discover whether he might be numbered among the elect; they commanded him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31)."

In his chapter "God and the Method of Evangelism," Kuiper places priority on a personal approach to evangelism over mass evangelism. However, he wisely observes that it is not necessary to advocate personal evangelism to the exclusion of mass evangelism. In fact, he suggests that mass evangelism ought to be encouraged because: 1) it was used in the New Testament, 2) it enables us to bring the gospel to as many as we can as quickly as possible, and 3) it often opens the door for personal evangelism.

For those in the Reformed tradition, one of the most exciting chapters will be "God and Zeal for Evangelism." Here Kuiper demonstrates that the charge of "complete indifference" to evangelism and missions often leveled against the Reformers overlooks many facts. The Reformers were deeply concerned for and zealous with regard to

evangelism and missions. While their focus was primarily "home missions," they conducted some of the earliest ventures to foreign shores with the gospel. Indeed, even John Calvin himself wrote: "God has created the entire world that it should be the theater of His glory by the spread of His gospel." As early as 1555, Calvin and Admiral Coligny organized a mission, sending eight missionaries to Brazil. Others followed his example beginning missions to Lapland, Moslem Turkey, the East Indies, Ceylon, India and to the North American Indians. All of this occurred long before William Carey left for India in 1793!

Kuiper's book provides an excellent apology for a God-centered approach to evangelism. Few other books compare with its breadth. None supply such rich insight combined with unusual clarity and simplicity. Best of all, in these days of "man-centered evangelism," *God Centered Evangelism* leads us back to a theological basis for the work of evangelism.

Jim Ehrhard
North Little Rock, AR

Tell the Truth

Will Metzger
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press (1981).
187 pages, paperback, \$9.95.

I've yet to find a more practical book on the work of personal evangelism. Best of all, those of us who believe doctrine must always precede and give birth to methodology find Metzger's book a refreshing change from modern books on this and related subjects. In *Tell the Truth*, Will Metzger, an InterVarsity staff member for many years, begins by identifying an incomplete theology that leads to an impotent witness, and drives us back to a biblical foun-

dation for God-honoring evangelism.

Using specific illustration, Metzger proposes three points essential for biblical evangelism. First, the gospel that we must share is a whole gospel, a gospel that has largely been overlooked by much of modern evangelicalism. For example, witnessing should always start, says Metzger, not with grace but with law. A person must see, and see clearly, the holiness and sovereignty of God. He must also comprehend his own hopeless, depraved condition. Only when he has grasped these truths can he effectively see any need for the "good news" of the Redeemer's person and work.

Biblical repentance, that mindset turnaround that leads to a behavioral turnaround, has all but vanished from modern evangelical presentations, observes Metzger, although it was historically as primary a message as faith, as it was to Christ, John the Baptist, and the New Testament writers. When the Spirit of God breathes new life into the spirit of man through regeneration, He always gives him a heart that turns *from* sin (repentance) and turns *to* Christ (faith).

Second, he with whom we share the gospel must hear and respond to it with his whole person—mind, will, and emotion. Many are "professing Christ without possessing Christ." Some have had a deeply emotional experience or follow after an attractive or pleasing gospel, whether it be based upon truth or not. Others have been taught faith is merely mental assent to the facts of Christ's death and resurrection, discarding the need for a genuine and action-producing love for Christ and others. Still others come to Christ, choosing Him as their Savior from God's wrath but rejecting Him as Lord, unwilling to surrender their will—they may have a desire to go to heaven (who wouldn't?) but no desire to do the will of God from the heart. Metzger correctly assesses this by showing that no such dichotomy exists for any true believer and that much of our modern

evangelistic teaching often leads people to only a partial faith response to Christ.

Instead, we must preach the gospel as truth, truth aimed at the human mind. We must present God's thoughts, and expect God to open the understanding of the person we are seeking to win to faith. To the heart, we must present the gospel as truth in love, not manipulating a person's emotions nor suppressing them, but allowing his emotions to respond to the truth. And to the will, we present the gospel as an appeal for men to come to Christ, not as Savior alone but also as Lord.

Lastly, the gospel must be shared by us, "whole people," through our witness and character, in a manner that is pleasing to God and effective with men. In our evangelizing our motives and attitudes must be biblical to ensure that our methods are biblical as well.

For example, we must fear God and not man, recognizing the gospel has always offended when presented correctly, but to those who are "appointed unto salvation," it is welcomed as truth. Prayer must be seen as the most important evangelical "tool," for without God's drawing men, all else that we do is in vain. And glorifying God must be the driving motivation behind all we do, the prime objective of our evangelism, else we may find ourselves working against the purposes of God with a man-centered approach.

With the attitudes in place, we must then communicate to others the truth of the whole gospel effectively. Metzger has provided throughout illustration after illustration, chart after chart, worksheet after worksheet, as practical aids to help "flesh out the truth."

One such aid is the idea of "conversation turning," turning any conversation begun spontaneously toward the truths of the gospel. A Christian thought-world, says Metzger, should not be "compartmentalized," separating the gospel from other ideas. Rather we should always be relating

religious ideas that crop up in everyday conversation, as well as translating theological truths into practical realities, using our own lives to illustrate.

Tell the Truth bills itself as “a training manual on the message and methods of God-centered witnessing,” and indeed it proves itself to be just that—a much-needed contribution to the discussion and practice of evangelism today.

Bill Izard

North Little Rock, AR

A Vision for Missions

Tom Wells

Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth (1985).

157 pages, paperback, \$6.95.

“It will kill your passion for souls!” This was one of the objections I heard from pastors and professors when I initially came to embrace the soteriology of the Reformed faith. To be sure there are versions of Calvinism (so-called) that do just that. Thankfully, Spurgeon’s sermons and the “experimental Calvinism” of Banner of Truth authors, both deceased and living, steered me clear of those rocky shoals. I well remember reading at the time of my ordination to the Christian ministry the Banner paperback *Five Pioneer Missionaries*. How thrilling it was to read of Brainerd, Burns, Eliot, Martyn and Paton, all men who loved the glorious doctrines of grace and had a driving zeal to reach souls around the world with the gospel of God’s grace.

Pastor Tom Wells is the kind of author that the Banner of Truth hoped would emerge. His missions offering, *A Vision for Missions*, is an excellent choice for most who want to

begin to relate sound doctrine to missionary zeal and activity. His doctrine is straight, alive and understandable to twentieth-century Christians. It is not filled with snake stories, but has plenty of anecdotes which press truth upon the reader’s heart. It is not a history of missions, per se, but offers succinct summaries of historic mission developments. It is motivational in the best way. It informs the mind and moves the heart with the matchless theme of the glory of God. Its purpose is not first and foremost to turn your eyes to the “fields that are white unto harvest,” but to the sovereign God who indeed is the Lord of the harvest.

The preface clearly states the book’s two theses. First: “God is worthy to be known and proclaimed for who He is, and that fact is an important part of the missionary motive and message.” That is not the usual starting point for missions in our time. The second thesis is likewise uncommon in our day. “Those who know the most about God are the most responsible and best equipped to tell of Him.” If that sounds like too much doctrine for a book on missions, you’re wrong. A biblical balance gives full weight to both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Pastor Wells sets them forth in plain language and demonstrates their practicality, yea necessity!

If you want answers for the world’s problems, then you must come to know the God who is Lord of all. There may be occasions when the pitiful plight of the world’s billions captures your attention, but if you want a passion that isn’t fleeting, you must learn to think God’s thoughts. The Christianity of western civilization has become incredibly soft. Many evangelical authors refuse to acknowledge God’s absolute sovereignty. Some don’t even care that they press the matter of human responsibility too far. In his own patient way, this seasoned pastor/writer rewards the reader with an understanding of selected attributes of God. He does so without losing sight of his objective. Mission his-

tory, anecdotes, quotations and hymns are woven throughout the 157 pages of this little book. (A helpful addition would be a brief annotated bibliography, guiding readers to standard mission titles for in-depth study or expanded reading.)

There are introductory works that deal with God's sovereignty, attributes, even the themes of evangelism and sovereignty. They should not be passed over in favor of *A Vision for Missions*. By the same token, though, if you have read A.W. Pink and J.I. Packer, don't conclude that you can afford to skip Tom Wells. Many fail to make practical connection between these great truths and missions. Many more will be bolstered in their conclusions with the supporting evidence that the author brings forward. What did William Carey, David Brainerd and Henry Martyn believe about God? Read *A Vision for Missions*. What course of Bible study will produce, under God's blessing, modern day counterparts? Indeed, have you renounced "the utilitarian God?" Read *A Vision for Missions*. Give this book to every missionary you know. And every mission executive. And don't overlook the pastors and mission committee members either. It's an antidote to so much bad theology and a tonic to what is true but often anemic in the hearts of those who believe.

David Straub
Carlisle, PA