THE ROMANISTS and Anglo-Catholics believe that Evangelicals have a
scholarly works written by Evangelicals concerning the way to help troubled
professed. Moreover, they can point to the fact that there are few, if any,
ception of the Christian life. The result of our '"brand' of Christianity
great weakness. Whereas this is not an entirely true picture of the situation,
care. Whereas this is not an entirely true picture of the situation,
the converts will progress satisfactorily and with little difficulty, Catho­
by our actions, or lack of action, we imply that we underestimate the forces
is a shallow Christian experience which apparently requires so little pastoral
more than a grain of truth in it. In fact it clearly outlines one of our greatest
weaknesses as Evangelicals - our failure to work out our theological position

The Puritan Pastor

The equipment of the Puritan pastor, as for all pastors, was his knowledge
of God and his understanding of divine action in human life. His textbook
was the Bible, from which he learned in three different ways. Firstly, in
the systematic study of it which gave him his theological system. There were
numerous systematic treatises available, such as are found in the works of Owen,
Charnock on 'The Attributes of God', the works of the Reformers. In
fact, Baxter gives a most formidable list in his Directory under his advice
for 'The Poor Student's Library'. Secondly, the Puritans possessed an
extremely detailed knowledge of biblical characters, especially those from
the Old Testament; from these they learned how God dealt and still deals
with man: e.g. Sibbe's four sermons on 'The Tender Heart', 'The Art of
Self-humbling', 'The Art of Mourning', 'The Saint's Refreshing' were
based upon the experience of King Josiah (2 Ch. xxxiv. 26-28). Thirdly,
there was the knowledge of the Scriptures which comes from its personal
devotional study and application. These great pastors knew sin and its subtleties
because they knew it within themselves. Often they felt that their insight into
the things of the Spirit comes from their own experience of the Holy Spirit
using the 'sword of the Spirit' upon themselves.

The second great branch of his knowledge was derived from the treatises
on all manner of topics related to the Christian life and experience. There
were many experienced shepherds from whom one could learn. Think of a
generation which included Owen, Baxter, Preston, Goodwin, Sibbe, Mantion,
Perrins and Ames! These were shining lights by which enquiring men could
be enlightened. It is evident from the writings of the Puritans that they
were exceedingly well-read. In the above-mentioned section of The Directory,
Baxter advised the student to obtain 'As many affectionate practical English
writers as you can get, especially Mr. Richard Allen's works, Mr. Camm, Mr.
and others like these, to which we find added a further fifty authors. Thus Baxter wrote
in the Reformed Pastor: 'It is common with us to be negligent in our studies
... and some have no delight in their studies but take only now and then
an hour, as an unwelcome task which they are forced to undergo and are
glad when they are from under the yoke. Will neither the natural desire
of knowing, nor the consciousness of our great ignorance and weakness,
not the sense of the weight of our ministerial work, will none of all this
keep us closer to our studies and make us more painful in seeking after
the Truth?: It is in this spirit that the Puritan pastor equipped himself
under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for his ordained task of dealing
with the souls of men.

The occasions

There are three ways or occasions when the pastor exercised this part of his
ministry.

a. The normal expository preaching of the Word of God, during which
he deals with problems and questions which he knew were in the minds of the
people. These addresses were often published and made available to a
larger public. Good examples of this type of preaching may be found in the recently published work of William Gurnall’s *The Christian in Complete Armour* (The Banner of Truth Trust).

b. Addresses delivered to the local congregation answering questions raised by them; e.g. Owen’s ‘Cases of Conscience Resolved; Delivered in Some Short Discourses at Church Meetings’.

c. Personal interviews in the study or at the homes of his flock. The sub-title of Baxter’s *Reformed Pastor* will in itself substantiate this point: it is ‘The Nature of the Pastoral Work; especially in Private Instruction and Catechising’.

*His Method*

The Puritan pastor divided troubled souls into three different categories. The unconverted who were troubled about their sins. The Christian troubled by a particular sin, due to lack of assurance, a period of darkness, or the root of sin abiding in us will, upon advantage, work unto all sorts of evil. Mortification of sin is a continual duty, that we ought to be exercised in all our days (Col. iii. 3). A particular sin does not gain a special stronghold without having special advantages. Owen mentions two advantages in particular: (a) The inclination of constitution, i.e. by nature some people are more passionate than others, others more worldly, others wrathful, etc. But, he adds, ‘To plead the inclination need to get the tenuration of their sins, when indeed it is an hallucination of the devil’. ‘This I say as my judgment, that if grace does not cure constitution sins, it hath cured none’. (b) Outward occasions.

Owen’s method is to investigate the enquirer’s condition, some constructive explanation and subsequent guidance, direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It seems to me that in section b of his answer, Owen has given some of the positive signs of a Christian fighting against sin. It could well be a summary of Romans vii and viii. There is a soul conscious of the power of sin in his life, earnestly seeking deliverance, and displaying the spirit advocated in Hebrews xii. 4. Similar records of experiences can be found in the Psalms. No doubt both in this section and in section c Owen is drawing from not only his knowledge of the Scripture but from personal experience either his own or otherwise. In fact section c displays the marks of a backslider.

In this brief treatment of a troubled soul, Owen has dealt with the spiritual problem analytically, like a physician examining a patient. First he has reviewed the normal functioning of the member in question, then he has examined his patient for signs of this normal functioning and finally he has ascertained whether there are signs of disease resulting in malformation or atrophy. The physicians of our bodies may follow a similar practice of Medicine. It should be obvious that the physician of souls must also acquire, through disciplined study, the knowledge of the plan of salvation and its application in human life, i.e. systematic theology and its pastoral application. If a man maintains his warfare and his conflict with it constantly, Owen says, ‘You need not repent’ - without a patient and, if necessary, painstaking analysis of the enquirer’s condition, some constructive explanation and subsequent directives to enable them to live to the glory of God. The Rev. H. M. Carpenter points out: ‘This section deals with the last issue: All our theologians should be pastors and all our pastors theologians.’ I would add that all pastors must be theologians, whether theologians are pastors or not.

Finally, the Puritans have pointed out the way, and it remains for us to apply our common biblical theological foundation to living in our generation as they did in their day. Baxter exhorts ministers in these words: ‘O Brethren do you not shrink and tremble under the sense of all this work!’ Will a common measure of holy skill and ability of prudence and other qualifications serve for such a task? I know not. ‘Every man must take the Church to the wise, but wee to us if we tolerate and indulge our own weakness. Doth not reason and conscience tell you that, if you dare venture on so high a work as this you should spare no pains to be fitted for it. If it is not now and then, it is not now and then. ‘O Brethren, lose no time: study and pray, and confer and practise. For by these four ways your abilities must be increased.’ Surely this must be our answer to the Confessional and its place in the life of the Church of God.

Illogan Rectory, Cornwall.

J. GWYN-THOMAS, B.A.