

# Objections

I shall consider the objections under two main headings – pragmatic and scriptural.

## *Pragmatic objections*

‘This is all very well, but the traditional, the institutional, is ingrained. It is going to be well-nigh impossible to shift’. I agree. I have said as much. What is more, it takes two to tango. An individual believer – maybe a stated preacher or teacher – might be persuaded that change is needed, but it is hard to set up a meeting for spiritual interaction if nobody else wants to interact. Nevertheless, if enough believers keep pressing the point, under God’s Spirit change can come. We must keep sowing the seed! True it is that 1800 years of Christendom have to be unlearned, and that will prove a mammoth task, but let us do what we can. The widow gave only two mites, and the lad only his picnic lunch (Matt. 12:42; John 6:9), so let us do what we can, and see what Christ may make of it.

‘Encouraging an all-body ministry is risky; it means opting for chaos’. Let me say at once that I sympathise with this objection. I am afraid there are too many cases where this has proved only too sadly true. But that is because the pendulum has been swung too far. The alternative – the biblical alternative – to rigid institutionalism is not chaos. Both extremes are unbiblical.

What I have set out, I agree, may be risky. It is. Yes, but life is always ‘risky’. But this is not the same as chaos. The *ekklēsia*, when functioning according to new-covenant principles, is not chaotic. It has liberty, certainly, but liberty is not licence.<sup>1</sup> The *ekklēsia*, according to the New Testament, is to be managed by elders under the direction of

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Liberty*.

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the Spirit of God. This, it goes without saying, needs great care, skill and wisdom. To encourage spiritual activity without descending into chaos and pride is not the easiest of tasks. It is far, far easier to manage silence constrained and confined by an institution. What is more, the new covenant speaks of freedom within a structure in the *ekklēsia*, where things are done ‘decently and in order’:

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up... For God is not a God of confusion but of peace... All things should be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:26,33,40).

After all, the *ekklēsia* is a body. It would be a fearful thing to see the members of the physical body acting independently, randomly, chaotically. All must be under the governance of the head. So it is with the *ekklēsia*. The members have liberty, but liberty under that governance of Christ exercised by his Spirit through elders with an open Bible, ruled by Scripture. And the believers must exercise their ministry with due regard and respect for all the others. An abundance of passages speak of it:

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour (Rom. 12:10).

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:15-21).

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility

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count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus... (Phil. 2:1-5).

And so on.

‘This is all very well, but the old, tried way – used for centuries, and by so many great men – can’t be wrong. It has worked’. I have two things to say in reply.

Take the last. If the monologue system really does work, whyever are you still reading my book? You must have disagreed with the opening paragraphs. More important, are you sure that the institutional system works? I, and an increasing number of others, are not. I have tried to argue my corner on this. But there is an even bigger point.

And that is, neither tradition or pragmatism is the touchstone for believers, however hoary the tradition, however seemingly successful it might be, however many great and good men have adopted it. Scripture is the benchmark (Isa. 8:20; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 3:15-16).<sup>2</sup> And I assert that Scripture does not warrant the monologue to a passive audience as the great teaching organ in the *ekklēsia*.

### ***Objections from Scripture***

Take that key passage, Ephesians 4:11-16. Not all agree with what I set out with regard to these verses. Not all? Very few, I am afraid. Especially is this so among ‘ministers’ themselves! Paul, apparently, in Ephesians 4:12, is not talking about ‘the ordinary, average members’, but ‘those, and those only, who hold ministerial offices’, and, furthermore, the New Testament generally uses ‘ministry’ in this way. So we are told by Lloyd-Jones. I am quoting him verbatim. In a few moments I will give extended extracts.

With respect, the facts just do not support Lloyd-Jones’ assertion. And this is putting it kindly. He was very wide of the mark. Paul states the position precisely: Christ gives

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<sup>2</sup> For more along this line, see Appendix 4.

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stated ‘pastors-and-teachers’ to carry out their work. And that work is ‘the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry’ (Eph. 4:11-12, NKJV). It is ‘the saints’ – all the saints – who are to be equipped ‘for the work of the ministry’. Moreover, Lloyd-Jones was guilty, as many others, of imposing a formal structure on the word ‘ministry’. He was making the mistake of reading back into the New Testament the disastrous principles dreamed up, and foisted on the churches, by the Fathers; in short, Christendom.

As Richard Hanson said: ‘All have been long accustomed to reading their own structures of ministry [back] into the earliest period of Christianity’. We all do it. It is wrong. We should, at the very least, be aware of it. Of course, having become aware of it, we should correct it. Otherwise we end up, like Lloyd-Jones here, losing the new-covenant concept of ‘ministry’ and the *ekklēsia*, confirming, in a self-fulfilling way, our preconceptions, and turning ‘ministry’ into a formal office, and concreting the church into its Christendom institution. And being set in concrete is not the best starting point for the exercise of a living ministry.

The new covenant is far more spontaneous than this Christendom approach. Allowing for the extraordinary, and without in any way sanctioning the Corinthian excesses, glance at 1 Corinthians 14. Hanson again: ‘The Christians of the earliest age were able, in a manner which we find difficult to understand, and more difficult to recapture, to reconcile and combine freedom and authority, spontaneity and consent’.<sup>3</sup> Quite! It would help if we used ‘service’ instead of ‘ministry’ for the vast majority of the New

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Hanson: *The Christian Priesthood Examined*, Lutterworth Press, Guildford, 1979, pp18-19.

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Testament.<sup>4</sup> Certainly we must eliminate this hushed-breath mentality when speaking about THE MINISTRY!<sup>5</sup>

But, as I said, with regard to that seminal passage clustering around Ephesians 4:12, Lloyd-Jones – in effect – distinguished between the clergy and the laity. He did not agree with the obvious, central point; namely, that Christ gives gifts to his church so that – in order that – the church may serve itself, minister to itself. Lloyd-Jones:

Some argue that it means ‘for the doing of service’, that our Lord has set all these offices in the church in order that we may all be rendered fit or ‘furnished out for’ the doing of our service, whatever that service may be. Some contend that it means that the apostle is saying that all these offices are designed to enable us as members of the body to serve one another. But it seems to me that this is quite untenable as an exposition.

I pause. Quite the contrary! It is precisely what the apostle *is* saying! Lloyd-Jones pressed on. Although, he grudgingly conceded, ‘there is a sense in which this is true’, Paul:

...is not thinking of the ordinary, average members of the church... He is emphasising that the Lord has appointed a form and order of ministry in the... church. That is the entire context; and he includes those, and only those, who hold ministerial offices. Indeed, in the New Testament this word for ‘ministry’ is generally used in that sense and connotation.

With respect, Lloyd-Jones was quite wrong. The context *does* favour the view that Paul was speaking of the ministry of the entire church; he was not speaking of ‘the ministerial office’. Lloyd-Jones had left the word of God at this point and adopted the error of the Fathers. The New Testament

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<sup>4</sup> See my earlier note on the use of ‘ecclesiastical words’ in the AV or KJV.

<sup>5</sup> But, and the point must not be missed, if ‘ministry’ is insisted upon, then all the saints are ‘ministers’. As they are – in the new-covenant sense.

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does not ‘generally’ talk about ‘ministry’ in terms of ‘the ministerial office’. Ministry means service.

Let me state the obvious. If Lloyd-Jones was right, then Paul would have been arguing in a circle, a very tight circle, at that. The job of ‘the minister’, apparently, is to preach a monologue sermon in order to reinforce ‘the ministry’; that is, ‘the pastor’ is to preach to reinforce the pastorate; to put it bluntly, the clergy are to preach to the laity to buttress the clergy. Really? This can only mean that ‘the pastor’ is to preach in order to make his congregation more dependent on him, and to get them to hold him in even greater awe. A vicious circle indeed!

Lloyd-Jones went on to emphasise his – the common, the misconceived – idea of ‘ministers’, reading it into the passage, by saying Christ ‘has ordained and appointed them... “ministers” of the church’ to do ‘what ministers do in the church Sunday by Sunday’; in other words, Christendom with a vengeance!

Lloyd-Jones wanted to leave no one in any doubt. He drove home the point:

Let no one think that this subject is only appropriate for a theological seminary or for a gathering of ministers, and that it has nothing to do with members of the church who are not called into the ministerial office. This matter is important for all church members, for this good reason, that far too often the pew has controlled the pulpit, and great harm has come in the church... So it is important that every member of the church should have a true conception of the church and the office of the ministry in particular.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, Lloyd-Jones wanted believers to know his Christendom doctrine, and be persuaded of it, so that ‘the minister’ could be confirmed in his unbiblical position, and the congregation kept in theirs.

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<sup>6</sup> D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16. Christian Unity*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980, pp199-201.

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Of course the pew can control the pulpit by under-estimating the man in the pulpit, yes, *but it can also do it by over-estimating him*. A glance at my *The Pastor: Does He Exist?* will soon show how often men (Calvin, Spurgeon, among others) have argued for pre-eminence and presidency, and then complained when their hearers and readers actually believe what they have been told, and show a love of pre-eminence and presidency in their pastor! Not a few pastors like it, too!

In fact, there is a broader point. As Rick Peterson said in a sermon:

Learning theology has but one purpose and that is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Theology does not exist to build systems or provide a curriculum for seminaries. Theology equips [every believer for] ministry [that is, service] to go out and minister as Jesus did.

Theology, of course, has a vertical – man to God – aspect, but Peterson was thinking of the horizontal, the mutual, ministry among believers, their ‘one-another’ ministry. In this, he was right. The teacher is to teach so that all the saints – every one of them – are better equipped and stimulated to teach.

As for Ephesians 4, A.W.Tozer got far closer to the apostle’s teaching on the vital passage than Lloyd-Jones:

Jesus Christ... gave special gifts ‘for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ’ (Eph. 4:12). Did you notice that we have purposely eliminated the commas? God did not put the commas in this passage – the translators did! The commas make the passage read as though there are three separate results of these gifts in the body of Christ. The work of the ministry which the saints are to do will bring about the edifying of the body of Christ – and this is not just in reference to the ordained ministry as we know it. It is the ministry of all Christians to have some share in the building up of the body of Christ until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a

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perfect man with a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Tozer later went on:

A careful study of the apostle's teachings concerning Jesus Christ and his church should persuade us that any local assembly ought to demonstrate all of the functions of the whole body. Paul clearly teaches that each... believer ought to demonstrate a proper gift or gifts, bestowed by God the Holy Spirit, and that together the believers would accomplish the work of God as a team [better, scripturally, a body – DG]... The... church is the body of Christ, with Christ himself the head of the body. Every true Christian, no matter where he lives, is a part of that body, and the Holy Spirit is to the church what our own soul is to our physical body... Every human body is thus an apt illustration of the spiritual life and functions of the church... [that is,] members designed and created for the distinct functions under the control of the head, Jesus Christ... In the illustration of the physical body, the members [the eye... the ear... the hand... the lungs... the heart...] are all designed for specific functions... These are all designed to cooperate and act and serve in concert with each other. So it is to be in the body of Christ... According to Paul, the whole body exists for its members, and the members exist for the whole body. And that of course is the reason God gives gifts, that the body may profit spiritually and maintain spiritual health and prosperity in its service for Jesus Christ in an unfriendly world.<sup>8</sup>

Taking up this biblical point about the *ekklēsia* being a body: the Christendom church – if it can properly be called ‘a body’ – nearly always has only two organs. It has one member who is the mouth or voice, while all the other members are the ear (or are supposed to be). What a grotesque monstrosity!

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<sup>7</sup> A.W.Tozer: *Tragedy in The Church: The Missing Gifts*, Christian Publications, Harrisburg, 1978, pp10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Tozer pp22-24.



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Tozer pressed on, speaking of the vital interest all this ought to have for every believer. It must not be relegated (I use the word advisedly) to ‘the ministers’ fraternal’. Tozer:

It is just as plain in Bible teaching that the church, the body of Christ, must get its life and control and direction from its living head, Jesus Christ our Lord! Every Christian, then, should be vitally concerned and personally interested in what the Bible tells us about the functions of the members. These functions – called gifts in the Bible – are special abilities; they are gifts from God out of the store of his grace... Paul... makes it plain that all believers in the church [have] been given ‘gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us’ [Rom. 12:6].<sup>9</sup>

Tozer issued a challenge:

Do you dare to accept the fact that the sovereign God had designed to do all[?] his work through spiritually gifted men and women?... He does all of his work on earth through the humble and faithful believers who are given spiritual gifts and abilities beyond their own capacities... [In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul] went on at great length to explain the necessity for the functioning of the gifts of the Spirit in the church – and... he was explaining that these spiritual functions and capabilities are the birthright of every Christian.<sup>10</sup>

Not that every believer has every gift, of course. But every believer – the weakest and the strongest, both male and female, whether young or old, newly-converted or a mature disciple – is gifted by the Spirit to play a full part in this mutual ministry, and this gift includes a measure of teaching ability.

R.Paul Stevens went one better than Tozer:

The first duty of the preacher-pastor is to equip the whole church to preach. This is part of the building up of the body of Christ so that believers will no longer be ‘infants’ (Eph. 4:11-14). Leaders do this by equipping the people of God to

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<sup>9</sup> Tozer p24.

<sup>10</sup> Tozer pp29,35.

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be able to open God's word, and to hear God speak *for themselves*... Who could have designed a system, as has surely happened, by which people can hear two sermons a Sunday for the whole of their lives, and [yet] not be able to open up the Bible to others publicly?

I would add the words 'and in most cases, not even privately; not even for themselves'. Stevens went on to ask:

What does this mean for the ministry of the people of God under the new covenant? *First*, every believer is called and equipped by God to bear witness to the gospel, and to bring God's word to the world. A person does not need the 'gift' of preaching to be a witness. *Second*, the prophet-hood of all believers means that each Christian should be ready to bring God's word 'in season' (when prepared and expected) and 'out of season' (when the opportunity comes unexpectedly and inconveniently, 2 Timothy 4:2). Not only the apostles, but all Christians, are Christ's ambassadors – 'God... making his appeal through us' (2 Cor. 5:20).<sup>11</sup>

Excellent! Speaking of every believer, the apostle was categorical:

Our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

This glorious declaration must not be limited to the apostles and their day. Nor must it be limited to 'ministers' today – unless the word is used biblically, as the new covenant does; namely, as applying to each and every believer.<sup>12</sup>

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God has made each one of us competent 'ministers of [the] new covenant'. So, I urge you, by the Spirit, exercise your ministry. It will profit others, but it will profit you. And God will be glorified!

And that takes us to the final chapter.

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<sup>11</sup> R.Paul Stevens: *The Other Six Days...*, William B.Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2000. This was previously published, in 1999, under: *The Abolition of the Laity*, pp169-172, emphasis his.

<sup>12</sup> See my *Glorious*.