

Candour

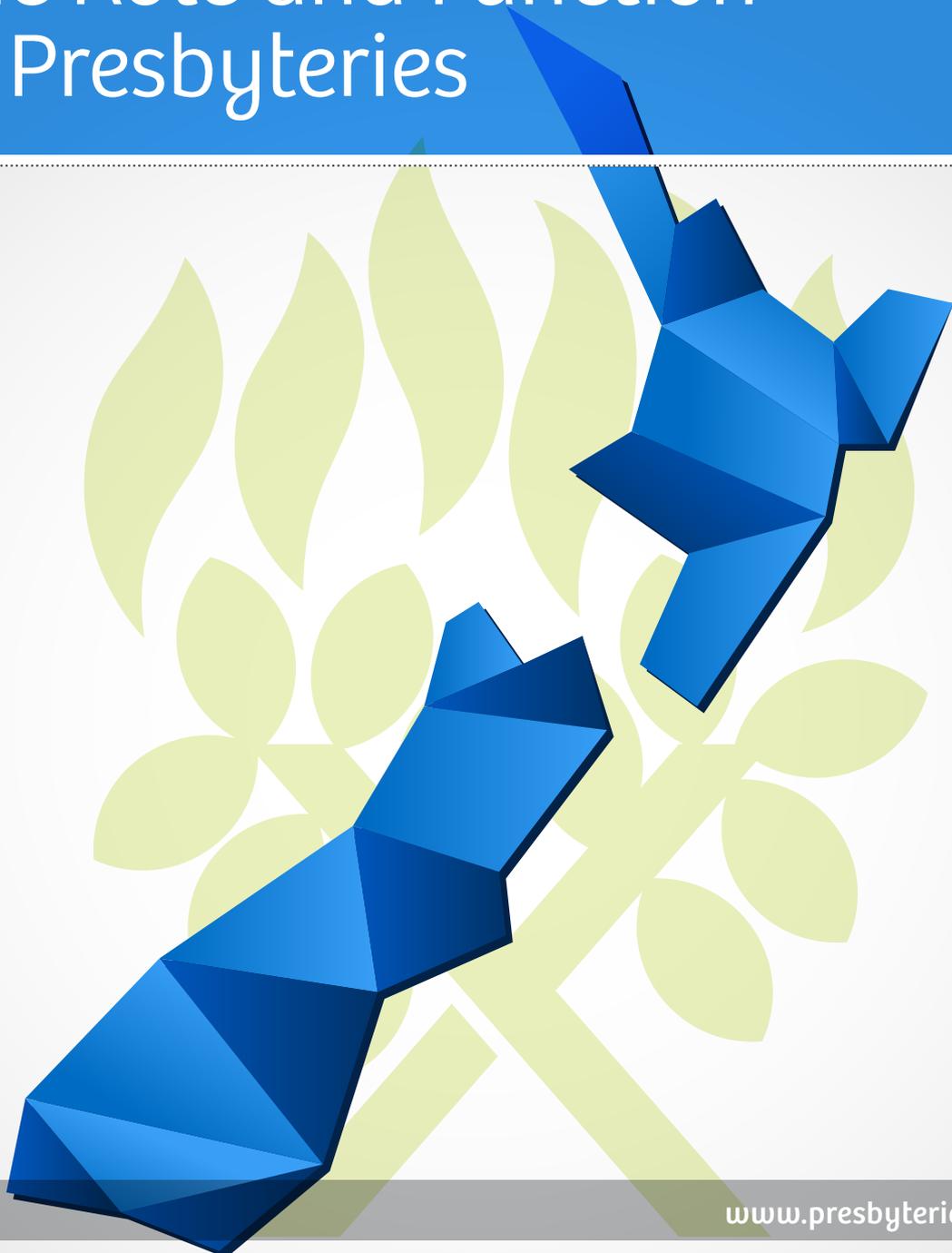


Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

NEWS AND VIEWS FOR MINISTERS

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The Role and Function of Presbyteries



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We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:

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Collegiality

Ray Coster, Moderator Presbyterian Church Aotearoa New Zealand

This will be my final article to you as Moderator. It has been an absolute joy and delight to have walked these past two years with you, meeting so many people at presbytery gatherings, chaplaincy settings, parishes and a few who serve in the “marketplace”. It was one of my goals when I set out two years ago to have at least one hour with every minister over a cup of coffee – simply to show my support and appreciation for the part you play in the life of the Presbyterian Church. I regret that I have not achieved that goal and I do apologise to those that I have not had some one-on-one time with. Suffice to say that I hold all of you who have dedicated your lives to serve the gospel in the highest honour. Thank you for all that you do.

This *Candour* is on the role and function of presbyteries. It has been my delight to have been involved in the inauguration of four of the new Presbyteries: Kaimai (before I was Moderator), Central, Pacific Islands and Alpine and I have attended gatherings of the other presbyteries. There are many positive aspects of the new presbytery model and some things that still need to be worked on to reach the ideal we have for our church.

As a Church I believe that trust, or rather lack of trust in each other, is holding us back in our mission.

One of the issues that I believe we need to concentrate on together is our collegiality. The sense of collegiality in ministry has always been one of the strengths of the Presbyterian Church in times past. Central to our collegiality is our presbytery. Spending time with each other – ministers and elders together – is crucial for our well-being as a Church.

I recently spent time attending a function in the Great Hall at Parliament. A long-serving politician reflected that this room once had eight pool tables and that some of the best political discussion took place in that context. Today there are no pool tables and most politicians spend their time in their rooms looking at a computer screen. The importance of collegiality is more than friendship and time – it leads to good decisions and determines the culture of the organisation.

As most of our new presbyteries only meet twice a year, I believe that we are losing some of the collegiality we once enjoyed. This is especially a concern for the collegiality between ministers and elders. The intent was that our cluster groups would ensure this collegiality continued. My experience is that in many parts of the country these groups have yet to reach their potential. As our sense of collegiality lessens, so does our commitment to each other in presbyteries. And this is not unique to the Presbyterian Church. As I have spent time with fellow moderators from the Uniting Church of Australia I have heard them lament the lack of commitment of some of their ministers towards presbytery meetings. We will build strong presbyteries when we all commit to making them strong and work for the good of all.

As a Church I believe that trust, or rather lack of trust in each other is holding us back in our mission. As much as I wish it were otherwise my experience is that some still want to put people in boxes of their choosing. For example, when speaking of colleagues some ministers will ask me things like, “Is he liberal?” or “Is she evangelical?” Our sense of collegiality must rise above our

differences. I am always very conscious that in the early Church people living with a resurrection mind-set understood that it is not “sinful” to hold different viewpoints or understanding about aspects of our Christian faith, but it is wrong to fall out of fellowship with other followers of Jesus.

A number of years ago a youth pastor shared with me his perception of our Church: “The biggest problem of Presbyterians is that they work well together, but they don’t play well together”. Collegiality is learning to play well together as well as working well together. It’s very hard to criticise someone when we have spent time with them in prayer, shared a coffee, played a game of golf, had them for a meal in our home... or any other number of ways of building a deep sense of collegiality. Then we begin to see the heart and depth in the other, rather than focus on a viewpoint that we may disagree on.

It is not “sinful” to hold different viewpoints... about aspects of our Christian faith, but it is wrong to fall out of fellowship with other followers of Jesus.

Collegiality is all about growing in understanding, appreciation and respect for the other. My prayer for our Church is that we as ministers and elders – as colleagues – will enhance and develop further our sense of collegiality – for the sake of the Lord of our Church who prayed “that they may be one as we are one... May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me”.

In my final article I also want to record my deep appreciation to Bob Eyles for the fantastic ministry he has as editor of *Candour*. Much appreciation Bob, from all your colleagues.



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Presbyteries in Reformed and Presbyterian Churches

John Roxborough, Southern Presbytery

In Reformed and Presbyterian churches the presbytery is the governing body between congregations and synods or general assemblies. Typically comprising equal numbers of ministers and elders from each congregation, they are presided over by an elected moderator. Ordained ministers in other roles (theological education, social services, church administration or retired) are also members, and equality in the numbers of ministers and elders is maintained by the appointment of additional elders.

It may seem strange to remember that in New Zealand, elders pushed for the development of presbyteries because they wanted to be able to participate in the running of their Church. Where the culture of the eldership is stronger than that of ordained ministers the tone of presbytery business can be noticeably more relaxed and its processing less of a minefield. Our church is congregational as well as Presbyterian and both traditions have always been closely related. Congregationalists also had forums which overarched individual congregations – especially for mission as the London Missionary Society now the Council for World Mission illustrates.

Elders pushed for the development of Presbyteries because they wanted to be able to participate in the running of their Church.

Presbyteries have powers to select, licence, ordain and discipline ministers and to visit parishes. They implement national policies, deal with disputes and seek to resolve conflict. They debate issues referred by general assemblies and may overture assemblies on issues of policy or discipline. They provide a voice for lay leadership. They may raise funds and employ staff. Their rituals transmit and modify narratives of faith, process and identity. They can be energising sources for mission. Like any participatory forum, they can also be arenas for party politics, personalities and conflict.

In Roman Catholicism, a presbytery is a residence for priests or religious, and part of the sanctuary reserved to priests. For us “Womens’ presbyterials” were meetings held at the same time as presbytery.

Presbyteries as regional courts of Reformed and Presbyterian churches originated in 16th century Switzerland, France and Scotland as a product of both political circumstance as well as theological principle. Unlike Scotland, Reformed churches in Hungary retained bishops.

Presbyteries have nurtured participatory democracy and believe it or not, have been threats to political powers. A Presbyterian theology of the Church has often been defined by concern for freedom of religion.

Recently there has been a tendency to reduce the number of courts between congregations and general assembly and for ethnic synods to develop similar powers to geographical presbyteries. In America and New Zealand presbyteries have become more like synods allowing for more efficient pooling of resources to handle administration. The multicultural nature of the Church raises issues about whose culture of decision-making should be followed and what provision is needed for minorities.

There are parallels between the experience of presbytery and the development of democracy, as well as the pitfalls involved in seeking to develop these structures in other cultures. Missionary presbyteries have been empowering of local Christian leadership, and sometimes of women, but they have not been spared the politics of control by local or expatriate forces or the sense of their being, at times, unnatural constructs.

Early presbyteries developed most clearly where convictions about the “priesthood of all believers” combined with a vision for a biblically based Christian community embracing the whole of society (like Israel in the Old Testament) which lacked the alternative of a “godly prince” to implement their vision. Reformers gaining power faced huge questions surrounding finance, leadership, education, and lifestyle and not just theology.

In Scotland the *First Book of Discipline* of 1560 provided for General Assemblies and weekly “exercises” in biblical theology. Presbyteries evolved in the 1570s from general sessions of elders and ministers operating across several congregations and as an alternative to episcopacy as bishops got entangled in politics. Support for presbytery became synonymous with the rejection of bishops, which also meant that presbyteries took over their roles. In 1581 the Scottish General Assembly decided to establish model presbyteries and the records of the Presbytery of Stirling created on 8 August 1581 still exist. The Form of Presbyterian Church Government drawn up by the Westminster Assembly and adopted by the Scottish General Assembly in 1645 is still a classic description, but in every generation we actually have to work out what is most appropriate for the church and society of our time.

Author’s Note: This is adapted from John Roxborough “Presbyteries” in G T Kurian, ed., ‘The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization’, Oxford, Blackwell, 2011.

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3. Parish and presbytery approval has been obtained for the study, where appropriate.

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Under normal circumstances, grants do not exceed one-third of the study costs involved and may be held in conjunction with other scholarships and grants other than the Postgraduate Scholarship. Grants are not made retrospectively and relate only to costs to be incurred by the scholarship holder themselves.

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How do I apply?

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Enquiries to: The Registrar,
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Knox College, Arden Street Opoho, Dunedin.
EM: registrar@knoxcentre.ac.nz **PH:** 03 473 0783

**Closing date for the next round of applications:
30th September 2014**

Presbyteries Today! Challenges and Questions?

Kevin Ward, Southern Presbytery

I come to this question of the role of presbyteries as someone who is not steeped in the Presbyterian tradition. My adult life until coming to Knox 12 years ago was spent in the context of Baptist churches, except for three years when I found refuge in the local Presbyterian church after resigning from Baptist ministry. However I was never involved enough to learn much about how it related to the wider Presbyterian Church, my assumption being that things by and large were determined locally, as they were in the Baptist context. The next 13 years were spent with the Bible College of New Zealand, an interdenominational context which gave me some more understanding and appreciation. I mention this to give an awareness of the perspective I bring on the role of presbyteries.

In my doctoral research, which looked at how New Zealand churches adapted to the rapid changes impacting on them in and since the 1960s, one of the conclusions I came to is that churches like the Baptists did better because they were able to adapt more rapidly as they could make decisions locally.

Churches like the Presbyterians and Anglicans were handicapped, sometimes because they were hamstrung by regulations that prevented them from taking the action they wished to, or on other occasions when they had to wait to get permission from other bodies.

Collegiality, support and networking is the heart of what Presbyterianism is about.

That research ended in 2000 and since then conditions have become much more challenging for churches, so much so that they are often beyond what a local church or parish can deal with on its own.

By the time I came to Knox and became involved with the Presbyterian Church in 2003, I gradually appreciated its presbytery structure as a significant benefit, particularly since the Baptists had almost completely stripped away the limited connectional life they did have. Many would point out that the Presbyterian Church has engaged on a similar journey, and there is truth in that. This is all part of what sociologists have called “creeping congregationalism” (we are all Baptists now?) which has affected all church polities in the western world. I would still argue that one of the greatest strengths the Presbyterian Church has to help it adapt to our very challenging and complex context is our presbytery structure. However, I would suggest, that the way it is operating currently is not serving us well.

There are three aspects I would like to focus on:

1. The first is the loss of the collegiality and support that the smaller presbyteries used to provide. For me coming in from a Baptist context – and I know for many others who came in from similar contexts – this is one of the elements I valued the most. You were not out there battling all the issues on your own, feeling overwhelmed. Since the larger presbyteries have been established this has largely vanished, and many of our ministers, especially those in more rural and scattered contexts, feel isolated with no one to share the journey and challenges with.

I am not arguing that the larger presbyteries were not a necessary change. Clearly they were in the interests of efficiency, good management and polity, especially when some presbyteries had only one or two ordained ministers. However these issues have been dealt with by an executive, rather than the regular gathering of the presbytery, which has meant that many ministers do not meet regularly with other ministers and elders outside of their own local context.

Many, like me, found the business part of presbytery a chore, however we attended because it kept us connected with our colleagues in ministry. Often networking opportunities that events provide are more important than the event itself. One of our interns who went into a rural parish found in doing some research on its history, that in a previous era the thing that ministers enjoyed the most about presbytery meetings was the train trip there and back. Collegiality, support and networking is the heart of what Presbyterianism is about and this has been largely lost. I know many would argue ministers should organise themselves and in Dunedin, monthly resourcing mission events have been held. However, these do not seem to provide the widespread regular gatherings that the older presbyteries did. We cannot go back to what once was, but I believe it is essential to find other ways of providing collegiality and mutual support.

One of the greatest strengths the Presbyterian church has... is our Presbytery structure.

2. We are handicapped by a lack of resources to provide what parishes need from presbyteries. When on his first visit, Alan Roxburgh was asked to reflect on what he observed about the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand, he said one of the major challenges was that we were trying to run presbyteries with volunteers. At one of our recent block courses a number of interns felt presbyteries should be doing more to support ministers in their parishes. I raised the question of who in the presbytery should be doing more. "It is mainly busy ministers" I said, "like you will be next year, trying to squeeze something more in to their overworked schedules". As the number of ordained ministers in full-time ministry continues to decline, this will become an even greater challenge.

We need skilled people with the time and ability to work with many of our parishes who will simply fade away if they just continue doing what they are doing now. Such people need to serve on commissions and do parish and ministry reviews that actually lead to some worthwhile changes and outcomes, rather than just meeting a regulatory requirement. But time equals money, and most parishes are reluctant to let their minister spend too much time on wider church responsibilities without some money coming in to allow them to employ someone else to take up the slack. Others who are not full-time, or lay people who have many good skills, are often trying to put together an income with several different bits of work, and need to get some financial return for what they do. So the priority is to do what pays the bills. So most of our presbyteries have very few people who do the work of presbytery as part of their employment.

I mentioned the Baptists as having largely dismantled the connectional structures they had; this was part of my alienation that led to my looking elsewhere for a church home. I have recently had considerably more involvement with the Baptist Church by speaking at some leaders' seminars. I have found they have redeveloped connectional structures in new ways. The Northern Baptist Association, for example, has six employees – a mission leader, an administrator, two children and family ministry coaches and two youth ministry regional

consultants – all of whom have teams working with them. So my argument here is that until we put more resources (that is money which creates people resources) into the life of the presbyteries, they will not be able to serve our parishes in the ways many so desperately need.

3. Finally I do not believe that our inherited system of interim moderators is working well. Many of our parishes are either marginal in terms of being able to sustain ministry, let alone engage in mission, and many others are well into the final stages of dying if they continue as they are. Such parishes need people with skills to help them transition: some into living out their life and mission in new and different ways that will lead to renewal; others to move into relationships, partnerships and mergers with other parishes; others to be brought to a graceful end. Instead they end up with interim moderators. Many of these are retired ministers (and having just become eligible for that I need to tread carefully here!) who do not really have the knowledge or skills, or often even the energy, to assist them in this difficult process. The other option is busy ministers who only have the time to do the job minimally rather than attend to those complex issues. So instead they both simply manage what is happening, ensuring that what has been done continues, and the parish continues to drift down the slope towards its end.

Some other church traditions have put resources into training and developing transition ministers. One way forward for the Presbyterian Church may be to see interim moderating in these kind of parishes (as opposed to those where an interim moderator is required until a new minister is found) as a particular ministry for which people who seem to have the right skills and aptitudes could be trained. Preaching and the way worship is led are also critical components in helping churches transition, and so the ability to do this would need to be part of the role. I should point out at this stage (before a flurry of letters or emails are directed at me) that I am not against using retired ministers per se. Some would be excellent in situations where change and transition is needed, but in many cases they do need to participate in training and resourcing to help develop skills and insights that would facilitate the process.

We were trying to run Presbyteries
by volunteers.

Finally I hope that this piece does provoke discussion rather than mere reaction. I have tried to put down on paper, still in raw form, some thoughts that have been growing over the past couple of years, as I have observed and in some cases engaged with the difficult situation many of our churches are in. I hope the discussion is one which might lead to better options than those I have suggested, rather than reaction which simply wants to maintain the status quo, which I fear will simply hasten and reinforce the decline we have been experiencing.

Forming/Shaping a Mega-Presbytery

Steve Jourdain and Gene Lawrence, Presbytery Central

[Steve] didn't offer to lead the transition team, or accept the subsequent Central Presbytery convener's role for our new mega-presbytery because I thought it was the best thing since sliced bread! I accepted that General Assembly had agreed to this re-structuring and I wanted to get involved to help make this change as well as we could.

The presbytery's primary function is to facilitate and resource the life, worship, spiritual nurture and mission of the congregations for which it has responsibility. (BOO 8.3) The initiative for presbytery reform is the desire to be more effective and innovative in facilitating and resourcing congregational life and mission within our region.

Presbytery Central was inaugurated in May 2013. The participating presbyteries are Gisborne-Hawke's Bay, Manawatu-Wanganui, Taranaki and Wairarapa and are committed to working together under a Memorandum of Understanding. Wellington Presbytery had been part of the initial conversations but declined to join together in May 2013. Earlier this year they voted "in principle" to join us.

Our structure is built around a coordinating team, regional moderators, task groups, Central Gatherings and clusters. The coordinating team is led by a convener rather than a moderator and comprises an elected representative from each contributing presbytery, four permanent task group conveners, plus the administrator. The regional moderators are dedicated to pastoral care and ceremonial roles within their regions and do not have any role in business matters or leading meetings.

This focusing of the regional moderators' roles on the pastoral care of ministers and conducting ordinations, inductions, celebrations and closures, met with ready approval and some willing volunteers. The administrator has been employed for 20 hours per week and the convener for 10 hours per week.

As with most change there have been difficulties, many of which stem from the reduced decision-making responsibilities at the regional level on matters of "management". Helping people understand that any regional decision-making needs to move towards the more vital governance role of ensuring a "mission-focussed" approach is taking time. Understandably there is still some resistance to a smaller team of people making the "business" decisions.

Regions now need to establish clusters to continue relationships and networking. This is proving elusive for many as it appears it was most often the "business" of Presbytery that drew people together. Now new missional and fellowship reasons for meeting need to be identified, requiring that people become proactive. In the busy-ness of life this can be difficult. Developing clusters around common interests, either locally or presbytery-wide, or between a number of parishes for mutual support and learning, is our next major challenge.

Communication is another challenge across such a vast area. The establishment of a website, email lists and a weekly e-newsletter from the administrator to presbytery members, have all helped to keep one another informed about people movements, activities and other news.

Congregations may be finding the change both positive and frustrating. The new decision-making processes (predominantly electronic) mean that there is no need to wait for presbytery meetings for decisions to be made or ratified. A downside to this is that the decision-making process is based less on relationship and more on "law" (read Book of Order and Church Property Trustees Policy). Questions of mission will challenge congregational thinking especially in regards to building projects.

Full presbytery meetings within Presbytery Central are in the form of Central Gatherings, held twice per year. These gatherings are for local church leaders and people and are designed to be primarily resourcing and relational, not business oriented. These have been very well appreciated and attended, with a very good representation across the parishes of our presbytery.

Being an official meeting of Central Presbytery means presbytery commissioners are required to attend. So far, no business matters have been decided at any of the four gatherings to date. The main business item discussed so far was about the presbytery employing a youth ministry resourcing person. This was an information meeting to be followed up by regional meetings within the former presbyteries.

These Saturday gatherings have been preceded by a Ministers' gathering on the Friday afternoon which have been a mixture of missional and ministry input, collegial time and engaging with national staff and other out-of-presbytery leaders who have come to participate in the Saturday gathering. I am glad to say that these Ministers' Gatherings have been very well attended and appreciated.

Throughout the presbytery, congregations have been taking calculated risks to engage in mission to their local community. This may be in the form of upgrading buildings so that church premises are able to provide a greater array of ministries and facilities. A few congregations have risked putting funds into a youth or children's/family worker, choosing to invest in people for God's mission. Congregations taking risks are finding that although change does bring with it a certain amount of conflict it also brings some very heart-warming surprises and new life.

And perhaps this is the message in a time of continuous change: God seeks a people of faith, risk stretches our faith in God and each other, and we are pleasantly surprised when we find God works through our deliberate risk-taking for his mission.

Presbytery Reform – the 'Southern' Experience

Anne Thomson, Southern Presbytery

As a brand new first-time-ever presbytery member six years ago, I was asked to be on the task group discussing the reform of presbyteries south of the Waitaki. At our first meeting two metaphors informed our understanding of what we were being asked to do.

The first came from Southland: reform of presbyteries as *tailing* – “You cut off the lamb's tail in one go rather than repeating the pain by cutting it off a bit at a time”. From the very first meeting it was clear that this was a process to be undertaken once, rather than bit by bit – if the aim was a single presbytery south of the Waitaki, we would go straight for that.

The second metaphor was illuminating. A *standard lamp* had been bought which required some self-assembly – but there were no assembly instructions. So thought was given as to how the lamp should look and function, and then it was assembled in a way that achieved that. So, with the reform of presbyteries, the components – the functions and responsibilities of a presbytery – were in front of us. Now was the opportunity to put them together in a way that achieved the best outcome for our situation. What happened in the south did not have to look exactly like what happened elsewhere – it needed to work for us.

What was put in place for the Southern Presbytery was a presbytery council drawn from the “old” presbyteries, to deal with the business and governance issues. A series of workgroups provided input and expertise (property and finance, ministry, students and licentiates, parish reviews), and resource groups were created based largely on the geographic lines of the old presbyteries.

The Southern Presbytery has just met for its fifth annual meeting. There was a good deal of enthusiasm and excitement as we came together – people were glad to be together, to renew old friendships and to meet new people, to get a sense again of who we were together, as part of the church of God in the south.

Business occupied part of the morning, but was largely pro forma, since the presbytery council seems to be working effectively and efficiently. The rest of the meeting was opportunity for input and discussion, in small groups and as a whole, on listening (see Lynne Baab's new book *The Power of Listening*), on fossil fuel divestment and on the way the Southern Presbytery was working, five years on.

One great advantage we have in the Southern Presbytery is that we are already used to working together across the region because we are all part of the Synod of Otago and Southland. The functions of Synod and Presbytery are different, but the connections are the same, and so, although each group meets only annually, many of the people come together twice a year, at each annual meeting.

The task group looking at the reform of presbyteries was clear that what we put forward was a first draft, a work-in-progress, which would need adjusting as it began to work. For example, providing interim moderators, nominators and MSBs across our Presbytery in timely fashion is a challenge.

You cut off the lamb's tail in one go rather than repeating the pain by cutting it off a bit at a time.

One of the losses of the reform process is also one of its gains. There are those who lament the loss of debate and decision-making in our meetings, both in the resource group meetings and in the Presbytery annual meeting. We have yet to find an effective way for the whole presbytery to have input into the discussion that needs to inform the decision-making of the presbytery council, or to consider special legislative proposals (overtures) coming through the Presbytery to General Assembly. And there is a question of loss of connection with and ownership of decisions made without input.

For many others, however, moving away from debate is a good thing. A greater challenge is how to move into mission (which was one of the main drivers of the reform process). How much can mission be "top-down", led from the top, and how much does it need to be grassroots? But how can we share and expand the grassroots mission initiatives, to provide encouragement and support and collaboration?

The general feeling at the fifth annual meeting of the Southern Presbytery was, I think, that this is working - not perfectly, but working. The challenge will be to be truly reformed – always to be reforming – so that our Presbytery can move more effectively into mission.

A Presbyterian take on Episcopacy

Graham Redding, Southern Presbytery

What is the primary function of a presbytery? Section 8.3 of the *Book of Order* describes it in terms of facilitating and resourcing the life, worship, spiritual nurture and mission of the congregations for which it has responsibility.

Noticeably absent from the above description are references to: (1) the function of governance, or oversight; and (2) the presbytery as a court of the Church.

It could be argued that these things are implied rather than stated – for example, the *Book of Order* says that “a presbytery may exercise executive, judicial and administrative functions” (8.2(1)), and that, in performing its functions, a presbytery “may exercise its authority” over its constituent churches and in relation to any matter committed to its charge by the General Assembly (8.2(2)). However, the word “may” seems to suggest that these things are occasional and optional rather than integral to the role of presbytery.

One suspects that the governance role, including that of being a court of the Church, has been deliberately downplayed so as to avoid portraying the presbytery in authoritarian terms, and to avoid weakening the primary emphasis on facilitating and resourcing the life and mission of congregations.

How do we understand the episcopal function today, and what structures and processes are best able to fulfil that function.

There is something to be said, however, for giving renewed emphasis to the governance role of presbytery. Why? Mainly because of the Greek word *episkopos*, meaning “overseer”. The word appears just a handful of times in the New Testament. In the likes of Acts 20:28 and Titus 1:7 it is used in close connection with the word *presbuteros* (“presbyter”, usually translated as “elder”), and seems to suggest that: (a) for the Apostle Paul the words *episkopos* and *presbuteros* were used interchangeably, and as synonyms for church leaders; and (b) a key part of the New Testament’s portrayal of the role of elders (*presbuteroi*) is the provision of oversight (*episkopeo*) of the church.

Different Church traditions have understood this episcopal or oversight role in different ways. Some traditions have created a separate office of Bishop (which is presumed in the King James Version of the Bible when it translates *episkopos* not as “overseer” but as “bishop”). These are sometimes referred to as episcopal churches. In the Anglican Church, for example, there are three categories of ordained ministry: *episkopoi* (bishops), *presbuteroi* (presbyters or priests) and *diakonoi* (deacons).

It is sometimes said that, because the Presbyterian Church does not have bishops, we are a non-episcopal church. Not so. We just understand the notion of episcopacy differently. For episcopal churches, the episcopal function, and the apostolic authority that goes with it, is tied to a historical succession of bishops. For Presbyterians, episcopal oversight is provided not by an individual person but by a presbytery consisting of *presbuteroi* (presbyters/elders) serving as a kind of

corporate overseer/bishop. So in our tradition it is presbyteries, not bishops, that ordain Ministers of Word and Sacrament through prayer and the laying on of hands; and it is from presbyteries, not bishops, that ministers and congregations take direction and correction.

Interestingly, in *The Plan for Union* (1971), which, had it been approved,¹ would have seen five denominations, including the Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists, form one Church, provision was made for the office of Bishop. It described the office as “historic”, saying that “it is a symbol and agent of the unity and continuity of the Church and its ministry with the witnesses of our Lord’s death and resurrection.” It further described six episcopal functions, summarised as follows:

1. To promote mission and evangelism;
2. To provide pastoral oversight, particularly of ministers;
3. To ensure the truths of the Christian faith are taught, and to state the doctrines of the Church;
4. To ensure the norms of Christian worship are observed, and to encourage and guide new developments in worship;
5. To be responsible for fostering recruitment to ministry, for the pastoral care of those in training, and to ordain those who complete their training and are appointed to ministry positions;
6. To authorise presbyters and deacons to minister.

It is an interesting exercise to compare the above list of episcopal functions from *The Plan for Union* with the list of presbytery functions contained in section 8.4 of our *Book of Order*. The first thing that strikes one is the difference in number: six (*Plan for Union*) versus thirty-five (*Book of Order*). No wonder some of our presbyteries are feeling overwhelmed and under-resourced!

The *Book of Order* tells us *what* presbytery does, but not *why*.

Secondly, although many of the thirty-five presbytery functions could be grouped to fall under the six episcopal functions listed in *The Plan for Union*, there are some notable gaps, especially around the areas of doctrine and worship. In regards to the latter, the *Book of Order* says the function of presbytery is to “facilitate worship” among the congregations for which it has responsibility by ensuring that: (a) the Scriptures are read; (b) the gospel is proclaimed; and (c) the sacraments are made readily available. But facilitating worship (whatever that means) falls far short of the sort of oversight and direction expected of a Bishop under *The Plan for Union*; and ensuring the Scriptures are read, the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are made readily available falls far short of “promoting the growing together of the whole Church in unity of spirit and worship” expected of a Bishop in *The Plan for Union*.

¹ For implementation, The Plan for Union needed the support of all five negotiating churches. Four supported it, but it failed by just a handful of votes in the Anglican Church’s House of Clergy. A second vote a few years later got the requisite level of support, but by then the House of Bishops had started to cool on the idea and in 1976 the Anglican Church’s General Synod voted not to proceed any further. That spelt the end of it, much to the regret of those who had spent 15 years or more promoting the vision of a united Church in this country. However, whilst denominational unity was no longer on the cards, congregational unity and cooperation was, and the Uniting Congregations of Aotearoa New Zealand (UCANZ) was borne with the purpose of advancing that vision. Congregations that wanted to embrace an ecumenical future had two main options: (1) Become a cooperating parish in which some or all of the partners agree to share ministry, worship, buildings and other aspects of local church life; (2) Become a union parish in which some of the partners (other than the Anglican Church) unite to form one parish.

Thirdly, the functions of presbytery in the *Book of Order* are generally described in terms that are more passive than the corresponding episcopal functions in *The Plan for Union*. We have already noted that in regards to worship, but the same is true of mission. “Recognising new forms of mission” (*Book of Order*, section 8.4(1)(p)) is not as dynamic and proactive as “promoting mission and evangelism” (*Plan for Union*).

The net effect of all this is a weakening of the episcopal function in Presbyterianism. To be sure, we see it operating at a practical level when a presbytery performs certain tasks, such as ordaining and inducting ministers, or appointing commissions and settlement boards, or forming and dissolving congregations, but the *Book of Order* offers no explanation as to why these sorts of tasks are the responsibility of presbytery. In other words, the *Book of Order* tells us *what* presbytery does, but not *why*. And in the absence of the *why*, we are denied a larger view of the purpose and scope of episcopal responsibility, and we see neither how individual tasks fit within a larger framework nor what additional tasks might perhaps be undertaken to better fulfil the function.

It is sometimes said that, because the Presbyterian Church does not have bishops, we are a non-episcopal church. Not so. We just understand the notion of episcopacy differently.

In recent decades, the weakening of presbytery’s episcopal function has been accentuated by the erosion of presbytery capacity. Internal denominational conflict and institutional decline have had a devastating effect. Many congregations are at best diffident, and at worst distrustful, towards the wider Presbyterian Church, including the presbytery. Recent moves towards a smaller number of larger presbyteries and a deliberate casting of the presbytery role in terms of facilitating and resourcing the life and mission of local congregations, are attempts to address the capacity issue and to revitalise our structures, but they may yet prove to be masking the problems rather than solving them.

One of the biggest weaknesses of the corporate episcopal model is that it is very dependent on the amount of buy-in from the presbyters (ministers and elders) and congregations that comprise its structures. The lower the level of buy-in, the lower the levels of sustainability and effectiveness. And that is a major challenge for our denomination right now. I suspect that before too long we will find ourselves discussing not just how to restructure and revitalise our existing presbyteries (like flogging the proverbial dead horse?), but how do we understand the episcopal function today, and what structures and processes are best able to fulfil that function. It would be nice to think that we could have that discussion because we think it’s important, not because it’s forced upon us.

The Special Nature of Call

I have just received a call to Clevedon Presbyterian Church and I've got to say I'm pretty excited about it.

Meeting, talking, praying, discerning, preaching, eating and drinking, and more meeting, and then voting. Given the leadership and wisdom of the people involved, I think I've experienced almost the ideal of how good the process can be. I was more anxious than I thought I would have been as I waited for the vote, and I also realise that at 54 I have now come to be seen as an "older" minister rather than a younger one.

Once I was "the youngest", but in three months I celebrate 30 years of ordained ministry. In fact I am still the youngest in my quite large ministry training "class of 84". We have, thanks to the efforts of one or two especially organised people, maintained an informal contact with one another over the years. We even get together occasionally. Almost all have maintained some form of ministry commitment.

As I move from being, over these last eight years, an employee receiving a salary, to once again being a minister called and supported by a stipend, I think about the nature of stipend and salary, and the difference between being called and being employed. I reflect on how many tensions and difficulties that I have been made aware of in my work in my current role, as our ministers and congregations and presbyteries wrestle with the implications of employment based on a contract, and a stipend based more around an understanding of promise and covenant.

While I am not quite sure that a simple line can be drawn between the nature of contract and covenant, it seems to me that the former is more to do with an economic arrangement where I agree to provide a range of services at an agreed price to a purchaser of those services. A covenant seems more to do with a much stronger sense of mutuality, a commitment promised to one another, built around an agreement of common purpose and benefit.

For a call to be made there has to be a "caller" and a "called". For a stipend to be offered there has to be a commitment by a community to gather and release its resources so that, in turn, people with the gifts and skills recognised by the faith community can be released to fully utilise those gifts and skills for the benefit of the nurture and mission of that community.

In a society that sees human labour as a commodity to be brought and sold at its value in the market, it seems to me to be a wonderfully counter-cultural and disruptive thing to still affirm the centrality of call, covenant and stipend.

I am no fan of "part-time" ministry or the creep to further regulate the expectations around ordained ministry. I do know that the more we use contractual language to describe the nature of ministry, the sooner a court will rule that ministers are employees. The deceptive clarity of law will trump the more organic and difficult language of covenant – and I think we will have all lost something.

That being said, the information we have clearly indicates that the cost of supporting stipendiary ministry, for a rapidly increasing number of congregations, is unsustainable. I do believe that the provision of a theologically and biblically literate ministers skilled in the kind of leadership we need today is critical for a congregation's growth and development. We need to then unbundle our understanding of a congregation as being of a single group of people supporting a single stipend, and see a congregation living and worshiping in multiple places and times, and of different sizes being resourced and supported by gifted and skilled people who include trained ministers supported by strong administrative centres.

I won't go on about how terrific the Clevedon church appears to me. In its ministry and leadership, and in the priority it places on being a gracious and hospitably presence in the community, it just feels like a wonderfully positive and hopeful place.

A wonderful person from the Clevedon congregation sent me a piece of "rocky road" – the gift they were giving to all the fathers at church that Fathers Day. It reminded me of those small gifts of kindness that are such an integral part of the best aspects of congregational life. My current role has taken me out of that rhythm of grace and generosity that is the church's beauty.

In my induction service we will make promises to one another, express our hopes and our shared faith, hear the Gospel preached, and share food and drink. I'm looking forward to that.

Martin

Hallowed By Thy Name: The Sanctification of All in the Soteriology of P. T. Forsyth

Reviewed by André Muller, Southern Presbytery

“My debt of gratitude to you is not nominal, but a real thing”, the 19th century congregationalist preacher James Baldwin Brown wrote to Thomas Carlyle, recalling how the experience of reading the latter’s 1836 novel *Sartor Resartus* had led him to abandon his legal studies for the pulpit. “To the course of study and thought to which the meditations of that period have led me, I owe it that I am not a member of a purely worldly profession for which I was then educating”, Brown confessed, “but a preacher of the living Word, into the proclamation of which I can at any rate throw as much earnestness and life as I have in myself”. By all accounts, Brown – “the greatest Independent of our times”, Peter Taylor Forsyth would later declare – had a great deal of earnestness and life in him, making him a highly attractive figure to a young man whose own reputation for “ethical passion, spiritual insight, intellectual grasp, and personal piety” (to quote from Forsyth’s eulogy of his former pastor) would by the end of the century eclipse his own.

Having graduated with first-class honours in Classical Literature at the University of Aberdeen, where he was known for his proclivity to grandiloquence as much as for his remarkable intellectual capability (and where also he came under the influence of the Professor of Logic, and founder of the philosophy journal *Mind*, Alexander Bain), Forsyth had taken up William Robertson Smith’s suggestion that he should spend a semester in Göttingen listening to Albrecht Ritschl, who was then at the height of his influence.

As Goroncy shows in his marvellous study of Forsyth’s treatment of sanctification, he would never discard the most important lesson he had learnt from that theologian, namely, that “Positive Christianity... is Christianity which recognises the primacy of the moral in the shape of life, and of holy life”. Neither would he shake off his teacher’s deep suspicion of metaphysical speculation, which following Kant, both Ritschl and Forsyth treated as not only beyond our ken but as ultimately destructive of moral seriousness. A “metaphysic of things”, Forsyth would claim in an article published in 1914, is “merely shells of ruined towers that let heaven be seen through their cracks rather than their windows”. “God has given men feet not wings, and the order is fight not flight”, he would exclaim in a sermon on Psalm 55.6 and Jeremiah 9.2. “We reach heaven step by step, fighting all the way. What we need most of all for this life is the courage of the prosaic”.

There was little, however, that was prosaic about Forsyth’s prose, which contemporaries described as volcanic. One declared him the “Ibsen of British theology”, and he would later be called, no less felicitously, theology’s Browning. “What a mental energy he had!”, a friend and disciple would write to Forsyth’s daughter after his death. “There was something demonic in it”, which helped to explain the difficulty of a style which, like Brown’s, bore indelibly the marks of “the man himself and his passion”.

It is no disparagement of Forsyth’s theological genius to note the extent to which his moral imagination was shaped by a 19th century romantic tradition that can be traced back through Kant to Rousseau. Yet it is not the least virtue of Goroncy’s study that while he shows Forsyth drawing upon the neo-Kantianism of Ritschl and Wilhelm Windelbrand, the literature of Carlyle and Lord Tennyson, the music of Wagner, the Maurician tendencies of Brown, he also attends to the influence of quite different traditions.

Forsyth’s intellectual debts are difficult to identify because he hardly ever identifies them himself, but Goroncy is surely right to suggest that the 16th century reformer John Calvin, the 17th century puritan Thomas Goodwin, and the late 19th to early 20th century biblical scholar Adolf Schlatter all figure prominently in the background to his thought.

Perhaps the greatest influence of all on Forsyth’s moral and theological vision was scripture itself, which he studied assiduously and with the aid of the resources of higher criticism. A third of his considerable library was in German, and much of this consisted of commentaries on scripture. As with Windelbrand and Calvin, Ritschl and Goodwin, Forsyth keeps his debts to biblical scholarship

close to his chest, but the depth of his engagement with scripture can be seen indirectly – for example, in his claim that no one should talk about theology in public until they had mastered the New Testament. This was a tall order, but one that Forsyth had evidently met himself, since he often talked about theology in public, not least in the sad controversy with R. J. Campbell, during which he had to point out how theologically out of his depth Campbell was.

Forsyth was also an extraordinarily good preacher who spoke to people who knew what extraordinarily good preaching looked like and so had very high expectations. Some of those best qualified to judge such matters claimed, after hearing him, that he had exceeded their expectations. Some still recalled the power of a particular sermon decades after the fact. In all of the sermons he gave he was meditating upon scripture, and he would have spent hours consulting his German commentaries in preparation.

Although Forsyth remained committed to the conviction that “the moral is the real”, he would come to reject Ritschl’s gospel as “unevangelical”. In so doing he was rejecting the liberal Protestantism which was becoming increasingly attractive to late 19th century congregationalists partly because it promised to assuage Victorian anxieties about holiness. “Tired of moral precepts and attitudes which represented Christianity as ‘just human nature at its best’, and God’s kingdom as “just our natural spirituality and altruism developed”, Forsyth, writes Goroncy, accused “his generation of succumbing to cheap comforts, or muffling the moral note, of seeking a form of idealised Christianity divorced from a historic and perennial Christ and of interpreting sin “in a softer light than God’s””.

In the light of the cross, there can be no question of God letting sinners off the hook, as it were, because what is at stake is not a principle that God can set aside, but God himself. “The holy God must go out in judgment against all that mocks and flaunts holiness because God’s Godhead is at stake”, Goroncy writes, “and because God is committed to hallowing all things”.

That God’s being is in question here is not unrelated to the divine commitment to hallow all things: in effect, these are two sides of the same coin. The very nature of God is holy love, and when God creates the world he calls into being creatures who are sustained by – and who must answer to – God’s own “hungering holiness”. It is this holiness that “constitutes and directs all being, binding a coherent universe in such a way as all remigrates to its source in God”. When human beings refuse this creative holiness, it is not some kind of abstract moral order conceived independently of God

VACANCY DEAN OF STUDIES

Applications are invited for the position of Dean of Studies and Lecturer at the Knox Centre for Ministry of Leadership in Dunedin, New Zealand. The Knox Centre forms and trains theology graduates for ministry and leadership in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. This includes running a two-year internship programme for people training for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

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that is put at risk, but the one who is committed by virtue of his very being to hallowing all things. To pray “hallowed by thy name” is to recognise that what sin places at stake is God’s being itself.

It was Hegel who had claimed in his *Philosophy of Religion* that “God cannot find satisfaction through anything other than Himself, but only through Himself”, although this was an insight that already had a long history within the Christian tradition by the time that Hegel came to it. Anselm of Canterbury, for instance, had insisted that the debt incurred by sin could only be satisfied by God himself. But while Forsyth drew upon Anselm’s account of the atonement in *Cur Deus Homo*, he is sceptical of what Paul Fiddes calls the 11th century archbishop’s “excessive objectivity”, preferring more ethical and personal categories to Anselmic jurisprudence.

Certainly, Forsyth moves far beyond Anselm when he speaks, as he does in *The Pulpit and the Age* (1885), of “[t]he living God” as “the dying God” and of “the Eternal principle of Eternal life” as “always and only possible even to God by Eternal Death”.

As Goroncy points out, the debt to Hegel is clearly evident when Forsyth contends that in the death of Christ, God makes death part of his own eternal life, and so (to quote Hegel) “comes to Himself”. While it might seem as if such talk of divine “self-realisation”, of God finding or coming to himself, which is intrinsic to Forsyth’s reading of the cross as divine theodicy, risks reducing the atonement to an exercise in divine solipsism, one of the great strengths of Forsyth’s account of God’s “hungering holiness” is that it effectively rules out such suggestions.

God’s regard for the holiness of his name – for, that is, the integrity of his very being – is a regard also and at the same time for human beings. If the atonement is divine self-reconciliation, its work is not done, Goroncy notes, “until there is created a ‘reciprocal communion’ between humanity and God”.

“The great theologies are epics”, Forsyth would write in *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (1909). This seems as good a description of Forsyth’s own theology as any. It is usual for scholars to comment upon the unsystematic quality of his work. Nothing could be more wrong-headed. Forsyth’s writing is certainly occasional, each essay, sermon, lecture, and book called forth by some specific need. But his moral and theological – and by now it should be clear why the distinction should not be pressed too hard – vision is highly coherent.

Like Calvin, Forsyth gives us “a gospel deep enough” with “all the breadth of the world in its heart”, as must any theologian who knows what they are about. Unlike Calvin, Forsyth’s theology demands that he takes the word “breadth” with a kind of ultimate – one might even say metaphysical – seriousness. In his final chapter, Goroncy shows that everything, or everything that matters, about Forsyth’s doctrine of sanctification necessitates a commitment to universalism. The cross is where “all things are (so to say) tied up”, Forsyth writes in his great theodicy, *The Justification of God* (1916). “All history, through his great act at its moral centre, is, in God, resolved into the harmonies of a foregone and final conquest”, he affirms in *The Cruciality of the Cross*.

Admittedly, such claims do not themselves entail a full-blown universalism, but in their light it seems a bit churlish not to go all the way. At any rate, Forsyth holds to a “hopeful” rather than “dogmatic” universalism, which is certainly a respectable theological position. But Goroncy persistently pushes Forsyth on this point, and his persistence pays off. As he shows, Forsyth cannot take refuge, as others have, in the doctrine of divine freedom because for him God’s freedom is “already bound up in his determination to hallow all things”. And since what is at stake in this hallowing is the very being of God, the price of one everlastingly unrepentant sinner is not the existence of hell, nor even the defeat of the purposes of God, but the collapse of divine being itself. There is simply no possibility of the coexistence of divine holiness and its antithesis. While Forsyth makes this point repeatedly, he does not follow his own logic, which Goroncy shows, “demands either universalism or annihilationism”, to its end. As Goroncy also points out, there are serious difficulties with the idea that God might, after a suitable term of punishment, annihilate creatures that he had brought into being. Forsyth really has only one option available to him. And yet he hedges.

It is interesting to speculate – and here this is all that can be done for lack of evidence – as to why Forsyth tacitly refuses to draw the necessary consequences of his theology. The author of *This Life and the Next* (1918) was hardly unconcerned with the last things, so that cannot be the reason. In all likelihood, as Goroncy suggests, ecclesial and theological politics played a role in Forsyth’s public agnosticism, which may have seemed to the principal of a congregational college and leader within the congregational community to be the most prudent course. There may have been another

reason, which Goroncy does not mention. It is possible that in hedging on the question of dogmatic universalism Forsyth was, perhaps even unconsciously, questioning the Hegelian assumptions that made that universalism a necessary consequence of his theology. There is a lot of Hegelian in Forsyth's work. Perhaps in the end he wanted to say something different.

And perhaps in the end he did. Forsyth was often tempted to "flirt with the mythological", as one of the most astute of his 20th century admirers once remarked. This is true not least when he talks of the "dying God" or construes sin as the antithesis of, and a threat to, the divine being itself. The Augustinian conception of sin as privation, along with the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* on which it depends, is an attempt to rule out something like Forsyth's account of sin (and with it, any notion that God's being might be subject to threat). Forsyth was nervous about the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, because it seemed to him not to be ethical enough – a criticism which suggests that he was reacting against the rationalist orthodoxies of the 18th and 19th centuries rather than Augustine or Thomas.

Curiously, while he rejected the metaphysics of what he calls "Chalcedonianism", and for all his Kantian objections to speculative thought, what Forsyth offers is nothing if not a profound essay in the metaphysics of divine being. Goroncy, perhaps Forsyth's finest interpreter, captures the heights and depths of this metaphysical vision in *Hallowed Be Thy Name*, revealing the richness and coherence (questions about universalism aside) of Forsyth's thought, because he knows that the metaphysics are always in the end an attempt to wrestle with the "evangelical centre".

In his wonderful and authoritative study of Forsyth, Goroncy shows how breathtakingly audacious his metaphysical theology is in both form and scope. But perhaps in order to gain the measure of the man, we also need a comprehensive study of his engagement with the Bible. One might begin with Goroncy's recent publication of Forsyth's sermons, *Descending on Humanity and Intervening in History: Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of P. T. Forsyth* (Pickwick, 2013).

Jason A. Goroncy, *Hallowed By Thy Name: The Sanctification of All in the Soteriology of P. T. Forsyth* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). ISBN: 9780567066824; xvi + 291pp.

Editorial Note on Book Reviews:

If you have just read a book that has gripped you and that you think may help others in ministry, you are invited to contact our reviews editor, Jason Goroncy, to see if the book is suitable for review in *Candour*.

Please don't send an unsolicited review to the editor.

Jason has received the following suitable books and if you would like to review any of these volumes, please contact him at jasongoroncy@gmail.com or jgoroncy@knoxcollege.ac.nz

Clive Ayre, *Earth, Faith and Mission: The Theology and Practice of Earthcare*

Greg Barton, Paul Weller and Ihsan Yilmaz, eds., *The Muslim World and Politics in Transition: Creative Contributions of the Gulen Movement*.

Jeremy Begbie, *Music, Modernity, and God: Essays in Listening*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters to London: Bonhoeffer's Previously Unpublished Correspondence with Ernst Cromwell, 1935–1936*

Neil Darragh, *But Is It Fair?: Faith Communities and Social Justice*

Noel Due, *Seeing God as Father*

Cornelius Ernst, *Multiple Echo Explorations in Theology*.

W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ, Expanded and Updated Edition*.

Diana Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*

Paul S. Fiddes (ed), *Faith in the Centre: Christianity and Cultureans*

Bartha Hill, *Teaching Hundreds To Heal Millions: The Story of Dr Beryl Howie*.

Richard Kidd & Graham Sparkes (eds), *God and the Art of Seeing: Visual Resources for a Journey of Faith*

Stuart Lange, *A Rising Tide: Evangelical Christianity in New Zealand (1930–1965)*.

William R. McAlpine, *Four Essential Loves: Heart Readiness for Leadership and Ministry*

Jan Morgan, *Earth's Cry: Prophetic Ministry in a More Than Human World*.