Q&A: Can we call the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Jesus?

SA asks:

Hi Will,
Can we call the Holy Spirit, Jesus' Spirit? What do you think? Clearly he isn't Jesus because he is the third person of the trinity, but I am a bit muddled as we sometimes say Jesus is with us by his spirit. What do we mean by that? Do we mean Jesus? Do we mean the Holy Spirit? Or are we meaning specifically the Holy Spirit but also Jesus and the Father as our God is one?
For example, when Jesus said he would be with us until the end of the age did he mean himself or the Holy Spirit? In John 14 Jesus promises "another Counsellor to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth" but also that the Father and he (Jesus) will make their home in the believer.
And then I look at Romans 8:9 where Paul talks about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and calls him both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ in quick succession and then says that "if Christ is in you…."
And Galatians 2:20 "Christ who lives in me.."
I'm not sure if I've even articulated my question clearly!

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/]

Thanks for the question. It takes us into the area of trinitarian theology, which is notoriously brain-bending, but is also deep, profound, and joy-bringing.

The short answer to your question is yes, we can (and must) understand that the Holy Spirit is Jesus' Spirit.

The longer answer means exploring the conundrum that you have described. Your exploration is great. You've quoted the verse that I would have gone to as a way into it: In *Romans 8:9-11* the Holy Spirit is referred to in the following ways:

1. "the Spirit"
2. "the Spirit of God"
3. "the Spirit of Christ"
4. "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead"

This passage also has a close correlation between "the Spirit" and "Christ" with regards to the one who dwells "in you." You've also rightly picked up other places where this is implied – *Galatians 2:20* – and also *Matthew 28:20* where Jesus says "I am with you always", *just before he leaves!* Of course, the Spirit is subsequently present.

It can be a bit of a brain twister, so what do we do with it?

We can get a little bit **theological**: What is being emphasised here is the *unity* of the Trinity. We cannot separate Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Spirit reveals the Son, and if we

see the Son we have seen the Father (that's *John 14* again). This unity is at the heart of the gospel: Jesus is not one third of God of with us, he is *truly* God with us. As Paul assures us in *Colossians 2:9*, in Christ "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

We can even get a bit **metaphysical** about it. My tentative exploration begins with thinking of God as a relational dynamic, and I start by looking to God the Father [As an aside, the Orthodox emphasis on the Father as the "Fountain of Deity" got me thinking here]: The Father perfectly and eternally pours himself out into the Son. We call this "begetting" and think of the way in which a parent desires to pour themselves – their character, wisdom, understanding, etc. – into their children and extrapolate from that. This is so eternal and perfect that the Son isn't just a reflection of the Father, the Father is pouring out his very being, and so the Son is of the same dynamic essence. The Son therefore pours himself back towards the Father, in response, agreement, and self-giving.

The Son's eternal and perfect "pouring back" is an eternal and perfect "Yes and Amen" to the self-giving of the Father. This eternal and perfect outpouring perfectly and eternally manifests not just the power and character of the Father and the Son, but the very substance of who they are. This mutual outpouring manifests perfectly and eternally in the person of the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father's eternally begetting love and the Son's eternal returning joy.

Take any aspect of this away and then the dynamic is not eternal or perfect, and therefore not God. That is, if the Spirit is not totally the Father's Spirit, or the Son's Spirit, or the Spirit of God Almighty, then God is not God.

Phew. That's a bit heady. But can you see the **passion and joy** of it all? At the beginning of creation, the Father pours out in creative fervour – "Let there be light!" – the Son

receives and responds in a “Yes and Amen” and from the power and joy of their agreement, the Spirit proceeds to hover over the waters of creation. Their unified love *creates*. It’s not like there’s some committee discussion in the Godhead about weighing up the pros and cons of creating the universe, rather the creative love and joy of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit simply brings it about. After all:

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)*

And here is the **joyous gospel** part of it. We know that *“God so loved the World”*. At some point the heart of the Father pours out in grace and love – “Let us go to our broken children” – the Son responds with a “Yes and Amen” and the Spirit manifests that loving purpose, hovering over the womb of a young woman. And now the eternally, perfectly begetting God and Father, pours himself out, eternally, and perfectly, into a human child. The eternal, perfect dynamic that is God, can incorporate, does incorporate, and still incorporates a human being, Jesus.

The Father pours himself out into Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Son’s response now has human voice: “Whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise” (*John 5:19*), and the Spirit manifests that desire as healings and miracles happen.

And then at some point it looks like the Father’s heart to save – “Let us take responsibility for our children” – and the Son, knowing exactly what that means, says “let your will be done” and enters into cruelty and injustice and forsakenness, until the sky goes dark and we hear “It is finished” and “Into your hands I commit my Spirit.” And then the self-giving, outpouring, justice-loving, fierce joy of God is truly made manifest, and we *really* see the Spirit of the One who raised

Jesus from the dead!

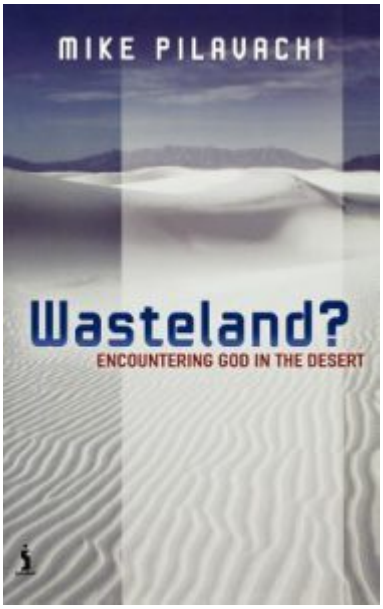
All the time, at every moment, the purposes of God occur from and within this dynamic of creative thought, creative response, creative power. Every aspect of God is like this – saving thought, saving response, saving power; healing, restoring, convicting, providing etc. etc. Every time we see the heart of the Father, grounded in the Son, manifest in the Spirit.

And then, lastly, **the profound realisation** of it is this, if we return to Romans 8:9 – embraced as we are by Jesus, we are "in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells within you." This tells me that we are not meeting God from the outside, as if we might occasionally have an audience with the Holy Spirit, or with Jesus, or (if we're really lucky) the Father. No! In Christ, we have been caught up into the dynamic of God himself. We don't pray from the outside, we pray from the inside. We seek to discern the will of the Father, we seek to respond with "Your will be done" and we find, amazingly, that the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead, the Holy Spirit, manifests the will of God, in, with, and through us.

So yes, we can call the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus – we must! If we can't, then Jesus is not really God incarnate, and we're not really abiding in the Father. And there's less gospel (if any) in that.

Review: Wasteland? –

Encountering God in the Desert



I'd never really heard of Mike Pilavachi before coming to the UK. I'd vaguely heard of Soul Survivor and, to be honest, was a little sceptical, suspecting just another super-spiritual-guru-man-caricature hyping it up. Instead, I have found in my experiences over the last couple of years that there is depth to the Soul Survivor movement, and Pilavachi himself has come to intrigue me. At the front he is part bumbling oaf, part lovable uncle, sometimes authoritatively prophetic and eloquent, other times lurching from anecdote to anecdote, self-effacing and yet stepping out in naturally supernatural words of knowledge and a ministry of restoration. In some ways it seems preposterous that God could work through him a successful and influential movement that reaches 1000's of youth each year, and sustains works of justice and care across the globe.

Now here's something I've learned over the years: you can't trust leaders who aren't dead yet. The more they are full of themselves, either in inferiority or superiority, the more they will injure, harm, or neglect. I include myself in that cohort. But those who have been through fire, who have been stripped away, who have been through wilderness and desert, and have learned to die and surrender all to God… well, I can trust them more. **They look more like Jesus and Jesus is trustworthy.**

Here's the same lesson: church leadership and the work of ministry can be either an act of self-focussed performance, or it can be an act of God-honouring worship. In his grace, God often uses both, but there is a difference. That difference

comes with brokenness, suffering, and wilderness. While we ask God to bless *our* ministry, we are performing, relying on our strengths. When we are stripped away, broken, we find ourselves operating out of *weakness and dependence* in ministry shaped less by our own (sometimes impressive) capability, but by the power and purpose and presence of the Spirit of God.

I think that's what I see in Pilavachi: He's a big man, and I see a bigger God.

All of this to introduce a book I picked up at a stall while attending Soul Survivor this year. Written in 2003, this is a somewhat autobiographical insight into where Pilavachi is coming from. And it's called **Wasteland? – Encountering God in the desert**.

Here's the dynamic I'm talking about:

> *The great need today is for deep and authentic people… In our attempts to be 'culturally relevant' we could, if we are not careful, become as shallow as the surrounding culture… Jesus came to usher in another way. He called it the Kingdom of God… Why do we prefer to stay in the Christian ghetto where it is safe?… Yet if we are to go further into the world and make a difference instead of being yet another voice that adds to the noise, we have to listen to the call to go on another journey, a journey into God himself. If we are to offer life instead of platitudes we need to catch more than a glimpse of glory… Specifically, if we want to move in the power of the Spirit, to live the life of the Spirit and to carry a depth of spirituality that alone can change a world, he invites us on a journey into the desert. It is sometimes a very painful journey… but it is, I believe, a necessary journey. This adventure is only for those who are committed to being a voice to and not merely another echo of society… It is only for those who are sick of superficiality both in themselves and in the church. (Pages 13-16)*

> *The desert is a dry place. Nobody goes to the desert in search of refreshment. The desert is an inhospitable place; it is not comfortable. The desert is an incredibly silent place; there are no background noises, no distractions to lessen the pain. The desert is the place where you have to come to terms with your humanity, with your weakness and fallibility. The desert is a lonely place; there is not usually many people there. Above all, the desert is God's place; it is the place where he takes us in order to heal us. (Page 20)*

This book simply unpacks this common, but often undescribed, dynamic. It is in the autobiographical content ("I wondered if God had forgotten me?", p19; "**More than anything else, when I came to the end of myself, I came to the beginning of God.**", p20 emphasis mine). And it is a common thread in his exposition of the biblical narrative ("In the desert Moses came to the end of himself. In so doing he came to the beginning of God." p29). At all times it both excites and dreads, and is therefore compelling.

I found *Wasteland?* to be personally challenging. Ministry life is not easy, and can often feel like a desert. Pilavachi has helped me in my own reflection and crying out. For instance, he writes that "dependence and intimacy are the two major lessons we learn in the desert" (p22). Over the last few years I've learned a lot about dependence, but I know I need to learn more about *intimacy* with the Lord who is near to me, even if I can't tell that he is there, even if he is setting my heart on fire. Pilavachi speaks of being determined to "seek God for himself whether I had ministry or not" (p21) and I know I need this example. He gives the forthright truth, "life's a bitch, but God is good" (p79) and I must face my resentment, and the pain of knowing that that truth applies to church life just as much as any other domain. I am encouraged to continue "plodding" (p86).

The book certainly makes for insightful reflection. I do have a slight question as to whether it would always be helpful to someone who might be in the midst of their wilderness. After all, it's very easy to slip into the despondency of (unfair) comparison: "It's easy for him to write, he's come through it, he's a successful famous Christian!". And sometimes the descriptions don't totally match what someone might be experiencing: for instance, the wilderness is not always a "place where he slows us down" (p43), I have found it can also be something that feels like a dangerous jungle, a place of anxiety and fear. These concerns are only minor though.

The aspect I most appreciate is how the book has a prophetic character, speaking truth to the church, the church of the West in particular. Consider this provocative truth:

> *When we turn from the spring of living water, we try to satisfy ourselves from any contaminated pool. We then become contaminated and diseased. Instead of seeking healing, we live in denial that there is anything wrong. The desert is a place of healing. Before that, however, it has to be the place where we discover that we are sick. When all the props are taken away we come face to face with our bankruptcy.* ***The gospel has to be bad news before it can be good news.*** *In the desert we find that we are 'wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked (Revelation 3:17). Only then can we truly receive the Saviour. It is very dry and arid in the desert. Only when we truly thirst can we begin to drink the living water. (Page 43, emphasis mine).*
>
> *This is the antidote to a faith that owes more to Western consumerism than to the word of God.* ***It is out of suffering and death that life comes.*** *If we have not learned that from the cross of Jesus, what have we learned? (Page 83, emphasis mine).*

The lessons he draws from the Song of Songs are profound as he

speaks of the longing of the Beloved seeking her Lover. If we resist being moved by the presence of God (which we do), how much more do we resist being moved by a sense of his absence? We would often rather numb out and muddle along in our own strength.

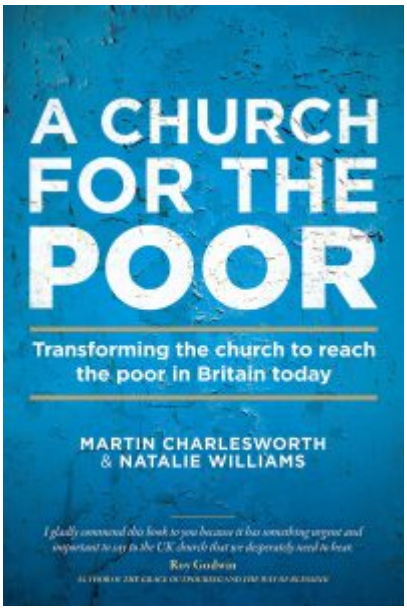
> *Sadly, for some Christians, for those who have never known themselves as the 'beloved', his presence is not missed. It is business as usual. I heard someone ask once, 'If the Holy Spirit left your church, would anyone notice?' The desert sorts out the spiritual men from the boys. [Like the Beloved in the Song of Songs], will we walk the streets until we find him in a deeper way, will we choose to sit in the desert until we hear him speaking tenderly to us? Or will we take the easy option?… God is not interested in a 'satisfactory working relationship' with his people. The passionate God wants a love affair with his church. A love so strong sthat we know we could never live without him. The desert is God's means of taking us to that place. (Page 52)*

This is an "if only" book. "If only" I could get the spirit of this book into the heart of the church at large. We are so formulaic, pulling programs off the shelf, often to avoid our wasteland by busyness or some self-made productivity. Yet in the wilderness, we can be made into a "voice, not an echo" (p57), a people that can speak the gospel from depth to depth. This is what changes lives. This is what changes the world.

I have learned to consider prospective church leaders with the question "How dead are they?" I have regretted it when I have gone past that question too quickly. I have regretted it when I haven't asked that question of myself. Pilavachi puts it this way: "I am wary of trusting any leader who does not walk with a limp" (p87). In many ways he is a Christian superstar, with big lights, big tents, and big band… but his limp is obvious. In this book it becomes a provocation, exhortation, and encouragement for all of us. I have come to really

appreciate the whole Mike Pilavachi, Soul Survivor thing, with all its chaotic, messy, haphazard, space where God is so often manifestly present. It *is* that blessing, because of a limp.

Review: A Church for the Poor



This book is about much more than reaching the poor. It is a handbook on mission. Missional illiteracy is high amongst our church leaders. Our structures are strictures on the strength of the gospel. This book, unassumingly, is something of a call to repentance. “Leaders… this book is for you” (p184).

Authors, Martin Charlesworth and Natalie Williams, come from different backgrounds but bring the same passion. They are involved in the *Jubilee+* movement, which I now have an inkling to investigate further. Their foundation is clear: “the coming of God’s kingdom involve[s] dealing directly with urgent human needs and social issues – as an outworking of our personal salvation and as a key part of discipleship” (p23).

Their key strength is that they present more than an economic approach to poverty; they explore the spiritual and cultural aspects as well. This is confronting; as church we can deal with economic matters through professionalism and program provision, but spiritual and cultural matters have us collide with ourselves, our weaknesses, and our hardness of heart.

> *The proliferation of church-based foodbanks, debt advice services, job clubs, educational projects, supported housing schemes, elderly support projects and much more are testimony to the energy and vision of churches in the face of increasing social needs of all types.* ***However, the poor and deprived are still sometimes helped at a relational 'arms length'.*** *The church has more to offer those in need than just social action projects.* ***People are more than 'clients' – outcomes are more than statistics.*** *People need friendship and community.* ***People need to be valued****. Many need someone to walk alongside them as they try to find ways of rebuilding their lives." (pp40-41, emphasis mine).*

> ***When the middle class culture is unchallenged the most likely outworking of the church's approach to poverty is to confine its activity to social action projects alone.*** *(Page 137, emphasis mine).*

The authors explore the deeper aspects of poverty – "aspirational poverty – the loss of hope" (p41), "relational poverty – the loss of community" (p43), and "spiritual poverty – the loss of meaning" (p45). Hope, community and meaning is the stuff of the gospel, but there is no false dichotomy between spiritual and temporal matters here. Clearly, real economic poverty causes things like hopelessness and this can be observed: There has been a generational shift from "millenial optimism" (p31) to post GFC austerity (p31) and the new class of "JAM's" ("Just About Managing", p33). The authors' concern is not just to present and analyse statistic, or to pontificate about the latest programs, but to delve into *cultural shifts and values*.

Here they demonstrate one of those basic aspects of mission that shouldn't need to be said, but must: the church at mission does not begin with what it can do, but with *cultural understanding.* "Response to immediate need is one thing, but it can't be sustained and built upon without careful

reflection about underlying issues raised by the context" (p34). **We are about cultural change** (what else does *"making disciples of all nations"* mean?) **which begins in us**, and our response to the poor is a touchstone, and often a point of conviction as to how obedient we are being.

> *We cannot use our donations to overseas projects as an excuse to walk by on the other side of the road and ignore the rough sleeper on our high street. Jesus doesn't leave that option open to us: in telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, he makes it abundantly plain that we're to help the person in front of us. (p35)*

Another basic aspect of mission is that we need to *go* (what else does *"go and make disciples…"* mean?) rather than rely on attractional methods alone. This is the principle of emulating the *incarnational* attitude of Christ, willing to empty ourselves in order to enter into the world which needs the gospel.

> *When people don't come to us – as the working class aren't coming to our churches – we need to find ways to reach out. But we cannot do it with an attitude of superiority. We simply must not approach wanting to draw working class and poorer people into our churches as something we 'do to them'. If we're to see churches that truly reflect all classes and economic situations, we need to be prepared to move into neighbourhoods that have bad reputations, to place our children in schools that may not achieve the best results, to shop where shopkeepers get to know their customers, to listen to people who we may feel we cannot relate to at all. (Page 95)*

Another basic aspect of mission is that the medium is the message, and the medium is *us.* In technical terms, missiology brings ecclesiology and eschatology to life. This is why the tendency for churches to split into homogenous units based on

age or background is fundamentally anti-gospel. The gospel doesn't divide and avoid, it unifies and proclaims.

> *Wherever there is division, the church is to demonstrate reconciliation. So we need churches where the working class and the middle class sit together, speak with one another, share food and faith and find community that transcends postcodes and income levels and educational achievements (Page 96).*
>
> *A mature church has a number of flourishing sub-cultures whose members feel both a security in their own sub-culture and an ownership of the main church culture, which, of course, takes them somewhat out of tehir sub-cultural comfort zone. (Page 120)*

But this mission is not possible until the fundamental posture of the church is addressed, until we consider our attitude, our humility, our willingness to die to self. Charlesworth and Williams provide a constructive provocation that brings us to that place.

This provocation has its roots in their exegesis of how God calls his people to serve the poor in both Old and New Testaments and then in their exploration of church history. In reflection we are left asking questions like: Are we *over, under, or next to* the poor? Our answer is an indicator of our humility before God, our ability to self-reflect and discern the Spirit's leading. It's an indicator of whether our mission builds up ourselves or truly advances the kingdom of God. Our response to the poor reflects the size of our mission heart, and how much we embrace the necessary attitudes of discernment, contrition, and courage so that we are willing to be "jolted out of our own understanding" of what we consider to be culturally normal (p76).

> ***We need to ensure that we are not speaking about inclusivity without putting it into practice.*** *It is one thing to say that*

> *we believe all people are equal before God, but another to create a level playing field where people from all backgrounds have the same opportunities. (Page 73, emphasis mine)*
>
> *We need to break down these barriers so that our churches can increasingly reflect the kingdom of God. But in order to do that,* ***we need to reflect on some of the attitudes in our hearts that might prevent our churches from more accurately reflecting our society,*** *and welcoming people from all demographics,* ***without expecting them to transition from on social group to another****. (Page 78, emphasis mine)*

In this light, their chapter on "British Culture: Materialism, Individualism, Cynicism" (Page 79) is an excellent mirror. It should be compulsory reading for all those who are considering church leadership; know your blind spots, be aware of your own culture, and discern the distinction between the essence of the gospel and how we have applied it for our own comfort.

> *There is no place in the church for the kind of individualism we see in our society,* ***but we need to be intentional about rooting it out.*** *Cultural concerns with personal space and boundaries may have influenced us in ways that we are not even aware of. (Page 87, emphasis mine)*
>
> ***Only by going against the grain of British Culture in these areas, can we build churches that really are homes for those who are poor or in need.*** *(Page 90, emphasis mine)*
>
> *If we are to build churches for all, we need to break out of mindsets that may have been formed by our own background and class or by the media and political narratives that surround us…* ***We need to have a sober assessment of ourselves, asking God to highlight any biases we have and any commitment to middle class values that is unhelpful to reaching others who may not share them.*** *I am trying to learn to let my first question, when I feel uncomfortable or judgmental or fearful*

> *around someone , be 'what is going on in my heart?' before I start to ask questions about the person in front of me. (Page 97, emphasis mine)*
>
> *Are we growing in kindness? Are we looking for opportunities to be generous? Are we more concerned about looking like 'good Christians' or actually becoming like Jesus?…* ***Changing the culture of our churches might also mean taking a cold, sober look at the prejudices of our hearts.*** *(Page 128, emphasis mine)*

Personally, I was confronted with my own growing cynicism. For me, it is a cynicism with regards to the middle class church itself. Moving in the opposite spirit is hard, but no matter who we are giving ourselves to, "we have to guard our hearts so that the disappointment we rightly feel doesn't turn into a cynicism that wrongly hardens us to others." (Page 89).

Charlesworth and Williams are intensely practical. The entire second half of the book is about applying the spirit of the first.

I was particularly glad that they raise the issue of the "gentrification of leadership" (p104). A key foundation for church maturity is the ability to have "native" leaders that rise up from within. Practically speaking, then, we must deal with our tendency to attach leadership to cultural markers such as tertiary-level training that is (sometimes merely) academic in nature. Our system of severing ordinands from their context not only diminishes vocation and disempowers church communities, it can be an imposition of culture. Rather, real, on-the-ground discipleship is needed, "enabling leaders among the poor to emerge and begin to function in leadership roles within the church" (p146).

Their valuing of prophetic leadership (p111) is also of practical importance. A case in point: I read this book having recently come across Bp. Philip North's prophetic word,

“Hope for the Poor” at this year’s *New Wine United* conference. Similarly, Mike Pilavachi spoke at the *Naturally Supernatural Summer Conference* drawing on the call for justice in Amos. Gill and I are finding ourselves moved and impassioned by these issues and we look to people such as these for leadership as “prophetic advocates” (p152). Wise churches and wise leaders need to take steps to hear the prophetic, especially when it is uncomfortable. After all, cultural change never happens when leaders are comfortable, “in my experience the real problem has been the lack of commitment by the church leader(s) to care for the poor” (p160).

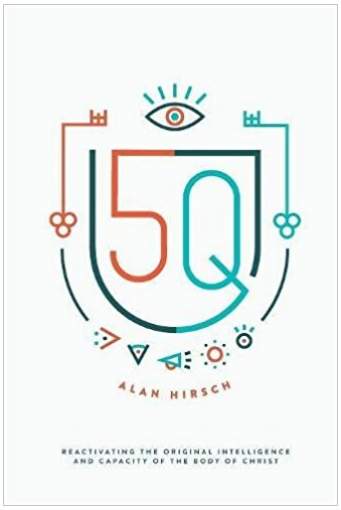
The role of the diaconate in this prophetic leadership is an interesting examination (p162). The diaconal role, when accepted and embraced, adds capacity to the pastoral role. A deacon is “someone called, equipped and able to work in social action while being appropriately linked to church pastors and the main life of the church.” Gill and I are both ordained deacons, and as I currently wrestle with the fact and substance of my ordination, this is a fascinating thought. The exercise of diaconal ministry can avoid the church splitting into groups of lobbyist/activists who have competed for resources, and can lead *corporate* discernment where the body moves together. Food for thought.

Their hope into delving into practicalities such as these various pitfalls and possibilities is to give encouragement: it can be done! They act as consultants to those who have questions to ask.

I would go further. It can be done, it *must* be done. As the saying goes, it’s not that the Church of God has a mission in the world, it’s that the God of Mission has a Church in the world. Charlesworth and Williams bring us to God’s heart for the poor and so give us a touchstone for our faithfulness. Here we have the very basic principles of mission, the fundamental necessary attitudes to be a faithful church. It’s not rocket science, it requires no preparatory steps. We

shouldn’t just learn from what they have to say, we should simply get over ourselves and get on with it.

Review: 5Q – Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ



Just as in family life, when it comes to church life it’s sometimes necessary to call a family meeting and have an open and honest conversation around the dinner table. *Who are we? What are we about? And what do we need to adjust in our family dynamic?*

In church life that dynamic is about ministry. And whether we call our leaders “ministers,” “priests,” “bishops,” “deacons,” “pastors,” “teachers,” “preachers,” “elders,” “vicars,” “rectors,” “curates,” “reverends,” “servers,” “carers,” or simply “workers,” the impetus remains the same: At our best, we want a dynamic which grows the church towards maturity. The “family table” conversation means grasping for more than tired old formulae or the latest managerial gizmo.

We commonly recognise that, whatever the nomenclature, we desire for God to be in us, with us, and through us, by the power and presence of his Holy Spirit. We might adhere to the

traditional threefold order of deacons, priests, and bishops, and understood them as a variety of *charisms* – anointings of the Spirit through the laying on of hands. Or we might emphasise the more universally "lay" *charismata* (spiritual gifts) through which the people of faith operate as one body as *"to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good"*.

Alan Hirsch, in his latest book *5Q*, (I think it's meant to rhyme with "IQ"), picks up on another emphasis – the so-called "fivefold" or "ascension gifts" outlined in Ephesians 4:11-13:

> *It was he (Jesus at his ascension) who gave some to be **apostles**, some to be **prophets**, some to be **evangelists**, and some to be **pastors** and **teachers**, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

This dynamic involves the fivefold "offices" or "functions" of **Apostles**, **Prophets**, **Evangelists**, **Pastors** and **Teachers**, often abbreviated as **APEST** with Pastor renamed as Shepherd so as not to have two P's. Unlike other biblical charismatic gift-lists (e.g. 1 Cor 12, Romans 12) these ascension gifts seem intended to form a more complete and coherent shape about our family dynamic.

A simple first glance shows that there is room to explore this in practice. We know what it means for the church itself, and for members of the church to be *pastoral*. We can also grasp when the church and its members act in a *teaching* capacity, or exercise *evangelism*. But we are less able to grasp the *prophetic* and *apostolic* shape of church life. Or, to put it another way, as I have observed, the church loves and embraces Shepherding and Teaching, appreciates and values Evangelism, generally tolerates the Prophetic (especially if prophets hold

back and keep to themselves), and unknowingly yearns for the exercise of the Apostolic.

Emphasis on the fivefold has increased in recent times. Hirsch's book is a worthy contribution, emphasising a holistic and systemic approach rather than a highly individualised pop-psychology. His motivation for a "great recalibration" (xxix) I share, and his yearning "for a new sense of wholeness that only an imaginative vision born… can provide" (xxi) definitely taps into the longings of the wider Western church. His recognition of how "the more dynamic APEST system has never suited the more static, hierarchical, fundamentally non-movemental form of the church that has dominated in the West" (xxxviii) is a frustration grounded in reality.

The whole understanding, of course, rests upon Ephesians 4:1-16. Hirsch's exegesis in the first chapter is more than adequate. In particular, his drawing out of the imagery of the triumph in the ascension makes a powerful point about Jesus gifting the church with (ideally) a regenerated and regenerative human community.

> *In his ascension, Jesus has "given" APEST to the church as its lasting possession. In other words, the fivefold is part of the church's inheritance in Jesus. (Page 6)*

Similarly his *systemic* approach to the fivefold is founded on the point and purpose of "attaining maturity and fullness in Christ" (p8). The corollary, of course, is that if there is an imbalance (or absence) in the operation of the fivefold gifts in the church, *immaturity* is the result (pp11-13). He integrates this into his robust missiology (p80*ff*), unveiling it's place in how we the (*Body* of Christ) now share in the *Ministry* of Christ, this participation being the essence of the *Fullness* of Christ (p80*ff)*.

> *New Testament ministry in the Body of Christ cannot be done with anything less than all the dimensions of inherent in*

> *Christ's own ministry. Without full APEST expression, a church cannot logically extend Jesus' ministry in the world; neither can it attain to the fullness of Christ or achieve its purposes/mission – it will inevitably have dangerous gaps in its culture. And herein, folks, likes a huge amount of the church's dysfunction! (Page 88)*

These are firm foundations.

Hirsch does well to resist our individualising tendencies. It's not until page 44 that he explicitly states that "it is quite conceivable that the fivefold could be used as a means to profiling personality and helping people live into their unique sense of identity as a follower of Christ." The system and the symphony come first.

What we have then, is a properly exhaustive, internally consistent, framework which naturally applies to personality and leadership, and which has strong threads that connect it with the range of human experience and our understanding of God.

> *Grounded in God, laced into creation, redeemed by Jesus, granted to the church, lived out in the lives of its saints, to the glory of God – here we have a "system" that goes as deep as it does wide. (Page 61)*

This is very useful.

As he gets into the five APEST aspects themselves, Hirsch brings in a very useful distinction between what he calls "functions" and "callings" (p94). The distinction allows us to consider the fivefold, firstly, in terms of the church's "innate purpose and functionality" and, secondly, in terms of individual calling or vocation. That is, we can speak of how the church, exercising the Ministry of Christ as the Body of Christ, to avoid dysfunction, needs to be, in a corporate

sense, apostolic (A), prophetic (P), evangelistic (E), pastoral (S), and didactic (T). Any sense of individual calling is best seen as an *expression* of that, an outworking of the Ministry of Christ in one member of the Body of Christ.

And so, having foreshadowed them, Hirsch arrives at his definitions of the APEST functions and callings (p99*ff*):

Apostolic-Apostle (p99): Is rightly identified as correlating to the missionary "sentness" of the church. "The driving logic of the apostolicity is the extension of the Jesus movement in and through the lives of the adherents, as well as establishing the church onto new ground."

From my own discernment, I feel that Hirsch overemphasises the functional and entrepreneurial aspects of the apostolic (entrepreneurship attaches more to the Evangelistic in my experience) and he also overlaps with the Prophetic when it comes to the guarding of values. This is a common mis-step in fivefold literature, and can be avoided by looking just a little deeper.

The apostolic is at the heart of *movement* but doesn't usually generate it by being out in front, but primarily through *covering* and *parenting*. Come close to the apostolic and you find yourself connected in worship to the fathering heart of God, you find something kenotic, poured out for the sake of the body. Paul is a definitive example (e.g. *1 Cor 4:9*, *2 Tim 4:6*). The confusion comes, because, in providing the covering, the apostolic will often lead with the shape of the other functions, so as to guide and bring movement in that area.

Prophetic-Prophet (p102): Is rightly associated with the call to holistic worship, so that "as his people, we are to be the one place where God, and everything he stands for, is revered, cherished, and obeyed." Hirsch usefully observes a "vertically" orientated prophetic that feels what God feels and brings about an encounter with him, and a "horizontally"

orientated prophetic that calls people to covenant obligations of justice, holiness, right worship, and right living. It risks a false demarcation, but this properly recognises both the "mystical-charismatic" and "social justice" (p105) aspect of the prophetic.

Unlike some commentators, Hirsch doesn't avoid the *hard* aspects of the prophetic function and calling. "Prophets are often agitators for change" (p105), he says understatedly.

> *The prophetic vocation is likely the most difficult of all the APEST callings, partly because of the personal vulnerability involved (God is "dangerous"… he is a consuming fire) but also because the prophetic word, like the Word of God that the prophet seeks to represent, is often rejected by people who prefer their own ways. The prophet is likely the loneliest of all the vocations and the one most open to misunderstanding. I think this is why Jesus calls us to especially respect the prophets in our midst (Matthew 10:4-42) (Pages 105-106)*

In my experience, the most common dysfunction of otherwise healthy churches, even those who have a sense of apostolic mission and evangelistic zeal is that they ignore or reject the prophetic. They end up forgetting even the elementary teachings about Christ (Hebrews 6:1) and become a self-referential self-absorbed shadow of who they are called to be.

Evangelistic-Evangelist (p106): Hirsch does well to move the understanding of evangelist beyond the Billy Graham caricature. Yes, evangelism is about communication and "getting the message out" but it's also about "the infectious sharing of the movement's core message" and "the *demonstration* of good news in word, sign, and deed" (p107).

An interesting thought that Hirsch mentions – one that I will need to dwell on more – is to consider a *priestliness* in the evangelistic calling. "They have a capacity to make

connections with people in a way that demonstrates social as well as emotional intelligence… their function is genuinely priestly in that they mediate between God and people as well as between people and people." (p108).

Shepherding-Shepherd (p108): The pastoral shepherding image is common in Scripture and Hirsch draws upon it to demonstrate a function and calling that emphasises "social connectivity", healing and protection. They "champion inclusion and embrace" and desire *formation* in disciples-making that "lives locally and communally" (p110).

The use of "shepherd" instead of "pastor" is not just about having a better acrostic at this point. "Pastor" has become an honorific, the stuff of name plaques on office doors. "Shepherd" re-engages with the necessary *empathy* and *sharing of life* that "knows the personal details of the particular people in one's orbit" (p111). All of the functions bring pain when they are done distantly and dispassionately, but shepherding that is merely theoretical and formulaic, or done without any self-giving, is the harshest dysfunction.

Teaching-Teacher (p111): This function is also commonly understood. Hirsch draws us to the rabbinical tradition and the Wisdom Literature of the Scriptures to describe it. The emphasis here is not just on the heady and intellectual love of the abstract truth (the development of a "biblical mind" that means "seeing the world as God sees it, as described in the Scriptures") but also on the application in real life.

> *In many ways, teachers are similar to prophets and apostles in that they deal with ideas that shape life… From a biblical perspective, teaching is not about speculation in and of itself (idealism); rather, it is about the ministry of ideas in action (ethos), that is discipleship or formation. Teachers cannot teach what they do not know, and they cannot lead where they will not themselves go. Therefore, biblical teachers must have real participation in the ideas they*

propose." (page 112)

All this is substantial…. But what to do with it?

The point of typologies and inventories is to consider and address imbalances, strengthen weaknesses, and avoid the "precociousness" of over-reliance on strengths (p118). It takes maturity to do this, and sometimes maturation is not popular; "asymmetrical churches always end up attracting people who are like-minded and therefore asymmetrical… witness the many one-dimensional charismatic/vertical prophetic movements of the last century… or the asymmetrical mega-church that markets religion and ends up producing consumptive, dependent, underdeveloped, cultural Christians with an exaggerated sense of entitlement." (p119).

Hirsch's bold response is to suggest a re-evaluation, almost a reconstitution, of our ecclesiology that is based on the fivefold as the "marks of the church." (p132). This *is* bold. Not only does this counter the ST imbalance of the "protestant marks" of "word and sacrament" (p130), but even challenges the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" marks of the Nicence Creed!

I'm not sure I'd go that far, and I think Hirsch's is over-universalising the fivefold at this point. What is needed is not a reconstitution, but a reinvigoration, a substantiation of what we say and pretend we are into who we actually *are.* For instance, I am currently working on some thoughts about how we have placed *professionalism* at odds with our *vocationalism*. If we could be a church that actually *values* and *practises* vocation (an inherently apostolic function that the church is literally crying out for) rather than just stealing the word for our own mechanics, then we will have reinvigorated something and addressed an imbalance. But more of that another time.

Nevertheless, the point is well made. Organisations as much as

individuals need discipling (p147), and the fivefold framework is a useful world of challenge and comfort in which to do that. It can even be a framework in which to make use of and respond to various tools for ecclesial self-reflection (NCD springs to mind) as well as the various tools and techniques that Hirsch hints at in the latter part of the book.

But it takes more than a brand, even a 5Q brand, it takes a brokenness, a contrition, a willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit through hard places. The Western church has a perverse resistance to such things. My hope is that contributions such as Hirsch's will not be quickly swallowed up as yet another branded technique to exploit for our own ecclesial self-gratification. It has enough substance, enough comfort and challenge, to avoid the pitfalls. Wise leaders will read, mark, inwardly digest, and *apply*.

Hirsch's contribution is therefore significant, and I recommend this book, but only as one dish at the fivefold restaurant. Hirsch is a Michelin-star missiologist, but the discerning leader will also sit at the table of other similar chefs. My recommendation comes with some caveats, you see:

1) I don't often comment on the *tone* of a book, and it may play well in America, but there are times when Hirsch comes across with an air of arrogance that brought me to the brink of putting the book down. It *has* stopped me from pushing the book forwards in some contexts where I would like to promote fivefold thinking, because, frankly, the tone would *undermine* the case. Alan, you are not my Yoda, I am not your padawan (xxii*ff,* p7, p23, p80, etc. etc.), and you are not bringing forth some hidden ancient "world-renewing energy" (p31) that you have been personally bequeathed (p89) or have discovered (xxiii, p27 etc. etc.) like some great white Luther-like Indiana Jones who "blows his own mind" (p29). You are making a worthy contribution amongst many worthy contributions. Get over yourself, son.

2) The book is *theological* in the sense that it interacts with the fivefold as more than just a personality typology. But Hirsch's theology, in terms of the discipline, is not great. I agree with many of the conclusions, but the arguments are not convincing.

Particularly this: Hirsch wants to show that the fivefold demarcations are not some arbitrary overlay but are inherent not only within the created order but within the character and operation of God. It's a worthy hypothesis, however, condensed down, his argument proceeds as follows: 1) State what the fivefold demarcations look like in practice; 2) Observe these practices in creation (archetypes, p35, p63*ff*) and divinity (p55*ff* especially); 3) Conclude that the fivefold is therefore a derivation of something essential.

This is fallacious, I could also argue: 1) My fruit lollies have different colours and related flavours; 2) I observe these colours in the physical world, and symbolically throughout history; 3) My fruit lollies are therefore full of inherent meaning.

Don't get me wrong, I *do* think the fivefold typology coheres with the wider sense of how personality, community, and divinity operate. I was hoping for some robust theology to help me out. Hirsch's *observation* is useful, but some *derivation* is needed, e.g. demonstrate how fivefold functions are a necessary outworking of God as Trinity. At the very least, begin with Biblical examples of the fivefold offices, and derive the typology from that.

e.g. Hirsch wants to show that Jesus is the perfect embodiment of the fivefold gifts But he describes it this way: "The fivefold typology is therefore not incidental to Christology but indelibly shapes it and gives it content" (p21, see also p78). No! To be meaningful, it should be that Christology is not incidental to the fivefold typology, but indelibly shapes *it*. Derive *from* Jesus, not *to* him! "Jesus cannot be understood

apart from all fivefold identities” (p79) is simply an incorrect statement. I can also understand him as Son of God, as Prophet, Priest and King, as Advocate, as Lamb of God, as the Word/Logos etc. etc.

3) I am always wary of books that attach to products. 5Q is a brand name with a business model. This is not a unique problem – PMC is the same – and I understand why it happens. But the higher road is this: if you want to push along a movement, or have something profound and biblical to say, then put out the base theological material generically, and then you and any other person can use it to help and assist, consult and guide, and so build the body of Christ (towards Ephesians 4 maturity even!). Otherwise it looks like you are monetising truth, and God’s truth at that.

Around the family table, though, as we wrestle with our church family dynamic, the fivefold discussion needs to happen. 5Q gives us something to talk about, and, if we have the courage, to do.