Does God Use People?

An exploration of the language of "God uses", its theological implications, and its place in pastoral care.

Introduction

In the Thomas the Tank Engine books of the Rev'd W. Audrey (1996), the greatest commendation that can be bestowed is that of "Really Useful Engine." (p.36) In this little world, ruled over by an omnipotent and omniscient dictator, the highest moral imperative is to be useful and the worst crime is to delay passengers by being lazy or incompetent. If you are not willing to be useful then you run the risk of being bricked up in a tunnel (p.19) until you're willing to be useful again. (p.20) The name of the directing mind in this world is "The Fat Controller."

It seems to me that there is a strand in contemporary Western, Evangelical, Christian thinking that tends to see the world and God in a similar way. I think that this is exemplified by the phrase "God wants to use you." I am deeply uncomfortable with this language for three reasons. Firstly, because my wife suffers from a life-limiting medical condition and has struggled with the fact that she feels unable to be useful. I do not believe that insisting that God wants to use her anyway is helpful. Our experience is that coming to an appreciation that God loves and values her because of who she is and because of who God is has been more important. Secondly, I believe that this language is deeply strange to the ears of those in the world. It is my experience that in any other context speaking about someone using someone else is to say something negative about the first person. Thirdly, as a church leader and pastor I have felt the temptation to see people as resources and tools in the work of the Kingdom, rather than as people who God loves, and whom I am called to love.

Given this background, this dissertation seeks to explore the reasons that this language is used, to critique it from a range of perspectives, and to investigate whether alternative language might be available. This task begins by analysing examples of popular Christian

literature that utilise this language, uncovering its theological foundations and revealing the pastoral contexts in which it is employed.

The first critical perspective is that of Scripture. This is addressed by exploring whether there is any precedent in the Bible for "God uses" language in relation to people. The second critical perspective is that of contemporary secular usage. This is given a voice by looking at the occurrences of the verb "to use" with a personal object in English newspapers. The third critical perspective is one that integrates conceptions of God, self, and relationship. These three concepts are seen to be entwined, but are addressed in three sections for the purposes of clarity. The third section deploys Buber's I-Thou / I-It model to demonstrate the negative implications of "God uses" language on our understanding of God, our selves, and our relationships.[1]

Having critiqued this language from these perspectives, the dissertation moves on to address the major theological root of this language, that of God's sovereignty. Consideration is given to different ways of apprehending God's sovereignty and whether this language provides the most appropriate way of expressing a person's response to it.

Finally the pastoral deployment of "God uses" language is addressed. The contention that everybody can and should be used by God is often employed in an attempt to encourage and to motivate the discouraged or complacent. It is proposed that there are alternatives to this language that should be embraced because they are more deeply rooted in Scripture, have a greater potential for deepening a disciple's relationship with God, and are more intrinsically affirming.

[1] A fourth critical perspective, beyond the current scope, might be provided by tracing the development of this language through the history of spiritual writings, with particular reference to the mystics writing in the spiritual tradition of submission.

Literature Review

In order to address the potential issues with, and identify the possible strengths of "God uses" language, an analysis of the use of that language in popular Christian literature was required. The first task was to select a group of texts which could be examined in order to discover how and why this language is being used. To provide a sample for this examination eight books were chosen. The main criterion for this selection was that they all included the assertion that God uses people in the title or subtitle of the work. In order to provide a focus for the research the selection was restricted to works published in the last thirty years in England and the US. However, it was possible to include a range of authors and intended audiences, both men and women, black and white.

Having identified the works to be analysed, certain questions were posed of each work in turn.

- What issue or problem is being addressed in this work?
- What synonyms or parallels are used in this work for "God uses" that might reveal its meaning for the author and implied reader?
- What Biblical evidence or examples are cited as justification for the assertion that God uses people?
- What theology is evident or implied alongside the choice of the language of "God uses"?
- Is there any evidence that there might be ambivalence in the meaning of the concept of someone using someone else?
- How important is this language to the work in question?

The answers to these questions were sought in both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the texts.

The quantitative analysis involved:

- Counting the occurrences of forms of the verb "to use" with God as the subject and a personal object.
- Identifying and counting direct and implied synonyms and parallels of "God uses".
- Identifying and counting the examples of Biblical characters described by the authors as being used by God.

The results of the quantitative analysis are detailed in the appendices and referenced as evidence in the qualitative analysis as appropriate.

Gonzales – Hey God, I'm A Woman! Can You Use Me?

Gonzales' (2008) aim is to demonstrate that it is entirely fitting for women to exercise public teaching and leadership ministry in the church. She addresses an American, evangelical context. The main thrust of her argument is that the objections to women exercising these ministries are based on tradition and that Scripture encourages women to fulfil the call of God on their lives, including the call to leadership.

For Gonzales the most important parallels of "God uses" language are those relating to God's call and commission. Of the fourteen occurrences of parallels, twelve have this meaning. It seems clear, therefore, that for Gonzales "God uses" is largely synonymous with "God calls" and that in this context that call is understood as a call to a particular task or ministry.

Whilst Gonzales does make reference to God using female characters in the Bible (p.15) this is fleeting and there is no direct evidence offered of the Bible describing these women as being used by God. One of the arguments put forward to support women in the exercise of leadership ministry is based on Genesis 3. (p.18ff) It is suggested that just as Satan tempted the woman, so God's plan of restoration involves woman. It is a woman who will bring the Saviour to birth, and given this it is argued that it is perverse to argue that they should be excluded from other roles in the Kingdom of God. This assertion is summarised in this way "God, in turn, used the woman to reinforce His purpose for the human race and to bring

restoration." (p.25) Unfortunately this does, for me, raise the image of woman as a doll being used in turn by Satan and God to further their own ends. Furthermore, it strikes me as ironic that in this discussion Gonzales does not describe Satan as using the woman, but God.

In an exposition of Luke 1:26-28, Gonzales writes "God can use anyone who is willing to yield to him."(p.27) This provides an example of a concept that "God uses" language expresses strongly, that of surrender. Whilst, as noted above, Gonzales mostly utilises "God uses" interchangeably with "God calls", here we have a case where "God can call" will not carry the same weight that "God can use" does. Here is a theology that includes the necessity of the absolute yielding of the creature to the creator. The question that this raises is whether distaste for the language of "God uses" is entirely derived from a right caution about its dangers, or whether there is also an aspect of unwillingness to bend the knee absolutely to the Lord?

Whilst the potential ambivalence of "God uses" language is not explicitly explored, Gonzales does, as part of her argument, note that God created both men and women for blessing and relationship with God. (p.35ff) As part of this argument she writes "Our Lord is never abusive...Jesus finds no reason to belittle His Bride; He is totally secure, and besides He truly loves us." (p.38) From this it is clear that she does not believe that there is any sense in which use by God is abusive.

"God uses" language is used relatively infrequently in this work, and of the seventeen occurrences, eight are repetitions of the title at the end of each chapter. The main meaning apparently intended by the author is one conveying an idea of being chosen and called. Given this, it does seem that this language is not critical to the achievement of the aim of the book.

Rouse – God uses Black Sheep

Rouse (2009) writes in order to encourage those who have been rejected and are on the outside of the church and society. He argues passionately that God loves them, values them, and is reaching out to them with a plan for their lives. He also rebukes the Christian community that excludes them. The origins of the book are related in the testimony of the author who writes "the Spirit of the Lord came to me and spoke these words into my heart 'I use black sheep.'"(p.5)

In the discussion of "God uses" language it is important to take seriously the witness of God's self revelation to someone. At the same time it is right to exercise discernment. What options are available to us? We might conclude that this language is contrary to Scripture and therefore God would not use it to communicate with someone. We might conclude that the language is neutral or even unsatisfactory but that God graciously communicates with people in a language that they understand. We might conclude that as this language is used by God, it is evidently a right way of talking about the relationship between God and people, and that we should not question it.

The parallels used by Rouse largely involve the call and choosing of people by God. Although there are references to a few Biblical characters, there is no evidence offered of the Bible saying that God used them.

In his analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:27, Rouse writes "So God will always use the base things." (p.11) This implies that there is an underlying understanding that it is things that are used, not people, but there is no expansion or exploration of this. Rouse does also use this language in a negative way "... we allowed him [the devil] to use our tongue and the knowledge of a person to bring about destruction."(p.26) However, there is no exploration of the possible dilemma that is found in the juxtaposition of "God using" and "The devil using."

Rouse uses "God uses" language relatively infrequently and utilises parallels with a greater relative frequency than any of the other works being considered. In fact, the only clear imperative for its inclusion is that it is the language that Rouse believes God spoke to him.

Blackaby and Blackaby – The Man God Uses

Blackaby and Blackaby (1999) wrote this book in order to call men to live out their lives as faithful disciples. Core to the argument is the concept that men are called to be used by God and that in order to be used, their characters must be Godly and their relationship with God must be strong. This argument is made from Scriptural examples, personal anecdotes, and from the examples of well known historical Christian men.

This work contains more parallels, more widely used, than any of the other texts. Of these, almost a third relate to being called or chosen by God. The remainder are very task orientated, either God using men as tools to accomplish tasks or men being given tasks to do. Every aspect of discipleship is cast in the language of being used by God. For instance "Our prayers allow us to become more aware of how God wants to use us." (p.174)

At this point it is worth remembering that this book is written specifically for men. It may be that the focus on task is deliberate, driven by a perception that men respond more favourably to the language of task and mission. However, as a man, whilst I agree with much of what is written in terms of practical discipleship, I find unhelpful the underlying, and unexamined, assumption that men are of value if they can be used by God.

Whilst there are many Biblical characters held up as examples of men that God used, either despite certain failings or because of Godly disciplines, there is no evidence of Biblical occurrences of "God used." There is a brief reference to 1 Corinthians 1:27-28 which does refer to people as things. (p.3)

One Biblical character is mentioned in this context, uniquely among these texts, in a formulation that is worth considering separately. The authors write that "Christ is our primary example of how God uses a man in relationship to himself." (p.33) This does seem to imply some problematic consequences for Christology, the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the Trinity, not all of which we have space to discuss.

These problems are further illustrated by the authors' understanding of the relationship between Christ and the Bible. Based on their understanding of John 1 they write "Scripture

is not a concept; Scripture is a person....The Word is a person. The Word is God speaking to you and me. The Word became flesh in Jesus Christ and lived among us." (p.83) However, they also see God's word as a tool in God's toolbox "God used his Word to speak clearly to me during my prayer time with him." (p.91)

I think that this confusion runs through the book. I do not agree that "the Word" in John refers to Scripture, it refers to Jesus. (Beasley-Murray, 2002, p.1ff) They are different but are conflated in this book. Perhaps this blurring of the distinction contributes, or is a part of, the blurring of the distinction between people and things that is implied in the concept of God using people.

The sovereignty of God appears to be a very important aspect of the theology that underpins this work. This sovereignty appears to be understood as an absolute control by God of people and circumstances. This is seen in the argument that is put forward that humility of attitude is necessary in the service of God. People are tools in God's hands and God's plans, and pride has no place. (p.88) This point is made even more strongly later, that Christians have submitted to Christ as Lord, and that "God has the right to help himself to your life anytime he wants." (p.93) It is also seen in the assertions made that God uses circumstances to shape people, especially their character. The argument follows this path: God uses circumstances, good and bad, to form us into tools that God can then use for other purposes. (p.27ff)

Here again we have "God uses" language carrying a weight in the discourse of yielding and surrender that may be appropriate. However, the formulation appears to me to be overly manipulative and mechanistic. Later I will address the theology of God's sovereignty and discuss whether there might be other ways of understanding and describing it that might more adequately preserve the depth of surrender without eliding our created personhood.

There is a fairly unrelenting emphasis throughout the book on God using men, and being prepared to be useful. Despite this, there are hints that there is more than a utilitarian manipulation in view. "God wants to commune with us in a reciprocating love relationship." (p.17) and "We are not called to a task, a mission, a job, or a ministry. We are called to a

relationship with our heavenly Father." (p.32) However, there seems to be no recognition that the very language that is being used might destroy relationship and that the over bearing volume of the task focussed language almost drowns these whispers of love.

In what appears to me to be one of the most internally contradictory statements made in any of these books, the authors write "The man God uses is first encountered by God." (p.92) I will argue later that you cannot authentically encounter with someone you use, because you use things not people.

"God use" language is so prevalent in this book that it could not be written without it. I believe that its aims could be met more effectively without "God uses" language, but it would be a fundamentally different book.

Calver and Delve – God Can Use You

Calver and Delve (1983) write to call the people of God to radical discipleship, and more holy living, in order to fulfil God's creation purposes. It is aimed at "ordinary" Christians who may believe that they are useless, or that they are not called to this kind of discipleship. It consists of three parts. The first focuses on the need in the world for faithful followers of Jesus. The second describes the answer in terms of the practical out workings of discipleship. The third part is an account of D.L. Moody's life, written by R.A. Torrey.

The parallels are so sparse in this book, that they do not provide any insight into the meaning of "God uses" language. Only two Biblical characters are considered, and again there is no evidence that the Bible describes God as using them.

In an observation of how the world defines people, and as part of a call to live counter culturally, the authors write "Identity is swiftly established by how we earn our living. The life-style of the Kingdom speaks for a different standard of values." (p.113) Perhaps one of the reasons that "God uses" language is found so thinly in this book, despite the title, is the acknowledgment that our identity isn't formed by what we do for God, but that what we do for God is established by our identity in God. This possibility is reinforced by a comment made in the teaching on prayer "God wants willing companions, not slaves." (p.65)

That said, the frequency of "God uses" language does rise significantly in the third section of the book. Here the main thrust is on Moody's fundamental surrender to God and the necessity of that surrender for the work that he did.

> "Is it too much to say that God is always looking for a man he can use? Notice the word 'use', for there seem to be four ideas concerning our relationship to God in service. Some teach that man is instructed of God. The divine command is given and man must obey. Others teach that in service man is helped of God. Still others, that he is led of God. All of these suggest a partnership with Deity. The fourth idea, and the right one, is that man can be used of God. This demands surrender and submission of a Christian. This looks to God for enablement and gives to Him the glory. Moody was used of God." (p.161)

In this forthright assertion we find again intrinsic links between a particular conception of the sovereignty of God, utter yielding, and "God uses" language which will be considered in more detail later.

The first two sections of this book could have been written with no reference to "God uses". This demonstrates that it is possible to write about strong and radical discipleship, encouraging those who feel useless, without insisting that the resolution is to believe that God wants to use them. However, the language of "God uses" is foundational to the third section. It is the primary lens through which Moody's life and ministry is presented.

LaHaye and Crouse – A Woman's Path to True Significance: How God Used the Women of the Bible and Will Use You Today

LaHaye and Crouse (2007) retell the stories of the five women in Matthew's genealogy, drawing lessons from these stories which they present in order to encourage women to live lives that are significant and fulfilled for God.

Half the parallels that are used in this work are clustered around concepts of being called or chosen. The other half describes service and obedience. Of the seven female characters mentioned, there is no evidence for the Bible describing any of them as used by God.

The strongest relevant theological theme that can be identified is that of the Sovereignty of God. As part of this, there is again the theme of God shaping the Christian to be a useful tool. (p.17) There is a strong theme throughout the book of the plans of God being woven together throughout the circumstances and episodes of life. This strong concept of God's controlling mind in all circumstances seems to feed the idea that all players in it, including people, must, in some way, be under that control, or used. This is seen in the call to complete surrender.

> "Mary's response to the angel is a model of us of true humility: God has the right to arrange my life however He chooses, whenever He wants to intervene. Because Mary's attitude was one of willingness to serve, God could use her to do the miraculous." (p.252)

The potential ambivalence of "God uses" language is highlighted in the retelling of the story of Tamar. Recounting the deceit of Onan, the author writes "But after using her, he would withdraw in time to prevent her from getting pregnant." (p.33) However, this doesn't prevent the author, in her analysis of the story, commenting "It is the story of how ... God used a woman to strip a man of his excuses..." (p.49)

Given the relative infrequency of "God uses" language I think that the majority of the aims of this book could have been met without it. However, it must be noted again that it might not be possible to talk about surrender in the same way without it. This possibility is reinforced by the observation that the frequency of "God uses" language intensifies around the discussion of humility.

Packer and Nystrom – Never beyond hope: How God touches and uses imperfect people.
Packer and Nystrom (2000) present a series of examinations of Biblical characters with the aim of showing how God blessed them and used them despite their flaws. From this, encouragement is offered to the reader not to allow their own flaws to cut them off from God. This encouragement is formed in a framework of offering hope that is seen by the authors as one of God's greatest gifts to humanity.

About a third of the parallels in this work have meanings associated with being called or chosen. The remaining majority are task and service focussed. There is no mention of people being tools or God working through people. Being used by God seems to mean that there is work that God has for people to do and God is calling them to do it. The recounting of episodes from the lives of several Biblical characters contains no evidence that the Bible refers to any of them as having been used by God.

What we find in terms of theology is an understanding of sanctification that sees God forming God's people at the same time as involving them in the work that is prepared for them. "God's way with folk is to change them as he uses them and to use them while he's remaking them." (p.77)

In the recounting of Martha's story we find an unwitting example of the ambivalence of the language of use; "Martha is actually trying to manipulate Jesus, to use Jesus as her heavy hammer for hitting her sister Mary over the head." (p.99) This implies that it was wrong for Martha to use Jesus. Although it is asserted that Jesus' response contains a refusal to be used as a tool by Martha (p.101), there is no discussion about whether that is because it is not appropriate for Jesus to be used as a tool, or for people in general not to use each other as tools, or if the problem was that she was trying to use him to harm someone else.

The fact that this work is effectively a collection of Packer's sermons, grouped around this theme, is evident from the uneven distribution of "God uses" language. It is very apparent in some of the chapters, and completely absent in others. I think that this demonstrates that it is possible to address the aims of this book without "God uses" language.

Kendall – Second Chance: However Far You Fall, God Can Use You Again

Kendall (2008) aims to reach church leaders who have sinned and been exposed. He writes to encourage them to return to God, that they may be restored but warns that the road is hard and dependent on true repentance. It has secondary audiences of church leaders and others, who are warned of the severity of the consequences of sinning. Underpinning this analysis is a particular concept of God's judgement at the end of time, and in particular the reward of faithful servants and passing over of unfaithful servants.

In this book there are a few occurrences of a description of those who are used by God as vessels. Just under a third of the parallels used by Kendall focus on the ministry and service aspects of being used by God. The remaining parallels describe these people as being called or chosen. The examples of more different Biblical characters are presented in this book than in any of the other works in the sample. There is no evidence presented that the Bible describes God using any of them.

In considering the underlying theological themes there is a familiar pattern beginning to emerge. The idea of God's Sovereignty, expressed in the control and shaping of people and circumstances is clear, as is a very strong emphasis on surrender to God.

The shaping and sanctification elements of this understanding are seen in the presentation of the argument that a Godly character is imperative for resisting temptation. Kendall describes the development of this character as God building the house of our lives. He then develops this idea using Psalm 127:1 "unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain." From this he asserts that we have responsibility in the task of shaping our characters, under the direction of God. "He builds it, yes, but he uses builders. Us!"(p.46)

In a discussion of sexual purity, and the acceptability of sexual love in the appropriate contexts, we find this statement "... *eros* love ... is what God uses to make a man and woman fall in love and want to get married."(p.82) Whilst this does not state that God uses people, I feel that it reveals a conception of God's sovereignty that includes a strong element of control. This feeling strengthens later in the same chapter when Kendall discusses Joseph's rejection of Potiphar's wife "He did not know that all that was going on in

his life was the consequence of an Architect's carefully drawn plan." (p.85) This understanding of the God's sovereignty is most clearly summarised in the author's assertion that "The sovereignty of God refers to his right and power to do what he please with whomever he chooses." (p.71)

The only proper response to this Sovereign is to surrender fully. In a lengthy exposition of the fall and restoration of Simon Peter as an exemplar, Kendall relates a situation from his own experience where he had to preach at a time that he was very aware of his own sinfulness "God was able to take over and he did ... I have tried ever since not to depend on my spiritual sense of preparation, unless by that one means a feeling of absolute powerlessness and emptiness of self." (p.200)

There is evidence that there is ambivalence about "use" language when persons are involved. In a discussion of the dangers of wealth Kendall writes "People don't need too much encouragement to use God to try to get what they want." (p.77) and "It is trying to 'use' God – he is but a stepping stone to wealth." (p.77) Again there is no discussion of why it is inappropriate for people to use God, when it is acceptable for God to use people, however the employment of quote marks around use in the second example suggests subliminal acknowledgment that this is ambivalent language.

The frequency of "God uses" language, and the relative lack of parallels in this work seem to suggest that it would be difficult to recast it all without this language. This impression is reinforced by the strength of the theology of Sovereignty that is expressed using this language.

Amess – Can God Use me?

Amess (2000) writes to encourage those who feel that God cannot use them because of a lack of training, family background, or failure. The recurring theme in Amess' purpose is that of encouragement. It is important to note that this book has arisen out of pastoral ministry in which people have come to him and said that they feel that they cannot be "used by God." (p.5) However, the question remains whether this is because that is the only

language that their theological tradition equips them with, and whether part of the answer to their felt need might be to challenge the language.

The vast majority of parallels used in this work carry the meaning of call and being chosen. They convey a positive sense of God inviting people to work alongside God to bring the Kingdom in. The methodology of showing how God called and worked with Biblical characters, despite their flaws, is used here also. Again there is no evidence for the Bible describing any of them as used by God.

The theme of sanctification as ongoing moulding to make God's people more fit for service also appears in this text. Alongside this, there is an emphasis on who we are in our individual nature as being important to God. "God called Moses and Paul because it was them that he wanted to use – as they were, as he could make them, not to be a pseudo someone else." (p.67)

It is in this book that we find the only explicit attempt in all the texts to deal with the potential ambivalence of "God uses" language.

> "To be used by God is not like being 'used' by people, which so often means being manipulated by others for their own selfish purposes. Being used by God means significance and opportunity in the family of God. It means having a reason to be alive and something to achieve while we yet live. It means being changed from one degree of glory to another until one day we stand perfect before Christ. And then we will be used in praising him, the one who took hold of such unlikely people as you and me and made something wonderful out of us." (p.163)

Whilst it is encouraging to note that the potential problem has been recognised, this seems to me to dismiss it as inconsequential rather than address it as substantive.

I think that more useful in this regard is Amess' conclusion of his discussion of Elijah's depression after Carmel with a personal testimony that what he needs when he is in the grips of depression is to have God present with him and speaking to him. "...God himself,

quietly speaking to me by name in terms of love, hope and future." (p.126) It strikes me as significant that this does not involve more things to do as God's tool, or how he can still be used by God, but is rooted in God's authentic, personal presence.

In conjunction with this insight, the relatively low frequency of "God uses" language suggests that there is very little in this book that could not be expressed without it.

Summary

All of these works feature a call to deeper Christian discipleship. There is a wide range of parallel language used across these works that reveal that the majority of meaning of "God uses" language is captured in the concepts of being chosen and called to service and ministry. The only aspect of "God uses" language that is not expressed in the parallels is that of complete surrender to God. This is linked with the key theological concept that is intrinsically bound up with "God uses" language, that of the sovereignty of God, expressed in strongly deterministic terms. Despite a wide cast list of Biblical characters, there is no evidence offered that the Bible refers to any of them being used by God. There is some indirect evidence that "God uses" language might be ambivalent, but this is not addressed adequately.

Biblical Material

The next stage of the investigation is to discover whether there is any precedent in the Bible for "God uses" language in relation to people. There was very little evidence provided for this in the literature review.

Dictionary Work

In order to provide a thorough examination of the Biblical material a two pronged approach was devised. The first stage was to identify the occurrences of "use" in English translations. The second stage was to consult exegetical dictionaries to identify the Greek and Hebrew language behind these verses.

Old Testament

The first thing that became apparent was that this language is very rare in the OT. In the New International Version, the word "use" only appears in 62 verses. This rarity is reflected in the fact that neither of the dictionaries consulted, Vine (1985) and VanGemeren (1996), had an entry for "use" in the index. Neither was there an entry for "instrument" or "tool". Despite this, one occurrence in the English did stand out as requiring further consideration.

In the NIV, Isaiah 7:20a reads "In that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the River —the king of Assyria—to shave your head and the hair of your legs," Although the verb "to use" is not explicitly present in Hebrew, it is implied. God is described as using Assyria as a razor to administer a humiliating shaving to the King and people of the land. This is seen by Watts (2002, Vol 24, p.178) as part of Isaiah's insistence that it is God who, for God's own purposes, uses the nations firstly to destroy and then to restore God's people.

The corresponding proclamation of restoration is found in Isaiah 44 – 45. Here Cyrus is described as being chosen by God, but *contra* Watts and Goldingay (2001, p.263), the passage does not explicitly say that God used Cyrus.

From this example, two elements seem to be pertinent to this discussion. Firstly, the language is metaphorical. Whilst a thorough treatment of the use of metaphor in theology is not possible, it is useful to note that the power of metaphors derives from the semantic shock of the pairing, thus maintaining an appreciation of the untruth of the metaphor is fundamental to grasping its meaning. (Stiver, 1996, p.115ff) Furthermore, as highlighted by McFague, (1982, p.20ff) no one metaphor can be allowed to become dominant, they must be considered in multiplicity.

Secondly, although Cyrus is named, the theological thrust of the narrative is not to explore the nature of the relationship of individuals with God, but to trace the purposes of God underpinning the salvation history of the people of God. The sovereignty of God is clearly in view, but it is sovereignty over nations and history rather than one that is interested in the surrender of individual lives.

New Testament

In contrast, there was more NT material available. The most important verb to consider is *chraomai*, which means "to use, employ, make use of, to treat." (Balz, 1993, p.471) However, there is no occurrence of this verb, carrying the sense of "to use" having a person as its object. (Appendix D) The key noun is *skeuos* which means "object, vessel, instrument." (Balz, 1993, p.250) Of the twenty two verses in which this noun occurs (Appendix E), one (Acts 9:15) explicitly describes a person, Paul, as an instrument of God. A further seven describe people as earthen vessels.

God's Instrument: Acts 9:15

Balz (1993, p.251) asserts that in this use of the metaphor, it is the instrumental nature of the relationship between God and Paul that is at the fore. This correlates with Bruce (1988, p.187) linking this verse with Paul's sense of his own call as a slave of Christ, illustrated in verses such as Romans 1:1. Dunn (1998, p.635) argues that Paul's primary focus in this image is on the obedience of faith exemplified by a slave's obedience, rather than the objectification of the slave by the institution of slavehood. Dunn (2002, Vol 38a, p.7) also suggests that Paul is seeking to emphasise the continuity between himself, and his message, and those described as servants of God throughout the Old Testament. He does, however,

note a secondary intention of reinforcing Paul's ongoing theme of the revolutionary nature of the Christian's relationship with God. To a society that prized freedom above all, presenting any form of slavery as an aspiration was scandalous. However, this must be held in balance with Jesus' declaration in John 15:15 that he does not call his followers "slaves" but "friends".

Potter's Vessels

The NT occurrences of the metaphor of the potter's vessel have their roots in the OT. The most obvious of these is Jeremiah's visit to the potter's house described in Jeremiah 18. Through this acted out parable God makes clear that the Creator has the right to reshape the creation, and that this reshaping takes into account the response of the creation. Craigie (2002, p.245) argues that this parable describes the interaction between God and nations. Clements (1988, p.114) asserts that this principle extends to the relationship between individuals and God. This theme of the Creator's sovereignty is found again in Isaiah 45:9, where the prophet uses this metaphor to insist that "creatures have no right to protest against the decisions of their creator." Watts (2002, Vol 25, p.157)

Paul's use of this metaphor in Romans 9:21-23 takes these prophetic assertions and applies them in his exploration of God's purposes in election. (Bruce, 1963, p.187ff) In this exploration, the shocking implication is that the community of Israel is currently in the position of the "vessels of wrath." (Dunn, 1998, p.513) Therefore, as Dunn (2002, Vol38B, p.557) argues, this imagery is more likely to have been intended to be understood at a community level than at the individual level. Paul is exploring the working out of God's purposes in relation to the communities of the Gentiles and of Israel, rather than to individuals. Fundamentally, the focus is not on the use of the vessels by the owner. It is on the making of the vessels by the Creator, and the subsequent relationship of humility that is therefore appropriate.

The metaphor of God's people as vessels reoccurs in Paul's writing in 2 Corinthians 4:7. Dunn (1998, p.482ff) suggests that Paul uses the contrast between the images of the fragile container and the powerful light to illustrate the eschatological tension inherent in the power of God both transcending and being expressed through the weakness of humanity.

Spicq's alternative view is presented as a counter balance to this position by Martin (2002, p.85). It is argued that the vessels Paul has in mind are not rough, clay pots, but the highly decorated and valuable lamps and vases of the period. In both interpretations of the metaphor, the glory and power all come from God. The vessel has none of its own, and the focus is not on its use by God, but on its property of showing forth God's power.

This metaphor makes a third appearance, with another level of meaning, in 2 Timothy 2:21-22. Here the controlling theme is that of the life of discipleship and ongoing sanctification. (Dunn, 1998, p.330) In order to be fit for the purpose of the ministry that God has called him to, Timothy is exhorted to keep himself free from pollution and sin. (Mounce, 2002, p.530)

1 Corinthians 1:27-28

These verses need to be examined here because they are cited in two of the works in the literature review. However, as is pointed out by Thiselton (2000, p.183ff), the entire thrust of these verses is the inclusion, by God, of all at the edges of society in the Kingdom. It seems ironic that one of the most powerful expressions of God's purpose to defeat the power structures of the world, characterised by the rich using the poor, should be used as a pillar for an argument that God wants to use people. It seems to me that the choosing by God of the poor and weak is more indicative of God's preference for the seemingly useless, and is a judgement upon the philosophy that sees a human's value in his or her usefulness.

Summary

This survey of the Biblical material has been brief, as the material is not extensive. That which is present carries theological themes relating to God's sovereignty. However, it expresses that sovereignty in terms of creation, election (with an emphasis on mercy) and on expressions of power rather than in terms of control. There is a range of levels of application, from that of the community to that of the individual. There is only one example that carries any indication that what is in view is the usefulness of the individual to God, and this bears the sense of being fit for purpose, rather than that of being a tool.

Contemporary Secular Usage

It is clear from this analysis that the word "use" and its cognates are relatively rare in the Bible. However, this is not the case in contemporary English. In order to investigate the dimensions of meanings, and the frequency of these meanings, it was decided to analyse its occurrences in a set of newspapers in the UK. Whilst this would not give a complete picture, such as would be gained by also looking at other repositories of English such as novels, film, TV, plays, or blogs, it has the advantage of being easily searchable.

Eight titles, made available through the InfoTrac Database, were analysed with a variety of searches. (Appendix F) Due to the high frequency of "use" a two phase approach was utilised. Firstly, the unique occurrences of "use" and "used" on a single day (01/03/2010) were identified. Secondly, articles published in 2010, where the phrases "can use" or "will use", were in the keywords field in the database were also identified. From these occurrences, the examples where the verb had a person as its object were identified, and the percentage of the total occurrences was calculated. (Table A)

Table A

	Total	Person as object of verb	
Word	Occurences	Occurences	%
use	116	6	5%
used	100	13*	13%
can use	76	2	3%
will use	102	2	2%
Total	394	23	6%

* Excluded from this count are several instances of "Subs not used" in match reports.

As can be seen from this analysis, it is clear that, in contemporary English, the object of the verb "to use" is very rarely a person. However, there are circumstances where it is, so what are these circumstances?

Of the twenty three occurrences noted, seven referred to the deployment of sports people. For instance “Frank Rijkaard used the left-footed Lionel Messi on the right side.” (Guardian Sports Pages, 01/03/2010, p.2) Four appeared in stories to do with slavery or exploitation “Apple admits that child labour was used at its assembly plants in China.” (Daily Telegraph, 01/03/2010, p.8) Three described the relationship between a client and a medical professional “Tim and Gisela Liardet ... used the same surgeon.” (Daily Telegraph, 01/03/2010, p.28) Two occurred in discussions of the employment of politicians in election campaigning. The remaining seven defied classification, but were all ambivalent or carried a sense of the objectification of the people being used. For instance “The four used alleged accomplices at now-defunct Essex-based Montague Mason Solicitors to submit false paperwork.” (Daily Mail, 01/03/2010, p.61)

One common phrase that did not come up in this search was any reference to “feeling used”. As part of the rationale for this piece of work was the dissonance that I felt between the suggestion that God uses people and the prevalence of this phrase in common discourse, a further search on articles written since 01/01/2009, employing the phrases “felt used” or “feels used” was made.

Of the fifteen examples identified, four related to sports professionals “'They described how excited they were to turn professional, but after a couple of years they felt used and abused.” (Mail on Sunday, 24/05/2009, p.73) I believe that this demonstrates that the description of sports people being used in games is not neutral, there is a real sense in which they are viewed, and view themselves, as impersonal tools. Five instances related to manipulative or abusive personal relationships “I felt used and violated, like I meant nothing to him but a night of casual sex. I wanted to dig a hole, crawl in and die.” (Daily Mail, 09/04/2010, p.13) A further three described dysfunctional working relationships in other professions.

Of the remaining three, two were of particular interest. The first was a review of a remake of television programme “The Prisoner”. The reviewer writes “She looks blankly up at you as if to say "I feel used" and really, The Prisoner has been used.” (Guardian, 17/04/2010, p.52) The power of the invective lies in the knowledge, held to be common, that it is

unacceptable to use a woman, and therefore it is wrong to use the original programme by cashing in on a remake. The second occurred in response to a reader's question to an agony column "Am I alone in being plagued by non-driving friends who manipulate me into 'offering' lifts?" (Guardian Money Pages, 14/03/2009, p2) One of the reader responses was "If you find it difficult to ask up front I suggest you ask a close associate to have a word, suggesting that you feel used ..." Here it is worth noting the assumption that "feeling used" is a synonym for "being manipulated".

Summary

In this analysis we have seen that in contemporary English the verb "to use" does not occur often with a person as its object. Where it does occur in this way, the sense of the person being an object is carried over from the majority usage. There is very little evidence for a positive usage of this construction, and significant evidence for its negative usage.[2]

[2] This analysis has focussed on a subset of contemporary English usage. There is scope for further research in this area, which might usefully include survey work focussed on understanding how people in different demographics and faith groups understand the verb "to use" when it occurs with a personal object.

Who is God?

Having demonstrated that "God uses" language has little Biblical precedent, and that the idea of a person being used does have negative connotations in secular use, we now turn to its wider implications. This part of the discussion begins with the foundational work of exploring who God is, and the teasing out of certain principles that might guide the way that we choose to talk about God and God's actions.

Foundational Principles

Kung (1980) suggests that in Descartes' work we see a transition point from a prevailing world view that works from certainty about God to learn about self, to one that is certain of self and works towards God. (p.15) This methodology, however, seems to have failed. Similarly, Buber (1957) argues that the reason that Kant's thinking ultimately fails to resolve is because it looks for the absolute of God in a place that it cannot be found, in the contingency of the inner workings of the human heart. He writes "the encounter with the original voice, the original source of yes or no, cannot be replaced by any self-encounter."(p.18)

Furthermore, as we will see later, it seems that one of the difficulties in post modernity is that a lack of trust in concepts of self have meant that the self is no longer experienced as solid ground from which to work towards God. The project of modernity has failed to provide authentic explanations of self, God, or any other aspect of reality and we are faced with what amounts to a council of despair in postmodernity.

Standing over against that is the Christian tradition that continues to invite us to return to the methodology of working from God out. This tradition is exemplified by Calvin, whose methodology of developing a doctrine of God is described by Karkkainnen. (2004, p.104) He describes how "Institutes of Christian Religion" begins by asserting that knowledge has two parts: that pertaining to God which is primary and comes by revelation through creation and scripture, and that pertaining to humanity which is secondary to knowledge of God.

This understanding of Calvin's methodology is seen as foundational by Gunton (1997, p.91) who also sees it as distinctive in the writing of Richard of St Victor. This methodology is one that continues to be fruitful in contemporary theology. For instance, Webster (in McCormack, 2008, p.108) contends that it is important that our concepts of God, in this case God's aseity, are developed from God's self-revelation, not as dependent or even in contrast to our notions of creatures as contingent. It is not that God is non-contingent but that God is self sufficient, self-defined, and self-existent.

The criticality of beginning with our conception of God, and working from there, to this discussion is further highlighted by Johnson. (1992) She begins her exploration of God's identity by asserting that the way in which we speak about God is absolutely fundamental to our beliefs and behaviour because speech is formative. Thus what is said about God shapes the community, the individual lives of the members of the community, and the way that they relate to each other and to God. (p.3) The implication of this argument is that if we get the way that we speak about God wrong, or allow it to become imbalanced, then we run the risk of deforming our communities and our own lives. She notes in Liberation Theology an analysis of how this has been seen to occur in history, quoting Segundo "Our falsified and inauthentic ways of dealing with our fellow men are allied to our falsification of the idea of God." (p.14)

As a further example of an inadequate and imbalanced view of God leading to misconceptions about humanity Johnson examines the classical theist concept of God. She argues that this was constructed through medieval and early modern times and can be typified by its controlling metaphor of King. God is transcendant, other, One, infinite along every dimension where creatures are finite in all. She considers that this leads to God's immanence being obscured or forgotten. Johnson goes on to describe the challenges to Theism that emerged through the 19th and 20th centuries. Atheism attacks theism as a projection of human consciousness onto the ceiling. The existence of radical evil and suffering leads others to decry the seperateness of the theistic concept of God. (p.19ff)

In response to these challenges, she discerns that a new set of ways of talking about God have emerged. Many of these emphasise the immanence of God and God's intimate involvement and love for the creation. (p.21)

Is God a Person?

It seems to me that the ways of talking identified by Johnson have their roots in the understanding of God as a person. In order for us to assess the validity of these ways of talking about God we therefore have to decide whether or not it is appropriate to describe God as a person.

Kung (1980, p.631) addresses this question. He argues that the concept of God as a person, or even personal is not found in the Bible, but that it was introduced in the early church as a very useful metaphor when trying to describe the Trinity. This assertion is supported by Johnson (1992, p.7) who argues that words about God that are not used in the Bible may be used if they authentically say something about God that is revealed in Scripture, tradition and current faith experience. She uses as an example of this Aquinas' defence of referring to God as person, when this is not found in the Bible.

Kung (1980) goes on to argue that God is not a person as a human is a person, God is beyond personhood. However, God created personality so God cannot be impersonal. This implies that God cannot be less than a person. The conclusion drawn is that God is not an "it" underpinning all being in the creative spirit. Kung suggests that a more adequate concept would be that God is transpersonal or suprapersonal. What, however, must not be lost is the fact that the Bible reveals not a faceless, empty object or universe but a God who can be met. "God can be heard and addressed: that he comes among men saying "I" making himself a "thou" for them, one who speaks to us and to whom we can speak."(p.632) Therefore, whatever term is settled upon, any concept of God has, if it is to be faithful to the Biblical revelation, must include the idea that God can be addressed.

In a parallel vein, Buber (1957, p.19) critiques Hegel's philosophy which he characterises as portraying God as using all creatures, including people, as instruments of God's own self-realisation and never entering relationship with them. Buber argues that the major flaw in

this portrayal is that it does not describe the God that is, and has been, encountered in history.

Any understanding of God must begin with God's self-revelation in Scripture and history. It is important that our understanding of God is not distorted, not just because of the impropriety of speaking unworthily of God, but also because of the damage that such understanding and speech about God can do to people. It does seem, however, that we may speak of God as having aspects of personhood, especially when we consider the possibility of relationship and speech with God.

The Trinity

A key development in contemporary theology that gives us some of the language that can be used to explore these ideas of who God is with respect to personhood and relationship is the rediscovery of the Trinity as a controlling theme of God talk.

This development is described by Johnson. (1992) She suggests that the classical theology of the Trinity was insistent on the "pattern of proceeding" which was based on the definitive role of John 20:21 and 14:26 in the conception of the Trinity, and the imperative requirement to keep the Persons of the Trinity separate without making them different. (p.194) However, she asserts that this is a hierarchical model, consisting of assymetrical relationships . She notes the Classical theological counter argument of radical equality, in which difference is only in ways of relating, not in substance or nature. She acknowledges that, in theory "sequence does not necessitate subordination" but maintains that for all practical purposes the hierarchy keeps returning. (p.196)

Describing the development of Trinitarian thought, Johnson cites Rahner's argument that "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa." Rahner (1997) proposes this axiomatic thesis in the course of the argument he is making against the separation of the discussion of who God is and what God does. He does not believe that salvation history can be separated from our understanding of God as Trinity; "There must be a connection between God and man." (p.21)

This assertion is supported by Moltmann (1981, p.158ff), who discusses the history of the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity. He argues that the traditional distinction arising from Platonist ideals leads to an imposition upon the nature of God from outside. He argues that any distinction between the two must come from within the Trinity rather than be imposed from without. On this basis, and given that he cannot accept that the Cross event can have reality in the economic Trinity but not the immanent Trinity, he supports Rahner's assertion that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity.

He clarifies this by further explaining that he sees this as meaning not that the two are identical but that there can be nothing that is in the economic Trinity that is not also in the immanent Trinity. We cannot know the whole of the Trinity, but that part that we see revealed in the work of the Trinity in salvation history is a true revelation of the reality of the Trinity as it is. (p.161)

If this is accepted as being the case, then it is apparent that there is a problem with a model of the Trinity that is experienced as hierarchical and destructive to relationship, because it implies that in some sense that destructiveness is present in the reality of Godself.

Johnson (1992, p.200) does note the postmodern apophatic position that we cannot know the inner life of God, we see through a glass darkly. Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging that we cannot say everything about the Trinity, Johnson holds that we can say something, and that something has to be based on consistency between the revealed God and the actual God.

This assertion is informed by her understanding of Barth, that "God corresponds to himself, that is, God really is as he has shown himself in revelation"(p.206) This reading of Barth is also found in Fiddes (2000, p.30) who asserts that whilst language cannot describe the whole of God, nevertheless it is seized by God in order to allow humans to talk meaningfully, if not completely, about God. Johnson (1992, p.216) goes on to argue that what is common to all orthodox conceptions of the Trinity is that of mutual relatedness. The way in which this relatedness can be expressed is up for debate, but relatedness is indisputable, and the nature of the relatedness cannot be separated from who God is.

Moltmann (1991, p.xii) insists that it is possible to go further than this, and asserts that the apprehension of the Trinity as eternal *perichoresis*, which he traces back to the Cappadocians, has become the dominant model accepted in modern theology. He further argues that this has important implications for many branches of theology, with the God whose very nature is that of communion and fellowship supplanting previous, unhelpful, models of monarchy, hierarchy and patriarchy.

This conclusion appears to be supported by Grenz (2004), who concurs with the assessment that the cumulative work of Boff, Zizoulas and LaCugna has led to the general acceptance of "the basic appropriateness of seeing in the relationality of the three divine persons the key to understanding the triune dynamic" (p.163) However, he also identifies certain strands of theology, such as the work of Urs von Balthasar, that have called this into question, primarily concerned that this collapses the immanent into the economic. (p.222) This concern is echoed by Brueggemann (1986) who suggests that "We are so preoccupied with God's relatedness, God being for us, that we do not attend enough to God's hiddenness, God's weighty concern for God's self, God's own way in heaven and on earth." (p.71)

Summary

In this exploration of who God is we have demonstrated some important principles for our ongoing discussion. Firstly we have noted the importance of working from God out, and seen how this methodology provides an objective basis for speaking of God and humanity. The importance of speaking as rightly as possible of God, because of the power of that speech to form the reality we experience, has been explained. We have seen that God is not impersonal, but is more than personal, and that furthermore we have seen that God is relational. We have also heard the note of caution that seeks to remind us of the otherness of God, a God whom we cannot appropriate to our own agenda.

Who Am I?

Having explored who God is, we now turn to an exploration of human self.

Storied-Self

Martin and Barresi (2006) provide a pen sketch of the development of concepts of selfhood. They trace the idea of the true self, as an individual that characterises who we really are, to Cicero. (p.30) In Plotinus is seen the conception that the highest aim of the soul is the escape from the material world to the selfless contemplation of God, where all traces of the individual self are forgotten. (p.38) They detect in Coleridge one of the first expressions of the concept of the self being discovered in its interaction with other selves. (p.184)
The fragmentation of the idea of a stable and knowable self, as per Descartes and Kant, is charted as the 20th century proceeds. (p.229 ff) This is seen in the insistence of Foucault that the self is not a once for all discoverable given, but an ongoing construction and transformation that must be addressed intentionally. (p.262) It continues with Derrida as a consequence of his wider project of deconstructing explanatory structures and models. By revealing their inability to model reality adequately, Derrida exposes the constructs of self as illusory and disappointing in their power to portray the reality of experience. (p.264)
The final development noted is that narrative self. This theory consists of the idea that the self is formed in the stories that we use to frame our experiences and the roles that we play in those narratives, and is exemplified by Daniel Dennett. (p.274ff)

Despite this development, they conclude by arguing that the construct of self as a unifying theory that is useful analytically and scientifically has been shredded, probably beyond reconstitution. Furthermore, they assert that this is no bad thing, as the construct was largely formulated to elevate humans above the rest of the natural world. “It is as if all of Western civilization has been on a prolonged ego trip that reality has finally forced it to abandon.” (p.305)

Webster (in Vanhoozer, 2003) concurs that deconstructive postmodernism has led to the death of the self. “What Foucault calls “the figure of man” is just that: a representation or invention; the appearance of this figure is recent, and is not the manifestation of a given

substance, but simply a false name given to a discursive product." (p.221) This reinforces the view that the postmodern sees "self" as a constructed myth of modernity. However, unlike Martin and Barresi, this perceived "death" of self in postmodern thought is not seen by Webster to be terminal. Rather it is seen as a valid critique of modern, individualistic, conceptions of self that provides theology with a challenge to propose a positive anthropology that is not susceptible to this deconstruction. He argues that degrading human selfhood is not allowable if God is to be glorified, rightly, as creator, saviour and perfector, asserting that "passion for God is necessarily passion for humanity." (p.223)

This view is supported by McFadyen (in Gunton, 1995, p.55) who argues that praise is only proper praise if it is offered by a self that knows itself to have worth because it has been "forgiven, affirmed, upheld, given, worth something." He further suggests that denying our own worth is a capitulation to despair, and does not glorify God.

Thiselton (1995) argues that Ricoeur's conceptualisation of narrative identity provides this robust conception of self. He asserts that Ricoeur's analysis provides key insights into three areas. Firstly the idea of narrative provides continuity for the mind of the self between past, present and future. Secondly it provides a framework for the encounter between persons, especially in the pastoral context. Thirdly it provides a way of integrating the notion of self with that of society by the interweaving of the narratives involved. "Ricoeur's profound achievement is to undermine equally the autonomous self which commands the centre of the stage in high modernity and the reduced, de-centred self of postmodernity." (p.77)

A possible way forward in the further development of a positive conception of the self is laid out by Blanton (2008, p.74ff). In order to propose a model of self that might be useful in Christian counselling, the author seeks to draw out the complimentary aspects of postmodern and Christian thought. In this context he offers an analysis of the postmodern conception of self. He also notes that, over against the modern thinking-self, postmodernism sees the self as a storied-self, constructed, along with the rest of reality, in mutual and dynamic relatedness and conversation with others.

Blanton suggests that this conception has the strength that it rejects the isolating individualism of modernity, and takes people out of the role of passive observers and subjects of an external reality, and places them in the creative process of contributing to the development of reality. He does, however, note its weaknesses. He argues, *contra* Ricouer, that the primary understanding of self as storied-self does not address such existential issues as the persistence of self. It also fails to adequately allow the self to experience the present moment, transfixed as it is by the narrative focus on past and future. Furthermore, he argues that postmodernism is limited because it does not, generally, allow God a voice in the story.

He goes on to argue that complimenting the postmodern world view with that of Christian contemplation can address these weaknesses by allowing God to take a part in the narrative, centering the person in the present and reassuring a person of their identity in God. (p.78ff) It seems to me, however, that this complimentary model might be strengthened further by taking the positive aspects of narrative-self and underpinning them with the relational aspects of God that we discover in the Trinity.

Relational Self

Gunton, (1998) whilst describing the implications on the doctrine of creation of the relational model of the Trinity, takes as a given that "relation is an ontological category: relation constitutes how and what we are." (p.206) This assertion is supported by Moltmann, (1981, p.172) who argues that person and relation are mutually reciprocal concepts, that one cannot exist without the other and that both are seen in the Trinity.

This axiom is used by Gunton in his discussion of what it means for humans to be created in the image of God. He follows Barth and Bonhoeffer in asserting that the analogy between the human and divine is not that of being but of relation. He goes on to argue that the relation between humans is an irreducible consequence of being created in the image of God. Therefore he argues that humans are only fully human in relationship to other humans, and that any entirely individualistic formulation of self is lacking a critical element of understanding of what it is to human, created in God's image. "To be in the image of God is therefore to be in necessary relation to others so made."(p.208)

Elsewhere Gunton (1997) argues that the modern refreshment and reengagement with Trinitarian thought allows us not only to say things about God that we had stopped saying, but that it allows us to see creation in a new light. In particular he argues that the concepts at the heart of being in communion are person, relation, otherness, and freedom. He asserts that whereas an individual is defined by their separation from the other, a person is defined by relation to the other. On the basis of this position he writes "One person is not the tool or extension of another, or if he is his personhood is violated." (p.11)

In developing his argument, Gunton identifies two streams of thought with regard to the self in modern thinking. He traces one back to Descartes. In this we see an individual that is defined by a thought life, a mind enfleshed in a particular body beyond which there is no objective reality. He identifies two problems with this. Firstly, the definition of the human being as individual and separate means that relationships with others are undermined from the start by an axiomatic doubt about the others selfhood. Secondly, the ontology of the human is reduced to a question of temporal continuity of the self – am I still the person that I was? (p.84)

In describing the second stream he presents as an examplar Macmurray, in whose work he sees a distinctive approach to the concept of person. The key element of his thought, for Gunton, is the concept that "As persons we are only what we are in relation to other persons." (p.88) In this concept, Gunton argues, we see the individual relavitised but not sublimated, distinct but not alone. He traces this idea back to John's gospel and its expositions on the mutual indwelling of the Father and Son, through the work of Richard of St Victor and Calvin.

He further argues that the concept of the person as being in relation stretches back to the theology of the Eastern Fathers, like a stream that has been underground for many centuries he argues that it is now breaking forth to bring refreshment to the modern world burdened with the curse of individuality. (p.96) This assertion is supported by Fiddes (2000, p.4) who suggests that the idea of a human person originally came out of the discussion around the divine persons. He notes the links between the work of Buber and Macmurray in attacking the modern concept of the individual and calling us to return to the concept of

persons in relation. (p.18) He argues that as the concept of the human person flowed out of the discussions around divine persons, so the insights of relational Trinitarian thinking have implications for the way in which we provide pastoral care for human persons. (p.19ff) One strand of this insight is that as God is relational, and we are to be like God, so we should be relational also. (p.28)

Summary

It seems, then, that a fruitful way of thinking about the human self is going to be in terms of the stories that we tell about ourselves, and that we believe about ourselves. However, there must be recognition that we are not the only characters in these stories, but that they are formed in community and relationship. A distinctively Christian perspective would also insist that God is part of the community in relationship which tells the stories that shape our understanding of who we are. More than this, our Trinitarian conception of God leads us to an understanding that the relationships that form our communities have their ultimate pattern in the relations at the core of who God is.

Relationship

Having discovered that relationship is at the heart of who God is, and of who we are, we now turn to a consideration of the impact of "God uses" language is on our understanding of relationships. As we have seen, the way that we talk about God is formative, and therefore it is important that we are careful in the way that we describe the way that God relates. Furthermore, we have also seen that any way that we describe God relating externally must be congruent with our understanding of how God relates internally. With respect to our selves, it is valuable to explore the way in which the relationships that form the communities in which our stories, and therefore our selves, are realised. It is also apparent that the relationship that has the most power to form us is our relationship with God. If we misconstrue the nature of that relationship, then we risk not encountering God fully.

I-Thou / I-It

To provide a framework for these considerations of relationship, we will use Buber's I-Thou / I-It model. As a foundation for this model Buber (1959) introduces the concept of "primary word". Each primary word is a combination of two words. These primary words are not a part of the language that pertains to objects, but to relationships. He argues that the primary word "I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being". In contrast, the primary word "I-It can never be spoken with the whole being." (p.3)

He argues that experience is the world of I-It. Neither the I nor the It are altered by the fact of one experiencing the other. (p.6) This is because I-It is fundamentally a word of separation. (p.23) Furthermore, he makes it clear that things that are used fall into the I-It primary word category. (p.38) In contrast, it is only in the I-Thou world of relation that interaction can occur. (p.6) This leads to the definition of love as exclusive to the I-Thou primary word relation. "Love is the responsibility of an I for a Thou"(p.15)

Having described the two primary words, Buber also describes the dynamics within this model of relating. He suggests that the knowledge of a person's identity is derived from the I-Thou word that is initially spoken to them. Having become aware the self then

conceives the I-It primary word. (p.22) For Buber this provides an explanation for his observation that the I-Thou relation seems to be unsustainable and that it reverts to I-It. (p17)

He argues that the world of It is one of space and time and that the world of Thou is beyond both. However, he also argues that any given Thou "after the relational event has run its course, is bound to become an It." (p.33) When considering this model in the context of relating to God, there are two potential problems with this assertion. How can a "Thou" that is beyond time by constrained by a process within time? Secondly, what dictates that a relational event must run its course – what if it is an eternal event? Buber addresses these concerns by defining God as Thou that can never become an It. (p.76) This definition is echoed by Kung (1980, p.634) "God can be heard and addresses: that he comes among men saying "I," making himself a "thou" for them, one who speaks to us and to whom we can speak."

Buber goes on to use these constructs to describe the difference between an individual and a person. He suggests that the I of I-It is different to the I of I-Thou. The I of I-It, the individual, is concerned with self-definition over-against the other, knowing itself as the one who experiences and uses and also is experienced and used. The I of I-Thou, the person, desires to know and to be known in relation with other persons. (p.62ff)
He further argues that individuality is mostly a self-delusion as its fundamental methodology of defining itself by what it is not, in continuous over-against, takes it further and further from true being. (p.64) Thus Buber demonstrates that the one who operates only in the I-It world becomes more unreal.

With this model in view, the problems of "God uses" language are thrown into stark relief. It is clearly the language of I-It, rather than I-Thou. Thus it takes us further away from genuine relationship in which each is fully present to the other, and in which healthy self developing stories can be known. By integrating into our narratives language which portrays ourselves as It to God's I, this becomes part of our understanding of ourselves. When we see ourselves as It, then we become more likely to relate to others, including God, as It, rather than Thou. So we become increasingly alienated from each other, and from

God. This alienation is noted by Buber who suggests that humans have a tendency to reducing God to It, taming God so that we can possess God. (p.112ff)

Moltmann (1991, p.xvi) goes beyond Buber and suggests that in the Trinitarian *perichoresis* there is a deeper and more fruitful example of mutuality than that in the I-Thou system. Emerging from this view of the Trinity, Moltmann argues that the cross event becomes God the Father suffering with God the Son rather than the Father causing the Son to suffer. Whilst there is not space here for a discussion of Moltmann's theology of the cross, it is worth noting that this moves away from Christ being the tool of salvation in the hands of the Father to Christ a being a partner in a mutual undertaking. This move addresses Boenhoeffer's critique, related by Blocher, of "a god of the heathen, a resource figure for us to exploit." (in McCormack, 2008, p.128)

A Worked Example

In order to illustrate how Buber's I-Thou / I-It model can be used to analyse and critique ways of relating, particularly with regard to use and abuse, we now turn to an examination of the analysis by Cooper-White (1995) of power dynamics, particularly in Christian communities.

The author begins her argument by asserting that, "All the abstractions and uses to which people put one another ... constitute some manner of objectification, an I-It encounter." (p.17) She goes on to argue that I-It thinking and relating is inseparable from power and objectification of the other. (p.18) She writes "Our entire social and economic structure depends upon the *use* of the It – regarding plants, animals, people and the earth largely as consumable resources." (p.19) Over against this, she suggests that Jesus in Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12a is not just laying out a laying out a legal framework for ethics, but instituting a deep I-Thou at the centre of human relating. (p.23)

With this ground work complete, Cooper-White demonstrates convincingly that at the centre of the story of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 is a complete lack of I-Thou relating to Tamar by the other protagonists and much I-It relating. (2 Sam 13:2, 13:14, & 13:17; p24)

To explore the reasons for this, she offers an analysis of power, after psychologist Rollo May, arguing that basic to the human condition is the power-to-be, that every human person needs to feel that they are significant. This need finds natural expression in the power of self-affirmation and the power of self-assertion. May argues that when these are repeatedly denied, then the power of violence and power of aggression break out.(p.30)

Cooper-White suggests that the conflict between the powers-to-be of individuals can only be reconciled by a true appreciation of the I-Thou in all relationships and the resisting of I-It. The sum of self-affirmation is greatest for all humanity when all humanity sees every other human as Thou rather than It. (p.30)

After Starhawk, Cooper-White offers a three-fold analysis of power: power-over versus power-within and power-with. "Instrumental, utilitarian I-It ways of relating lead to only one kind of power, the currently predominant understanding of power as power over others." She argues that power-with, mutuality, can only be achieved when power-within, one's own authority over oneself is truly recognised. (p.31) Cooper-White suggests that in Christianity the power structure has been seen as a pyramid, with God at the top, with leaders (men) in the next level, then everybody else.

> "Those lowest are cultivated, used, and exploited for their resources with little or no acknowledgment or compensation. Below a certain line (usually defined by gender, age, race, or serving-class status), beings always have been regarded as the property of those above the line. They are used, used up, and abused."(p.33)

Over against this, Cooper-White advocates power-within, which she understands as the spark of the divine in the human self. Interestingly, she doesn't appeal to an *imago dei* argument at this stage, which I feel would strengthen her case by rooting the argument in the creation order. From that spark of God in human life, power-within, comes the ability to develop power-with, which is the expression of power-within in relationship. Because both participants are secure in their own selves they are able to reach out in a way that negates neither, but builds each other up. (p.33) This is a true I-Thou expression of power.

From this analysis, the dangers of relating to one another in an I-It manner are clear. However, Cooper-White also points out that the way in which we picture our relationship with God is formative for our understanding of our relationships with each other. She argues that rather than relating to God as Thou, we tend to relate to God as It. Worse than this, an It in the image of ourselves, a powerful peak to the pyramid. (p.40) Again we are drawn to the conclusion that describing God's relationship with us as one of utility, an I-It relationship, damages the way in which we form relationships with each other, and with God.

Summary

Seen in this framework, it seems clear to me that "God uses" language carries significant risk. It is apparent that this language exists only in the realm of I-It relations. If this is the way that God relates to humans, then it must also be a way in which God relates internally in the Trinity. It has also been shown that I-It ways of relating lead to alienation from God, from others, and ultimately from self. This alienation is completely at odds with the understanding of the relational God, who is love, and who calls God's people to love with all that they are.

The Sovereignty of God

It was observed in the literature review that one of the key strengths of "God uses" language was its ability to express complete surrender to the Sovereign God. Therefore we now turn to a consideration of God's sovereignty and whether this language provides the most appropriate way of expressing it and our response to it.

Sovereignty and Worship

Williams (in McCormack, 2008) addresses the links between God's sovereignty and freedom. He asks the question "Must sovereignty mean control?" In response to this rhetorical question he delineates two view points. The first argues that control is not necessary to sovereignty and that the freedom of the creature is maintained in a relationship with a God who may be trusted. The second holds onto control and is content to relinquish freedom, on the understanding that freedom is understood as anarchy. (p.172)

Williams argues that both views of sovereignty and control seem to flow from an understanding of God, which is derived from Scripture, of an absolute monarch with absolute power. He further argues that the use of this image of God may be a conceptual error. He argues that the primary purpose of the presentation of God as Sovereign in Scripture is there to draw out our worship, not to answer our questions. "The greatness of His sovereignty does not lie either with meticulous control or; alternatively, in the donation of space that He does not determine. In worship we find that sovereign greatness lies in God's sheer being." (p.174)

This view finds support in McFadyen (in Gunton 1995) who argues that at the root of sin is a refusal to praise God properly, of denying the worship that is rightfully God's. (p.54) The implication of this argument is that rebellion against God's sovereignty is more to do with denying who God is, than failing to do what God says.

Sovereignty and Being

However, *contra* Williams, it might be argued that the primary factor in God's sovereignty is one of power. If this is the case then it is necessary to have an appropriate conception of

power in God's nature. Furthermore, this understanding must be held in common with a complimentary apprehension of God's love and God's justice. Such an understanding is presented by Tillich.

Tillich (1954) argues that to see power merely as a compulsive force is to misunderstand the fundamental ontological commonality of love and power. (p.12) This commonality is evident in his proposed definition of love "Life is being in actuality and love is the moving power of life." (p.25) This definition, he argues, reveals that to be really alive is to experience the journey towards the other, a journey that requires the fuel that we call love. In this journey we discover not only the other, but our self. Human selves cannot be fulfilled except in the meeting with other selves in love.

To compliment this ontological definition of love, Tillich also proposes one for power "Power is the possibility of self-affirmation in spite of internal and external negation."(p.40) Given the necessary expression of power through compulsion, Tillich asks again how love and power can be reconciled. Returning to the ontological definitions and drawing on Luther's distinction between the proper work and strange work of love, he suggests that as far as the strange work destroys those things opposed to the proper work then power and love work in harmony. "In order to destroy what is against love, love must be united with power, and not only with power, but also with compulsory power." (p.49)

The guiding principle is that anything that supports love's aim of the reunion of the separated is allowable but anything that prevents that aim is not. He does, however, critique Luther's model by suggesting that he does not take sufficient account of the misappropriation of love's strange work by those who wish to maintain their own power. Tillich further suggests that protection against this appropriation is found in the ontology of justice. (p.51)

In this analysis of justice, Tillich also attacks the concept of complete self-surrender as the apotheosis of love. He argues that a self that surrenders on the basis of weakness and vanishing is not expressing love because love is defined as the uniting of the separate. In this construct there is no unification there is merely sublimation. (p.69)

In his application of these concepts in practical situations, Tillich argues that it is only in personal encounters that a person becomes a person. "only by meeting a 'thou' does man realize that he is an 'ego'."p.78

Having presented this understanding of justice, linked ontologically with love and power, Tillich outlines the dynamics at work in a situation where a person denies the personhood of another.

> "man can refuse to listen to the intrinsic claim of the other one. ... He can remove or use him. He can try to transform him into a manageable object, a thing, a tool. But in doing so he meets the resistance of him who has the claim to be acknowledged as an ego. And this resistance forces him either to meet the other one as an ego or to give up his own ego-quality. Injustice against the other one is always injustice against oneself. The master who treats the slave not as an ego but as a thing endangers his own quality as an ego." (p.78)

It seems to me that all of these objections to the abuse of love, power and justice as self-defeating when exercised between human persons carry even more weight when considered as aspects of the human-divine relationship. This is particularly true if we take Tillich's definition of God as being-itself. (p.107) Whilst a view of the transcendence of God might allow God to transcend the restrictions of inter-human relationships, this ontological analysis reveals that to do so would be to betray the very nature of Godself because love, power and justice are inescapable functions of authentic being. (p.109)

From this analysis, it seems that an expression of God's sovereignty that depends on "God uses" language is, ironically, an expression that denies God ontological primacy. A god who relates on a basis that denies the selfhood of people is not only not the supreme Being, but is not even authentic being.

Sovereignty and Otherness

A third perspective on God's sovereignty is provided by Brueggeman. (1986) In his exposition of Ezekiel, he argues that the primary portrayal of God in Ezekiel is of God as

utterly other, holy, over and above creation. Flowing from this observation is the assertion that humanity is entirely incapable of drawing near to God, so any relationship with God is entirely on God's terms. One of the implications that Brueggemann draws out is that God is not there to be useful to God's people. Deriving from the widely held perception that anything or anybody that does not have usefulness can be dismissed out of hand, he argues that "we have arrived at a view of God that is essentially utilitarian" (p.53) In contrast to this understanding of God, Ezekiel's narrative of God leaving and departing, with no particular grief, illustrates very starkly that God will not stay where God is presumed upon. "God has the will to leave and not look back." (p.54)

Brueggeman argues that Ezekiel's ministry is driven by the discrepancy between "the disinterested holiness of God and the utilitarian unrighteousness of Israel." (p.57) He further suggests that Ezekiel presents three challenges to contemporary culture. Firstly, the exaltation of the self and the needs of the self that has led to the church becoming a means to the end of self-actualisation. Secondly, the reduction of our relationship with God to a utilitarian one, where the important thing is what God wants us to do for God. Thirdly the utilitarian co-option of God as a useful buttress to our views on certain moral issues. (p.86)

Summary

Having considered these three perspectives on God's sovereignty, it seems that we can speak of God being sovereign in our worship, over all being, and apart from all creation, without "God uses" language. More than this, it is apparent that "God uses" language does run the risk of limiting God's sovereignty from all three of these perspectives: a focus on what are to do distracts us from who God is; ascribing to God the will to treat people as tools reduces God's ontological primacy; and asserting that God is interested in what we can do for God disregards God's complete otherness.

Pastoral Implications

A common theme revealed in the literature review was the pastoral deployment of "God uses" language. The assertion that anybody can and should be used by God is believed by these writers to provide resources for the pastoral work of encouraging those who have become discouraged, and of spurring on to more faithful discipleship those who have become complacent. In order to assess the implications of this language on pastoral care it is necessary to address two questions. Firstly, how indispensible is this language to these pastoral tasks? Secondly, what is the impact of the use of this language on pastoral care overall?

Questions of Encouragement

Buber (1965) argues that it is a fundamental need of humans to be confirmed in their selfhood by the recognition of their presence by another self. He argues that it is not in a person's relation to themselves that growth occurs, but in the relation to the other. Buber writes that "It is from one man to another that the heavenly bread of self-being is passed." (p.71) I would argue that it is also, even more so, passed from God to human, and that one of the primary pastoral tasks that faces us is to enable people to encounter God's presence with a reality that confirms their selfhood, grounded in the objective reality of God.

Hopkins (in Hampson 1996) argues that this need is particularly acute for some women. She laments that,

> "Women who are psychologically conditioned and socially restricted to passive, self-denying and self-sacrificing roles have been told that they are sinners puffed up with pride. They have been enjoined to picture Christ dying on the cross in their place, to repent of their selfishness and to take up their cross daily."(p.75)

She presents and concurs with Saiving's assertion that in actuality the sin of women is not pride, but a lack of self worth, indeed a lack of anything that could coherently be called a self.

A methodology for addressing this pastoral task is proposed by McGrath and McGrath. (1992) The authors begin by identifying a tension between people in churches who feel utterly worthless and the desire to release these people leading to an uncritical appropriation of secular self-worth techniques which take no account of human sinfulness. They suggest that "this sense of personal worthlessness seems to lie at the root of many pastoral difficulties." (p.ix) They propose that, rather than relying on methodologies which fundamentally rest on a person's own resources, "Christian confidence rests totally on the cross of Christ."(p.x)

The authors argue that the cross is an objective basis for a Christian understanding of our own worth. Here the reality of our sinfulness and forgiveness are found. We know ourselves to be both unworthy and made worthy. (p.85ff) They go on to argue that a person's understanding of their own worth can usefully be explored in the Biblical images of the parental care of God for us. They demonstrate how the elements that make up a healthy self esteem are fulfilled in the parental care of God, in adoption, love, pedigree, family resemblance, and inheritance. (p.103ff)

In order to provide a model in which achievements might be helpfully understood they introduce the image of the yoke, and suggest that in some senses Christians are yoked with God. Thus we achieve things that are impossible for us on our own, but that there is a contribution to the task that we make. "The notion of partnership with God in the service of the gospel is profoundly affirming." (p.145) This concept is given practical expression by Padilla (2008, p.88) in his proposal of a missiology based on the notion of accompaniment. In this conception of mission, God is seen to be walking with God's people as they engage in God's mission in the world.

McGrath and McGrath also assert that a key element of building a healthy Christian community is the valuing of each other in that community. The authors note that "There is, however, a natural human tendency to value high achievers, to the detriment of those who appear to have little to offer."(p.152) They suggest that Kingdom values should be turning this on its head, and that it is important to make it clear that it is the person that is valued, rather than that just what that person is good at, or the usefulness of that person.

In their consideration of how this could be worked through in pastoral ministry, the key themes that are presented are those of working with people to help them come to an understanding that they are in Christ, through grace, and are of great worth to God. (p.139ff) A scriptural image that might have value in this context is one identified by Macloed, (in McCormack 2008) who addresses the issues of our understanding of the nature of God, and what the implications of this might be for pastoral care. He takes as the primary scriptural image of God's pastoral care that of shepherd. Tracing through the Psalms, Isaiah, John and Revelation this thread of metaphor is shown to be rich is providing insight into God's pastoral relationship with God's people. At no stage does it indicate that the usefulness of those people to God is in consideration. (p.245ff)

Exploring the implications of God's attributes for pastoral care, Macleod notes the importance of God with us (Matt 28:19-20). He argues that God's presence in and with us is our strength and encouragement. (p.258) It seems to me that it is only in an I-Thou context, in which one is truly present to the other, that this strength and encouragement can be realised.

At first sight it might seem appropriate to respond to some who feels worthless and useless with the reassurance that God wants to use them. However, this is counterproductive as it reinforces their view that they are only of worth to God if they can be useful. This is especially damaging if there are circumstances which mean that they cannot fulfil the roles which are held to be useful in the church to which they belong.[3] Much more valuable is the response that God loves the person, values them, and is longing to encounter them.

Questions of Discipleship

Fiddes (2000, p.70) argues that one of the tasks facing a pastor who is looking to help people in the path of discipleship has two facets. On the one hand there are prophetic words of protest that must be spoken in defiance of dominating power. On the other hand there is the releasing of those who are willingly subject to domination because they believe that in it they have found safety.

[3] There are potentially significant links, an exploration of which is beyond the scope of this analysis, between this assertion and Disability Theology.

He suggests that there is a difference between healthy and unhealthy dependence, and that healthy dependence can be the dynamic that brings freedom from the unhealthy dependence that is seen in the desire to be dominated. This healthy dependence can be cultivated by encouraging people to take their place in the movement of the dance of *perichoresis*. On a practical level, this means giving space and time for rites which acknowledge and express a right dependence on the eternal source of all. (p.106)

> "Participating in the relationships in God, we experience a sense of dependence upon an uncreated origin as we lean upon a son-like movement of being sent forth from the a father. We take our experience of being a child into the communion of God's life, and discover a motherly-fatherhood which is not oppressive."(p.107)

It strikes me that the beauty of this model is that, having developed an appropriate sense of dependence, the disciple is free to follow and released to serve in a way which stands as a prophetic judgement on the power structures of the world. Thus both facets of the pastoral task identified above are accomplished.

The pastoral implications of a compulsion to busyness are explored by Parker *et al* (2009) The authors suggest that Hornay's analysis of neurotic attitudes to relationship can helpfully be applied to a person's relationship with God in order to enable them to understand the dynamics of that relationship more fully. (p.36) This analysis identifies three trends that, taken to extremes, can cause dysfunction in relationships. These three trends are: moving toward, moving against and moving away. (p.37)

Of particular interest in this context is the analysis of the trend to move against God. "In this style of relating the basic anxiety is experienced as powerful and hostile; the characteristic response is to fight back." (p.39) Examples of this include those who see God as task master, and who serve God not because of love for others but to avoid punishment. An identifying characteristic of this style of relating is to see the relationship with God as a utilitarian one, in which either hard work is used as means of controlling or using God, or the person perceives God as unwilling to use one because of one's weakness and failing.

The authors suggest that the most appropriate pastoral aim in working with people who relate to God in this way is to help them to come to a place where they recognise that God is not out to get them or to abuse them. (p.41) It is unlikely that a pastoral response which relies on the assertion that "God wants to use you" is going to facilitate this process. Rather, in this context it seems to me that more appropriate would be the suggestion of Breuggeman (1986) that Ezekiel's portrayal of God's refusal to be useful can release God's ministers from busyness. Encouraging someone to own Brueggemann's assertion that "All of us are too busy being useful."(p.55) may allow that person to be released into a deeper discipleship characterised by trust in God.

The discipleship question of obedience to God and wholehearted working with and for God is addressed by Webster. (in Vanhoozer, 2003, p.224) This is done in the context of the working out of the purposes of God, understood within a Trinitarian framework which puts relationship at the heart of those purposes. In addressing this question, Webster quotes Calvin "each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord ... It is enough to know that the Lord's calling is in everything the beginning and foundation of well-being." (p.230) Webster notes that a deconstructive reading of this may see it is an attempt to assert moral and social structure and control with an ethic of duty and resignation to an imagined will of God. He counters that this is only the case if the call is misunderstood as a call of force, or of domination.

It seems, then, that here we also have a pastoral response to those who have become complacent or who are not living out a radical discipleship. It is seen in the writings of someone with a very high regard for the sovereignty of God. It is the pastoral response of calling. Jesus called his disciples to follow. God calls us to obedience. We call others to walk with us in the strength and direction of the Holy Spirit.

It might seem appropriate to motivate the half hearted with the call to submit fully and allow God to use them. However, this is counterproductive in that it misunderstands the imperative and foundations of true submission. The submission of a used thing is passive. The God revealed in Christ calls us to the active submission of worship and participation in

the work of the Kingdom. The tasks prepared in advance for us to do are there, and there is a genuine pastoral task of calling the people of God to the challenge of engaging with them. However, a more creative and fruitful engagement is found in the soul wholly submitted to God in true relationship than in the one consigned to a place in the tool cupboard.

Overall Pastoral Care

Pastoral care is an attitude of heart. It is an expression of the love that we have for other people, flowing from the love that we have been shown by God, in Christ. It may be seen in certain tasks or activities that are undertaken, such as those outlined by Baxter: (1974, p94-110) conversion, advising those convicted of sin, building up, overseeing family life, visiting the sick, reproving, and disciplining. It may be focussed on a goal such as that suggested by Pattison (1993, p.13) of, "the presentation of all people perfect in Christ to God." However, neither the tasks nor the goal are the essence of pastoral care, which is the expression of God's love for people.

What then is the impact of "God uses" language on this essence of pastoral care? I would argue that it has a tendency to be counterproductive and even destructive. It has been demonstrated that the language of use belongs to the realm of I-It. It has also been argued that love cannot be expressed in the I-It realm. It follows that the language of "God uses" is likely to inhibit the authentic expression of God's love. Furthermore, the thought patterns associated with the language of use are patterns which tend to reduce other people, and God, to potential things in our thinking, and reduce our capacity to love them. In contrast, the alternative language of "God encounters", "God calls", and "God loves" provide solidly rooted Biblical language that nourishes relationships and people in a way that builds up and promotes fruitfulness.

Summary

In examining the pastoral tasks that are addressed in the literature, those of encouragement and discipling, we have identified several alternative models and images that equip for these tasks, without relying on "God uses" language. These include the language of God as parent, God as shepherd, and God as yoke-partner in work. We have also seen how a

person's relationship with God can be modelled as one of participation in the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, of trust in God, and of obedient response to a calling.

Furthermore, it has been argued that the concepts implicit in "God uses" language are poisonous to the heart of pastoral care, the expression of the love of God for people. Therefore its place in pastoral care should be reduced, it is unneeded and it tends to move people further away from authentic encounters with God and with each other.

Conclusion

I began this work with an antipathy for "God uses" language that was founded in personal experience and a concern for God's mission in the world. Having completed it, my antipathy for the language is deeper. From the literature review it was evident to me that these writers have a deep appreciation of the sovereignty of God, of God's care for all people, and of the urgency of God's call on their lives. However, I believe that I have shown that this could, and should, be expressed using different language.

From the first critical perspective, it was difficult to see much evidence that there is a Biblical precedent for "God uses" language. From the second critical perspective, it was clear that in secular English, a construction in which one person is described as using another person says nothing good about the first person. It implies an unhealthy power dynamic in which the person being used is a victim.

From the third critical perspective the damage that this language does to conceptions of God, self, and relationships was evident. Using language which describes God's relationship with a person as an I-It relationship has several consequences. It objectifies and depersonalises the person. It makes God the I of I-It, someone who is not truly present to the other. It gives permission for people to believe that they may relate to other people as It. Finally, it encourages the tendency for humans to relate to God as It, someone who is there for us to experience and to use, but not to encounter.

Having considered three different perspectives on God's sovereignty, it was argued that this could be expressed more fully than "God uses" language allows. Knowing that God relates to us as Thou does not preclude our submission to God. I believe that it leads to a deeper, more active, submission to the God who encounters us.

Similarly, the place of "God uses" language in pastoral care was explored. It was seen that it could be replaced by alternatives, which are more fruitful, in the contexts in which it was promoted in the literature. It was also argued that not only is "God uses" language unnecessary to pastoral care, but is also deeply antithetical to it.

Appendix A

This table details the occurrences of "God uses" language in the texts. To indicate the importance of this language to the work the frequency of its occurrence is given, along with the ratio of the occurrences of this language to the parallel terms identified in Appendix B. For the purposes of this analysis the main text only was considered, and not any study material as this was seen to consist largely of repetition of the main text, and was not present in all the books analysed. The work by Calver is considered as a whole and also in sub sections, as the included essay by Torrey (Calver II) has a significantly different content to the remainder of the work.

	Gonzales	Rouse	Blackaby	Calver	Calver I	Calver II	La Haye	Packer	Kendall	Amess	Total
Number of Occurences	17	7	103	26	9	17	9	23	53	39	277
Number of Pages	63	50	195	189	159	30	264	177	238	182	1358
Frequency per page	0.27	0.14	0.53	0.14	0.06	0.57	0.03	0.13	0.22	0.21	0.20
Number of Parallel terms	14	9	34	6	4	2	11	27	30	33	164
Frequency with respect to parallel terms	1.21	0.78	3.03	4.33	2.25	8.50	0.82	0.85	1.77	1.18	1.69
Importance to Work	0.33	0.11	1.60	0.60	0.13	4.82	0.03	0.11	0.39	0.25	0.34

Appendix B

This table details the occurrences of direct and implied synonyms and parallels to "God uses" language in the texts. The data columns contain the number of separate occurrences of the given parallel in each work. The Total column provides the sum of these occurrences whilst the Frequency column shows the number of works in which the parallel in question appears at least once.

	Gonzales	Rouse	Blackaby	Calver	La Haye	Packer	Kendall	Amess	Total	Frequency
Chosen	1	2	2		4	2	5	3	19	7
Serving God			4	1	2	6	5	3	21	6
Called	4	1					5	11	21	4
Commissioned	4		2			1		1	8	4
Ministry						4	5	3	12	3
Sent	1		3	1					5	3
Appointed			1			1		1	3	3
Working partners			1			4			5	2
Called to do					1	3			4	2
Anointed							2	1	3	2
Given a task			2			1			3	2
An instrument		2						1	3	2
God works through			1	1					2	2
Honoured		1				1			2	2
Picked		1				1			2	2
Trusted with tasks			5						5	1
Significant in the purposes of God								3	3	1
Accomplish God's will					2				2	1
Acheived for God								2	2	1
Called to be a tool			2						2	1
Conduit for God's love			2						2	1
Functioned for God	2								2	1
God accomplishes his will through us			2						2	1
Kingdom impact								2	2	1
On mission with God			2						2	1
Potter / clay			2						2	1
Vessels							2		2	1
Accepted							1		1	1
Agreeing to God's plan					1				1	1
Ambassadors						1			1	1
Called to represent God			1						1	1
Dedicated to a task								1	1	1
Employed		1							1	1

	Gonzales	Rouse	Blackaby	Calver	La Haye	Packer	Kendall	Amess	Total	Frequency
Fulfil the purpose God has for your life			1						1	1
Gifting							1		1	1
Given a share in God's work						1			1	1
God can make things happen for you							1		1	1
God offers a job			1						1	1
He would achieve through our lives				1					1	1
Inspired	1								1	1
Invited							1		1	1
Loosed	1								1	1
On a mission							1		1	1
Participate in what the Lord wants to do				1					1	1
Power of God manifest in				1					1	1
Raised up					1				1	1
Represent God							1		1	1
Stirred up		1							1	1
Sustained						1			1	1
Told to do something								1	1	1

Appendix C

This table details the Biblical characters who are described by the authors as having been used by God. The data columns contain the number of separate appearances of these characters in each work. Where an entire chapter is dedicated to a particular character, this is counted as one appearance. The Total column provides the sum of these appearances whilst the Frequency column shows the number of works in which the character in question appears at least once.

	Gonzales	Rouse	Blackaby	Calver	La Haye	Packer	Kendall	Amess	Total	Frequency
Moses			2	1			2	1	6	4
David			2				4	3	9	3
Abraham			3				1	1	5	3
Jacob						1	1	1	3	3
Joseph (O.T.)			1				1	1	3	3
Nehemiah			1			1		1	3	3
Rahab		1			1		1		3	3
Simon Peter			1			1	1		3	3
Paul			2					3	5	2
Elijah				1				2	3	2
Jonah						1	2		3	2
Samson						1	2		3	2
Deborah	1				1				2	2
Gideon			1				1		2	2
Jeremiah			1					1	2	2
Mary	1				1				2	2
Ruth					1			1	2	2
Disciples			2						2	1
Aaron							1		1	1
Anna	1								1	1
Barnabas			1						1	1
Bathsheba					1				1	1
Cyrus		1							1	1
Daniel			1						1	1
Deborah					1				1	1
Eli							1		1	1
Esther	1								1	1
Esther					1				1	1
Woman	1								1	1
Habukkuk								1	1	1
Hagaii								1	1	1
Hezekiah							1		1	1
Hosea								1	1	1
Isaac							1		1	1

	Gonzales	Rouse	Blackaby	Calver	La Haye	Packer	Kendall	Amess	Total	Frequency
Isaiah			1						1	1
Jephthah							1		1	1
Jesus			1						1	1
Judah							1		1	1
Manoah's Wife						1			1	1
Martha						1			1	1
Noah							1		1	1
Paul			1						1	1
Phoebe	1								1	1
Priscilla	1								1	1
Thomas						1			1	1
Timothy			1						1	1

Appendix D

A list of the RSV translations of the occurrences of *chraomai* in the NT. The underlined words indicate the translation of the construction that includes *chraomai*.

Acts 27:3 The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. (RSV)

Acts 27:17 after hoisting it up, they took measures to undergird the ship; then, fearing that they should run on the Syr'tis, they lowered the gear, and so were driven. (RSV)

1 Cor 7:21 Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. (RSV)

1 Cor 7:31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away. (RSV)

1 Cor 9:12 If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. (RSV)

1 Cor 9:15 But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have any one deprive me of my ground for boasting. (RSV)

2 Cor 1:17 Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans like a worldly man, ready to say Yes and No at once? (RSV)

2 Cor 3:12 Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, (RSV)

2 Cor 13:10 I write this while I am away from you, in order that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down. (RSV)

1 Tim 1:8 Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, (RSV)

1 Tim 5:23 No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. (RSV)

Appendix E

A list of the RSV translations of the occurrences of *skeuos* in the NT. The underlined words indicate the translation of the construction that includes *skeuos.*

Matt 12:29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. (RSV)

Mark 3:27 But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house. (RSV)

Mark 11:16 and he would not allow any one to carry anything through the temple. (RSV)

Luke 8:16 "No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, that those who enter may see the light. (RSV)

Luke 17:31 On that day, let him who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away; and likewise let him who is in the field not turn back. (RSV)

John 19:29 A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. (RSV)

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; (RSV)

Acts 10:11 and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. (RSV)

Acts 10:16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. (RSV)

Acts 11:5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, something descending, like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came down to me. (RSV)

Acts 27:17 after hoisting it up, they took measures to undergird the ship; then, fearing that they should run on the Syr'tis, they lowered the gear, and so were driven. (RSV)

Rom 9:21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use? (RSV)

Rom 9:22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, (RSV)

Rom 9:23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, (RSV)

2 Cor 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. (RSV)

1Thes 4:4 that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, (RSV)

2 Tim 2:20 In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble. (RSV)

2 Tim 2:21 If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work. (RSV)

Heb 9:21 And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. (RSV)

1 Pet 3:7 Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered. (RSV)

Rev 2:27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father; (RSV)

Rev 18:12 cargo of gold, silver, jewels and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, (RSV)

Appendix F

Infotrac Database Search Details

Titles Searched

Daily Mail (London, England), Daily Telegraph (London, England), Guardian (London, England), Mail On Sunday (London, England), Observer (London, England), Sunday Telegraph (London, England), Sunday Times (London, England), Times (London, England)

Search 1 – "used" in full text on 01/03/2010

http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?selectedTab=ALL&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&ssso=DateDescend&type=search&tabID=T004&prodId=SPN.SP00&queryId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C4%29used%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28AC%2CNone%2C8%29fulltext%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28DA%2CNone%2C8%2920100301%24&version=1.0&userGroupName=sto_eare&source=gale&infoPage=infoMarkPage

Search 2 – "use" in full text on 01/03/2010

http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?selectedTab=ALL&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&ssor=DateDescend&type=search&tabID=T004&prodId=SPN.SP00&queryId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C3%29use%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28AC%2CNone%2C8%29fulltext%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28DA%2CNone%2C8%2920100301%24&version=1.0&userGroupName=sto_earl&source=gale&infoPage=infoMarkPage

Search 3 – "can use" in key words after 01/01/2010

http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?selectedTab=ALL&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&sort=DateDescend&type=search&tabID=T004&prodId=SPN.SP00&queryId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28ke%2CNone%2C9%29%22can+use%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28AC%2CNone%2C8%29fulltext%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28DA%2CNone%2C10%29%3E+20100101%24&version=1.0&userGroupName=sto_earl&source=gale&infoPage=infoMarkPage

Search 4- "will use" in key words after 01/01/2010

http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?selectedTab=ALL&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&sort=DateDescend&type=search&tabID=T004&prodId=SPN.SP00&queryId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28ke%2CNone%2C10%29%22will+use%22%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28AC%2CNone%2C8%29fulltext%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28DA%2CNone%2C10%29%3E+20100101%24&version=1.0&userGroupName=sto_earl&source=gale&infoPage=infoMarkPage

Search 5- “felt used” or “feels used” in full text after 01/01/2009

http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?selectedTab=ALL&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&sort=DateDescend&type=search&tabID=T004&prodId=SPN.SP00&queryId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C12%29feel+w1+used%3AOr%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C12%29felt+w1+used%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28AC%2CNone%2C8%29fulltext%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28DA%2CNone%2C10%29%3E+20090101%24&version=1.0&userGroupName=sto_earl&source=gale&infoPage=infoMarkPage

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