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An evaluation of adopting or excluding
suggested prayers of response in
evangelistic literature used by British Christians
with particular reference to authorial intention

By

David Robert Bennett

Dissertation submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry,
in the College of Arts and Humanities,
School of Theology and Religious Studies,
University of Bangor
October 2013

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Abstract

This study is driven by the following Hypothesis: Although the intent of the author in including a suggested prayer of response in evangelistic literature may be to help people express their response to the Christian Gospel, a thorough evaluation demonstrates that it could lead to, false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation, and less professional practices in evangelism.

The unique aspect of this study is that it is restricted to evangelistic literature published or used in Britain. The historical enquiry makes a fresh contribution to this area of research by revealing that suggested prayers first appeared in British evangelistic literature written by Anglicans in the 1950s. The scholarly investigation engages with the issues raised by the statements of the hypothesis and form the foundation for qualitative research.

An analysis of current evangelistic literature asks whether the content and context of suggested prayers could support the hypothesis. This results in mixed conclusions with some indications of how to avoid the negative aspects of the hypothesis. Literature which does not contain a prayer is also examined and it is found possible that this, too, could support the hypothesis.

Fourteen writers of evangelistic literature are interviewed. A group of seven who include prayers in their writings are compared with an equal number who do not include prayers. These interviews are facilitated by a questionnaire developed from the findings of the scholarly investigation. These interviews provided insights and suggestions regarding how evangelistic literature might be improved.

The conclusion of this study is that if the practice of including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature is to be continued safeguards would need to be put in place to that the reader does not misunderstanding the relevance of such a prayer. Therefore, the findings of the qualitative research form the basis for recommendations as to how this might be achieved.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction

It is a common practice among evangelical Christians to encourage those responding to the Christian Gospel to say a suggested prayer (sometimes referred to as 'The Sinner's Prayer').¹ Such prayers are used at the end of evangelistic sermons in Churches or on television, during counselling at crusades, as part of personal faith sharing and on evangelistic websites.² This study focuses on the adoption or exclusion of suggested prayers of response in evangelistic literature used in this country. In Britain today such a prayer is included in much of the evangelistic literature which encourages a response to the Christian Gospel.³ Prayers of response are also included in the literature associated with 'The Alpha Course' and 'Christianity Explored' which are popular 'process evangelism' courses used in Britain.⁴ However, common usage or pragmatism are not good reasons for accepting the practice without question.⁵ Historical research demonstrates that eighty years ago no such prayers were included in evangelistic literature used in Britain, therefore, the practice can not be justified by appealing to a long tradition.⁶

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), p. 717, 'What shall we say about the common practice of asking people to pray to receive Christ as their personal Savior and Lord?' For definition of 'evangelical Christians' see: D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp.2-3. Bebbington lists four marks of evangelical religion: conversionism, activism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism. See also Evangelical Alliance 2012 Report, '21st Century Evangelicals', available from <<http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/snapshot/>> [accessed 4.2.2013].

² See <<http://www.trustingodamerica.com/SinnerPray.htm>> [accessed 5.9.2011].

Over 10 million used the suggested prayer on the websites of Global Media Outreach in 2009. <http://www.globalmediaoutreach.com/about_us.html> [accessed 11.1.2011].

³ *Knowing God Personally* (Birmingham: Agape, 1996 reprinted 2006). *Steps to Peace with God* (Buckhurst Hill: Billy Graham Association, 2006). *How to Become a Christian* (Christian Publicity Organisation, 2000). *Love is the Bridge* (Birkenhead: Bridge Builders, 2005), p.67. S. Hughes, *Discovering the Way* (Farnham: CWR, 2009), p.30. Luis Palau, *What is a real Christian?* (Farnham: CWR, 2006), p.27. Norman Warren, *Journey into Life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publishing, 1964, 2005).

⁴ Nicky N. Gumbel, *Why Jesus* (London: Alpha International Resources, 1991), p.20. Rico R. Tice and Barry B. Cooper, *The Real Jesus* (New Malden: Good Book Company, 2005), p.30.

⁵ Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity – Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (Carol Stream: Barna/Tyndale, 2008), pp.67-68.

⁶ The first publication used in Britain, discovered in the course of my research, which included a suggested prayer is John R. Stott, *Becoming a Christian* (United Kingdom [No town given]: Inter Varsity Fellowship, 1950) [University Booklet Number 12]. There is a fuller treatment of the historical aspect in Chapter 3.

The Purpose of this study

The overarching focus of this dissertation is a critical evaluation of authorial intention in adopting or excluding prayers of response in their literature.⁷ I, myself, am engaged in the production and use of such literature as part of my work as National Director of Bridge Builders.⁸ The Doctor of Ministry was chosen as a vehicle for this study because of its vocational nature that encourages professional reflection.⁹ Therefore, the aim of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the practice of adopting or excluding suggested prayers of response in evangelistic literature. This understanding will then be used to formulate guidelines to encourage authors to be much more critically self-reflective about the theological and practical issues associated with this form of evangelism.

Outline of dissertation

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. After outlining the whole dissertation, this opening chapter will assess the biblical background to using suggested prayers in evangelism. It will explain why I, as a researcher, have undertaken this project. The limitations of this work and my starting position as the researcher will be explained.

Chapter 2 examines previous research by other scholars into the origin and use of suggested prayers in order to gain insights and avoid duplication.

⁷ Authorial Intention is a term used in the study of English literature when examining the aims and objectives of writers and also in Biblical studies regarding the original intent of the writers of books of the Bible. Clare Connors, *Literary Theory* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010) pp.60-64. For example: 'And the extent to which we should take 'authorial intention' into account as we read a work – and the question of how we go about defining that intention – is a subject hotly debated by literary theorists from the 1950s onwards.' p.61. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downes Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) pp.24, 93, 202, 297, 469, 478-497, 503, 509-511 and 530. For example: 'I want to encourage you to get and use the tools that enable us to bridge the gap to Bible times and authorial intention.' p.25

⁸ I have worked for 'The Pocket Testament League' in the UK [now known as 'Bridge Builders'] as an Evangelist (from 1983 to 2006) and since then as National Director. 'Bridge Builders' ['The Pocket Testament League' in UK] has produced and distributed evangelistic literature since about 1910. <www.bridge-builders.net> [accessed 8.1.2013].

⁹ 'The DMin is in every sense intended to deliver practical, applied research that can have a direct and specific benefit on the life of a congregation, denomination or network as well as the ministry and personal development of the candidate.' Taken from Mattersey Hall/Bangor University, Doctor of Ministry, course handbook. <<http://www.matterseyhall.com/gradschool/dmin.html>> [accessed 1.11.2009].

The works of Bennett, Chitwood and McIntyre are analysed and the main points raised by the immense amount of internet material are outlined.

Chapter 3 is an Historical Enquiry which will investigate the introduction and use of prayers of response in evangelistic literature used in Britain. The authorial intention of early writers who adopted a suggested prayer is considered.

Chapter 4 is a Scholarly Investigation which considers the questions regarding the areas of conversion, assurance of salvation and good practice in evangelism. Together with the historical enquiry and the experience of the researcher this formed the basis for the research hypothesis.

Chapter 5 gives a detailed methodology of the empirical research which investigates author intention in adopting or excluding suggested prayers in evangelistic literature. The chapter also introduces the research hypothesis which is tested in the qualitative research reported in chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 6 examines contemporary evangelistic literature used in Britain. The content and context of suggested prayers are analysed. Points raised by the research of others and my own scholarly investigation are set alongside the content of these evangelistic publications.

Chapter 7 reports the findings of interviews with British writers of current evangelistic literature. The comments of a group who include a suggested prayer in their writing are evaluated alongside a group of equal size who do not include a suggested prayer. The observations of the researcher and the scholarly investigation were used to formulate a questionnaire. This questionnaire facilitated semi-formal interviews with the objective of testing the hypothesis.

The final chapter of this dissertation will outline the conclusions reached by this study and make recommendations to authors of evangelistic literature

regarding the use of suggested prayers of response. It will also comment on the application of this research to other forms of evangelism.

Biblical Background

Many Christians who use a prayer of response in evangelistic literature have a strong emphasis on using the Bible to support their doctrine and practice.¹⁰ Nevertheless, one of the criticisms against using suggested prayers is the lack of biblical support for this practice.¹¹ Philpott says that conversion is 'too mysterious and subjective' to be founded on a 'simple prayer that has no biblical precedent.'¹² However, there are prayers in the New Testament which could be used to support the practice. For example, the man in the temple who prays 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner' which Elliff (a strong opponent of The Sinner's Prayer) calls 'the only sinner's prayer in the New Testament'.¹³ There is, too, the thief on the cross next to Jesus asking 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'¹⁴ Both Paul and Peter use a quotation from the prophet Joel which says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."¹⁵ Bennett points out that Jesus promising that God would give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him could be viewed as relating to conversion.¹⁶ Although there are examples of prayers voiced by sinners the actual wording of a suggested prayer is not found in biblical presentations of the Christian message.¹⁷

¹⁰ For example, conservative evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem speaks of the Bible as 'the final standard of truth' and gives 80 pages of his *Systematic Theology* to defending the Bible as the Word of God. He also writes in support of the use of a prayer of response. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 83 and 717.

¹¹ Brian D. McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realise* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), pp.151-152.

¹² Kent Philpott, *Are You Really Born Again* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2005), p.49.

¹³ Jim Elliff, *Wasted Faith* (Kansas City: Christian Communications Worldwide, 2005), p.35; Luke 18:13.

¹⁴ Luke 23:42.

¹⁵ Acts 2:21, Romans 10:13, Joel 2:32.

¹⁶ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.16. See Luke 11:13 and Romans 8:9; see also David Watson, *I Believe in Evangelism*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton,1976), p.113 where his outline of how to respond to the Christian message includes not accepting or receiving Jesus but 'Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit'. Luke 11:13; John 1:12.

¹⁷ No suggested prayer found in Acts 2:14-41; 3:11-26; 8:26-40; 10:34-46; 16:29-34; 17:22-33; 19:1-7; 22:1-21; 26:1-28. See Wayne Jackson, 'The 'Sinner's Prayer – Is it Biblical?' <www.christiancourier.com/articles/368-the-sinners-prayer-is-it-biblical> [accessed 22.1.2013].

The practice of including a suggested prayer of response in evangelistic literature is often supported by the use of isolated verses of scripture which are taken out of context.¹⁸ One example would be Revelation 3:20 which Stott uses to support the concept of an individual 'inviting Jesus into their heart'.¹⁹ McCullough points out that this verse is from a passage addressed to a Church and that the context does not refer to salvation.²⁰ Gaines says that, 'asking Jesus to come into your heart' might not be in scripture but the concept is there.²¹ He states that the Greek word translated 'receive' in John 1:12 does not mean validating Jesus but inviting Him to come into your life. Elliff would totally disagree with this interpretation of the verse which he says is the result of taking it out of context because the passage teaches the need to believe and a reliance on the Christ who came into the world.²² Elliff asserts that this involves a work of God to make the believer a child of His and that this could not be done simply on the respondent's initiative of asking Jesus into their heart.²³ Contrastingly Gaines advocates that Romans 10:9 is the quintessential text referring to asking Jesus to come into your heart and he points out that verse 13 of the same chapter advocates that this involves prayer.²⁴ However, at issue here is not whether there is biblical support for encouraging people responding to the Christian Gospel to pray but whether authors of evangelistic literature

¹⁸ See Russ McCullough, 'The Sinner's Prayer' <<http://www.sinners-prayer.info/>> [accessed 6.1.2012]. This article looks at Luke 19:9-11; Luke 23:39-43; Revelation 3:19-20 and Romans 10:9-11. Russ McCullough is an Elder of Archdale Church of Christ, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. <<http://www.archdale.org/leaders.shtml>> [accessed 6.1.2013]. He says that the purpose of his website is 'to examine the theology of "The Sinner's Prayer" by putting it under the light of Scripture to test its validity.'

¹⁹ For example: John Stott, *Basic Christianity New Edition* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008) pp155-162.

²⁰ Russ McCullough, 'The Sinner's Prayer' <<http://www.sinners-prayer.info/>> [accessed 6.1.2012].

²¹ Dr. Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, speaking during the debate on the sinner's prayer at the Southern Baptist Convention of the United States of America in June 2012. The link to the actual debate is:

<<http://mediasuite.316networks.com/player.php?p=gj59id16>> [accessed 8.1.2013]

The discussion on the Resolution about The Sinner's Prayer is on the Wednesday morning under the Resolutions Committee Presentation. You have to click on this particular video under the main screen. The debate is ten minutes into the session and lasts 24 minutes. The resolution passed by the Convention can be found in Appendix 3 of this dissertation.

²² Jim Elliff, 'Getting John 1:12 Right: Should You invite Jesus into your Heart'.

< http://www.ccwtoday.org/article_view.asp?article_id=209> [accessed 3. 1. 2013].

²³ Elliff, 'Getting John 1:12 Right'.

²⁴ Steve Gaines taking part in the debate on The Sinner's Prayer at the Southern Baptist Convention Wednesday am 19th June 2012.

<<http://mediasuite.316networks.com/player.php?p=gj59id16>> [accessed 8.1.2013].

should provide the actual words of response in a suggested prayer because of the absence of such a prayer in the Bible.

In June 2012 the American Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution 'affirming the use of a Sinner's Prayer as a biblical expression of repentance and faith'.²⁵ This dissertation discusses whether prayer can truly be an adequate expression of repentance and faith. The whole area of prayer as a way of responding to the Christian Gospel is examined in Chapter 4.²⁶ The issue also arises in Chapter 7 in the analysis of how writers of evangelistic literature responded to the question of the role of prayer in conversion.²⁷

Origin of this study

The main reason for my interest in the use of suggested prayers of response in evangelistic literature comes from the dilemma of very mixed observations. In my experience some people who prayed a suggested prayer of response have become strong Christians who testify to what God has done in their lives, while others who prayed the same prayer do not seem to have any real experience of conversion. Christians I have worked with in evangelism have claimed people as converts on the basis of them having said a suggested prayer of response but there was no evidence of repentance, lives did not seem to change and these people did not become part of a Church. I witnessed Christians reassuring people they are 'saved' because they had said the suggested prayer without explaining the challenges of living a Christian life.

People have shared with me that they have prayed the suggested prayer in the publications of the organisation with whom I work but have not, in their opinion, experienced conversion. By contrast, a lady known to me shared how she had silently prayed the suggested prayer in the Alpha literature.²⁸ In the weeks that followed she shared how her life was changing and the changes were witnessed by others. She would regard praying the suggested prayer in

²⁵ Downloaded from <<http://sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1221>> [accessed 2.1.2013].

²⁶ See pp. 81-85.

²⁷ See pp.150 -153.

²⁸ Nicky N. Gumbel, *Alpha: Questions of life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1993), pp.64-65.

'The Alpha Course' literature as a pivotal moment in her journey to faith. Similar confusing observations led pastor Christopher Bass to undertake doctrinal studies looking at Assurance of Salvation in 1 John.²⁹ He states that among his congregation was a proud and arrogant man who did not live a good life but claimed conversion because he had said a prayer at a youth camp many years ago.³⁰ From the observations made by Bass and my own experience I call into question why it is that for some the use of a suggested prayer is a significant expression of genuine faith, while for others it becomes a reason for false assumptions about Salvation. This study will seek reasons for these contrasting reactions and ask whether authors could alter their evangelistic literature to minimise possible misconceptions by the reader.

I am approaching this issue as an experienced practitioner. In 1969, having trained at the 'Bible Training Institute' in Glasgow, I joined the staff of the 'Seamen's Christian Friend Society' as an Evangelist among Merchant Seamen.³¹ In 1983 I left SCFS and joined 'The Pocket Testament League' (now known as 'Bridge Builders') as an Evangelist. In that role I always used evangelistic literature which included a suggested prayer of response. In 2006 I became the National Director of Bridge Builders which produces evangelistic literature which includes a suggested prayer.³² My work still involves teaching evangelism and leading evangelistic teams. My Master's degree from Sheffield University, awarded in 2003, is in Evangelism Studies and my research project looked at how adults find faith in Britain today.³³

²⁹ Christopher D. Bass, *That You May Know: Assurance of Salvation in 1 John* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), author's preface p.xiii.

³⁰ Bass, *That You May Know*, p.xiii.

³¹ 'The Bible Training Institute', Glasgow is now 'The International Christian College'. <<http://www.icc.ac.uk/>> [accessed 1.6.2010]. 'The Seamen's Christian Friend Society' still has Port Missionaries engaged in evangelism among Merchant Seamen in ports in the UK and in other countries. <<http://www.scfs.org/>> [accessed 1.6.2010].

³² The Pocket Testament League in the UK adopted the working title of 'Bridge Builders' in 2004. <<http://www.bridge-builders.net>> [accessed 1.6.2010].

³³ My Master's Dissertation can be downloaded from <<http://www.bridgebuilders.net/current/whoweare.php>>.

In recent years I have been responsible for producing three new Bridge Builders' publications.³⁴ These all followed the format of a section of scripture followed by an outline of the Christian Gospel which includes a suggested prayer. During my D.Min studies I have written the Gospel presentations for two of these publications. I included a suggested prayer in both publications because I sincerely believed it could be of help to the reader. However, I was also concerned that the reader may misunderstand the relevance of the suggested prayer and believe that all they had to do in response to the Gospel was to say the prayer. My early research resulted in my taking great care over the wording of the prayer and the context in which it was placed. However, this study will question whether such action is enough to militate against possible misconceptions as to the relevance of such prayers in evangelistic literature.

Limitations of this study

This study will be limited to the evaluation of adopting or excluding suggested prayers of response by authors of evangelistic literature used by British Christians. Others have looked at the origin and use of prayers of response in America.³⁵ My own experience in evangelism is mostly in Britain and the evangelistic organisation I lead works exclusively in the United Kingdom. This study will look at the influence of American preachers and literature on evangelistic thinking here in Britain.

The focus of this study is evangelistic literature used in Britain in the last 110 years. Other researchers have already dealt adequately with the consideration of changes which led to the introduction of the use of suggested prayers in nineteenth century evangelism.³⁶ Consequently this study will concentrate on the development of evangelistic literature used in Britain in the twentieth century and consider literature in use in this country today. The reason for this is that the inclusion of a suggested prayer of response in

³⁴ *The Key to Life*, 2008, *The Story of Christmas*, 2010, *The Story of Easter*, 2011, See <www.bridge-builders.net> [accessed 7.2.2013].

³⁵ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*. Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*: Also an email from Chitwood 20.10 2009.

³⁶ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*; pp.48-138. Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.15-41.

evangelistic literature does not become common in Britain until the mid-twentieth century.³⁷

The subject was approached from a position that recognised both positive and negative aspects of providing such prayers in evangelistic literature. This study considered all kinds of prayers of response in evangelistic literature and did not set out any limiting criteria such as those suggested by other researchers.³⁸ The reason for this is the belief that any suggested prayer has the potential of leading to misunderstanding regarding the nature of conversion and the grounds for assurance of salvation. A fuller explanation of this decision is given in the next chapter reflecting on the writing of others which analyses definitions used by other researchers.

³⁷ The first prayer of response in a British evangelistic publication in wide circulation found by this study is in John Stott's *Becoming a Christian*, published in 1950.

³⁸ David Malcolm Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer: Its Origins and Dangers* (Capalaba, Queensland: Even Before Publishing, 2011), p.2. Paul Harrison Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer: An Historical and Theological Analysis* (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, 2001), p.45.

Chapter 2. Examination of previous research

Introduction

This section will discuss how the work of other researchers and writers has influenced the way this study has been undertaken. The two more academic works are a doctoral dissertation completed in 2001 by Paul Chitwood, a Southern Baptist from the USA, and a recent book by the Australian Presbyterian Dr David Malcolm Bennett.³⁹ Another contemporary book is *The Graham Formula* by Patrick McIntyre which, while not as rigorously academic, raises many points for discussion and includes some new historical material.⁴⁰ In preparation for this chapter I have also considered an article and booklets by Elliff, an older work by Peter Masters, a contemporary leaflet by Peter Jeffery and the very recent book on the Sinner's Prayer by Andrew Strom.⁴¹ The plentiful material on the Sinner's Prayer found on the internet has also been examined, particularly the views of Paul Washer and Jim Elliff.⁴²

Rather than presenting a summary of the content of each of these works this chapter will seek to demonstrate how my reflection on them has shaped

³⁹ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, supplied to me by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with the permission of Paul Chitwood – also emails from the author: October 2009. Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*. Although this book is a recent publication, a draft copy was sent to me by the author twelve months before the book was published. I have had contact with David Malcolm Bennett for the past five years, involving extensive email correspondence and the sharing of original ideas and research. I am mentioned in the acknowledgements in this book and part of the book is based on my Master's dissertation. David Malcolm Bennett is not a relative of David Robert Bennett the writer of this dissertation.

⁴⁰ Patrick McIntyre, *The Graham Formula* (Mammoth Spring: White Harvest Publishing, 2005).

⁴¹ Jim Elliff, *Closing with Christ* (Christian Communications Worldwide, 1999) available at <http://www.ccwtoday.org/article_view.asp?article_id=52> [accessed 11.12.2012]. Jim Elliff, *Pursuing God - a seeker's guide* (Parkville: Christian Communications Worldwide, 2003). Jim Elliff, *Wasted Faith* (Parkville: Christian Communications Worldwide, 2005). Peter Masters, *Physician of souls* (London: Wakeman, 1976). Older work by a British writer, which is still in publication. Peter Jeffery, *The prayer of faith*, (Baglan Ministries, 2011). Also published as an article in Evangelical Times, March 2011 <<http://www.evangelical-times.org/archive/item/4812/-The-prayer-of-faith-/>> [accessed 6.10.2011]. The significance of this small leaflet is the fact that it is the only piece of current writing by a British author on the subject of the use of a prayer of response that I have discovered during the course of this research. Andrew Strom, *The Sinner's Prayer Fact or Fiction?* (New Zealand: RevivalSchool, 2012).

⁴² Paul Washer, Declaring War on the Sinner's Prayer.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dc5IY9YP_bE> [accessed 15.11.2012]. Jim Elliff, <http://www.ccwtoday.org/speaker_jim_elliff.asp> [accessed 15.9.2011]. Full text of some of Elliff's books are found at <<http://www.waytogod.org/>> [accessed 15.9.2011].

and influenced my own research. The first section will demonstrate why, in the light of what others have written, I have chosen to look at all suggested prayers of response in evangelistic literature regardless of whether they meet any presupposed criteria.

The second section considers the historical investigations and suppositions of these writers and explains how these have impacted on my research. There is an explanation of why my historical research focuses on twentieth-century Britain. My own historical inquiry in Chapter 3 of this dissertation will be driven by three questions raised by these writers.

The third section summarises the theological discussion of these writers and explains how this laid a foundation for my own scholarly investigation in Chapter 4. It raises questions regarding how people should be encouraged to respond to the Christian Gospel which are reflected on during the rest of this project.

The fourth section considers the writers' research and propositions regarding suggested prayers in evangelistic literature. There is then an explanation how this led me to examine the use of prayers in current evangelistic literature used in this country, which is analysed in Chapter 6.

The fifth section examines the motive and starting point of the writers which led me to seek to strive to approach the subject from as unbiased a position as possible, which saw not only the negative issues relating to the adoption of suggested prayers but also the possibility that such prayers could prove helpful to the respondent. The issues raised by this section will be included in the analysis of the interviews in Chapter 7.

The final section of this chapter will look at what these writers have suggested as practical applications regarding their research or their views of the use of a suggested prayer. Throughout the rest of this dissertation, and particularly during the analysis of my interviews in Chapter 7, I will be

considering the practical outcomes of my research. In the concluding chapter I will set out suggestions as to how my research outcomes could be applied to the writing and use of evangelistic literature.

Section 1. Why this research examines at all kinds of prayers of response in evangelistic literature

The first reason why my research examined all kinds of prayers of response in evangelistic literature is because there is no universally-accepted term to describe such prayers. Chitwood and Bennett deal with what they call 'The Sinner's Prayer'.⁴³ This is a term widely used on the internet as illustrated by Washer 'declaring war on The Sinner's Prayer'.⁴⁴ However, McIntyre talks about 'a Salvation Prayer' and Jeffery prefers the term 'The Prayer of Faith'.⁴⁵ Although these writers use different terms they are all referring to suggested prayers used by preachers, personal workers or in evangelistic publications at the close of a Gospel presentation as part of the suggested response. For example, Masters refers to the fact that 'some tracts often conclude by suggesting a very brief prayer of repentance'.⁴⁶ The use of different terms alerted me to the lack of a universally-accepted term for such prayers.

In contrast to this, Chitwood makes the assumption that the reader will know what he is referring to by 'The Sinner's Prayer' and a definition does not appear until a third of the way through his thesis.⁴⁷ Judging by the recent debate on the sinner's prayer during the American Southern Baptist Convention, Chitwood's attitude could reflect his cultural situation where the term 'Sinner's Prayer' is widely accepted without any explanation.⁴⁸ In a

⁴³ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, see p.2. 'Clearly, the Sinner's Prayer is one of the most popular evangelistic tools in use today.' Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.1-12 'What is 'the Sinner's Prayer', pp.13-38 'A Biblical, Theological and Practical Look at the Sinner's Prayer'.

⁴⁴ Paul Washer, *Declaring War on the Sinner's Prayer*.

⁴⁵ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, p.29.

⁴⁶ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, p.29.

⁴⁷ Chitwood, *The Sinner's prayer*. His definition appears on page 45 of the 142 page thesis.

⁴⁸ Recording of 2012 Southern Baptist Convention, Wednesday morning June 20th 2012, Committee on Resolutions

< <http://mediasuite.316networks.com/player.php?p=gj59id16> > [accessed 9.9.2012].

See more details about this debate in Chapter 1 pp.5-9.

different context this is further illustrated by Paul Washer, another Southern Baptist, never defining the prayer over which he has ‘declared war’.⁴⁹ Chitwood understands ‘The Sinner’s Prayer’ as having four ‘basic elements, which are: recognition of sin, statement of belief, pledge of repentance and the acceptance/invitation of Jesus.’⁵⁰ He talks about ‘the development of a standardised prayer’ but if there was such a thing I would expect it to be defined in similar terms by others.⁵¹ Contrary to this, Bennett, who acknowledges Chitwood’s thesis as ‘ground breaking’, has an almost totally different detailed definition of what he regards as The Sinner’s Prayer.⁵² For Bennett The Sinner’s Prayer ‘must include three essential elements: An actual prayer addressed to God or Jesus Christ; the assumption that prayed sincerely it will be effective; and that the prayer refers to the sinner inviting, accepting, receiving or taking Christ into the sinner’s life or heart as an act of the human will’.⁵³ These definitions will be discussed in the theology section which follows. It is sufficient to say here that they are strikingly different and only the point regarding receiving or inviting Christ into one’s life is found in both. Other writers, with the exception of Elliff, do not include an explanation of what they mean by ‘a prayer of Salvation’ or whatever term they choose to use.⁵⁴ This lack of any standardisation in defining what is meant by The Sinner’s Prayer caused me to decide to include in my research any suggested prayers of response found in evangelistic literature used in this country.

⁴⁹ Paul Washer, ‘Declaring war on the Sinner’s Prayer’. John Frye calls Washer ‘a dyed-in-the-wool Calvinist and a Southern Baptist itinerant minister.’

<<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2010/09/06/who-is-paul-washer-john-frye/>> [accessed 24.11.2012]. David J. Steward says Washer is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention. <http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Wolves/paul_washer.htm> [accessed 24.11.2012]. See also: <http://www.theopedia.com/Paul_Washer> [accessed 24.11.2012]. Washer was educated at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary which is under the direction of the Southern Baptist Convention. <<http://www.swbts.edu/about-us>> [accessed 24.11.2012] and <http://www.theopedia.com/Paul_Washer> [accessed 24.11.2012].

⁵⁰ Chitwood, *The Sinner’s prayer*, p.45.

⁵¹ Chitwood, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, p.45.

⁵² Bennett, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, see particularly pp. vii; x; 1-5; see also pp.13-14; 20; 39; 43; 50; 53; 105; 130; 137-140; 143; 146-147.

⁵³ Bennett, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, p.2.

⁵⁴ Jim Elliff, *Closing with Christ*. Elliff’s definition states that ‘The sinner’s prayer, as we have come to see it, has three elements: a mere acknowledgement of sin, which is not the same as repentance; a belief in the act of Christ’s death, which is far removed from trust in his person and work and an ‘inviting Christ into the life. The last phrase hangs on nothing biblical though John 1:12 and Rev 3:20 are used out of context for this basis’.

This was consolidated by asking David Malcolm Bennett to examine two Bridge Builders' booklets which I have written.⁵⁵ He concluded that the suggested prayers in these publications are not strictly 'The Sinner's Prayer' as he has defined it because 'the prayer does not indicate that the one praying is receiving, inviting or accepting Christ into their heart or being'.⁵⁶ This issue is also included by Chitwood in his definition.⁵⁷ So here were examples of suggested prayers which did not meet the criteria laid down by these researchers. This led me to decide that this research would consider all kinds of prayers which were provided in evangelistic literature as part of the suggested response to see if they substantiated my hypothesis which is introduced in chapter 5.⁵⁸

Section 2. Historical Enquiry

Chitwood says that the primary purpose of his thesis 'is to trace the origin of the Sinner's Prayer' and that, in this regard, his work is historical in nature.⁵⁹ Most of Bennett's book is given to a thorough historical search for the origin of such prayers and the theology which accommodates their use. Consideration of the outcomes of the research of Chitwood and Bennett and the historical suppositions of McIntyre led me to three issues which impacted my research. The first is a limitation on my research as a result of these writers having

⁵⁵ Biographical details of David Malcolm Bennett and information on his other books can be found at <<http://www.angelfire.com/wy/dmbennhome/>> [accessed 29.12.2012]. [Bennett has the degrees of B.Th and M.Th (with Merit) from The Australian College of Theology and a Ph.D from The University of Queensland].

⁵⁶ e-mail from David Malcolm Bennett received on 11th February 2011. The booklets were published by Bridge Builders. '*The story of Christmas*' in September 2010 & September 2011 and '*The story of Easter*' in January 2011. 60,000 copies of these booklets have been distributed.

⁵⁷ Paul Harrison Chitwood is Assistant Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, [Louisville, Kentucky] and an Adjunct Professor at The University of the Cumberlands. He is also the Executive Director-Treasurer of the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Since 2003 he has been the Pastor of First Baptist Church of Mount Washington. *Western Recorder: June 7, 2011*. <<http://www.westernrecorder.org/recent-kentuck-news/606-paul-chitwood-new-exec>> [accessed 29.12.2012].

⁵⁸ See page 107

⁵⁹ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.3.

adequately covered the historical period before the twentieth century and the other two are issues raised which I sought to investigate.

Limiting my historical research to twentieth century Britain

Chitwood is the first researcher to seek to discover the origin of The Sinner's Prayer.⁶⁰ After his extensive investigation he concludes that the use of The Sinner's Prayer is 'absent even through the rise of revivalism and mass evangelism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'.⁶¹ Ten years later, Bennett carried out a meticulous investigation of nineteenth-century literature without discovering who was the first to use The Sinner's Prayer. However, he does conclude that Charles Finney, D.L. Moody, R.A. Torrey, Wilbur Chapman, Billy Sunday, and early members of the Brethren did *not* use a suggested prayer.⁶²

While not discovering the originator of a suggested prayer, Chitwood says that his investigations led him to believe that a theological shift that took place in the first half of the nineteenth century resulted in an emphasis on human decision.⁶³ He sees this shift in theology and methodology as a 'critical factor in the historical roots of The Sinner's Prayer'.⁶⁴ In similar vein, Terry considers that during the second great awakening in America 'the predominant theology of the frontier changed from Calvinism to Arminianism' resulting in an emphasis on the belief that people have the ability to choose salvation by an act of their own will.⁶⁵ From a British perspective, Bebbington points out that during this period some Calvinists changed their thinking to 'Moderate Calvinism' which held that unsaved sinners were responsible for their own perdition'.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.8-9.

⁶¹ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.4.

⁶² Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, re Finney pp.53-54; re Moody, p.106; re Chapman p.116; re Torrey p.121; re Sunday p.124-125; re early Brethren p.113-114.

⁶³ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.23-25.

⁶⁴ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.25.

⁶⁵ John Mark Terry, *Evangelism a concise history* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994) p.137. McIntyre defines a Calvinist as: 'Someone who believes that people have little influence over whether or not they will be born again and that born again Christians cannot lose their salvation. He defines an Arminian as: 'Someone who believes that people have a significant influence over whether or not they are born again and believes that a born again Christian can lose their salvation.' McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, p.6.

⁶⁶ David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2005) pp.122-123.

While Bebbington says nothing about the introduction of prayers of response he does support the view that there is a shift in theology in the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁷

Bennett advocates that this trend starts with conversion first being viewed as a decision in 1832.⁶⁸ His research revealed that in the early part of the nineteenth century enquirers were encouraged to 'go home, read their Bible, reflect upon their condition' or join a Methodist class as a probationer for six months.⁶⁹ However, by the middle of the century evangelists were calling for an instant response.⁷⁰ While the arguments of these researchers do show that the use of suggested prayers could be the result of an emphasis on the human aspect of conversion, their conclusion is that suggested prayers are not used before the twentieth century. Because of the thoroughness of their research into the nineteenth century I decided to focus my research on the twentieth century.

Chitwood presents a case that The Sinner's Prayer originated in the early twentieth century as a result of efforts to simplify and reproduce methods in evangelism; he advocates that the popularity of The Sinner's Prayer is due to its use by Billy Graham and Bill Bright.⁷¹ In the next chapter this dissertation will consider the impact of these men on evangelistic literature used in Britain. Bennett advocates that, while there was a theological development in the nineteenth century that would support the use of such prayers, their use becomes common in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷² Therefore, this

⁶⁷Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, pp.121-130. Dr David W. Bebbington (MA, Ph.D, F.R.Hist S.) is Professor of History at Stirling University. <<http://www.historyandpolitics.stir.ac.uk/staff/history/DavidBebbingtonHistoryStirlingStaffInformation.php>> [accessed 29.12.2012].

⁶⁸ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.39-40. The earliest reference he has found to this is in 1832 in a book by Calvin Cotton. He points out that Nevin criticized preachers for using the term in his book on the Anxious Bench published in 1844.

⁶⁹ Jacob Knapp, *The Autobiography of Elder James Knapp* (NY: Sheldon, 1868) pp.217-218. Quoted Bennett, *Sinner's Prayer*, p.13 <http://books.google.com/books?id=DCIaH7kExjAC&pg=PA111&dq=Knapp,+Jacob,+The+Autobiography+of+Elder+James+Knapp&hl=en&ei=8nJSTdb2IJqhAfR6OTaCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false> [accessed 1.2.2011].

⁷⁰ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.46.

⁷¹ Chitwood, p.62.

⁷² Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.150.

present research takes up these issues from a British perspective and investigates whether there is any evidence that suggested prayers were first used in evangelistic literature in this country in the early part of the twentieth century.

Suggested prayers may have evolved from decision pledges

McIntyre's work, while focusing on the methods of Billy Graham, looks also at the history and use of The Sinner's Prayer from a wider perspective.⁷³ He states that cards which were used to gather the contact information of those who came forward at evangelistic meetings developed into a 'convert's pledge card' containing all the elements of The Sinner's Prayer.⁷⁴ He states that 'by the 1930s, pledge cards were called decision cards and included the basic content of today's salvation prayer'.⁷⁵ Bennett gives examples of such cards and comments on their wording, including the idea of accepting or receiving Christ, but in his opinion the wording of such cards is not given in the form of a prayer.⁷⁶ McIntyre is of the opinion that it is easy to see how pledges evolved into prayers simply by the way they were used.⁷⁷ This results in McIntyre putting forward his original concept that The Sinner's Prayer developed from pledges on decision cards.⁷⁸ This is an intriguing suggestion which I decided to test in my historical enquiry as I had access to evangelistic literature published by The Pocket Testament League during the first part of the twentieth century which contains both pledges and prayers. Therefore, Chapter 3 of this dissertation examines the wording of pledges and early prayers of commitment in evangelistic literature to test the feasibility of McIntyre's theory.

⁷³ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*. McIntyre narrates a 30 minute video based on his book. <<http://www.reformedvoices.com/2008/01/graham-formula.html>> and <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmpCC4jhng8>> [both accessed 28.12.2012].

The whole text of the book can be downloaded at <<http://www.christianebooks.com/TheGrahamFormulaDownload.pdf>> [accessed 28.12.2012].

⁷⁴ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, pp.44-50.

⁷⁵ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, p.50.

⁷⁶ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.130-137.

⁷⁷ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, p.50.

⁷⁸ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, pp.47-50.

The role of Billy Graham in introducing suggested prayers to Britain

McIntyre traces, with accurate referencing, the evolution of Graham's use of a 'salvation prayer'.⁷⁹ At first Graham had his counsellors using a salvation prayer at the end of the counselling session.⁸⁰ Only later did he start to lead everyone in the prayer himself *after* enquirers were counselled. Then, due to increased numbers coming forward and enquirers leaving before they could be counselled, Graham started to lead a group salvation prayer *before* the enquirers were counselled.⁸¹ However, it has been asserted that Graham never believed that everyone who repeated a salvation prayer was saved and claimed that only a percentage of those who came forward were genuinely converted and at best he put this at 25%.⁸²

Chitwood suggests that because Billy Graham was using The Sinner's Prayer in the 1940s it possibly originates with him. When asked, Graham confirmed that even 'back in Bible college days' he used the prayer but 'could not recall if it came from someone else or not'.⁸³ Chitwood states that although we cannot be sure with whom the prayer originated, what is certain is that 'Graham has had a major role in popularizing The Sinner's Prayer.'⁸⁴ Bennett is of the same opinion and states that, from a British perspective, there seems no evidence that The Sinner's Prayer appeared in an evangelistic publication before the Billy Graham crusades of 1954 and 1955.⁸⁵ As a result of these suggestions I decided to investigate whether Graham was, in fact, the first person to introduce a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature used in this country. An explanation of this enquiry forms a section of the next chapter of this dissertation.

⁷⁹ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, pp.69-71.

⁸⁰ John Pollock, *Billy Graham* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966) pp.107-108.

⁸¹ Mitchell Curtis, *Those who came forward* (Kingswood: World's Work, 1966) p.41.

⁸² Pollock. *Billy Graham*, pp.107-108.

⁸³ Cliff Barrows, telephone interview with Chitwood, 21.11.1998. Chitwood p.57 [Cliff Barrows is a member of the Billy Graham team. Because Billy Graham was unwell at the time of Chitwood's research Barrows asked Billy Graham questions on his behalf and relayed the answers back to Chitwood during a telephone conversation].

⁸⁴ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.57.

⁸⁵ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.147.

Section 3. Theological Discussion

This section considers the theological arguments which have preoccupied these researchers. It lays the foundation for my own scholarly enquiry in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Elliff has written a number of booklets relevant to The Sinner's Prayer and his paper 'Closing with Christ' makes a significant contribution to the subject.⁸⁶ Chitwood's theological analysis is based on Elliff's definition of The Sinner's Prayer in 'Closing with Christ' which states that the prayer has three elements: 'a mere acknowledgement of sin, which is not the same as repentance; a belief in the act of Christ's death, which is far removed from trust in his person and work and an inviting Christ into the life'.⁸⁷ Chitwood's theological argument therefore centres around what should be the correct response to the Gospel and whether a suggested prayer can be part of that response.⁸⁸ In a similar vein my scholarly investigation will consider the issues surrounding this question.

Chitwood's point that The Sinner's Prayer will include a 'pledge of repentance' is relegated by Bennett to the supplementary comment that comes after his definition.⁸⁹ However, Bennett's use of the term 'an explanation of repentance' is different from Chitwood's 'promise to repent' and suggests the need to state what is meant by repentance. This caused me to question whether a person could repent by saying a prayer because repentance involves more than mere confession. Chitwood analyses the wording of prayers in evangelistic literature concluding that they 'acknowledge sin, rather than

⁸⁶ For details of Elliff's publications see footnote 85 on p.22. Jim Elliff is Founder and President of Christian Communicators Worldwide.

< http://www.ccwtoday.org/speaker_jim_elliff.asp > [accessed 29.12.2012].

Elliff is an Elder of Christ Fellowship of Kansas City which is a Church made up of a number of congregations meeting in houses. <<http://www.christfellowshipkc.org/>> [accessed 29.12.2012]. This fellowship is Calvinistic and their doctrinal statement is based on the Five Points of Calvinism. <http://www.christfellowshipkc.org/believe_statement.asp> [accessed 29.12.2012].

⁸⁷ Elliff, *Closing with Christ*, p.2.

⁸⁸ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.64-111. See footnote 99 on p.26 for Elliff's definition.

⁸⁹ As stated in section one Chitwood understands The Sinner's Prayer as having four 'basic elements, which are: recognition of sin, statement of belief, pledge of repentance and the acceptance/invitation of Jesus.' Chitwood, *The Sinner's prayer*, p.45.

expressing repentance'.⁹⁰ After looking at the biblical words Chitwood concludes that:

by biblical definition, repentance is much more than an acknowledgement of sin. It is a change of mind, a turning away from sin. Furthermore, this turning from sin is an essential part of what we have seen as the biblical requirements for salvation. Without genuine repentance, the gospel has not been fully accepted.⁹¹

If this statement is accepted mere words would not be enough to constitute true repentance and so assuring someone of salvation on the basis of having said a prayer could result in misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation. This will be further considered in Chapter 4.

Peter Jeffery is the only British writer to have commented on the use of a suggested prayer in evangelism in recent years.⁹² He sees a danger in the use of a suggested prayer because, in his opinion, it can replace repentance and faith which he sees as the true means of salvation.⁹³ He likens the use of such a prayer to eating a bag of chips.⁹⁴ Both satisfy a hunger but the effect soon wears off. He sees the use of the prayer more to blame for short term 'conversions' than inadequate follow up.⁹⁵ He advocates that the use of a suggested prayer is an example of impatience on our part with God's way of conviction of sin and repentance.⁹⁶ It brings results but not the fruit of changed lives. However, in his outline of 'God's way of Salvation', after hearing the word, believing, conviction and repentance comes 'receive Christ as saviour'.⁹⁷ This stimulated me to ask whether a suggested prayer could be used as part of that act of receiving while safeguarding against the negative issue of lack of

⁹⁰ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.91.

⁹¹ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.83.

⁹² Peter Jeffery is a retired Welsh minister who pastored Free Evangelical and Congregational Churches in Wales. Since 1994 he has had an itinerant preaching ministry. He is the author of over 40 books. He has written evangelistic booklets which do not include a prayer, two of which are considered in Chapter 5. <<http://blog.christianfocus.com/index.php/2011/07/12/author-profile-peter-jeffery/>> [accessed 28.12.2012] See also: <<http://www.youtube.com/user/peterjeffery1>> [accessed 28.12.2012].

⁹³ Peter Jeffery, *The Prayer of Faith*, (Baglan Ministries, 2011). Also published as an article in Evangelical Times, March 2011 <<http://www.evangelical-times.org/archive/item/4812/-The-prayer-of-faith-/>> [accessed 24.11. 2012]. The significance of this small leaflet is the fact that it is the only piece of current writing, by a British author, on the subject of the use of a prayer of response that I have discovered during the course of this research.

⁹⁴ Jeffery, *The prayer of faith*, p.3.

⁹⁵ Jeffery, *The prayer of faith*, p.3.

⁹⁶ Jeffery, *The prayer of faith*, p.4.

⁹⁷ Jeffery, *The prayer of faith*, p.7.

change in lifestyle which is at the heart of Jeffery's objection to the use of such prayers. While Masters does advocate that there is a place for pressing people to 'repent and cast themselves upon the Lord pleading for forgiveness and new life' he disagrees with the use of a suggested prayer because it suggests that salvation is gained by an act of the human will.⁹⁸ This caused me to consider whether it was possible to supply a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature which would aid a person in pleading with God for forgiveness without resulting in the objections raised by these writers. This question influenced the formulation of the research hypothesis which is introduced in chapter 5.

Bennett's definition of The Sinner's Prayer says nothing about the 'recognition of sin' or 'a statement of belief' which Chitwood includes. This reinforced the need to ascertain in my theological enquiry what the essential elements of a response to the Gospel are. Chitwood, in summing up his biblical survey, states that the responses to the Christian message expected in the New Testament are: calling on the name of the Lord, belief, repentance and confessing Jesus as Lord. He states that although baptism is called for in Acts 2 in the light of New Testament teaching it should not be viewed as a necessary part of salvation.⁹⁹ On the other hand Strom, who is the most recent person to write against the use of The Sinner's Prayer, sees repentance, faith, water baptism and being filled with the Spirit as essentials to salvation and for this reason sees a suggested prayer as an inadequate non-essential.¹⁰⁰ Such differences between scholars on what constitutes the correct response to the Gospel led to this being considered in greater detail in my scholarly investigation in Chapter 4.

The issue raised by McIntyre, which I find most thought provoking, is his opinion that, for modern evangelists, 'The Altar Call' and The Sinner's Prayer

⁹⁸ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, p.74-75.

⁹⁹ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.77.

¹⁰⁰ Strom, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.39. Andrew Strom is the founder of RevivalSchool.com, the REVIVAL List and Johnthebaptist TV; he is described as a 'Revival preacher'. <<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Andrew-Strom-Revival-Precacher/100981033308640>> [accessed 31.12.2012]. He comes from New Zealand, his ministry emphasises repentance, the Cross and a Revival of righteousness and he has written many articles which can be found at: <RevivalSchool.com> [accessed 31.12.2012].

have replaced the biblical requirement of Baptism.¹⁰¹ During the video summary of his book, McIntyre states that ‘since the 1950s baptism has been replaced by the salvation prayer as the number one way most ministers usher people into the kingdom of God.’¹⁰² The leaders’ guide to the youth version of ‘Christianity Explored’ might be used in support of this view in that it states that ‘If anyone prays a prayer and they meant it they should be treated as a believer.’¹⁰³ However, there does follow a note of caution to the leader to look for evidence of God’s transforming work and this course does come from a paedobaptist tradition.¹⁰⁴ Viola and Barna would agree with McIntyre that saying a prayer which is encouraged at the point of conversion, has replaced the role of water baptism as an initial confession of faith.¹⁰⁵ They suggest this is due partly to the modern practice of not baptising converts immediately after conversion which they see as the practice of the early Church.¹⁰⁶ This issue is pursued in this dissertation which asks why most current evangelistic literature used in Britain does not mention baptism and whether this encourages the saying of a suggested prayer to be viewed as a sacrament.¹⁰⁷ In Chapter 6 this issue will be included in the analysis of current evangelistic literature used in Britain. In Chapter 7 this is further discussed where the interviewees’ answers regarding this issue are analysed.

Bennett’s point that the content or context of the prayer will include a statement that ‘if it is meant or prayed sincerely it will be inevitably and immediately effective’ could lead to a false assumption regarding assurance of salvation and therefore an issue considered when formulating the hypothesis which is introduced in Chapter 5. Masters objects to the practice of telling people that if they pray the prayer, Christ immediately enters their heart. He states that such literature carries the message that: ‘The moment you pray the

¹⁰¹ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, pp.16, 114.

¹⁰² <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmpCC4jhng8>> [accessed 9.8.2011].

¹⁰³ See also: *Christianity Explored, Leader’s Guide for CY and CY Namo* (New Malden: The Good Book Company, 2010) p.158.

¹⁰⁴ Christianity Explored originated at All Souls Anglican Church in the centre of London. Rico Tice, *Christianity Explored: The Leader’s Guide* (London: Paternoster, 2001) pp.3-4.

¹⁰⁵ Viola, and Barna, *Pagan Christianity*, pp.188-189.

¹⁰⁶ Viola, and Barna, *Pagan Christianity*, pp.188-189.

¹⁰⁷ For example ‘The Pocket Testament League’ has produced evangelistic literature for almost 100 years and is still in operation but there is no mention of baptism in any of their publications.

little prayer God is absolutely bound to make you His child then and there'.¹⁰⁸ Chitwood says that from a theological standpoint this issue of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human free will is at the heart of the debate regarding the use of The Sinner's Prayer.¹⁰⁹ He goes on to say that 'conversion, once defined as a work of the sovereign God endowed on sinners is now seen by many as an act of the will of sinners participated in by God at the demand of sinners.'¹¹⁰ From this I saw a need to include within my research the careful analysis of evangelistic literature in order to ascertain whether changing the wording would eliminate this emotive issue.

McIntyre asserts that the practice of assuring people who have prayed a 'salvation prayer' that they are 'born again' has resulted in a large number of spurious conversions in America.¹¹¹ He advocates that this practice gives people a false sense of security and results in pseudo-Christians.¹¹² He states that this method of evangelism is partly to blame for falling standards of morality in America.¹¹³ While these are startling claims, the focus of my research is on Britain and I have not found any claims that the use of a suggested prayer has such effects in this country.¹¹⁴ Masters expresses concern over telling people that one prayer is enough because it is his opinion that people often come to faith after a long struggle.¹¹⁵ While he agrees with persuading people to seek God, he considers it unbiblical to tell people that God will instantly accept them after one superficial prayer.¹¹⁶ There is, too, the issue whether it is possible to know if a feeble faltering prayer is the outcome of saving faith. Masters would answer that there is a need to look for the signs of God at work in a person's life which he calls 'the marks of grace'.¹¹⁷ These indications that God is at work in

¹⁰⁸ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, p.30.

¹⁰⁹ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.95.

¹¹⁰ Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.96.

¹¹¹ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, p.4.

¹¹² McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, pp.9, 11-12.

¹¹³ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, pp. 8, 69, 74-77. See also 21-24. All the material in this paragraph is commented on by Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.27-28.

¹¹⁴ Jeffery, the only current British writer on the subject, says nothing about this issue although he does advocate that the 'sinner's prayer' can result in false conversions. Peter Jeffery, *The Prayer of Faith*, (Baglan Ministries, 2011) p.3.

¹¹⁵ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, pp.30-31.

¹¹⁶ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, p.31 see also pp.47-75 where he deals with persuasion.

¹¹⁷ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, pp 17-26.

a person's life are discussed in Chapter 4 in an examination of the basis for assurance of salvation.

Only one of Bennett's essential elements of The Sinner's Prayer agrees with Chitwood's four-point definition and that is that the prayer will include the acceptance of, or invitation to, Jesus coming into the respondent's life. For Bennett this is the pivotal issue because his main objection to the Sinner's prayer is an emphasis on the human will. This point is also included in Elliff's definition of The Sinner's Prayer. Elliff advocates that much western evangelism is based on the wrong view of encouraging people to 'receive Christ' based on what he considers to be erroneous views of John 1:12 and Revelation 3:20.¹¹⁸ He states that these verses do not support the practice of encouraging people to 'ask Jesus into their heart' and sees the use of a suggested prayer as a component of this false teaching. His view is that in John 1:12 'receive' means to welcome Christ for who he is and putting the verse in context the emphasis is on the work God does in bringing people to life through His Spirit and enabling them to have faith.¹¹⁹ Green would disagree and uses Revelation 3:20 to illustrate how someone can respond to the Gospel.¹²⁰ However, like Elliff, he does not advocate an easy believism but a call to costly discipleship.¹²¹ This whole topic is further discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Elliff advocates that assurance of salvation should not be linked with the saying of a prescribed prayer but to the signs of spiritual life activated by God.¹²² When advising parents, Elliff says that there is a need to look for the signs of spiritual life which are: 'repenting and believing', a 'new valuing of scripture' and 'obedience from the heart.'¹²³ He says baptismal candidates should not be accepted on the grounds of them saying they believe but on the evidence of these signs in their life. His view led me to consider that the inclusion of a suggested prayer in evangelistic writing could lead to misleading

¹¹⁸Jim Elliff, 'Getting John 1:12 Right: Should You Invite Jesus Into Your Heart?' <http://www.ccwtoday.org/article_view.asp?article_id=209> [16.9. 2011].

¹¹⁹ Elliff, 'Getting John 1:12 Right'.

¹²⁰ Michael Green, *Compelled by joy* (2011) p.187.

¹²¹ Michael Green, *Compelled by joy* (2011) p.186.

¹²²Jim Elliff, *Reading our children – is there something alive in there?* <http://www.ccwtoday.org/article_view.asp?article_id=170> [accessed 17.9.2011].

¹²³ Elliff, *Reading our children*.

assumptions regarding assurance of salvation because respondents might base their assurance on having said a prayer and not on God's transforming work in their lives. Once again this raises the question of what part God plays in conversion and what part the person responding to the Gospel should be encouraged to take. All these issues will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Masters is adamantly against telling people that if they 'receive Christ' they may not feel anything.¹²⁴ He states that true conversion will always affect the feelings; resulting, for example, in a new sense of peace or forgiveness.¹²⁵ This view would be contrary to that illustrated in 'Campus Crusade for Christ' literature which used a railway engine called 'fact' pulling a tender called 'faith' and a guard's van called 'feelings'.¹²⁶ They state that 'we can not always rely on our feelings' and point out that the train can run without the guard's van.¹²⁷ Whereas Pollard would agree with Masters on the importance of feelings because he sees a need to 'offer people opportunities to express their desires for spiritual experience, and build on their willingness to explore and experience the spiritual realm', he advocates that just presenting propositions to be believed could be met with a wall of rejection.¹²⁸ Unlike Pollard, my experience is that people are often confused by an emphasis on feelings if, having made a response, they don't feel any different. Masters points out that one reason why people regard their genuine prayer of repentance ineffective is because of their wrong expectations as to what will happen as a result of praying.¹²⁹ Feelings are therefore an important issue which will be considered further in Chapter 4 where the question of the place of feelings in Christian conversion is discussed.

¹²⁴ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, p.30.

¹²⁵ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, p.27.

¹²⁶ *Knowing God Personally* (Aylesbury: Agape, 1994), p.14.

¹²⁷ *Knowing God Personally*, p.14.

¹²⁸ Nick Pollard, *Beyond the fringe* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999) p.31.

¹²⁹ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, p.139-140.

Section 4. Evangelistic Literature

From the perspective of evangelical literature used in Britain, which is the focus of this current research, Bennett makes a number of relevant discoveries. Moody printed a tract for his first British tour in 1873, which contained a brief exposition of Revelation 3:20, by him on one side and on the other the Gospel song 'Jesus of Nazareth passeth by' but there was no suggested prayer.¹³⁰ However, in 1893 William Booth comes close to using a suggested prayer when he includes a statement of intent in his booklet 'How to be Saved'.¹³¹ His introduction to the 'seven steps to salvation' in this booklet urges the reader to go through the steps 'on your knees before God.'¹³² The content of the booklet expects the enquirer to pray and gives assurance that this will result in immediate salvation. This study will examine whether this type of promise is at the root of the unhelpful aspects of providing a suggested prayer which are stated in the hypothesis.

Bennett did find two examples of a printed version of The Sinner's Prayer in the first part of the twentieth century but neither is in an evangelistic publication.¹³³ Both these works give instruction to Christian workers in giving an appeal and encouraging respondents to say a suggested prayer. Although this does demonstrate the use of a suggested prayer in the first half of the twentieth-century neither of these works are British publications.

Chitwood examines the content of the American Tract Society's (ATS) English publications from 1825 onwards. He compared old ATS tracts with their

¹³⁰ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer* p.95.

¹³¹ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer* pp.78-79.

¹³² Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer* pp.80-81 "The crucial final step read: 'I do here and now welcome Him [that is Christ] to my heart as my Saviour from Hell, from sin, and from the power of the devil. Jesus Christ says in the Bible that if I will come to Him, He will in no wise cast me out; and I do come to Him with all my heart just now, as a poor, helpless, guilty sinner, seeking salvation, and trusting only in His Blood. I am sure that He will not cast me out. Nay, as well as I can, I believe that He does at this very moment take me in. He forgives me now.... With His sufferings I am healed. I am cured. I am saved. Praise the Lord! Jesus save me now!' " 'How to be saved' (Melbourne: War Cry, 17th August 1895) quoted Bennett, *Sinner's Prayer* p.79-81.

¹³³ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.135-137 Albert Gage, *Evangelism of Youth*, (Philadelphia: Judson, 1922) pp.71-80. Suggests a prayer of commitment for a decision day service. Faris D. Whitesall, *65 Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations* (Grand Rapids: Kregal, 3rd edition 1945 reprinted 1984) p.88. One of the ways is based on Gage's decision day idea and gives a prayer of commitment which respondents repeated after the preacher.

modern equivalents and discovered an ‘unquestionable shift in language and theology’.¹³⁴ The older writers urged readers to ask God: ‘Will you accept me?’; more recent tracts expected a response such as: ‘I accept thee’. He assesses this as a shift not only in language but of theology.¹³⁵ Chitwood discovered that an ATS publication containing a suggested prayer does not appear until 1955 but it is the following year before the inclusion of a Sinner’s Prayer which meets with Chitwood’s definition.¹³⁶ However, he found that by the late 1950s The Sinner’s Prayer had become commonplace in ATS tracts and, today, evangelistic tracts published by ATS almost always include a suggested prayer.¹³⁷ Chitwood’s research into the publications of the American Tract Society was robust, incisive and inspired me to investigate British evangelistic publications. Although I found no equivalent organisation to ATS in this country with a large archive, I was able to access the archives of The Pocket Testament League and The Scripture Gift Mission.¹³⁸ The results of my historical research will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Chitwood’s research also led me to undertake a study of evangelistic literature currently available in this country and the results of this part of my research will be found in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Section 5. Examining the motive and starting point

This section examines how and why writers approached the subject of a suggested prayer of response used in evangelism. All but one of the writers started with an extremely negative approach.¹³⁹ For example, Bennett starts from a position of believing that the use of The Sinner’s Prayer is unbiblical, springs from incorrect theology and results in evangelistic methods which are dangerous.¹⁴⁰ Terms such as ‘Sinner’s Prayer method’, ‘Sinner’s Prayer

¹³⁴ *The Sinner’s Prayer*, pp.53 and 73.

¹³⁵ Chitwood, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, p.52.

¹³⁶ Nathanael Olson, *Do you know Davy Crockett* (New York: American Tract Society, 1955) Chitwood pp.53. The prayer reads: “Dear Jesus, I really want to know you as my own Saviour. Forgive me my sins, and take me to Heaven when I die. In Jesus’ name I ask it. Amen”.

¹³⁷ Chitwood, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, p.54.

¹³⁸ At the time of writing the archives of ‘The Pocket Testament League’ are housed at the charity’s registered office which is situated at 32 Edenpark Road, Birkenhead, CH42 9JP.

¹³⁹ Chitwood is the exception as will be explained at the end of this section.

¹⁴⁰ Bennett, *The Sinners Prayer*, pp.29-30.

evangelism' and 'Sinner's Prayer theology' are used in a derogatory way.¹⁴¹ His concerns are consistent with his Calvinistic doctrinal stance which causes him to think that the use of such prayers results in a view of conversion 'primarily dependent on human decision rather than upon divine activity'.¹⁴² In similar vein, Masters sees the use of such prayers as 'shallow evangelism'. He too, approaches the subject from a strongly Calvinistic stance.¹⁴³ This leads him to object to the inclusion of a suggested prayer because such evangelistic literature ignores the 'supernatural transforming operation' of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁴ Washer's adamant opposition to the use of The Sinner's Prayer is fuelled by his belief that salvation is by grace and faith alone and the desire to see the fruit of changed lives.¹⁴⁵ The main thrust of Elliff's argument¹⁴⁶ is saying that The Sinner's Prayer is futile because for someone to receive eternal life God needs to be at work in their life.¹⁴⁶ The objections of these writers led me to include in my interview questionnaire a question about divine sovereignty and human responsibility to test whether all opponents of suggested prayers were motivated by their stance on this issue. The result of this part of my research will be found in Chapter 7 of this dissertation.

Another issue which motivated writers was their observations that praying a suggested prayer did not always result in genuine conversion. McIntyre suggests that in America over half of the adults believe they are going

¹⁴¹ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp. ix, 13, 21, 31, 34, 40, 41, 52, 54, 67, 71, 77, 82, 84, 85, 92, 112-113, 129.

¹⁴² By Calvinism I mean those doctrines associated with John Calvin which are often referred to as 'Reformed Theology' and include the belief 'that Salvation in its entirety is the work of God.' R.W.A. Letham, 'Reformed Theology' in *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998) pp 565-572. See also footnote 189. Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.2; 20; 42; 48; 50; 57-58; 63; 141-143.

¹⁴³ The website of the Metropolitan Tabernacle of which Masters has been minister since 1970 states: 'We teach the doctrines of grace (in the reformed faith, often summarised as the 'five points of Calvinism'). Our doctrinal basis is the *Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*. <<http://www.metropolitantabernacle.org/Basic-Policies-of-the-Church>> [accessed 1.11. 2011]. See also footnote 186 for a definition of 'Calvinism' and footnote 189 for the 'five points of Calvinism'.

¹⁴⁴ Masters, *Physician of Souls*, p.29.

¹⁴⁵ 'Calvinistic' is used here to refer to the teaching associated with John Calvin. Dally outlines 'The five points of Calvinism' as Total Depravity; Unconditional Election; Limited Atonement; Irresistible Grace; Perseverance of the Saints. Ben Dally, 'A brief definition of Calvinism', WRS Journal 16.1 (February 2009) pp.16-21 <http://wrs.edu/Materials_for_Web_Site/Journals/16-1_Feb-2009/Dally--_Calvinism_Defined.pdf> [accessed 31.10.2011] See also footnote 186.

¹⁴⁶ Jim Elliff, *Wasted Faith* (Parkville: Christian Communications Worldwide, 2005).

to Heaven, regardless of their lifestyle, because they repeated a 'salvation prayer'.¹⁴⁷ However, this statement, like many of McIntyre's comments, is unsubstantiated.¹⁴⁸ Having said this, he might gain support from Washer who believes The Sinner's Prayer to be the source of false complacency for many Americans who claim to be Christians because they have said a prayer but know nothing of repentance and a change of lifestyle.¹⁴⁹ In a similar vein Strom approaches the subject from concern over false conversions caused by the saying of a prayer which he considers to be an inadequate response to the Gospel.¹⁵⁰ My research will consider whether this issue is a possible cause for concern regarding the use of suggested prayers in evangelistic literature used in this country. Washer speaks of the 'idolatry of decisionism' which leaves people thinking they are going to heaven because of the sincerity of their own decision.¹⁵¹ This raises questions as to the role of the human will in conversion which will be examined in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. The reason for this study is my observation that Christians involved in evangelism can give the impression that all the respondent has to do to gain salvation is to say a suggested prayer. Reflecting on this issue caused me to include a negative statement regarding evangelism in the research hypothesis introduced in chapter 5.

On the other hand, Chitwood is the only writer who, while recognising some problems, starts from a position of accepting the use of The Sinner's Prayer. He

¹⁴⁷ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, front cover. All the material in this paragraph is commented on by Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.27-28 [The formula is written as S+C+F=D (.25) =B].

¹⁴⁸ For example: McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, pp.42-43 "The nineteenth century Altar call never implied people who came forward would immediately be saved"; "But throughout the 1800s a 10% salvation rate among those who came to the Altar was considered spectacular." McIntyre does not support these intriguing statements with evidence or references.

¹⁴⁹ <<http://www.reformedvoices.com/2009/03/declaring-war-on-sinners-prayer.html> zdfwrseWS2Aq2wqAQ2W12> [accessed 30.7.2011]. See also Paul Staten, *The Chicago Cradle*, (One chapter of an unpublished book on "The Sinner's Prayer") <[http://www.myconvictions.com/.](http://www.myconvictions.com/)> [accessed 22.3. 2010]. Overview of the whole book [Where did we get The Sinner's Prayer?] obtained from <<http://www.s8int.com/sinnersprayer.html>> [accessed 22.3.2010] and <<http://www.bible.ca/g-sinners-prayer.htm>.> [accessed 22.3. 2010]. In an email 26.10.2009 Staten indicated that he is unlikely to complete this work.

¹⁵⁰ Strom, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.5-12. 'True repentance and true faith in the Bible were not the same as repeating some little rote prayer that takes about two minutes to recite.' p.12.

¹⁵¹ J. M. Vergara, Transcript of one of Washer's sermons. <<http://newdemonstration.com/biblical-evangelism/declaring-war-sinners-prayer>> [accessed 3.1 2011]. See also <<http://www.reformedvoices.com/2009/03/declaring-war-on-sinners-prayer.html>> [accessed 15.2 2011]

takes up the subject at the suggestion of his supervisor. This results in a robust and relatively unbiased academic approach. Even in his conclusion he still accepts that there could be some value in providing such prayers if his suggested guidelines are followed. Emulating his example I set out on my research seeing some value in the use of such prayers and seeking to test the positive as well the negative aspects of adopting suggested prayers.

Section 6. Practical application

Chitwood addresses the issue of applying his findings to current evangelism, stating that his research ‘indicates that very little has been done to evaluate the use of The Sinner’s Prayer in evangelism’ and says that ‘an in-depth, scholarly assessment is long overdue.’¹⁵² This present study will seek, within specific parameters, to respond to this call. However, my research was not limited to prayers which would meet with Chitwood’s definition but considered all kinds of prayers of commitment in British evangelistic literature. He advocates that The Sinner’s Prayer can only continue to be used if theological correctives are applied.¹⁵³ He considers these measures to be the defining of all theological terms and an understanding and practice of the biblical theology of evangelism that redresses the imbalance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. He also advocates that there must also be an understanding of the concepts of sin, faith and repentance.

Bennett’s second chapter, entitled ‘A biblical, theological and practical look at The Sinner’s Prayer’, resonates most with my research.¹⁵⁴ It looks at the expected response to the Gospel which this dissertation considers in Chapter 4. When considering the practical relevance of his work Bennett refers to my unpublished Master’s dissertation on how adults become Christians.¹⁵⁵ He uses my research to support the value of relationships and Church involvement in the

¹⁵² Chitwood, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, p.6.

¹⁵³ Chitwood, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, pp.107-109.

¹⁵⁴ Bennett, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, pp.13-38.

¹⁵⁵ Dave Bennett, *A study of how adults become Christians with special reference to the personal involvement of individual Christians*: Unpublished MA dissertation (Sheffield University at Cliff College, 2003) p.33; Bennett, *The Sinner’s Prayer* pp.33-35.

process of adults coming to faith.¹⁵⁶ However, his presumption that the respondents to my questionnaire were reached by methods that did not involve the use of a suggested prayer is misplaced.¹⁵⁷ In actual fact, over half of the respondents to my questionnaire were significantly impacted by 'The Alpha Course' which includes a suggested prayer.¹⁵⁸ He suspects that The Sinner's Prayer is not as widely used in Britain as it is in America.¹⁵⁹ However, it is inadequate to substantiate this from my work by citing the fact that only three of my respondents mention saying a prayer of response. Rather, I consider that the reason for this low number has more to do with the design of my questionnaire which did not ask a specific question about the use of a prayer of response. My Master's dissertation considered how adult converts had been helped in their journey to faith by the actions of Christians.¹⁶⁰ Specifically, it was in answer to a general question asking them to tell their story in their own words that these references to a prayer of response arose.¹⁶¹ I did not find, as a result of that research dissertation, that any conclusion could be reached about the popularity of the use of a prayer of response in Britain.

Bennett also examines the best ways to engage in evangelism today; this is my primary concern in researching author intention in adopting or excluding a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature. He does consider it acceptable to encourage non-Christians to pray for salvation but advocates that the use of The Sinner's Prayer is 'bad evangelism'.¹⁶² His thesis hinges on the view that it is wrong to provide the words for people to use as they articulate their response to the Christian Gospel. He states that if God is working in a person's life there is no need to give them the words to say and if God is not so working, then it is wrong to provide for them inappropriate words.¹⁶³ Green puts forward an alternative view that people are often at a loss for words and that

¹⁵⁶ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.34.

¹⁵⁷ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.34.

¹⁵⁸ Dave Bennett, *A study of how adults become Christians* p.33; Nicky Gumbel, *Alpha: Questions of life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1993) pp.64-65.

¹⁵⁹ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer* p.34 Dave Bennett, *A study of how adults become Christians* p.95.

¹⁶⁰ Dave Bennett, *A study of how adults become Christians*, pp.11-13.

¹⁶¹ Dave Bennett, *A study of how adults become Christians*, pp.95; 104.

¹⁶² Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.29-30.

¹⁶³ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, pp.29-30.

giving them some idea of what sort of things they might include could be helpful.¹⁶⁴ This would be consistent with my own experience. Bennett states that people should be encouraged to 'repent' and 'believe' but not told that they are saved.¹⁶⁵ This is a very relevant statement to my research because it raises the question of whether it is the provision of a suggested prayer itself or the accompanying statements telling the respondent that if they pray the prayer salvation is guaranteed that might cause misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation or false impressions as to what is involved in conversion. The expected response to the Gospel, including repentance and faith, is examined in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

The consideration of these works has influenced the way this study has been undertaken. Various writers have called suggested prayers by different titles such as 'a prayer of faith' or 'salvation prayer'. There was, too, no common definition of the so called 'Sinner's Prayer' accepted by all the writers. In fact, the definitions put forward by Chitwood and Bennett were found to be strikingly different. For these reasons I decided to investigate all 'prayers of response' in evangelistic literature used in this country.

It was found that Chitwood and Bennett have covered adequately the pre-twentieth century and the changing situation in America. Previous researchers pointed to the earlier part of the twentieth century as the time when suggested prayers first began to be used. Therefore, this dissertation focused on British evangelistic literature of the past 110 years while considering whether early British writers, who include a suggested prayer, were affected by American influences.

The historical research and consideration of these scholars also led me to investigate two other issues. Firstly, whether there is any evidence to

¹⁶⁴ Green, *Compelled by Joy*, p.190: 'Many people are unable to verbalize what they want to say to God'. See also John Prince, *Early Harvest* (London: Falcon 1976) pp.37-38.

¹⁶⁵ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer* pp.30-36.

suggest that McIntyre is right in asserting that early prayers in evangelistic literature developed from decision pledges. Secondly, to look for evidence that the use of a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature was introduced to Britain by the Billy Graham Association as suggested by Bennett. These historical issues are investigated in Chapter 3.

The previous writers raised a number of issues that were investigated during the course of my research. These include the danger of assuring people that they have experienced genuine conversion because they have prayed a suggested prayer and the role of feelings in conversion (especially made an issue by Masters). Most previous researchers have approached this subject from a Calvinistic position; their main concern is the way the use of a suggested prayer and supporting statements emphasised human responsibility at the neglect of the work of God in conversion. These issues will be included in my own scholarly investigation in Chapter 4.

It was Chitwood's examination of the publications of the American Tract Society that inspired me to investigate British evangelistic publications, particularly as I had access to the archives of 'The Pocket Testament League'. He did not find prayers in evangelical literature before 1954 and so I investigated in Chapter 3 when such prayers first appeared in similar literature in this country. Chitwood's meticulous research into the content of ATS publications led me to investigate current evangelistic publications available in this country and this is the subject of Chapter 6.

An examination of the motives and starting position of the writers led me to realise that most approached the subject from a biased position that such prayers were harmful. However, Chitwood demonstrated a much more open response and this led me to approach the subject keeping in mind the possibility that there may be positive as well as negative issues relating to the use of suggested prayers.

It was seen that these writers, particularly Chitwood and Bennett, had made a genuine effort to try to apply their research outcomes to the practice of evangelism. However, only Chitwood presented suggestions of how to safeguard the use of suggested prayers from falling into the main objections to their use. This led me to including in my interview questionnaire questions relating to the practical outworking of the theological issues raised by the work of others and my own scholarly investigation. The analysis of this part of my research will be found in Chapter 7.

Chapter 3 Historical Enquiry

Introduction

This chapter will seek to answer three questions relating to the history of including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature used in Britain.

1. Is there any evidence to suggest that McIntyre is right in asserting that early prayers in evangelistic literature developed from decision pledges?¹⁶⁶
2. Is Bennett right in thinking that prayers in evangelistic literature were introduced to Britain by The Billy Graham Association?¹⁶⁷
3. Can any clues be found as to why those who introduced suggested prayers into evangelistic literature believed they would be helpful to those wishing to respond to the Christian Gospel?

The starting point of this enquiry will be the archives of The Pocket Testament League (PTL) and evangelistic literature published by others in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶⁸ As each question is considered it will also be asked whether the discoveries of this enquiry are relevant to my negative concerns regarding adopting suggested prayers.

Question 1.

Is there any evidence to suggest that McIntyre is right in asserting that early prayers in evangelistic literature developed from decision pledges?

Introduction

The relevance of this question to my dissertation is discovering whether the concerns of the researcher regarding the adoption of suggested prayers would be equally true of the decision pledges which preceded prayers in British

¹⁶⁶ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, pp.47-50.

¹⁶⁷ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.147.

¹⁶⁸ The Pocket Testament League has been publishing evangelistic literature in Britain since the early part of the twentieth century. Their archives contain New Testaments dated from 1914 to 1955 and Gospels of John from 1914 to the present. I have access to these archives because I am the National Director of The Pocket Testament League in the UK [now known as Bridge Builders] see <<http://www.bridge-builders.net/current/index.php>> 'about us' section.

evangelistic literature. A secondary consideration is whether the transition from pledges to prayers affected the nature of those prayers, resulting in the possibility of misunderstanding the intended meaning of the author.

Distinguishing between decision pledges and prayers.

The dictionary definition of 'a pledge' is 'a solemn promise or agreement to do or refrain from doing something'.¹⁶⁹ Whereas the definition of 'prayer' is 'a solemn request for help or expression of thanks to God'.¹⁷⁰ When considering pledges and prayers in evangelistic publications I'm using these definitions:

a pledge is a solemn promise which says what the person has resolved to do.

a prayer is addressed to God or Jesus, makes some sort of request and usually, but not always, ends with Amen.¹⁷¹

Pledges became common in Britain in late Victorian and Edwardian times.¹⁷² For example, the Temperance Movement encouraged people to sign a pledge to promise they would refrain from drinking alcohol.¹⁷³ Recruits to the Salvation Army were asked to sign a pledge before they could become regular soldiers.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Dictionary.Com. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/pledge>> [accessed 7.11. 2012].

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary definition is 'a serious promise'.

<<http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/Pledge>> [accessed 7.11.2012]. *Concise Oxford Dictionary Tenth Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.1098 'a solemn promise or undertaking'.

¹⁷⁰ *Concise Oxford Dictionary Tenth Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.1124

Prayer can include petition, supplication, thanksgiving, adoration and confession to God
Dictionary.Com. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Prayer?s=t>> [accessed 7.11.2012].

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: 'words that you say to God giving thanks or asking for help'. <<http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/Prayer>> [accessed 7.11. 2012].

¹⁷¹ J.B. Taylor, 'Amen', *New Bible Dictionary*, p.29 'It is used in the OT as a liturgical formula in which a congregation or individual accepts both the validity of an oath or curse and its consequences...or a response to a benediction.' 'By NT times Amen is regularly used at the close of prayers... and is a natural response to be expected in public worship'.

¹⁷² <<http://www.victorianbazaar.com/eras.html>> [accessed 8.11. 2012]. The first example of a written pledge used evangelistically in the United Kingdom, discovered in the course of this research, was on a decision card used during the 1859 revival in Northern Ireland.

Ian R.K. Paisley, *The Revival* (Belfast: Martyrs Memorial Publications, 2009), p.306.

This is before the period which is the focus of this study.

¹⁷³ Rebecca Smith, 'The Temperance Movement and Class Struggle in Victorian England' *Loyola University Student Historical Journal* 1992-93.

<<http://www.loyno.edu/~history/journal/1992-3/smith-r.htm>> [accessed 7.11. 2012].

¹⁷⁴ Roy Hattersley, *Blood and Fire* (London: Abacus, 1999), p.266. 'Soldiers... were required to sign the 'Articles of War' which forms so simple and clear an expression of the Army's teaching and system that the most illiterate recruit could at once take in their practical effect.' The promise made by Salvation Army soldiers says: 'Having accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and desiring to fulfil my membership of His Church on earth as a soldier of The

The Scout Movement, founded in 1908, required its members to make a pledge.¹⁷⁵ Christians seem to have taken up the use of such pledges. For example, The Pocket Testament League asked members of the general public to sign a pledge promising to read a chapter of the Bible each day.¹⁷⁶ In the early part of the twentieth century pledges in evangelistic literature were also used as a suggested response to the Gospel and as an expression of commitment to becoming a Christian.¹⁷⁷

Pledge used in SGM literature

Pledges are found in the publications of the Scripture Gift Mission (SGM) distributed during the First World War (1914-1918).¹⁷⁸ These are New Testaments or Gospels which conclude with a decision form using the words of John 1:12.¹⁷⁹ There is a copy of a Gospel from this period in the archives of SGM. The pledge on the back page says:

Salvation Army, I now by God's grace enter into a sacred covenant. I believe and will live by the truths of the word of God expressed in The Salvation Army's eleven articles of faith'. There then followed the eleven articles of war which are the basis of faith and life for a member of the Salvation Army.

<<http://www1.salvationarmy.org/heritage.nsf/1e66c5a3687a37638025692e00500ad4/fea4acf97c61102c80256a2200443120?OpenDocument>> [accessed 7.11. 2012].

The Salvation Army was founded in 1865 and grew to a worldwide movement before the death of its founder William Booth in 1912.

<http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/www_usn_2.nsf/0/816de20e46b88b2685257435005070fa?opendocument> [accessed 7.11. 2012].

¹⁷⁵ The Scout oath in 1908 was 'On my honour I promise that: I will do my duty to God and the King. I will do my best to help others whatever it may cost me. I know the Scout law and will obey it.' <<http://www.netpages.free-online.co.uk/sha/law.htm>> [accessed 8.11.2012]. See also <http://www.scout.org/en/about_scouting/facts_figures/history> [accessed 8.11.2012] on the history of the Scout movement.

¹⁷⁶ Although 'The Pocket Testament League' was started in 1908 the New Testaments in the archives date from 1912 to 1955. The only extra information in the early copies is a membership card for the recipient to sign indicating they were joining PTL by promising to read a chapter of the Bible each day and to carry a Testament or Bible with them wherever they go. These New Testaments do not include a date of publication. Dates were established either because the owner put a date in the inside cover or because of an accompanying document with the New Testament such as a letter from the person who owned the New Testament. The archives of the Pocket Testament League in the UK are presently stored at 32 Edenpark Road, Birkenhead, CH42 9JP and I have access to them as the current National Director of The Pocket Testament League in the UK which is known as Bridge Builders.

¹⁷⁷ See examples of such pledges in this dissertation, pp.50, 52 and 61.

¹⁷⁸ Ashley Baker, *Publishing Salvation – the Story of the Scripture Gift Mission* (London: SGM, 1961), pp.76-77.

¹⁷⁹ Baker, *Publishing Salvation*, p.77.

I am truly sorry for my past sins and unbelief, and I take JESUS CHRIST the Son of God, who "died for our sins", to be MY SAVIOUR and MY KING, NOW, and for ever, and with His help I intend to confess Him before men.

There is then a place for the respondent to fill in their name and service details. As this is a solemn promise, which says what the person has resolved to do, and not in the form of a prayer addressed to God making a request, I regard it as an illustration of an early twentieth-century pledge.¹⁸⁰

This particular Gospel was distributed to members of the Royal Navy by the Royal Sailors' Rest (RSR). There is a personal hand-written note in the inside cover of the Gospel written by Dame Agnes Weston, founder of the RSR, encouraging the reader to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as his saviour and to testify to this by signing the decision form at the end of the booklet.¹⁸¹ From this it can be seen that she believed that the decision card could help some men express their response to the Christian Gospel. Contrary to this such urging suggests that the use of the pledge might lead to less than professional practice in evangelism in pressurising men to respond.

Ashley Baker says there was opposition to the inclusion of this decision form but the mission continued to include it because they were encouraged to do so by Army Chaplains.¹⁸² Many of the SGM publications which included this pledge during the First World War were returned to the relatives of soldiers who were killed. SGM received many letters saying that men had signed the decision form.¹⁸³ One has to question whether the use of such a form without an adequate Gospel explanation would lead to misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and false impressions as to what is involved in conversion. For example, did many believe that their loved ones had gone to heaven simply because they had put their name in this pledge? If so, this could indicate a false impression as to what is involved in conversion because of a lack of adequate Gospel explanation in the extra pages in these publications.

¹⁸⁰ See definition of prayer and pledge on p.48.

¹⁸¹ Agnes Weston was born 1840. She founded the first 'Sailor's Rest' in Devonport in 1876. She became a Dame in 1918 and died later that year.

<http://www.royalnavalmuseum.org/info_sheets_agnus_weston.htm> [accessed 25.10.2011].

¹⁸² Baker, *Publishing Salvation*, p.77.

¹⁸³ Baker, *Publishing Salvation*, p.77.

Having said this, much scripture distribution during the First World War was accompanied by meetings at which the Gospel was explained.¹⁸⁴ Many soldiers made a commitment to Christ at the close of these meetings. However, British society was very different then to now and the likelihood was that people went to church and had been presented with the Gospel in a way that cannot be assumed today.¹⁸⁵ This means that a more fully-articulated explanation of the Gospel may be needed for today's reader.

After the end of the First World War SGM continued to publish a Gospel of John which included a decision form.¹⁸⁶ It is unclear for how long this continued to be published. SGM have a copy of this Gospel dated 1941 in their archives.¹⁸⁷ The pledge in the Gospel is entitled 'My Decision' and reads:

Being convinced that I am a Sinner, and believing that Christ died for me. I receive Him as my personal Saviour. I acknowledge Him as my Lord and with His help I intend to confess Him before men.

This is followed by John 1:12 and a space for the respondent's name and address. If one added 'amen' at the end and addressed it to God this pledge would be similar to some early prayers. It could equally be said of these pledges that, although they might help some people express their response to the Christian Gospel, it is possible that it could lead to misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and false impressions as to what is involved in

¹⁸⁴ J. Kennedy McClean, *Signing On: The inspiring story of the PTL with the colours* (London: Marshall Brothers Ltd, no date given), pp.23-25. An account of World War One scripture distribution held in the archives of The Pocket Testament League, 32 Edenpark Road, Birkenhead, CH42 9PJ, [accessed 21.8.2011].

¹⁸⁵ Sunday School was attended by 80% of British children in 1900 but this was down to 1% in 2000. Edward Madigan, *Faith under Fire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) p.28 and The Independent, Sunday 30th July 2000. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/church-predicts-death-of-sunday-school-707079.html>> [accessed 21.12.2012]. Another study says that the % of Sunday School attendance was 55% in 1900 and 4% in 2000. Peter Brierley, *The Tide is Running Out* (London: Christian Research, 2000). Brierley says that Church membership was 27% of the population in 1900 and 10% in 2000. Peter Brierley, *Religious Trends No 2* (London: Christian Research Association, 1999). Another source says that British Church membership was 33% of the population in 1900 but is down under 4% in 2011. <<http://www.brierleyconsultancy.com/images/csintro.pdf>> [accessed 21.12.2012]. Church of England Baptisms have dropped from 65% of births in 1900 to less than 20% by 2000. <http://www.whychurch.org.uk/shrinking_cofe.php> [accessed 21.12.2012]. The issue is discussed by Steve Bruce of Aberdeen University in *Sociology of Religion* 2001, pp. 191-203 <<http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org/content/62/2/191.full.pdf>> [accessed 20.12.2012].

¹⁸⁶ Ashley Baker, p.77.

¹⁸⁷ E-mail from Jeremy Williams of SGM Lifeworks, attaching photocopies of two early Gospels. 18.10.2011.

conversion. SGM has never included a suggested prayer in an evangelistic publication.¹⁸⁸ SGM chose to present the Gospel message through selected scripture passages with headings but with the minimum of non-biblical material and for this reason they have not included pledges or prayers in subsequent publications.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the focus of research returned to the archives of PTL in order to see the transition from pledges to prayers in evangelistic literature.

Pledges in evangelistic literature published by PTL

From 1927 onwards PTL New Testaments include an outline of the Gospel at the front and in the back pages there is a decision pledge to sign. This information is also included in early copies of the Gospel of John produced by PTL. The Gospel outline opens with the heading 'How to become a Christian' and this is followed by four instructions supported by Bible verses:

- Accept Christ as your Saviour
- Ask forgiveness for all your sins
- Acknowledge Christ openly
- Absolutely trust Christ

By 1938 the heading had been changed to 'The way of salvation.' However, this outline says more about how to respond to the Gospel rather than outlining the Gospel. It reflects a Britain where the Christian message of salvation through Christ was more familiar to the general populace.¹⁹⁰ The outline ends with the instruction: 'If you decide to accept Christ as your Saviour, sign your name on the dotted line on the inside back cover.' This pledge says:

My Decision: Believing that the Lord Jesus Christ died for me: I now accept Him as my Saviour. I ask Him to blot out all my sins and I will acknowledge Him before others and trust Him day by day.

¹⁸⁸ Confirmed in a telephone conversation with Jeremy Williams of SGM Lifewords on 19th October 2011.

¹⁸⁹ Confirmed in a telephone conversation with Jeremy Williams of SGM Lifewords on 19th October 2011.

¹⁹⁰Edward Last, *Hand-gathered Fruit Third Edition* (Stirling: Stirling Tract Enterprise, no date) p.76 speaks about people not needing instruction but only encouragement to make a decision. Amazon lists a 1920 Edition of *Hand Gathered Fruit* <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Hand-Gathered-Fruit-Chapters-Personal-Soul-Winning/dp/B008PENW9E/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1360071432&sr=1-2> [accessed 5.2.2013].

Readers who agree with this pledge are asked to write their name in John 3:16, at the bottom of the page, in place of the word 'whosoever'. This pledge does include asking God for forgiveness but because it is not addressed to God or Jesus I still regard it as a pledge.

Moving from pledges to prayers

The last British PTL publication to include a pledge is a Gospel of John using 'The Living Bible' published in 1972.¹⁹¹ By 1975 the pledge in PTL publications was replaced by a prayer of response.¹⁹² The first of these prayers says:

Lord Jesus, it is true I am a sinner. I honestly want to turn from all my sin. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sin. I am glad you are alive again. Please Lord Jesus come into my life right now. Thank you. Now help me to live the rest of my life in the power of your Holy Spirit, under His control. Amen¹⁹³

The content of this prayer is similar to the earlier pledge found in PTL publications. Both state a belief that Christ died for the reader, they accept Him as Saviour, express a need to turn from sin and state an ongoing desire to live a new life with God's help. That the wording of the pledge in early PTL publications and that of the first prayer in a PTL publication are very similar, does support the feasibility of McIntyre's theory, that the concept of prayers of commitment could have developed from such pledges.¹⁹⁴ However, in my opinion this example of transition from pledge to prayer does not result in a prayer which matches McIntyre's negative stereotype of a suggested prayer.

¹⁹¹ *John's Gospel in Modern English* (Bromley: The Pocket Testament League, 1972) this is a reprint of the 1971 Edition which uses the Living Bible (Tyndale House Publishing, 1967).

¹⁹² *John's Gospel in Modern English* (Bromley: The Pocket Testament League, 1975) which is a new reprint of the 1971 Gospel, using the Living Bible, which does not contain a suggested prayer. Bennett, *Sinner's Prayer*, pp.147-144 and footnote 467 states that the first prayer in a British PTL publication appeared in 1972. This is based on an email from me to David Malcolm Bennett 19th May 2010 when I was only part way through researching the PTL archives. Further research found that the prayer did not appear in the 1971 and 1972 printings of this Gospel in the Living Bible but only in the 1975 reprint. I have expressed my apologies to him.

¹⁹³ *John's Gospel in Modern English* (Bromley: The Pocket Testament League, 1975), p.63.

¹⁹⁴ McIntyre, *The Graham Formula*, p.50.

Conclusion to question one

Some evidence was found to support McIntyre's theory that early prayers in evangelistic literature developed from decision pledges. This was seen in the similarity between pledges and prayers in the publications of PTL. It has also been demonstrated that it is possible that my concerns regarding the use of a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature could be equally true of the pledges which preceded them. The transition from pledges to prayers affected the nature of those prayers, resulting in the possibility of false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation because they were very much a statement of what the person wanted rather than them submitting to God's mercy and pleading for His salvation.

Question 2.

Is Bennett right in thinking that prayers in evangelistic literature were introduced to Britain by the Billy Graham Association?

Introduction

The relevance of this question to my dissertation is that proving suggested prayers are a recent addition to evangelistic literature would call into question the view that it is a proven method that has a long history. Some insight into who introduced such suggested prayers in evangelistic literature will also help answer the third question about the author's intention of introducing suggested prayers.

When did the Billy Graham Association introduce a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature used in Britain?

The study has identified the first American publication used in Britain which contains a prayer of response to be *Steps to Peace with God* which was

first published by the Billy Graham Association, probably in 1955.¹⁹⁵ This booklet was written by Charlie Riggs of the Navigators during the 1954 Billy Graham Crusade in Harringay, London.¹⁹⁶ Riggs was a member of the Billy Graham team. Graham does not include a suggested prayer in any of his books until 1965.¹⁹⁷ *Steps to Peace with God* is not listed among the counselling materials used at Harringay.¹⁹⁸ Billy Graham says that the booklet was taken largely from his book, *Peace with God*, which was first published in 1954 but this book does not include a suggested prayer.¹⁹⁹ It is not listed by Dudley-Smith in 1957 among the evangelistic booklets available in Britain.²⁰⁰ I acknowledge that Chitwood is right in saying that *Steps to Peace with God* played a significant role in making popular the use of a suggested prayer. However, if there is another publication published before the mid-1950s, containing a suggested prayer, this would prove that the Billy Graham Association did not introduce suggested prayers in evangelistic literature to Britain.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵ Chitwood says that The Billy Graham Association were unable to tell him the date when '*Steps to peace with God*' was first published. Chitwood, p.47 footnote 138. However, Tom Philips, Step One: Peace with God (BGEA: Decision Magazine, October 1, 2004) <<http://www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?articleid=471>> [accessed 9.2.2011] says it had been in use for 50 years. If this is true it was first published in 1955.

¹⁹⁶ Tom Philips, 'Step One: Peace with God' (BGEA: Decision Magazine, October 1, 2004) <<http://www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?articleid=471>> [accessed 9.2.2011]. *Steps to peace with God* was written by Charlie Riggs of the Navigators during the 1954 Billy Graham Crusade in London. Riggs was a member of the Billy Graham team. The Navigators were founded in 1933 by Dawson Trotman who was involved in discipling men in the US Navy. In the 1950s Billy Graham asked Trotman to help follow up those who came forward at his crusades. Trotman assigned some of his team to help the Billy Graham Association with counsellor training, counselling and follow up. Much of the material used by the Billy Graham Association in counselling and follow-up originated with the Navigators.

<<http://www.navigators.org/us/aboutus/history>> [accessed 29.10.2011].

Riggs left The Navigators in 1957 to become Director of Counselling for 'The Billy Graham Association', a post he held for 40 years.

<<http://www.navigators.org/us/aboutus/items/stories/items/Charlie%20Riggs%20Lifelong%20Laborer>> [accessed 27.10.2011].

¹⁹⁷ Billy Graham, *World Aflame* (Minneapolis: The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1965), pp.147-148.

¹⁹⁸ Frank Colquhoun, *Harringay Story: a detailed account of the Greater London Crusade 1954* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1955), p.118 [Packet consisting of a copy of St John's Gospel, a booklet called '*Beginning with Christ*' and a card on which the counsellor was asked to record details of the decision made.]

¹⁹⁹ Billy Graham, *How to be born again* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), p.151.

Billy Graham, *Peace with God* (Kingswood: The World's Work Ltd, 1954) [First Edition].

²⁰⁰ T. Dudley-Smith, *A Bibliography of Booklets* (London: Crusade, 1957).

²⁰¹ Chitwood, pp.56-57.

Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ

Another possible American publication to be the first to include a suggested prayer and used in Britain is Bill Bright's *The Four Spiritual Laws* which he wrote in 1952. As over 2.5 billion copies have been distributed worldwide this is probably the most widely-distributed evangelistic booklet containing a suggested prayer.²⁰² However, the edition for mass distribution did not appear until 1965.²⁰³ Campus Crusade for Christ, the organisation Bill Bright founded, did not work in Britain until 1967.²⁰⁴ Therefore, this was not the first publication to include a suggested prayer which was used extensively in Britain.

Early prayers in British evangelistic literature

The archives of PTL include a 'Gospel of John', distributed during the First World War, which contains a prayer suggested by the Chaplain-General.²⁰⁵ This prayer says:

Almighty and most Merciful Father, Forgive me my sins: Grant me thy peace:
Give me thy power: Bless me in life and death, for Jesus Christ's sake.
Amen.²⁰⁶

My assessment is that while the prayer pleads for God's forgiveness, peace, power and blessing, the one praying makes no commitment. The prayer also appears at the bottom of a page which includes a decision form and the layout suggests that the prayer is seen as supplementary to the more prominent pledge. The use of a prayer in this publication is an isolated example aimed at soldiers and not the start of a general trend. Another example of a suggested prayer does not appear in a PTL publication until 1975.²⁰⁷ This prayer is found

²⁰² <<http://campuscrusadeforchrist.com/about-us/history>> [accessed 29.7.2011]. Bill Bright *'Come change the world'* (Orlando: New Life Publications, 1999), pp.53-56.

²⁰³ Bennett, *The sinner's Prayer* p.147 footnote 465 quoting an email from Laura Sherwood of Campus Crusade for Christ.

²⁰⁴ <<http://www.agape.org.uk/>> [accessed 29.7.2011].

²⁰⁵ *The Pocket Gospel of St John* (London: The Pocket Testament League). There is no date but it can be dated to the First World War by its contents and the address of PTL. Held in the archives of the British Pocket Testament League, 32 Edenpark Road, Birkenhead, CH42 9JP. [accessed 6.9.2010.]

²⁰⁶ McClean, *Signing On*, p.25 talks about Charles M. Alexander (husband of Helen Cadbury founder of PTL) giving out copies of the Gospel of John, which included hymns, to troops in the early days of World War One. It is this Gospel which contains the prayer.

²⁰⁷ *Peace, Truth, Love: John's Gospel in Modern English* (Bromley: The Pocket Testament

in an edition of John's Gospel in 'The Living Bible' prepared for general distribution in this country. Therefore, while this research did find an isolated incident of a prayer of response in a PTL Gospel during the First World War, a prayer of response is not found in a PTL publication in general circulation until 1975.

The Reason Why

Written by a successful New Zealand businessman, Robert A Laidlaw, and first published in 1913, this is another publication which includes what may be regarded as a prayer.²⁰⁸ Over 30 million copies have been distributed worldwide.²⁰⁹ It was in use in Britain from 1914 onwards.²¹⁰ Laidlaw himself visited Britain in 1920 and was involved in evangelism among troops in Britain during the Second World War.²¹¹ The context of the prayer reads:

As you leave the mystery of the current with the engineer, and take the benefits of the car to yourself, leave the mystery of salvation with God, and take the infinite benefits of a personal Saviour to yourself. Yield to Him now – He wants to come into your life. Will you not let Him? Say and mean it **“I am Yours, Lord Jesus; yielded to You, body, soul and spirit and YOU ARE MINE.”**

Then clinch it by signing the declaration form on the next page.²¹²

This short statement in bold which is addressed to Jesus is more in the form of a solemn promise than a request addressed to God and as such I do not regard it as the first suggested prayer in an evangelistic publication used in this

League, 1975). Held in the archives of the British Pocket Testament League, 32 Edenpark Road, Birkenhead, Ch42 9JP [accessed 6.9.2010].

²⁰⁸ The version of the booklet used here is found in Robert A. Laidlaw, *The story of 'The reason why'* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), pp.87-118 which according to Laidlaw is reproduced here 'just as I first wrote it'. See p.87. Other versions of the booklet which have been examined are: R.A. Laidlaw, *The Reason Why* (Clapham: Walter Brothers: not dated). R. A. Laidlaw, *The Reason Why* (London: C.S.S.M: not dated). R.A. Laidlaw, *The Reason Why*, (Mechanicsburg: Executive Books, 2002). In two early examples of the booklet published by Walter Brothers and C.S.S.M there is a poem about not putting off your decision between the prayer and the decision form. However, the wording of the prayer and decision form has not been changed. The version published in 2002 is very much updated but does not include the poem but includes the prayer and decision form.

²⁰⁹ Graham C. Stoop, *Laidlaw, Robert Alexander Crookston – Biography* from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography Te Ara – the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. <<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/312/1>> [accessed 12.8.2011].

²¹⁰ Robert A. Laidlaw, *The Story of 'The Reason Why'* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), p.6.

²¹¹ Laidlaw, *The Story*, pp.39, 40 and 71.

²¹² Laidlaw, *The Story*, p.115.

country.²¹³ The following page in *The Reason Why* is headed 'My Decision' and says:

Before God, Who knows the innermost secrets of my soul, I ACCEPT Jesus Christ into my life as Saviour. I yield absolutely to Him, and know on the authority of His own written Word in John 5:24, that I have everlasting life, for there He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."²¹⁴

There then follows a place for signature, address and date. The main focus in this publication is on this lengthy pledge and not on the sixteen word prayer on the previous page. Therefore, while this publication was in general circulation, I do not regard it as containing the first prayer of response used in this country because the small 'prayer' is more in line with the definition of a pledge.

The introduction of prayers

Other than the two isolated examples already examined, the first British publication discovered during the course of this research that includes a prayer of response is *Becoming a Christian*, by John Stott, published in 1950.²¹⁵ I did inform David Malcolm Bennett that I had found a suggested prayer in a British publication which dates at least five years before the Billy Graham Crusades of 1954 and 1955.²¹⁶ However, he challenged whether there was a prayer in the first edition of *Becoming a Christian* because I was using a later edition of the booklet.²¹⁷ However, when I viewed the original 1950 edition of *Becoming a Christian* at The British Library in London it was found to be identical with the

²¹³ There is a similar short prayer in a tract attributed to Spurgeon. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Salvation and Safety*, p.4, <www.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/tract01a.html> [accessed 20.9.2010]. This is not dealt with here because this study looks at publications since 1900. Both Bennett and Chitwood refer to this prayer. Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.2; Chitwood, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.45.

²¹⁴ Laidlaw, *The Story*, p.116.

²¹⁵ John R. Stott, *Becoming a Christian* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity press, 2008), pp.25-26.

²¹⁶ Bennett, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.147. John Pollock, *Crusades: 20 years with Billy Graham* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1966), pp.121-151. Billy Graham Crusades were held at Harringay in London in March 1954 and in Glasgow in March 1955.

²¹⁷ Email from David Malcolm Bennett, 31.8.2011, used by permission.

most recent edition, other than it having a contents page and using the Authorised Version of the Bible.²¹⁸

Although, according to Graham's autobiography, Stott later had a close relationship with Billy Graham, they were strangers in 1954 when the Billy Graham team first attended a service at the Church where Stott was the Rector.²¹⁹ However, Stott was involved with the Harringay Crusade in 1954 and became a friend and informal pastor to the team who lived in his parish during their stay in London.²²⁰ It could be suggested that Stott influenced Graham particularly in relation to methods used in University missions.²²¹ However, this research found no evidence that either of them influenced the other in regard to the use of a suggested prayer. It is only after the publication of *Becoming a Christian* that prayers of commitment became common in evangelistic literature used in Britain. This is extremely recent for a method of evangelism which is so well accepted.²²²

Stott's influence continued through his writing of later presentations of the Christian message. His books *Your Confirmation* and *Basic Christianity*, published in 1958, also include a suggested prayer.²²³ The suggested prayer in *Becoming a Christian* reads:

Lord Jesus Christ, I humbly acknowledge that I have sinned in my thinking and speaking and acting, that I am guilty of deliberate wrong doing, and that my sins

²¹⁸ John R. Stott, *Becoming a Christian* (1950) viewed at The British Library, 96 Euston Road, London, at Humanities 1 reading room on 20.9.2011.

²¹⁹ Billy Graham, *Just as I am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), p.220.

²²⁰ Roger Steer, *Inside Story: The Life of John Stott* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), pp.97-99.

²²¹ Steer pp.103-105 Graham "had learned a great deal that he could use profitably in the States about how to conduct university missions – 'but, John, I learnt more from you than all the rest'."

²²² For example, it is used in the literature associated with 'The Alpha Course' which is used by a wide variety of Churches throughout Britain. Nicky Gumbel, *Why Jesus*, p.20. Nicky Gumbel, *Alpha, Questions of Life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2003), pp.64-65. "Over 7,000 churches are currently running The Alpha Course across the UK in rural and urban settings, including every major UK city." <<http://uk.alpha.org/who-alpha-course>> [accessed 29.9. 2011]. Alpha is running in Catholic Churches <<http://www.alpha.org/catholics>> [accessed 29.9.2011]. In September 2011 there were Courses running on the Wirral in Anglican, Brethren, Methodist, New Frontiers and Pentecostal Churches.<<http://uk.alpha.org/find-a-course/1520%2C0/GB/Birkenhead?page=1>> [all accessed 29.9.2011].

²²³ John Stott, *Your Confirmation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958 [First Edition]), pp.23-24; John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1958 [First Edition]), p.132.

have separated me from Thy holy presence, and that I am helpless to commend myself to thee; I firmly believe that Thou didst die on the cross for my sins, bearing them in Thine own body and suffering in my place the condemnation they deserved; I have thoughtfully counted the cost of following Thee. I sincerely repent, turning from my past sins. I am willing to surrender to Thee as Lord and Master. Help me not to be ashamed of Thee: So now I come to Thee, I believe that for a long time Thou hast been patiently standing outside the door, knocking, I now open the door. Come in, Lord Jesus, and be my Saviour and my Lord for ever. Amen.²²⁴

This is addressed to Jesus, makes a request and ends with Amen and, as such, it fulfils the definition of a prayer rather than a pledge. It includes the element of the respondent inviting Jesus to come into their life which has been seen to be a contentious issue among opponents of such prayers.²²⁵ After the prayer there are 'Some Final Suggestions' for those 'readers who have humbly and sincerely echoed this prayer, and received the Lord Jesus Christ' and item two of these says:

Do not be in doubt that the Lord Jesus has come into your life. Do not worry if you do not feel any different. His sure promise, not your fluctuating feelings, is to be the ground of your certainty. Read Revelation 3:20 and John 6:37. He has promised to come in if you receive him, and to receive you if you come to him. Believe his Word. He will not break it.²²⁶

There is in this statement a strong affirmation that the person who prayed this prayer now possesses salvation. The thought here is that if you invite Jesus into your life He comes in and it does call into question whether this is an adequate expression of faith. Stott encourages the respondent to base their salvation on isolated verses of scripture which some would say are taken out of context. These issues are discussed in the next chapter which deals with my scholarly investigation.

²²⁴ Stott, *Becoming a Christian*, pp.24-25.

²²⁵ See pp.6-7, 24-25 and 31.

²²⁶ Stott, *Becoming a Christian*, p.26.

The influence of E.J.H. Nash

Stott was influenced by the ministry of Nash who worked for Scripture Union in outreach to boys from the top 30 public schools in this country from 1932 to 1965.²²⁷ Nash ran camps which, over the years, 7000 boys attended.²²⁸ Stott was one of Nash's prodigies.²²⁹ He became a Christian under the influence of Nash and from 1940 to 1945 he was Secretary and Treasurer of the camps.²³⁰

Nash produced a booklet, *Life at its Best*, which was in circulation in 1938.²³¹ The booklet has a simple ABC presentation (Admit, Believe, Come) and uses Revelation 3:20 and Holman Hunt's painting 'The Light of the world' to illustrate that responding to the claims of Christ is like opening a door to one's life to Him.²³² It is listed by Dudley-Smith as deserving to be widely known.²³³ However, I would posit that the significance of this publication is not wide circulation but the great influence that Nash had on those who would write later evangelistic literature or significant books about evangelism. Concerning this booklet Michael Green wrote of *Life at its Best*:

²²⁷ Richard Rhodes-James in John Eddison, (Editor), *A Study in Spiritual Power: An Appreciation of E.J.H. Nash (Bash)* (Crowborough: Highland Books, 1992), pp.36 and 44. Christened Eric John Hewitson Nash, 'Bash' was Nash's nickname. See Eddison pp.7-11.

²²⁸ Donald A. MacLeod, *C. Stacey Woods and the Evangelical Rediscovery of the University*. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), p. 246.

²²⁹ John Eddison, (Editor), *A study in spiritual power: an appreciation of E.J.H. Nash (Bash)* (Crowborough: Highland Books, 1992), pp.83-86. [This is a collection of articles written in appreciation of Nash]. Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), pp.97, 128. He wrote to Stott weekly for five years.

²³⁰ Dudley-Smith, *John Stott*, pp.68; 91-96; 232 and Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, p.80.

²³¹ Dudley-Smith, *John Stott*: p.101 "Summer term 1938... He was therefore the first friend whom John tried to bring to Christ, explaining things as best he could, with his own copy of '*Life at its Best*' conveniently to hand between the pages of his Bible from which he was pointing Philip to key verses".

²³² Holman Hunt painted three versions of 'The Light of the World'. One of these hangs in St Paul's Cathedral in London. The booklet about the painting, obtainable from St Paul's Cathedral, states that: 'The first version, much smaller than that which hangs in St. Paul's, is now to be found in Keble College, Oxford. Another version is in Manchester Art Gallery.' <http://www.stpauls.co.uk/StPauls/documents/spc_light_of_the_world_booklet.pdf> [Downloaded 18.12.2012] See also photos of these versions of this painting at: <<http://www.keble.ox.ac.uk/about/chapel/chapel-history-and-treasures>> [accessed 18.12.2012] <<http://www.stpauls.co.uk/Cathedral-History/Explore-the-Cathedral/Walk-the-Cathedral-Floor>> [accessed 18.12.2012.] <<http://www.manchestergalleries.org/the-collections/search-the-collection/display.php?EMUSESSID=a3a181b17a763ede8fe42afc4e288488&irn=596>> [accessed 18.12.2012].

²³³ Dudley-Smith, *A Bibliography of Booklets*, p.16. Maurice Wood, *How to Find God* (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1988). Maurice Wood, *How can I accept Christ?* (London: Scripture Union, 1978).

It was designed to help people over the threshold into new life. It had an enormous influence. It began precisely where the schoolboy found himself. It used the appropriate language. It dealt with the most pressing questions. And it made the way to a living faith inescapably clear, even to the point of suggesting a prayer of commitment, and the first steps forward from there.²³⁴

Contrary to Green's assertion that the prayer in *Life at its Best* is a prayer of commitment, I consider that it is a prayer to be used by a believer.²³⁵ It reads:

Defend, O Lord, me Thy child with Thy Heavenly grace, that I may continue Thine for ever; and daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more until I come unto Thy everlasting Kingdom. Amen²³⁶

Although this cannot have been the inspiration for Stott's suggested prayer there are many similarities between *Life at its Best* and the evangelistic writing of John Stott. Stott also has three similar points – Acknowledge, Believe and Come. Both Nash and Stott use Revelation 3:20 to challenge their readers to open the door of their life to Jesus as a response to their presentation of the Gospel. Nash affirms that the way to receive Christ is:

to open the door and ask Him to come in and cleanse you and then to take over the control of your life.²³⁷

Part of Stott's prayer of commitment in *Becoming a Christian* is also based on the same verse and illustration.

So now I come to Thee, I believe that for a long time Thou hast been patiently standing outside the door, knocking, I now open the door. Come in, Lord Jesus, and be my Saviour and my Lord for ever.²³⁸

They both explain that the assurance that Christ does come into one's life is not based on how you feel but on His promise to come in if invited. However, there is at present a strong challenge coming from those engaging with our present culture that feelings and experiences are more important to contemporary people than logical arguments.²³⁹ Therefore this is an issue discussed in

²³⁴ Michael Green, in Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, p.119.

²³⁵ E.J.H. Nash, *Life at its Best* (London: Scripture Union, 1972 Revised edition).

²³⁶ Nash, *Life at its Best*, 1972 Revised edition p.14.

²³⁷ Nash, 1972 Revised edition, p.11.

²³⁸ Stott, *Becoming a Christian*, 2003 pp.25-26.

²³⁹ See Gerard Kelly, *Get a Grip on the Future without losing your Hold on the Past*, (London: Monarch, 1999) pp.205-207. John Drane, *After McDonaldization* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008) pp.87-92. Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001) pp.122-123. Michael Green, *Compelled by Joy* (Nottingham: Inter-

Chapter 4 of this dissertation when the basis of assurance of salvation is examined.²⁴⁰

Green advocates that Nash's *Life at its Best* was used to help many people find faith in Christ.²⁴¹ Even more significant for this present study is his assertion that *Life at its Best* formed a foundation for the next generation of evangelistic approaches.²⁴² He states that men influenced by Nash went on to write evangelistic literature that was widely circulated and that these publications all 'show the imprint of *Life at its Best* and its influence.'²⁴³ I sought to identify the men, in addition to Stott, who were influenced by Nash and to ascertain to what extent their publications were influenced by *Life at its Best*.

Other Men influenced by Nash

Right Revd. Maurice Wood.²⁴⁴

During the 1950s Wood produced his 'Islington booklets', including, *How can I Find God?* and *How can I Accept Christ?*, both of which contain suggested prayers.²⁴⁵ It is uncertain when they were first published but they are mentioned in his book *School of Evangelism* which first appeared as articles in *Crusade* (the magazine of the Evangelical Alliance) in the autumn of 1955.²⁴⁶ His evangelistic booklets are also listed by Dudley-Smith in 1957.²⁴⁷ Although it is

Varsity Press, 2011) pp.126-128. Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2007) pp.45-61.

²⁴⁰ See pp.94-95.

²⁴¹ Green, in Eddison, *A Study in Spiritual Power*, p.119.

²⁴² Green, in Eddison, *A Study in Spiritual Power*, p.119.

²⁴³ Green, in Eddison, *A Study in Spiritual Power*, p.119.

²⁴⁴ Evangelicals Now, March 1999 <<http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-825-Doing-the-impossible.htm> > [accessed 27.8.2011]. David Fletcher – reflecting on a lifetime of ministry in the Anglican Church. Fletcher ran the Iwerne Camps [which were started by Eric Nash in the 1930s] from 1960s to 1980s. He lists Bishop Maurice Wood as someone who came from the 'Iwerne stable' and by implication he would be someone influenced by Eric Nash. Wood would have been a teenager in the early years that Nash ran the Iwerne Camps. He was educated at Monkton Combe School, Bath. See <www.telegraph.co.uk/news/Obituaries/1555728/The-Rt-Rev-Maurice-Wood.htm> [accessed 17.6.2013]

²⁴⁵ Maurice Wood, *How can I accept Christ?* (London: Scripture Union, 1978), pp.9-10.

Maurice Wood, *How can I find God?* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1988), p.27. These booklets were first published in the 1950s: see Dudley-Smith, *A Bibliography of Booklets*, p.16.

²⁴⁶ Maurice A.P. Wood, *School of Evangelism Textbook* (London:Crusade,1956), p.30.

²⁴⁷ T. Dudley-Smith, *A Bibliography of Booklets*, p.16. Maurice Wood, *How to Find God?* (Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1988). Maurice Wood, *How can I Accept Christ?* (London: Scripture Union, 1978).

likely that Wood's booklets were in use in Britain before The Billy Graham Association's *Steps to Peace with God* there is a strong link between Wood and Billy Graham. Maurice Wood was chairman of the counselling and follow up committees of the Billy Graham Wembley Crusade in 1955.²⁴⁸ It is possible that his *School of Evangelism*, was part of the preparation for this crusade.²⁴⁹ However, this research has not discovered whether Graham influenced him.

Contrary to this, there are similarities between Wood and Nash in that Wood uses the ABC approach of advising people how to respond to the Gospel taught by Nash.²⁵⁰ He also uses Revelation 3:20 in the same way as Nash.²⁵¹ However, even more relevant to this present study is that Wood provides a suggested prayer. In his *School of Evangelism*, he advises that once a person sees his need of Christ, is willing to face the cost and understands the ABC steps, he should be left alone with a copy of the prayer in *How can I Accept Christ?* in order to make 'the lonely decision of personal commitment to Christ'.²⁵² He further teaches that once this step is taken the person should be led on immediately to assurance but this is not based on them having said a prayer but on the promises of the Bible and the work of Christ.²⁵³ Wood's explicit instructions seem to eliminate my negative aspects that the use of a suggested prayer could lead to misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation, false impressions as to what is involved in conversion and less professional practices in evangelism. This is also particularly true of *How can I Accept Christ?* because the prayer in this booklet is in the context of a Bible study which the reader is encouraged to continue for three days after saying the prayer.²⁵⁴ However, studying Wood's work raises the question of whether my concerns about the adoption of suggested prayers possibly leading to misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation or false impressions as to what is involved in conversion can be eliminated through adequate

²⁴⁸ Wood, *School of Evangelism*, p.3.

²⁴⁹ See Wood, *School of Evangelism*, pp.9-12.

²⁵⁰ Maurice Wood, *How can I Lead someone to Christ?* (London: Scripture Union, 1978), p.12. Maurice Wood, *How can I accept Christ?* (London: Scripture Union, 1978), pp.4-9. Compare: Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, pp.45 and 74-75.

²⁵¹ Wood, *How can I Accept Christ?* p.8 Eddison, *Spiritual Power*, p.76.

²⁵² Wood, *School of Evangelism*, p.30. Wood, *How can I accept Christ?*, pp.9-10.

²⁵³ Wood, *School of Evangelism*, p.30.

²⁵⁴ Maurice Wood, *How can I accept Christ?* (London: Scripture Union, 1979), pp10-15.

explanation in the context. This is considered further in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.²⁵⁵

Revd. Michael Green

Green attended Nash's Iwerne camps from the age of 15 and says they played a major part in his development as a disciplined Christian.²⁵⁶ At the age of 19 he became a leader at the camps and testifies that the camps equipped him intellectually to help others to find faith. He lists Nash among the outstanding Christian leaders from whom he learnt much.²⁵⁷ Green went on to be a leading evangelical minister and a prolific writer of evangelistic books which include a suggested prayer.²⁵⁸ Contrary to this, in *How can I lead a friend to Christ?*, he advises that if the person responding wants your help you should sit or kneel next to them, pray for them and then encourage them to pray for themselves.²⁵⁹ He says it is not the content of the prayer but the commitment that matters and that the one responding could pray aloud or silently but he gives no suggested wording for the prayer. However, here he is advising a personal worker who is able to respond to the situation whereas in his evangelistic books he is giving as much help as possible to people who may not have any other help.

Revd. David Watson

Another Anglican minister influenced by Nash is Revd. David Watson. He was a leader at the Iwerne camps while an undergraduate at Cambridge and Nash became like a father to him.²⁶⁰ The prayer in Stott's booklet *Becoming a Christian* was used by Watson on the evening he responded to the Gospel.²⁶¹ Watson advocated persuading people sensitively to make a

²⁵⁵ See pp.121-124.

²⁵⁶ Green, *Adventure of faith*, pp.22-27.

²⁵⁷ Green, *Adventure of faith*, p.207.

²⁵⁸ Green, *Adventure of faith*, pp. 395-396. There are at least 14 evangelistic books among the 48 books Green lists in this autobiography. The following included a prayer of commitment: Michael Green, *New life, new lifestyle* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973) p.24; Michael Green, *Man Alive* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1967), p.96; Michael Green, *Jesus spells freedom* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1972), p.121.

²⁵⁹ Michael Green, *How can I lead a friend to Christ?* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), pp.92-93.

²⁶⁰ Teddy Saunders and Hugh Sansom, *David Watson* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), pp.40-41.

²⁶¹ David Watson, *You are my God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), p.17.

personal commitment to Christ through praying a suggested prayer.²⁶² He became a prominent Evangelist and writer of widely circulated, evangelistic books which include a suggested prayer.²⁶³ This illustrates the theory that evangelists often seek to reach out to others using the methods by which they came to faith. Saunders and Sansom say that Watson later saw that the content of Stott's booklet had its beginning in Nash's 'careful teaching.'²⁶⁴ However, Watson deviates from other outlines of how to respond to the Gospel when he includes 'Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' thus emphasising his more charismatic position.²⁶⁵

Although the research has identified some of the men influenced by Nash who went on to write evangelistic literature, which was widely circulated, and show in their writing the imprint of *Life at its Best*, this study found no evidence that Nash influenced them in the use of a suggested prayer of response.

Conclusion to question two

The first evangelistic publication in general circulation in Britain to provide a suggested prayer is *Becoming a Christian* by John Stott published in 1950. As this is at least five years before the earliest possible date of the first Billy Graham Association publication to include a suggested prayer I conclude that Bennett is wrong in thinking that suggested prayers in evangelistic literature were introduced to Britain by The Billy Graham Association.

My research has revealed that the first people to include a suggested prayer in their evangelistic publications were Anglican priests who were influenced by Nash. Although Nash's booklet *Life at its Best* was an influence on these men, no evidence was found that he encouraged them to include a suggested prayer. However, knowing who were the first people to include a

²⁶² David Watson, *I believe in Evangelism*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), pp.112-113.

²⁶³ David Watson, *In search of God* (London: Falcon, 1974) p118. David, Watson, *My God is real* (Eastbourne: Falcon, 1970), p.90.

²⁶⁴ Saunders and Sansom, *David Watson*, p.41.

²⁶⁵ Watson, *I believe in evangelism*, p.113.

suggested prayer facilitated the investigation of their intentions which is examined in the next section.

Question 3.

Can any clues be found as to why those who introduced suggested prayers into evangelistic literature believed they would be helpful to those wishing to respond to the Christian Gospel?

Introduction

The relevance of this question to the overall study is that it considers the authorial intention of the first people to introduce prayers of response in evangelistic literature in this country. This could supply support for the adoption of such prayers and also indicate the source of the issues of concern which led to this research.

Liturgy and prayers of response

This study has suggested that the first evangelistic publications containing a prayer of response in common use in this country were written by British Anglican ministers influenced by Nash in the 1950s. In fact, the inclusion of a suggested prayer had become common in Britain by 1963 when another Anglican clergyman, Norman Warren, wrote *Journey into Life* which is still widely used in Britain today.²⁶⁶ Is it possible that these men found the use of such prayers appropriate because of their familiarity with liturgy? This is difficult to substantiate but it is known that Nash often quoted the *Book of Common Prayer* in his evangelistic talks.²⁶⁷ As Anglican priests these men who were influenced by Nash would be required traditionally to read prayers from the

²⁶⁶ Norman Warren, *Journey into Life*, First published 1963 in a private edition while Warren was Vicar of St Paul's, Leamington Spa. Published by CPAS in 1964. Norman Warren, *Journey into life* (Eastbourne Kingsway, 2005. Verite CM Ltd and Deo Gloria Trust have Revised their booklet 'On Your Marks' for use in connection with the 2012 London Olympic Games. This booklet includes 'Journey into life'. Deo Gloria Trust, Selsdon House, 212-220 Addington Road, South Croydon, Surrey, CR2 8LD <http://www.deo-gloria.co.uk/resources_on-your-marks.php> [accessed 12.8.2011].

²⁶⁷ Dick Knight in Eddison, (1992), p.25.

prayer book at daily services.²⁶⁸ They would be familiar with the practice of communicating with God by using prayers written by someone else. In their parish ministry they would teach people to use written prayers in worship.²⁶⁹ It seems only a small step from this to supplying a suggested prayer for those responding to the Christian Gospel.

I was originally drawn to the whole discussion as to how to help people on their journey to faith by the lectures, research and books of Rt. Revd. John Finney, one time Anglican Bishop of Pontefract.²⁷⁰ Although Finney does not discuss the use of a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature in any of his books I entered into an email discussion with him.²⁷¹ He sees some advantages in having such a 'liturgical' form as a suggested prayer of response because it helps people to start expressing what they believe. He gives the example that as an Anglican he encourages people to use the promises of baptism 'I turn to Christ'... 'I repent of my sins'... 'I renounce evil' as a primer for expressing their own faith.²⁷² This does resonate with my suggestion that the first writers to include a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature in this country may have been comfortable with the use of such prayers because as Anglican priests they were familiar with the use of liturgy.²⁷³

²⁶⁸ 'And all Priestes and Deacons shalbe bounde to say dayly the Mornyng and Evenyng prayer, either privatly or openly, excepte they be letted by preaching, studeing of divinitye, or by some other urgent cause.' Preface of 1552 Book of Common Prayer. This is known as the 'Daily Office'. <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1552/Front_matter_1552.htm#Preface> [accessed 26.10.2011].

²⁶⁹ For example when preparing people for Confirmation.

<<http://www.churchofengland.org/weddings-baptisms-funerals/baptism-confirmation/confirmation/frequently-asked-questions.aspx#group>> [accessed 3.11.2011].

²⁷⁰ Lectures delivered to the MA in Evangelism Studies course at Cliff College Autumn 2000. John Finney, *Finding Faith Today* (Swindon: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1992), John Finney, *Stories of Faith* (Swindon: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1999), John Finney, *Fading Splendour?* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000) pp.117-141. [Reflection on the second great awakening in America and the start of crusade style Revival meetings]. John Finney was the Archbishop's Officer for the Decade of Evangelism in the Church of England and Bishop of Pontefract. See back cover of John Finney, *Emerging Evangelism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004). He is now an Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham, <http://www.southwell.anglican.org/about_ourbishops.html> [accessed 7.11.2012].

²⁷¹ John Finney, *Emerging Evangelism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), pp.60-65. There is a discussion of crusade evangelism where as part of the counselling process enquirers are asked to repeat the Sinner's Prayer. This is very descriptive and does not include an opinion on the merit of this practice.

²⁷² Rt Rev John Finney. e-mail 9.2.2011.

²⁷³ See p.69.

This resulted in a quest to find support for this theory from Anglican writers. There are some relevant comments in a book written ‘to describe what Christianity is all about... to those outside the faith’ by Anglican theologian Tom Wright.²⁷⁴ Wright says that there is ‘nothing wrong with having a form of words composed by somebody else’.²⁷⁵ He speaks against the idea that the person praying must always use their own words. Wright sees a need to accept humbly that ‘someone else has said, better than I can, what I deeply want to express’.²⁷⁶ Similarly, writing about the use of liturgy, Galli speaks of the benefit of ‘praying prayers crafted not by my lonely piety, but by the Church.’²⁷⁷ It is not a big step from accepting how liturgy helps the Christian to speak out the desires of the inner self to believing that supplying a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature may afford such help to those responding to the Christian Gospel. Wright says that many Christians have been ‘helped in prayer by using words and forms written and shaped by others’.²⁷⁸ This suggests that those making the first faltering steps of faith might be likewise helped. However, while these writers are insightful they do not, in fact, say anything that links liturgy to the use of a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature.

While not finding Anglican support for my theory of a link between liturgy and suggested prayers in evangelistic literature I did discover that one of the main British advocates of the use of a suggested prayer of response, who believes such prayers help people to express their response to the Gospel, is very motivated by liturgy.²⁷⁹ Roger Carswell is a British Evangelist who is a

²⁷⁴ Tom Wright, *Simply Christian* (London: SPCK, 2006), p.ix and pp.136-147 on prayer. The back cover of this book says: ‘Not since C.S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity* has there been such a thrilling attempt to re-express the heart of the Christian faith and the transformation it offers to every area of personal and social life.’ N.T. Wright is the former Bishop of Durham in the Church of England (2003-2010) and one of the world’s leading Bible scholars. He is now Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Studies at The University of St Andrews. In 2000 he was awarded an earned Doctor of Divinity from the University of Oxford. <http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/38932.N_T_Wright> [accessed 9.11.2012] <<http://twitter.com/profntrwright>> [accessed 9.11.2012] <<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/divinity/rt/staff/ntw2/>> [accessed 9.11.2012].

²⁷⁵ Wright, *Simply Christian*, pp.141-142.

²⁷⁶ Wright, *Simply Christian*, p.142.

²⁷⁷ Mark Galli, *Beyond Bells and Smells* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2008), p.33.

²⁷⁸ Wright, *Simply Christian*, p.143.

²⁷⁹ Conversation with Roger Carswell 17th October 2011 quoted with his permission.

prolific writer of evangelistic literature.²⁸⁰ He uses a suggested prayer at the close of his evangelistic messages.²⁸¹ The tracts, booklets and books which he has written include a suggested prayer.²⁸² He provides more suggested prayers than any other British writer discovered in the course of this research and his motive is a genuine belief that providing such prayers helps the reader in their response.²⁸³ He has even written a tract of prayers to pray on different occasions which includes a prayer of response for those who want to 'get right with God'.²⁸⁴ This tract was given to the congregation of a church that does not use liturgical prayers; the feedback was very positive that these written prayers were helpful in that they provided words to express thoughts appropriate to different situations.²⁸⁵ This is a further indication of the possible usefulness of such prayers in evangelistic literature. Like that particular church, Carswell is a Free Evangelical and is not affiliated to any church which uses liturgy. However, in his daily personal devotions he uses the nineteenth-century copy of *The Book of Common Prayer*.²⁸⁶ He says that, when he uses these ancient prayers, 'expressions of the heart are formed in him which the selfishness, busyness and repetition' of his own prayers would overlook'.²⁸⁷ He further asserts that the use of written prayers helps him overcome a lack of 'imagination in prayer which may be indicative of a loss of sense of the awesome privilege of talking to Almighty God'.²⁸⁸ These thoughts could also be applied to providing a written prayer in order to help a new believer express their faith. Carswell also uses his own hand-written devotional aid which

²⁸⁰ See <www.tell-me-more.org> and

<<http://www.associationofevangelists.org/aofe/index.html>> [both accessed 6.11.2011].

²⁸¹ Conversation with Roger Carswell 17th October 2011 quoted with his permission.

²⁸² A selection of his publications are examined in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. See pp.114-127 and Appendix 1.

²⁸³ Conversation with Roger Carswell 17th October 2011 quoted with his permission.

²⁸⁴ Roger Carswell, *Prayers You May Wish to Pray* (Lees: Printbridge) [No date of publication].

²⁸⁵ The tract was given out during a talk on prayer at Maitland Evangelical Church, Oxtou, Birkenhead on the 11.11.2012. Details of the Church can be found at:

<<http://www.maitlanduk.com/>> I am an Elder of this Church. This Church is not affiliated to any denomination but is an independent self-governing Church founded in 1907 to meet the needs of the people in the locality. It is affiliated to the Evangelical Alliance. I did not express any view as to whether the prayers in this tract might be useful but the unprovoked feedback from those who received a copy of the tract was very positive. I repeated this in two other Churches and received similar responses.

²⁸⁶ Roger Carswell, 'Praying On Prayers' an article written for the 'Prayer Book Society Journal' supplied to me by the author 25.10.2011 and used by permission.

²⁸⁷ Carswell, 'Praying On Prayers'.

²⁸⁸ Carswell, 'Praying On Prayers'.

includes written prayers.²⁸⁹ He has recently published a unique personal devotional book for those engaged in evangelism which is based on his own practice of daily devotions.²⁹⁰ This contains a devotional for every week of the year that includes a portion of Scripture, a meditation on that passage, a hymn, a written prayer and a place to write one's own prayer. Carswell says that using the written prayers of others and making them his own helps him express his thoughts in a way which he would not put together so ably himself.²⁹¹ I would suggest that it is a short step from making the written prayers of others your own to expecting those responding to the Christian Gospel to benefit from using a prayer which you have written and to make it their own.²⁹²

Conclusion to question three

Although inconclusive, and based only on the practice of one prominent writer of evangelistic literature, if there is benefit in liturgy there could be benefit in providing a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature. The benefit being to enable the respondent to more adequately express their response. Therefore, I would propose the theory that the first writers to introduce a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature published in this country may have believed this would help the respondent because of the benefit they derived from liturgy. Although a great deal more research is needed to prove this theory there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest it is a possibility.

Concluding Theological Reflection

I would suggest that just as the interpretation of the Biblical text is done within a cultural and theological framework authors of evangelistic literature write within such a framework.²⁹³ Osborne says that 'meaning is filtered through the traditions of the community resulting in multiple meanings'.²⁹⁴ As authors

²⁸⁹ Conversation with Roger Carswell 17th October 2011 quoted with his permission during which he showed me his hand written prayer book and explained its use to me.

²⁹⁰ Roger Carswell, *Facing a Task Unfinished – a Personal Devotional for Evangelism* (Feam: Christian Focus Publications, 2011).

²⁹¹ Email from Roger Carswell 24th October 2011 used by permission.

²⁹² I shared this with Roger and he agreed that there is this link in his ministry but he had not realised the connection himself until I asked him about it. Conversation with Roger Carswell 17.10.2011 quoted with his permission.

²⁹³ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downes Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) p.467.

²⁹⁴ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* p.24.

write from within different communities the accepted views of that community will influence the content of their writing. Authors bring to the task all their own preconceived notions about soteriology and this impacts on their intentions.

During chapters 2 and 3 there have been passing references to issues relating to divine sovereignty and human responsibility.²⁹⁵ Previous researchers advocated that the adoption of a suggested prayer of response has its roots in a change in doctrinal view from Calvinism to Arminianism.²⁹⁶ This section reflects on the possible impact on the adoption or exclusion of responsive prayers depending on the position of the author regarding this area of theology.

Those who hold to the traditional views of Calvinism would be more inclined to exclude suggested prayers of response from their writing because of an emphasis on the inability of humans to respond to the Gospel without God's intervention.²⁹⁷ Their doctrine of total depravity 'means that sin is in every part of one's being, including the mind and will, so that a man cannot save himself'.²⁹⁸ Thus the saying of a suggested prayer would be rejected because it could give people the impression that salvation was within their control. Traditional Calvinists see God's grace 'as the effectual source of election, redemption, faith and perseverance' which does not involve cooperation with human activity.²⁹⁹ Having said this they would advocate that there is a need to persuade people to respond to the Gospel.³⁰⁰ However, they are more likely to encourage the reader to confess sin and throw themselves on God's mercy, pleading for salvation, rather than providing them with a suggested prayer.³⁰¹

²⁹⁵ See pp.16, 233, 28, 30, and 33.

²⁹⁶ See pp.15-16.

²⁹⁷ Calvinism is also called Reformed Theology see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.315

²⁹⁸ <<http://socsci.gulfcoast.edu/rbaldwin/TULIP.htm>> [accessed 26.9.2013] See David N., Steele, *The Five Points of Calvinism, Defined, Defended, Documented* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989) pp.18-26 For example: 'The sinner is so spiritually bankrupt that he can do nothing pertaining to his salvation.' p.19.

²⁹⁹ Michael Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), pp.15-16.

³⁰⁰ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), pp.91-92 and 98. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p.58.

³⁰¹ Peter Master, *Biblical Strategies for Witness* (London: The Wakeman Trust, 1994), pp.40-41.

There is a more extreme view of divine sovereignty often referred to as Hyper Calvinism.³⁰² Whereas Calvinists have been very active in evangelism and have a strong belief in proclaiming the Gospel, Hyper Calvinists have been known to discourage outreach.³⁰³ They would disagree with telling everyone that God loves them or that Christ died for them because they believe that the Gospel message will only be effective for those God has elected.³⁰⁴ Proponents of this view would exclude suggested prayers, and probably the type of evangelistic literature in which they are found, because of their strong emphasis on divine sovereignty to exclusion of the human will.³⁰⁵

Those who hold to the views of Classical Arminianism are much more likely to be comfortable with adopting suggested prayers of response because of their view regarding the freedom of the human will to respond to the Gospel.³⁰⁶ They see God's election as conditional to his foreknowledge of how people would respond to the Gospel.³⁰⁷ For them it is possible for anyone to

³⁰² Phillip R. Johnson, A Primer on Hyper-Calvinism.

<<http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/hypercal.htm>> [accessed 26.9.2013].

³⁰³ For Calvinists involvement in Mission see: Michael Horton, *For Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), pp.152-169 [Calvinism and Christian Missions]. See also John Benton, *Evangelistic Calvinism* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006). For Hyper-Calvinism's opposition to mission see: Phillip R. Johnson, 'A Primer on Hyper-Calvinism'.

<<http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/hypercal.htm>. [accessed:25.10.13] 'John Ryland heard William Carey talking about becoming a missionary to India, and told him, "Sit down, young man. When God decides to save the heathen, He will do it without your help.' See also <<http://www.corkfpc.com/rylandsenior.html>> [accessed 26.9.2013] where this story is discussed.

³⁰⁴ Phillip R. Johnson. A Primer on Hyper-Calvinism

<<http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/hypercal.htm>> [accessed 29.2.2012].

Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation Second Revised Edition* (Carlisle: Piquant, 2011) pp.23-24. Says some Calvinists can not tell people that Christ died for them. However, he advocates that Calvin did not teach limited atonement. He quotes Calvin commenting on John 3:16 "Men are not easily convinced that God loves them, and so, to remove all doubt, He has expressly stated that we are so very dear to God that for our sakes He did not spare even His only begotten Son". See John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, No date given) p.642.

³⁰⁵ Greg Gibson, 'Half-Truth Hyper-Calvinism'

<<http://jesussaidfollowme.org/HyperCalvinism.htm>> [accessed 27.9.2013] And also

<<http://www.theopedia.com/Hyper-Calvinism>> [accessed 27.9.2013]

<<http://carm.org/dictionary-hypercalvinism>> [accessed 27.9.2013]. John Piper on Hyper Calvinism <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xttlK284nl>> [accessed 28.9.2013]

³⁰⁶ F. Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism – A Theology of Salvation* (Nashville: Randall House, 2011) pp.21-23, 51-52, 51-52, 79-80.

³⁰⁷ Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology Myths and Realities* (Downes Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006) pp.179-200. On the Arminian view of predestination. p.179 states that 'Predestination is God's sovereign decree to elect believers in Jesus Christ, and it includes God's foreknowledge of those believers' faith'.

respond to the Gospel and not just those God has selected.³⁰⁸ Prayers suggested by Arminians would emphasise a human decision and inviting Christ into one's life.³⁰⁹

Wesleyanism differs from Classical Arminianism in teaching that Christians can be completely sanctified in this lifetime and live a holy life.³¹⁰ Some Wesleyans see this as a process while others see it as an instant second work of grace or a combination of the two.³¹¹ While for Arminius loss of Salvation came only through ceasing to believe in Christ, Wesleyans hold that it could result from either unbelief or unconfessed sin and that apostasy could be remedied through renewed repentance.³¹² Wesleyans might adopt a suggested prayer of response but their views of the impartation of righteousness and the possibility of entire sanctification would safeguard against the notion that salvation could be secured by the saying of such a prayer with no commitment to ongoing discipleship.³¹³

³⁰⁸ David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *Romans: An Interpretive Outline* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967) pp.141-147 for a very good summary of Arminianism. For example p.144 says that the Arminian view is that: 'God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does so in such a manner as not to interfere with man's freedom.'

³⁰⁹ C. S. Lovett, *Soul winning is easy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954) particularly pp.46-50 is a good illustration of this position and the earliest example found in the course of this research of a book on personal evangelism recommending the use of a suggested prayer of response as part of calling for an instant decision.

³¹⁰ Kevin Jackson 'A Comparison of Wesleyanism and Classical Arminianism.'
<<http://wesleyanarminian.wordpress.com/2009/12/08/a-comparison-of-wesleyanism-and-classical-arminianism/>> [accessed 26.10.2013]. J. Kenneth Grider, *Entire Sanctification: A Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980 [Kindle Edition, 2011].Chapter One, heading B. Wesley's Distinctive Contribution 'This doctrine is John Wesley's most distinctive contribution to the Christian faith'. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *The Gospel of Grace: The Way of Salvation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Books,1992) pp.101-120. For example on p.101: 'Conversion does not exhaust the possibilities of God's grace, and we should regard Christian conversion not as an end but as a beginning'. M. James Sawyer, *Wesleyan Arminian Theology: an introductory survey* (London: Saga, 2010) Kindle Edition. Chapter 4. 'Distinctive Doctrine of Sanctification'.

³¹¹ Margaret Jones, 'Growing in Grace and Holiness' in Clive March, Brian Beck, Angela Shier-Jones and Helen Wareing, *Methodist Theology Today* (London: Continuum, 2004) pp.155-165. William Birch, 'Demarcating Wesleyan Arminianism and Reformed Arminianism'.
<<http://evangelicalarminians.org/demarcating-wesleyan-arminianism-and-reformed-arminianism/>> [accessed 25.10.2013]. John Wesley, *Forty-Four Sermons* (Kindle Edition) Sermon 35, Christian Perfection.

³¹² J. Matthew Pinson in the introduction to Michael S. Horton, Norman L. Geisler, Stephen M. Ashby and J. Steven Harper, *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

³¹³J. Steven Harper, A Wesleyan Arminian View and Stephen M Ashley, A Reformed Arminian Response to Steve Harper in Michael S. Horton, Norman L. Geisler, Stephen M. Ashby and J. Steven Harper, *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) pp.226-228 and 276-277. Kenneth Wilson, *Methodist Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2011) pp.73-75.

Some have advocated a middle way between Calvinism and Arminianism such as Lasley who puts forward the Hubmaierian/Molinist view of soteriology.³¹⁴ This view attributes to God a middle knowledge whereby he knows how people will react in certain scenarios and as a result arranges events so that people have the opportunity to respond accordingly.³¹⁵ A more thoroughly academic consideration of a middle way is put forward, from a missional perspective, by C. Gordon Olson.³¹⁶ Olson advocates that both systems are Biblically flawed and limit God's love.³¹⁷ He says: 'conditional security means conditional love for Arminians and the restriction of his love in limited atonement is just as serious a limitation.'³¹⁸ Through inductive Biblical studies he presents a mediate position between Calvinism and Arminianism which holds together that salvation is available to all while also accepting a view of eternal security.³¹⁹ Most relevant to this study is that Gordon Olson does not mention prayer in his chapter on the correct response to the Gospel.³²⁰

Even so these middle way views would allow for the adoption of a suggested prayer of response because of their emphasis on accommodating a freedom of choice.³²¹ Having said this I would suggest the reason for this conclusion is that these views lean towards Arminianism and away from those doctrines which cause Calvinists to reject suggested prayers of response.³²² Arminian scholar Roger Olson is adamant that a hybrid between Calvinism and Arminianism is impossible because 'once terms are properly elucidated, it

³¹⁴ James Douglas Lasley, *Calvinism, Arminianism or Another Option* (Leipzig: Amazon Distribution, 2012)

³¹⁵ Lasley, *Calvinism, Arminianism or Another Option*, p.27. Kinghorn, *The Gospel of Grace*, pp.68-72.

³¹⁶ C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: An Inductive, Mediate Theology of Salvation*, Third Edition (Lynchburg: Global Gospel Publication, 2012) pp.13-24 and 378-442. There is also a less academic version of this work entitled: C. Gordon Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right: A Balanced View of Salvation Truth* (New Jersey: Global Gospel Ministries, 2005). It is interesting that on the following website this book is listed as an Arminian work. <<http://evangelicalarminianism.wordpress.com/arminian-books/>> [Accessed 25.10.2013].

³¹⁷ Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right*, pp.353-354.

³¹⁸ Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right*, p.354.

³¹⁹ Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right*, pp.61,100-122, 357.

³²⁰ Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right*, pp.69-82.

³²¹ Lasley, *Calvinism, Arminianism or Another Option*, p.50-51. Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right*, pp.33-38.

³²² It is interesting that on the following website Olson's book is listed as an Arminian work. <<http://evangelicalarminianism.wordpress.com/arminian-books/>> [accessed 25.10.2013].

becomes clear that the scope of election, atonement and grace differ appreciably between' these two systems of soteriology.³²³

Although these views have been presented as fixed positions many approach this area of theology with a pick and mix approach. For example, Moderate Calvinism refers to those who maybe come from a heritage of classical Calvinism but now hold only some aspects of Calvinism while rejecting others.³²⁴ Referring to the traditional five points of Calvinism, Pinson says that moderate Calvinists accept some form of total depravity and the preservation of the saints but reject one or more of the other points.³²⁵ The most commonly rejected aspect of classical Calvinism is limited atonement.³²⁶ Moderate Calvinists may well adopt suggested prayers but because of holding on to the doctrine of the preservation of the saints they could give the impression that if the respondent prays the prayer they can not subsequently lose their salvation.³²⁷

This reflection has resulted in the view that the division between those who adopted suggested prayers of response in their evangelistic writing and those who excluded them would be determined by the beliefs of the author regarding this area of theology, with Calvinists excluding such prayers while Arminianists adopted them. This became an issue I examined during the interviews with current authors of evangelistic literature that are reported on in chapter seven.³²⁸

³²³ Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) pp.66-67.

³²⁴ See Norman L Geisler, *Chosen but Free* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2010) pp.19-21.

³²⁵ J. Matthew Pinson in the introduction to Michael S. Horton, Norman L. Geisler, Stephen M. Ashby and J. Steven Harper, *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) pp.11-12 [The other points of Calvinism are Unconditional election, Limited atonement and Irresistible grace].

³²⁶ <<http://arminiantoday.com/tag/moderate-calvinism/>> [accessed 26.9.2013] Some doubt that Calvin believed in Limited Atonement. See Dr Roger Nicole, John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement. < <http://www.apuritansmind.com/arminianism/john-calvins-view-of-limited-atonement/>> [accessed 26.9.2013] See also R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) pp.2-3 and 13-18.

³²⁷ I've observed this position among some of the independent Churches where I have the privilege of preaching.

³²⁸ See pages 184-186

Conclusion to Chapter 3

Some evidence was discovered to suggest that McIntyre is right in advocating that early prayers in evangelistic literature developed from decision pledges. There was a similarity in the last pledge found in a PTL publication and in the first prayer in a PTL publication. It was seen that the statements of my hypothesis regarding the use of a suggested prayer could be equally true of the pledges found in British evangelistic publications.

The first evangelistic publication in general circulation in Britain to include a suggested prayer was *Becoming a Christian* written by John Stott which was first published in 1950. As this was five years before the first possible date of the publication *Steps to Peace with God*, the Billy Graham Association did not introduce to Britain a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature. It was discovered that the first writers to include a suggested prayer were all Anglican priests influenced by Nash.

In answering the third question regarding the reason for introducing a suggested prayer to evangelistic literature it was proposed that this could be because the first writers were influenced by their use of liturgy. The theory was put forward that being Anglican priests, these writers saw the same value in a suggested prayer as they experienced from liturgy. Just as liturgy helped them to express themselves to God more adequately it was proposed that they could have believed that the same benefit would be found in a suggested prayer.

Chapter 4. Scholarly Investigation

Introduction

My own experience as an evangelist and writer of evangelistic literature and my theological reading led to the issues examined in this chapter. Positively the author includes a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature in order to help people express their response to the Christian Gospel.³²⁹ However, negatively it can be unhelpful because it can lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion; misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and less professional practices in evangelism.

Reflecting on the possible negative outcomes of adopting suggested prayers led to the formulation of nine statements and support was found for these within the literature. This chapter will consider the issues raised by these statements and as a result facilitate the questions to be asked during the documentary analysis in chapter 6. While the broader issues relating to conversion, assurance and evangelism are examined during the interviews reported on in chapter 7 the nine questions are not used because the interview questionnaire had been formulated before these questions were finalised.³³⁰

This chapter is divided into four sections (A to D), the first of which looks at the positive intent of the author to help the reader in their response to the Gospel and subsequent sections deal with issues relating to conversion, assurance of salvation and evangelism. In each of these subsequent sections (B to D) three issues relating to that section will be examined, making nine subsections in all and these are numbered 1 to 9.³³¹

³²⁹ By 'the Christian Gospel' I mean the message that the Church was commissioned by Christ to take to the whole world. See Chapman, *Know and Tell the Gospel*, pp.15-27.

³³⁰ Chapter 4 went through a series of rewrites as my reading advanced. However, the necessity to gain ethical clearance from the University and the anticipated time it would take to complete the interviews resulted in the interview questionnaire being formulated before the final version of chapter 4 was written and the nine issues had emerged.

³³¹ In section B on conversion there are three subsections numbered 1 to 3, in section C on assurance of salvation there are three subsections numbered 4 to 6 and in section D on evangelism there are three subsections numbered 7 to 9. These same issues will be dealt with in Chapter 5 under the same numbers.

Section A. Positive authorial intention

There is support within the literature for my intention that including a suggested prayer of response in evangelistic publications might help some people express their response to the Christian Gospel. For Grudem, personal faith in Christ involves an act of the will and he advocates that it would be helpful to express that decision in the words of a prayer 'to Christ in which we tell him of our sorrow for sin, our commitment to forsake it, and our decision actually to put our trust in him'.³³² Grudem does not believe the use of such a prayer saves the person who prays. Having said this he asserts that the 'attitude of heart' such a prayer represents does constitute true conversion.³³³ However, I note here that the content of the prayer he is envisioning is very different from some suggested prayers which say nothing of matters such as sorrow over sin and the willingness to repent. Payne says there is value in using The Sinner's Prayer because it helps people to mark the moment when they 'volitionally repented of their sin and confessed Jesus as Lord of their lives'.³³⁴ Here again what is regarded as The Sinner's Prayer is very different from the model scrutinised by opponents of such prayers.³³⁵ Nevertheless for Payne the saying of a suggested prayer has a 'commemorative' value similar to the Israelites setting up piles of rock as memorials of what God had done. Moyer agrees that using a suggested prayer helps to fix in a person's mind what they are doing and adds that such verbalising of the decision to God will encourage the convert to articulate their decision to other people.³³⁶ While all these statements will be seen as contentious to opponents of the use of a suggested prayer, what I am seeking to demonstrate here is that within the

³³² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.717.

³³³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.717.

³³⁴ J.D. Payne, *Evangelism: a Biblical Response to Today's Questions* (Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2011), p.127.

³³⁵ See p.25 of this dissertation including footnote 99.

³³⁶ Larry Moyer, 'Is The Sinner's Prayer essential to Salvation?' EvanTell, Inc. <<http://www.freegracealliance.com/pdf/IsTheSinners%20PrayerEssential.pdf>> [accessed 13.8.2011]. Larry Moyer is President and CEO of EvanTell, Inc <<http://www.evantell.org/>> [accessed 13.8.2011]. This American organisation claims '58,302 trainings on how to present the gospel clearly and simply, and 2,425,456 gospel presentations facilitated using their EvanTell training and resources'.

literature there is support for my intention that a suggested prayer could help someone express their response to the Gospel.³³⁷

Bell raises the objection that people can view the saying of a suggested prayer as the only qualification to gain heaven.³³⁸ However, this does not mean that he is totally against the use of a suggested prayer because for him praying a prayer as a child was a defining moment.³³⁹ He gives the contents of that prayer as: 'I invited Jesus into my heart. I told God that I believed I was a sinner and that Jesus came to save me and I wanted to be a Christian'.³⁴⁰ Even taking into account his environment, the pressure to please parents and how religion can shape a child, Bell insists that what happened that night was real and that it is still of significance to him today.³⁴¹ There is some biographical evidence to support the view that adults find the use of a suggested prayer equally helpful.³⁴² For example, in his book Jonathan Carswell includes twelve stories of conversion and ten of these include the words of a prayer which the person used.³⁴³ He provides a suggested prayer at the end of his book with the comment that 'many have found that praying similar words to these have helped

³³⁷ There is, too, the evidence of those who include a suggested prayer in their evangelistic literature. I assume that this action indicates that they believe providing such a prayer will be a help to those responding to the presentation of the Gospel. There is a study of such literature in Chapter 5.

³³⁸ Rob. Bell, *Love Wins* (London: Collins, 2011), pp.1-7.

³³⁹ Bell, *Love Wins*, p.194.

³⁴⁰ Bell, *Love Wins*, p.193. See Chapman, *Know and Tell*, p.24 where he says: 'The modern tendency to ask people to respond to the gospel by 'opening your heart and letting Jesus in' or 'let Jesus come in and cleanse you from sin', will leave a person completely open to every possible misunderstanding.'

³⁴¹ Bell, *Love Wins* p.194. See also Leslie J. Francis and Jeff Astley, *Children, Churches and Christian Learning* (London: SPCK, 2002), particularly pp 53 to 116 on 'Children and Faith'. Christine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), particularly pp.127-144 'Knowing God in Childhood'. Francis Bridger, *Children Finding Faith* (Bletchley: Scripture Union, 2000).

³⁴² Gavin Wakefield, *Conversion Today* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2006), pp.3-4. One of the three stories of conversion in this publication includes the praying of a suggested prayer as a pivotal moment in the person's faith journey. See also the Bridge Builders' Newsletter, January 2012 <<http://www.bridge-builders.net/current/pdf/newsletters/2012january.pdf>> [accessed 12. 3. 2012]. This tells the story of a lady who used the suggested prayer at the back of *Love is the Bridge* 'to surrender her life to the Lord'. Church leaders, who had been helping her investigate Christianity, believe this to be a genuine case of conversion because of the change they have observed in her life. See also Ken Edgecombe, *Will they or Won't they* (Lidcombe NSW: Scripture Union, 2000) pp.38, 46, 85, 108, 135, which tells fourteen stories of young people being converted. They include two stories which tell of the benefit of praying a suggested prayer from an evangelistic booklet and others which include the saying of a prayer.

³⁴³ Jonathan Carswell, *Uncovered: True Stories of Changed Lives* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2005), pp1-98.

them in coming to know real forgiveness'.³⁴⁴ The cynic could suggest that people found such a prayer helpful because this was the teaching of the Christians who helped them.³⁴⁵ However, my motive here is only to suggest that there is some biographical support for my intention in adopting a suggested prayer that some people would find it helped them to express their response to the Christian Gospel.

The qualitative research will continue this discussion by asking what are the advantages and disadvantages of including a prayer in evangelistic literature. Having looked at support for the positive intent of adopting suggested prayers in evangelistic literature this study now proceeds to evaluate my concerns that such a prayer could lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion; misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and less professional practices in evangelism.

Section B. Conversion

Introduction to Conversion

As this dissertation is examining suggested prayers in evangelistic literature used by Christians, this section focuses on what conversion means in a Christian context rather than a wider religious meaning.³⁴⁶ The word 'conversion' is derived from the Latin *convertere* which means 'to revolve, turn around' or 'head in a different direction'.³⁴⁷ Having examined the relevant biblical words, Barclay concludes that 'conversion is a turning of a man's mind

³⁴⁴Jonathan Carswell, *Uncovered*, p.103.

³⁴⁵Mark Harris, 'Understanding conversion, How our Understanding of Conversion Can Help or Hinder Our Evangelistic Efforts', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, volume 38, Number 4 (October 2002), pp. 497. 'People alter their own experience to fit the elements they hear about from those teaching them about salvation.'

³⁴⁶ C. Lamb and M.D. Bryant, *Religious Conversion - Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, (London: Cassell, 1999) Looks at conversion from the perspective of major world religions including Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and also Paganism in a multi-faith and post-Christian context. See also: Christopher Partridge and Helen Reid (Editors) *Finding and Losing Faith, studies in conversion*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006). David Greenlee, *One Cross One Way Many Journeys: Thinking again about Conversion* (London: Authentic, 2006).

³⁴⁷ Frank Flinn, 'Conversion: up from Evangelicalism or Pentecostal and Charismatic Experience': Chapter 3 of Lamb & Bryant *Religious Conversion*, p.51.

and heart and life in the direction of God'.³⁴⁸ He further states that this turning involves not only a turning to but a turning from 'darkness to light', from 'ignorance to knowledge' and from 'power of Satan to God'.³⁴⁹ Wallis adds that conversion involves a 'change of Lords'.³⁵⁰ Its meaning is encapsulated in the report about the Thessalonians who 'turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God'.³⁵¹ It would be possible to use a suggested prayer to express a desire for such a change or as a thanksgiving that such a change has happened. However, such a prayer would not cover all the aspects of conversion because conversion is not solely a human activity.

There is a mysterious supernatural aspect of conversion which has to do with the work of God in enabling this turning.³⁵² While some use the term conversion to include both divine and human involvement others refer to the former as regeneration and reserve conversion for the human aspect.³⁵³ Thus Grudem defines conversion as 'our willing response to the gospel call'.³⁵⁴ While acknowledging the work of God in the conversion process, this dissertation focuses on the expected response to the Christian Gospel. Debate on this issue focuses on to what extent a person has the ability to make that response.³⁵⁵ Some argue that regeneration is necessary before a person has the ability to respond while others see regeneration as coming after a human decision.³⁵⁶ Having said this, while I will refer to the issue of divine sovereignty

³⁴⁸ William Barclay, *Turning to God* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew's Press, 1978), p.25. William Barclay was Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University. <<http://rotherwoodpress.co.uk/williambarclay/>> [accessed 21.2.2012]. See also Stephen J. Chester, 'Paul: Archetypal Convert and Disputed Convert' in Lamb and Bryant, *Religious Conversion*, pp.123-149. pp.140-141 where he examines the Greek used by Paul in relation to conversion. Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), pp.346-353. A Lexical Summary of Conversion.

³⁴⁹ Barclay, *Turning to God*, pp.26-30. Based on Acts 26:18.

³⁵⁰ Jim Wallis, *The Call to Conversion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p.6.

³⁵¹ Geoffrey W. Grogan, *The Faith Once Entrusted to The Saints* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2010), p.186 commenting on conversion in 1 Thessalonians. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, p.348 commenting on 1 Thessalonians 1:9 NIV and other Bible references to conversion resulting in change. See too John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Nashville: Nelson, 2000), pp.17, 34 and 183. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2006), pp.129, 146 and 181.

³⁵² Chapman, *Know and Tell*, pp.67-79, 'Who does what? God's work and ours'.

³⁵³ France, 'Conversion in the Bible', pp.291-310 and pp.304-305.

³⁵⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.709.

³⁵⁵ See Bennett, *Sinner's Prayer*, pp.17-21.

³⁵⁶ William K. Kay, 'Pentecostal Perspectives on Conversion' in Lamb and Bryant, *Religious Conversion*, pp.103-119. Kay states that the position of the Assemblies of God denomination is

and human responsibility, a thorough theological debate on this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation.³⁵⁷ I would suggest that the issues raised by my concerns could be relevant regardless of which view of divine sovereignty and human responsibility one adopts.

While regeneration is a single event in which God brings a person alive spiritually, conversion is not just an unrepeatable human decision but both a beginning and an ongoing process of transformation.³⁵⁸ In agreement, Downes questions whether ‘asking Jesus into your life’ is the essence of true conversion.³⁵⁹ He concludes that ‘True conversion is threefold: conversion to Christ, conversion to his community and conversion to his cause.’³⁶⁰ It can be seen from this that the term conversion covers more than the initial response to the Christian Gospel which is the main focus of this dissertation. In the past, when asking if someone had been converted, Christians would ask ‘are you saved?’³⁶¹ While both Salvation and Conversion can refer to an ongoing process this dissertation is asking what a person needs to do to secure salvation or to start the process of being saved.

‘that the moment of salvation occurs as someone... puts their faith in Christ for the very first time. Once this happens, the Holy Spirit causes the individual to be born again, or born from above, in a process that is as complete as natural birth’. p107.

³⁵⁷ C. Gordon Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right: A Balanced view of Salvation Truth* (New Jersey: Global Gospel Ministries, 2005), for a discussion of Calvinism and Arminianism as these doctrines impact on Salvation and Evangelism. Stanley N. Gundry (Editor), *Four views on Eternal Security*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), for discussion of Calvinistic and Arminian views about Assurance of Salvation. R. B. Kuiper, *God-centred Evangelism* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1966) and J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1961) for a classic Calvinistic view of evangelism evident in older books which are still in publication. F. Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (Nashville: Randall House, 2011). Giving the Arminian position and providing useful insights into issues relating to this debate.

³⁵⁸ Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), p.68.

³⁵⁹ Greg Downes, ‘What does it really mean to “become” a Christian?’ *Christianity*: (April 2011, pp.53-57). Greg Downes, <<http://www.lst.ac.uk/news-and-events/1/post/56>> [accessed 13.8.2011]. Greg Downes is Director of the Centre for Missional Leadership and Lecturer in Evangelism and Apologetics at London School of Theology and Theologian-in-residence for *Christianity Magazine*.

³⁶⁰ Downes, ‘What does it really mean to “become” a Christian’. This is also supported by Derek J. Tidball, ‘The Social Construction of Evangelical Conversion’ in Lamb and Bryant, *Religious Conversion*, pp.93-100. Tidball shares his analysis of Theological College applicants’ answers to a question about conversion and the expressions they use to describe ‘coming to faith’.

³⁶¹ Moody Adams, *The Titanic’s Last Hero*, (Belfast: Ambassador International, 2012), pp.23-24. It is reported that Rev John Harper asked fellow passengers ‘Are you saved?’ as the Titanic was sinking in 1912.

What are these false impressions as to what is involved in conversion?

Today, rather than using the term conversion or salvation, many Christians will say someone ‘made a commitment’ or refer to someone ‘becoming a Christian’.³⁶² Enquiring if a person is a Christian can result in the response: ‘Well, they prayed the prayer’.³⁶³ This section asks whether encouraging someone to pray a suggested prayer could result in misconceptions about what is involved in conversion by examining three possible misconceptions which are numbered 1 to 3 in the following sections. That including a suggested prayer could result in these misconceptions arises from the observations and reading of the researcher.

1. The first false impression regarding conversion is that just saying a prayer is enough to constitute conversion.

McLaren is concerned that, in his experience, many people equate being ‘born anew or born again’ with ‘saying a prayer at the end of a booklet or tract’ believing that because they have said such a prayer they are a genuine Christian.³⁶⁴ Supportingly, O’Neil advocates that the Bible teaches people are not saved by prayer but by faith.³⁶⁵ Chapman adds that the proper response to the Gospel is both repentance and faith.³⁶⁶ For Wright, repentance involves ‘a

³⁶² Michael J. Penfold, Conversion – Incidental, Important or Imperative?

<<http://www.webtruth.org/articles/what-is-gospel-21/conversion-incidentail-importance-or-imperative-61.htm>> [accessed 10.1.2012].

³⁶³ Greg Koukl, ‘Is the Sinner’s Prayer Effective?’

<http://www.implainsite.org/html/the_sinners_prayer.html> [accessed 21.11.2011].

³⁶⁴ Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006) pp.37-38.

³⁶⁵ Michael D. O’Neal, ‘The Sinner’s Prayer ‘ <<http://www.brothermike.com/sinner.html>> [accessed 3.1.2011].

³⁶⁶ Chapman, *Know and Tell the Gospel*, p.24; Greg Gilbert, *What is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), p.116. See also Harry L. Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp.280-284.

The Lausanne Covenant details the message to be communicated as ‘the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe’. The Lausanne Covenant

<<http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html>> [accessed 25.10.2012]. The Lausanne Covenant was adopted by the delegates at a congress on evangelism July 1974 in Lausanne Switzerland organised by what is now known as The Lausanne Movement. See: <<http://www.lausanne.org/en/about.html>> [accessed 25.10.2012].

serious turning from patterns of life which deface and distort our genuine humanness' and 'the call to faith is a call of obedience'.³⁶⁷ Thus the expected response to the Gospel is more than the saying of a prayer; it is a total reorientation of the respondent's life in following Jesus.³⁶⁸ Nonetheless, while prayer alone does not save I would propose that a suggested prayer could express the intent of the respondent to turn from wrong and trust in Christ. However, because both repentance and faith are active and such a prayer is passive it could not in itself constitute repentance and faith.³⁶⁹ Having said this, confession is an aspect of repentance and a suggested prayer could help the respondent to voice their acknowledgement of wrongdoing.³⁷⁰

There are a number of challenges to repentance and faith being the required response to the Gospel. Hixson does not believe that repentance is a requirement of Salvation.³⁷¹ In defending his view that Salvation is by faith alone he relegates repentance to an appendix and states that it is a misconception that 'true repentance must always be evidenced by a change of behaviour'.³⁷² This denies the transformational nature of conversion and turns 'being a Christian' into nothing more than a belief.³⁷³ Metzger says lack of teaching repentance leads to easy believism.³⁷⁴ To him 'faith without

³⁶⁷ Tom Wight, *Simply Christian* (London: SPCK, 2006), p.178.

³⁶⁸ Scot McKnight, *One Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), p.106 'A Christian is one who follows Jesus by devoting his or her One Life to the Kingdom of God...'. John Stott, *Basic Christianity New Edition* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2008), pp.139-154 'At its simplest, Christ's call was "Follow me".' p.141.

³⁶⁹ Mark Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), pp.40-43. Payne, *Evangelism*, pp.13-16 on repentance and pp.17-19 on saving faith. L.L. Morris, Faith, in *New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), pp.357-360 particularly p.360, on Faith being active. J.D.G. Dunn, Repentance, *New Bible Dictionary*, pp.10007-10008, where Dunn makes it clear that repentance is more than just words.

³⁷⁰ Victor Benavides, *Breaking the Evangelism Code: Evangelism Today* (Bloomington: Cross Books, 2011), pp.131-148. On p.144 he says: 'Confession is an expression by the individual who desires to turn from sin and live for God'.

³⁷¹ J.B. Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong* (USA: Xulon Press, 2008) p.361.

³⁷² Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong*, p.361.

³⁷³ Wilson Awasu, *Transformational Conversion* (Enumclaw: Pleasant World, 2004), pp.33-62 'God and Jesus on Transformational Conversion'. See also: Gordon T. Smith, *Beginning Well*, (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), pp.19-20. 'We cannot think effectively and biblically about conversion until we take seriously both the possibility of and call to transformation'. Jim Wallis, *The Call to Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Monarch, 2006), particularly pp.1-30 For example: 'The goal of biblical conversion is not to save souls apart from history but to bring the kingdom of God into the world with explosive force; it begins with individuals but is for the sake of the world.' p.9.

³⁷⁴ Will Metzger, *Tell the Truth* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), pp.76-77.

repentance is unfounded optimism, leading to self-deception'.³⁷⁵ I would advocate that, in the response to the Gospel, faith and repentance should come together and that they are 'inseparable'.³⁷⁶ Therefore, I conclude that a suggested prayer should express both repentance and faith and that these need to be presented in evangelistic literature in such a way as to be seen as more than just the saying of a prayer.

Warner advocates that asking people to say a suggested prayer is not biblical and 'arises from the vacuum created by the omission of baptism as a proper response to the Gospel'.³⁷⁷ Barclay sees baptism as the second demand that the New Testament preachers requested of those who wanted to respond.³⁷⁸ In agreement, France points out that in Acts baptism seems regularly to have taken place immediately, 'as part of the conversion process', rather than as a sequel after lengthy preparation.³⁷⁹ This begs the question of whether baptism is necessary for salvation. While acknowledging the close connection in New Testament times between baptism and conversion Wellum sees baptism as coming after faith and regeneration.³⁸⁰ This would not eliminate baptism being used as an outward expression of faith. However, the suggestion that The Sinner's Prayer has replaced baptism does not fit with what I have discovered of the recent introduction of such a prayer and the fact that those who first introduced it into British evangelistic literature were paedobaptists.³⁸¹ However, I am approaching this subject from a Baptist position that says, baptism is an outward act symbolising an inner work God has done in the

³⁷⁵ Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, p.76.

³⁷⁶ Gordon T. Smith, *Transforming Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), p.124 'Though faith and repentance are distinct, they are inseparable'. See also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp.713-717 for a defence that repentance and faith are the expected Biblical response to the Gospel.

³⁷⁷ Tim Warner, 'Baptism and the Sinner's Prayer', (Pristine Restoration Society) <www.pfrs/baptism/sinner_prayer.pdf> [accessed 13.08.2011].

³⁷⁸ Barclay, *Turn to God*, pp.50-54.

³⁷⁹ France, 'Conversion in the Bible', p.305.

³⁸⁰ Stephen J. Wellum, 'Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants', in Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, Editors, *Believers Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), pp.97-161. pp. 92-96. See also: Dan Clark, *I'm a Christian, aren't I?* (Nottingham: IVP, 2010), p.94.

³⁸¹ See Chapter 2 pp.59-68 see also: John Stott and J. Alec Motyer, 'The Anglican Evangelical Doctrine of Infant Baptism', <<http://www.theologian.org.uk/gatissnet/stottmotyerpreface.html>> [accessed 4.2.2013].

life of an adult believer and therefore would agree with Gilbert that baptism should be viewed as subsequent to repentance and faith.³⁸²

On the other hand, Pawson, a Baptist minister, sees conversion as consisting of 'true repentance and genuine faith, expressed and effected in water baptism, with a conscious reception of the Holy Spirit'.³⁸³ He takes issue with The Sinner's Prayer because in his opinion it does not adequately express all four aspects of his view of conversion.³⁸⁴ He disagrees with a general confession of sin expressed in suggested prayers and says repentance must involve dealing with individual sins.³⁸⁵ This could leave the respondent doubting salvation each time they recalled an individual sin they have not confessed. For Pawson, expressions such as 'receiving Jesus' and 'opening the door' to Jesus, which are found in suggested prayers, are inadequate in describing faith.³⁸⁶ He also points out that Baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit are not usually mentioned in suggested prayers of response to the Gospel.³⁸⁷ While accepting that Pawson does justice to a biblical pattern I see a need to separate what are the essential responses necessary for salvation and what should follow as part of the initiation into the Christian community. However, for Pawson, what he calls his four 'spiritual doors' are all necessary.³⁸⁸ Having said this, Pawson would be happy with a suggested prayer if it covered everything he regards as part of conversion and that the prayer was only part of what was expected of

³⁸² Gilbert, *What is the Gospel*, p.33. For Baptist view of baptism see: Paul E. Engle (Editor), *Understanding four views on Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) pp.25-58. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer's Baptism* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006) A definitive textbook on the Baptist position of believer's baptism by Immersion.

³⁸³ David Pawson, *The Normal Christian Birth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), p.5. For biographical information on Pawson see <<http://davidpawson.org/about/>> and <<http://www.guildfordbaptist.org/>> [both accessed 4.1.2013]. He was minister of Guildford Baptist Church from 1968 to 1981 when he took up an itinerant Bible teaching ministry. Under his leadership the Church in Guildford grew to be one of the largest Baptist Churches in Britain.

³⁸⁴ Pawson, *Normal Christian Birth*, pp.250-254. Pawson takes a prayer he attributes to Billy Graham as his example of 'The Sinner's Prayer'. The prayer says: Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner, I believe you died for my sins. Right now, I turn from my sins and open the door of my heart and life. I receive you as my personal Lord and Saviour. Thank you now for saving me. Amen'.

³⁸⁵ Pawson, *Normal Christian Birth*, p.251.

³⁸⁶ Pawson, *Normal Christian Birth*, pp.251-252.

³⁸⁷ Pawson, *Normal Christian Birth*, pp.252-253.

³⁸⁸ Pawson, *Normal Christian Birth*, pp.251 and 11.

the respondent.³⁸⁹ Therefore, taking his view would conclude that just encouraging someone to say a suggested prayer could lead to a misconception of what is involved in conversion.

It has been seen then that the prayer alone is not an adequate response to the Gospel but this leaves the question as to whether prayer can or should form part of that response. Erkel protests that The Sinner's Prayer, as commonly used, suggests that one instance of prayer will usher in regeneration.³⁹⁰ However, coming to faith could be a long drawn out process of pleading with God. Nevertheless, prayer still plays a part in his concept of responding to the Gospel. In a similar vein, McLaren advocates that those seeking the Kingdom of God should pray the Lord's Prayer not as 'some sort of magical incantation, not as a mindless mantra', but meditatively focusing on the content.³⁹¹ He says this activity will 'create a pathway in the soul that leads us to God – and into God's kingdom'.³⁹² This seems to be preparing someone to respond to the Gospel rather than part of that response. While it is clear that just saying a suggested prayer is an inadequate response to the Gospel the place of prayer in that response is still an open question which will be carried over into my qualitative research.

2. The second false impression is that conversion is only about securing a place in heaven.

Bell objects to the use of a suggested prayer because it gives the impression that all one is trying to do is avoid going to hell after death.³⁹³ The view put forward is that as long as the person has, at some point in their life, sincerely said the suggested prayer God will allow them into heaven.

³⁸⁹ Pawson, *Normal Christian Birth*, p.253 where he says: 'So the Sinner's Prayer is good as far as it goes, but it does not go nearly far enough. It contains omissions and distortions. More carefully phrased, it might serve as the beginning of a response to the gospel; but it is dangerously misleading to regard it as a complete response, covering all that is necessary to become a Christian. It should only be used after a person has truly repented in thought, word and deed and before leading them on into water-baptism and Spirit-baptism.'

³⁹⁰ Darryl Erkel, 'Errors of the Invitation System: should we lead people to repeat a 'sinner's prayer'. <www.5solas.org/media.php?id=74> [accessed 7.11.2012].

³⁹¹ McLaren, *Secret Message*, p.217.

³⁹² McLaren, *Secret Message*, p.217. This view of the use of the Lord's Prayer would be supported by N. T. Wright see *Simply Christian*, p.137.

³⁹³ Bell, *Love Wins*, pp.1-5, We have already seen on page 2 that Bell is not totally against the saying of a suggested prayer.

Contrastingly Bell advocates that the Gospel should not focus on preparing people for life 'somewhere else' but on making a difference here and now.³⁹⁴ From a more robust academic position Wright's assessment of New Testament teaching is that the 'gospel is not how to escape the world'.³⁹⁵ His emphasis is on the transformation of the world gained by the work of Christ and how the individual can experience that transformation. He says that this, 'draws together what we traditionally called evangelism, bringing people to the point where they come to know God in Christ for themselves, with working for God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.'³⁹⁶ Consequently some explanation of the role of the Christian on earth would need to be included in order to avoid false impressions as to what is involved in conversion.

Contrastingly, Comfort speaks against an emphasis on 'God having a wonderful plan for your life' by people who avoid saying anything about hell and judgement.³⁹⁷ He advocates encouraging people to 'flee from the wrath to come'.³⁹⁸ Contrary to this, Wright states that the power of the Gospel is not in telling people that if they pray this prayer the threat of hell will be removed but in announcing that 'God is God, that Jesus is Lord, that the powers of evil are defeated, that God's new world has begun' and 'inviting people to join the party'.³⁹⁹ This message is coloured by Wright's views on God's continuing kingdom on a new earth and hell not being a place of eternal punishment for those who don't become Christians.⁴⁰⁰ Tice takes the opposite position in asserting that people must understand that the consequences of wrongdoing are judgement, facing God's wrath and ultimately hell, unless they have 'trusted in the rescue of the Lord Jesus.'⁴⁰¹ He says that Christians must have the courage of their convictions in warning people. However, even if Tice is right there is still a need to inform people that part of the commitment called for in the

³⁹⁴ Bell, *Love Wins*, pp.6-7.

³⁹⁵ 'Mere Mission: N. T. Wright talks about how to present the gospel in a postmodern world, Interviewed by Tim Stafford', *Christianity Today*, January 2007 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/january/22.38.html?start=4>> [accessed 5.1.2012].

³⁹⁶ 'Mere Mission', N. T. Wright Interviewed by Tim Stafford. See footnote 412.

³⁹⁷ Ray Comfort, *The Way of the Master* (Alachua: Bridge-Logos, 2006), pp.25-26.

³⁹⁸ Ray Comfort, *Hell's Best Kept Secret*, (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 2004), p.19.

³⁹⁹ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), pp.238-239.

⁴⁰⁰ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, pp.187-198 and 206-216.

⁴⁰¹ Rico Tice, 'Christianity Explored: Next Ten', *Evangelicals Now*, March 2012, p.24.

Gospel is to become a disciple of Jesus for the rest of their lives.⁴⁰² I would suggest that while this would affect the wording of a suggested prayer it would not render the use of such a prayer inappropriate.

3. The third false impression regarding conversion is that it is always a sudden event.

The use of a suggested prayer could lead to the misconception that conversion will always be experienced as a dateable event. While Warrington says that this is considered the norm for Pentecostals others would point to a diversity of conversion experience.⁴⁰³ During the last century thinking shifted from seeing Paul's sudden conversion as normative to seeing conversion as a process.⁴⁰⁴ Peace tells how his view of conversion changed from an experience marking the start of the Christian life which involved 'saying yes to Jesus by means of a simple prayer' to the discovery of a second New Testament paradigm of conversion involving coming to Jesus through a long-term process.⁴⁰⁵ He argues that Mark's Gospel describes 'the unfolding conversion of the twelve'.⁴⁰⁶ While this is seen as a slow process there are the same characteristics of 'insight, turning and transformation' found in Paul's rapid conversion.⁴⁰⁷ I would interject that part of the act of turning could involve a prayer which expresses the attitude of heart that according to Grudem constitutes true conversion.⁴⁰⁸ This would be supported by McKnight who, inspired by Rambo's sociological stages of conversion, constructed a six dimensional concept of the conversion process.⁴⁰⁹ He advocates that private prayer could be one of the ways of expressing the decision which he sees as part of his commitment dimension of conversion.⁴¹⁰ Thus, these proponents of conversion being viewed as a process would not rule out the use of a relevant

⁴⁰² Smith, *Beginning Well*, pp.111, 113. Alan P. Stanley, *Salvation is More Complicated than you Think* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007), pp.151-177.

⁴⁰³ Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), pp.35-36.

⁴⁰⁴ Stephen J. Chester, 'Paul: Archetypal Convert and Disputed Convert' in Lamb and Bryant, *Religious Conversion*, pp.123-149, p.143.

⁴⁰⁵ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, pp.1-4.

⁴⁰⁶ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, p.4.

⁴⁰⁷ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, pp.280-281.

⁴⁰⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.717.

⁴⁰⁹ Rambo, *Understanding religious conversion*, pp.16-18; McKnight, *Turning to Jesus*, pp.22-25, 49-51, 67-68.

⁴¹⁰ Scot McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002) pp.98-99.

suggested prayer. I would, however, suggest that the wording of that prayer would need to convey the on-going nature of conversion.

Finney's research is often cited as a reason for thinking of conversion as a process.⁴¹¹ He says, 'The gradual process is the way in which the majority of people discover God and the average time taken is about four years.'⁴¹² However, in my own research the norm for most adults becoming a Christian was seen as a sudden experience within a gradual process.⁴¹³ Warrington sees conversion as a watershed moment before which a person was an unbeliever and after which they became a believer; whereas my study would agree with Finney in presenting conversion as a diverse experience.⁴¹⁴ However, if, as suggested in the models of conversion set out by the Engel's scale, Gray's Matrix and Fowler's stages, there is a point within the conversion process, where a person moves from seeker to believer, then at that stage a relevant prayer could be appropriate.⁴¹⁵

Conclusion regarding conversion

The question still remains as to whether a suggested prayer could be provided in evangelistic literature without leading to a misconception as to what is involved in conversion. However, it has been demonstrated that there is the possibility that such a prayer could lead someone to think that all one had to do was to pray a simple prayer. I would suggest that this misconception could be eliminated by the careful wording of both the suggested prayer and the accompanying text. The prayer could be an expression of a person's commitment to repentance, faith and ongoing discipleship which could include baptism and surrender to Christ as Lord.

⁴¹¹ For example: Michael Green, *How can I lead a friend to Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995) p.viii. Revd. Dr Martyn Atkins, 'Three year conversion' Methodist Recorder, 27th October 2000.

⁴¹² John Finney, *Finding Faith Today* (Swindon: Bible Society, 1992), p.25.

⁴¹³ Bennett, *A study of how adults become Christians*, pp.28-32.

⁴¹⁴ Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology* p.37. Finney, *Finding Faith*, pp.23-25.

⁴¹⁵ James F. Engel & Wilber Norton, *What's Wrong with Harvest* (Zondervan, 1975), p.45. Frank Gray, *Radio Programming Roles: FEBC Perspectives* (Far East Broadcasting Company, 1996) <<http://thegraymatrix.info/docs/roles230.pdf>> [accessed 12.3.2012]. James W. Fowler, *Stages of faith* (Cambridge: Harper & Row, 1981), p.281. See also Steve Croft, *Growing new Christians* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993), pp.24-30.

The misconception that conversion is all about gaining a place in heaven could be eliminated by an explanation that the person was being called to a life of serving expressed in love for God and other people. Conversion must be presented as the beginning of a new life.⁴¹⁶ The question of representing conversion as a sudden experience is more problematic because I would suggest that there is often a sudden response within a gradual process. However, this could be solved by presenting conversion as diverse and not giving the impression that all must have the same identical experience.

This study of conversion does leave questions particularly regarding whether prayer does have a legitimate part in the response to the Gospel. Also highlighted is the fact that it is not just the suggested prayer which could lead to misconceptions about what is involved in conversion but the whole content of an evangelistic publication. These are issues which will be taken into the next two chapters dealing with my qualitative research.

Section C. Assurance of Salvation

Introduction regarding assurance

By assurance of salvation I mean knowing without doubt that one possesses salvation.⁴¹⁷ Hoskinson defines salvation as 'deliverance of guilty sinners from their sin and eternal punishment by means of faith in Christ.'⁴¹⁸ Some ask if it is possible to have such certainty about this salvation.⁴¹⁹ Whitney answers in the affirmative, stating that it is a 'God given awareness' which should be normative for every believer. If this is the case, why do some Christians lack this confidence? Masters' answer would be that just as faith

⁴¹⁶ France, 'Conversion in the Bible', pp.291-310 and p.304.

⁴¹⁷ J. I. Packer, 'Assurance', in I. H. Marshall; A. R. Millard; J. I. Packer and D. J. Wiseman [Editors], *New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996) pp.95-96 Packer gives two meanings of Assurance 1. 'Grounds for certainty' (a pledge, token or proof) and 2. 'The state of certainty'. See also: Matthew C. Hoskinson, *Assurance of salvation: Implications of a New Testament Theology of Hope* (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 2010), pp.4-5.

⁴¹⁸ Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, p.5.

⁴¹⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *How can I be sure I'm a Christian?* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 1994), p.12. See also: Reinhard Bonnke, *Assurance of salvation* (Frankfurt: Full Flame GmbH, 2001), pp.3-9.

needs to be exercised, so too 'assurance is both a gift and a duty' and thus needs to be appropriated by the believer through trusting in God's promises.⁴²⁰ This would indicate that an evangelistic publication would need to point to such promises to avoid a possible wrong assumption about assurance. Having said this, Bass warns that in the Bible there is a tension between verses that offer assurance and exhortations to be righteous.⁴²¹ There are too the many indications in the New Testament that not all who presume they possess salvation are approved by the Lord and we are encouraged to examine ourselves to see if we truly are in the faith.⁴²² This calls for very careful wording of advice regarding assurance given in evangelistic publications.

There is too a diversity of opinion among theologians as to the nature and means of assurance of salvation. Hoskinson identifies three contemporary views of assurance of salvation, which he calls: 'The Present Only View', 'The Time of Conversion Only View' and 'The Composite View'.⁴²³ 'The Present Only View' affirms present assurance of present salvation but rejects the possibility of present assurance of final salvation because genuine believers will forfeit their salvation if they apostatise.⁴²⁴ The means of assurance are seen as the promises of God and the post-conversion lifestyle of the believer. If a suggested prayer was used alongside this view it could lead to misconceptions if the accompanying material did not make clear the anticipation that genuine salvation required a change in ongoing lifestyle.

On the other hand, 'The Time of Conversion Only View' accepts that present assurance of final salvation is possible because those who apostatise are still ultimately saved.⁴²⁵ This view affirms only the promises of God as the bases for assurance and rejects the believer's post-conversion lifestyle as a means of assurance to the point of believing the convert will ultimately be saved

⁴²⁰ Peter Masters, *Deepening Faith, Dealing with Doubts, Coping with Trials, Getting Assurance* (London: Wakeman Trust, 2006), pp.100-101.

⁴²¹ Bass, *That you May Know*, p.2.

⁴²² Stanley, *Salvation*, pp.15-16; Michael Griffiths, *How Can I be Sure?* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1980), pp.9-12.

⁴²³ Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, pp.51 to 72. The three terms he uses to describe these views are original to him.

⁴²⁴ Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, pp.52-57.

⁴²⁵ Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, pp.57-63.

regardless of lifestyle.⁴²⁶ This view could be open to misleading assumptions through the use of a suggested prayer because the respondent could conclude that they have salvation because they said a prayer regardless of lack of any transformation. Hodges, a proponent of this view, counters this by asserting that the miracle of regeneration will affect a person's lifestyle but that they should not base assurance on this change.⁴²⁷

Hoskinson's 'Composite View', of which he is an advocate, combines elements of the other views. Thus, it agrees with 'The Time of Conversion Only View' about the possibility of present assurance of final salvation but also agrees with 'The Present Only View' that those who apostatise will forfeit their salvation because it regards those who fall away as pseudo-Christians.⁴²⁸ This view affirms the promises of God as the means of assurance but also accepts the believer's post-conversion lifestyle as a secondary and subordinate means of assurance.⁴²⁹ Hoskinson examines the three views in the light of his doctrinal study of New Testament hope and concludes that this is the most biblical view.⁴³⁰ Notwithstanding this, as with the 'The Present Only View', there is a need to consider whether the use of a suggested prayer in conjunction with this view could foster misleading assumptions about assurance depending on the assertions made in an evangelistic publication about the relationship between conversion and transformation.

What are the misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation?

It has been seen from the consideration of contemporary views of assurance of salvation, that regardless of the view put forward, there could be the possibility of misleading assumptions regarding the nature and means of

⁴²⁶ R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved Always Saved* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984), p.16. Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, pp.57-63.

⁴²⁷ Zane C Hodges, 'We believe in Assurance of salvation', *Journal of Free Grace Evangelical Society*, 1990 Volume 3:2 downloaded from <<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1990ii/Hodges.html>> [accessed 19.4.2012] Hodges was the main proponent of this view.

⁴²⁸ Hoskinson, *Assurance of salvation*, pp.63-72 and p.210.

⁴²⁹ Bass, *That You may Know*, pp.124,162-179; Hoskinson, *Assurance of Salvation*, pp.63-72.

⁴³⁰ Hoskinson, *Assurance of salvation*, pp.196-205.

assurance of salvation if a suggested prayer was adopted. My observations and reading raised concerns that adopting a suggested prayer could result in false assurance. For example people presuming they are truly Christians because of the assertions made in evangelistic literature when in fact they have not yet experienced true salvation. This section considers three possible assumptions regarding assurance of salvation which are numbered 4 to 6. That including a suggested prayer could result in these assumptions arises from the observations and reading of the researcher.

4. The first possible assumption regarding assurance of salvation is that if you pray the suggested prayer sincerely you have been saved.

As an illustration of this, Matt Slick, in his article 'What is the Gospel?', includes a suggested prayer.⁴³¹ Although he says this prayer is not a 'formula', the prayer is followed by the statement, 'If you just prayed this prayer with sincerity, Congratulations! Welcome to the family of God!'⁴³² This illustrates how the additional wording accompanying a suggested prayer can give the impression that all one needs to do to possess salvation is to say a simple prayer. Conversely, Harris warns that the use of such 'simplistic rituals and formulas for conversion can prevent the development of biblical assurance' and results in the unconverted gaining false assurance of salvation.⁴³³ O'Neal strongly advocates that a person who is depending on a prayer is unsaved to this day.⁴³⁴ He goes on to say that the person must not depend on anything they do but only on what Christ has done for them.⁴³⁵ This brings us to the question as to what evangelistic literature should suggest as the basis for assurance and whether O'Neal's answer is adequate.

Bass, in his doctoral work on the teaching of assurance in the first epistle of John, advocates that John teaches that the Christian's assurance of salvation

⁴³¹ Matt Slick, 'What is the Gospel?', <<http://www.carm.org/what-gospel>> [accessed 9.1.2012]. Matt Slick is president and founder of the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry. He holds a Master of Divinity from Westminster Theological Seminary.

⁴³² Slick, 'What is the Gospel?'

⁴³³ Harris, 'Understanding conversion', pp.497-498.

⁴³⁴ O'Neal, *The Sinner's Prayer*. p.16. See also Whitney, *How can I be sure I'm a Christian?*, pp15-16.

⁴³⁵ O'Neal, *The Sinner's Prayer*, p.16.

should be based first and foremost on the work of Christ as propitiator and advocate.⁴³⁶ He shifts the focus from human actions to the work of Christ in salvation. To stop here could give the impression that all that was required of the recipient was a mental assent of these truths and the saying of a prayer of response.⁴³⁷ However, Bass sees John as teaching that true Christians are members of a new covenant resulting in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which should be evidenced by transformation.⁴³⁸ He asserts that John encourages his readers to assess the genuineness of their salvation through his tests regarding righteousness, love and beliefs. Hodges disagrees and sees these as tests to help the believer to answer whether they are presently in fellowship with God rather than tests to gain assurance of salvation.⁴³⁹ This highlights a disagreement about the purpose of the epistle which Bass argues is that the readers may know they have eternal life.⁴⁴⁰ If the purpose of the letter is to help Christians discern whether they are in tune with God, then John's teaching in the epistle does not seem relevant to my negative concerns. However, because Bass sees the lifestyle of the believer as secondary evidence for salvation, he argues that John's teaching on salvation and assurance are diluted when people are asked to repeat a prayer of salvation without making sure they understand the Gospel, the cost of discipleship and the necessary commitment to obey Christ's commands to love fellow Christians and to persevere for the rest of their lives.⁴⁴¹ Consequently, following this more comprehensive view of John's teaching conveys that a suggested prayer could lead to misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation if there is inadequate teaching on the nature of discipleship.

This research has already indicated that in *Physician of Souls*, Masters advocates that true conversion will be accompanied by feelings; in fact, he

⁴³⁶ Bass, *That you May Know*, pp.55-97 particularly, pp.55 & 95.

⁴³⁷ Bass, *That you May Know*, p.182.

⁴³⁸ Bass, *That you May Know*, pp.119-120.

⁴³⁹ Hodges, 'We Believe in Assurance of salvation'.

⁴⁴⁰ Bass, *That you May Know*, pp.32-54, particularly p.50 where 1 John 5:13 is seen as stating the writer's overriding purpose. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life".

⁴⁴¹ Bass, *That you May Know*, pp.186-189.

defines assurance as 'a felt certainty of salvation'.⁴⁴² As a contrast, Bonnke warns against the mistake of relying on our feelings and says that 'Assurance is not dependent on your psyche' but on the Bible.⁴⁴³ He refers to 'lying feelings' which result in the believer feeling saved one day but not the next.⁴⁴⁴ Consequently, it is feasible that the praying of a suggested prayer could lead to a feel good factor which could be mistaken for assurance of salvation. Having said this, in a more recent work referring to assurance, Masters clarifies the nature of feelings and states that while all genuine believers will have 'feelings of happiness, gratitude and gladness', the presence of God is not to be perceived by 'physical or mystical sensations' but by faith.⁴⁴⁵ What he calls 'feelings' are more inward than such things as tingling of the hands or even a sense of peace.⁴⁴⁶ He argues that, 'there is no such thing as a direct touch of God upon the feelings, by-passing the agency of the mind.'⁴⁴⁷ Gumbel disagrees, saying that when people are filled with the Holy Spirit they can shake or find themselves breathing deeply or 'glowing all over' but he does not include such experiences as a basis for assurance advocating that this should be based on the word of God, the work of Christ and the transforming work of the Spirit.⁴⁴⁸ Consequently, the context and content of any suggested prayer would need to be worded carefully to avoid giving a wrong assumption of the relationship between feelings and assurance.

5. The second possible assumption is basing assurance of salvation on what we have done.

This research has indicated that repentance and faith are the essential responses to the Gospel but does our salvation depend on the quality of our actions? There has been a tendency in evangelistic literature to instruct someone to take an action and then to base assurance on having taken that

⁴⁴² Masters, *Physician of Souls*, pp.26-27. See this dissertation p.37.

⁴⁴³ Bonnke, *Assurance*, p.8.

⁴⁴⁴ Bonnke, *Assurance*, p.17.

⁴⁴⁵ Masters, *Deepening Faith*, p.126.

⁴⁴⁶ Masters, *Deepening Faith*, p.132.

⁴⁴⁷ Masters, *Deepening Faith*, p.126.

⁴⁴⁸ Gumbel, *Questions of Life*, pp.145-147 and 53-65.

action.⁴⁴⁹ So Stott says that Jesus is waiting to be invited into our lives and we can base our assurance on the promise that He will come in if invited.⁴⁵⁰ Conversely, Elliff asserts that assurance should be based on the effect of God's work in our lives evidenced by the 'fruits of salvation' and on the affirmation that God's own Spirit gives to the true convert.⁴⁵¹ This leads to the question of whether the Christian has assurance only because of the work of God within them, or even as a special gift subsequent to conversion.⁴⁵² On the other hand, Clark presents five essential elements of being a Christian and says that assurance will come only when all five are in place.⁴⁵³ The elements are: believing, belonging, behaving, baptism and being born again. For Clark the latter comes in response to repentance and faith.⁴⁵⁴ The fact that Clark talks of someone who is already a Christian being challenged to get baptised suggests that he does not believe all these elements are essential for salvation.⁴⁵⁵ He does seem to put forward that these elements are all subject to the human will and talks about 'allowing God to forgive us' suggesting that assurance is within our control.⁴⁵⁶ However, his suggested prayer for those who have elements missing includes 'please come into my life in a new and deeper way. By your Spirit, please transform me. I want to put the missing pieces in place, with your help', which suggests a dependency on God's work.⁴⁵⁷ Consequently, basing assurance solely on something we have done would be a misleading assumption because we must acknowledge the work of God for us and in us as a means for assurance of salvation.⁴⁵⁸

There are two views of the place of the human will in the process of salvation. Hulse talks of the view of the supremacy of the human will in

⁴⁴⁹ Warren, *Journey into Life*, pp.13-14. 'You have said this prayer and meant it. What you have said is a fact. You have asked Jesus Christ to come into your life and he has come. He now lives in your heart by his Holy Spirit. Don't rely on your feelings; you may not feel any different at the moment. Trust his sure promises.'

⁴⁵⁰ John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 2008 [New Edition]), p.165.

⁴⁵¹ Jim Elliff, 'Southern Baptists, an Unregenerate Denomination' (Revised 2010) <http://www.ccwtoday.org/article_view.asp?article_id=150> [accessed 7.2.2012].

⁴⁵² Whitney, *How can I be sure I'm a Christian?*, p.150.

⁴⁵³ Dan Clark, *I'm a Christian, aren't I?* (Nottingham: IVP, 2010), p.122.

⁴⁵⁴ Clark, *I'm a Christian*, p.106.

⁴⁵⁵ Clark, *I'm a Christian*, p.93.

⁴⁵⁶ Clark, *I'm a Christian*, p.35.

⁴⁵⁷ Clark, *I'm a Christian*, pp.131-132.

⁴⁵⁸ Bass, *That you May Know*, pp.55-97 and 110-119.

conversion permeating the Churches to the extent that 'the idea prevails that God is only allowed to do what we allow him to do'.⁴⁵⁹ Those who held this view of the human will would have no issue with the use of a suggested prayer because they would see people as in control of their own destiny. In contrast, Hulse believes that 'total depravity means a spiritual inability and spiritual enmity towards God'.⁴⁶⁰ However, he still believes that people are responsible for their own actions and advocates that they are able to confess their sins and pray for the 'will-power that they lack for repentance and that they must have for salvation'.⁴⁶¹ Consequently, his view of the role of the human will would not rule out the use of a suggested prayer but it would affect the content of that prayer. In similar vein, Payne advocates the need of regeneration by the Holy Spirit before a person prays for salvation.⁴⁶² This raises the issue of how we can tell whether regeneration has taken place and how we can be sure that a person's prayer is, as Payne advocates, the result of regeneration.⁴⁶³ Having said this it can be concluded that neither of these views relating to the place of the human will in salvation would eliminate the use of a suggested prayer at some point in the conversion process but they would impact on the content of that prayer.

6. The third possible assumption regarding assurance of salvation is that having said the suggested prayer a person cannot be lost.

Chalke speaks critically of people being led to believe that because they prayed a prayer they have instantaneously moved to God's side, are no longer guilty and that they can cling to the belief that 'once saved always saved' because their eternal destiny is guaranteed.⁴⁶⁴ Some would see the idea of 'once saved always saved' as a licence for licentious living.⁴⁶⁵ This could be

⁴⁵⁹ Erroll Hulse, *Who saves God or me?* (Darlington: EP Books, 2008), p.x.

⁴⁶⁰ Hulse, *Who saves*, p.30.

⁴⁶¹ Hulse, *Who saves*, p.30.

⁴⁶² Payne, *Evangelism*, p.127. See also Stephen M Ashby, A Reformed Arminian View in *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), p.158.

⁴⁶³ Payne, *Evangelism*, p.127.

⁴⁶⁴ Steve Chalke, 'The Redemption of the Cross', in Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker, Editors, *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) pp. 34-45), p.41. See also Paul Washer, *Declaring War on The Sinner's Prayer*, where Washer criticises the view that, regardless of how a person has lived or their involvement in a community of believers, if at a youth camp sixty years ago they prayed a simple prayer salvation is still secured.

⁴⁶⁵ For example: Dan Corner, 'Eternal Security or Conditional Security?' where he strongly advocates that teaching people that once they are saved they can not be lost leads to the

true if the idea was communicated that the only requirement to gain salvation was the saying of a suggested prayer. This does seem to imply changing this theological cliché to 'once *prayed* always saved' and this research has already indicated that prayer alone is not an adequate response to the Gospel.⁴⁶⁶ The part of the cliché which now has to be questioned is what is meant by the term 'saved'. Kendall gives the definition that to be saved means that a person is preserved from Hell and will go to Heaven when they die.⁴⁶⁷ This could lead to the misconception that having said a prayer a person is saved and they can base their assurance on this. Contrary to this, Chalke has a strong emphasis that conversion should lead to service here and now on earth.⁴⁶⁸ Therefore, I would question whether conversion should be viewed as more complicated and that assurance needs to be a developing aspect of the life of the Christian.

There is a continuous three-stage nature of salvation as past (Justification), present (Sanctification) and future (Glorification), indicating that the genuine Christian has been saved, is being saved and will be saved.⁴⁶⁹ Here can be seen not just the securing of a favourable eternal destiny but a present 'savedness' of which the person can be aware. This research has already engaged with different views as to whether someone who is saved can lose their salvation part way through this process. While some state that those who fall away were never genuine converts, others believe that even if a genuine convert falls away they will ultimately be saved.⁴⁷⁰ Kendall is in the latter group believing that salvation 'is an irrevocable gift from God'.⁴⁷¹ This

lowering of moral standards. <<http://www.evangelicaloutreach.org/eternal-security.htm>> [accessed 15.5.2012].

⁴⁶⁶ Stanley, *Salvation*, pp.15-16 where he says that 'once saved always saved' is correct but 'once believed always saved' is wrong. Harris, '*Understanding Conversion*', p.497. Harris says that prayer is not enough.

⁴⁶⁷ Kendall, *Once Saved Always Saved*, p.36.

⁴⁶⁸ Steve Chalke, *The redemption of the Cross*, p.41.

⁴⁶⁹ Dane Gardow, 'Three tenses of Salvation', <<http://www.standingforgod.com/2011/03/the-3-tenses-of-Salvation/>> [accessed 22.5.2012]. P. Simmons, *A Systematic Study of Bible Doctrine Chapter 28 The Three Tenses of Salvation* <<http://www.pbministries.org/Theology/Simmons/chapter28.htm>> [accessed 22.5.2012].

See Grudem, *Systematic Theology* pp.746 to 759. Philip Graham Ryken, *The Message of Salvation* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), pp.190-205 on Justification, pp. 237-251 on Sanctification and pp. 265-279 on Glorification.

⁴⁷⁰ Bass, *That you May Know*, pp.3-4. Failure to persevere means they were not genuine converts.

⁴⁷¹ Kendall, *Once Saved Always Saved*, p.36.

would seem to support the misleading assumption that having said the suggested prayer, articulating the acceptance of this gift, a person cannot be lost. However, the issue here is the danger of equating the acquisition of genuine salvation with just the praying of a suggested prayer and advocates of both positions would be against this.

Conclusion regarding assurance

This enquiry has shown that regardless of the writer's view of assurance of salvation there is a possibility of the use of a suggested prayer resulting in misleading assumptions about assurance, if information regarding the nature and means of assurance of salvation in the publication is inadequate. It is vital to guard against giving the impression that assurance can be based on the saying of a prayer because assurance should be based on the work of Christ and on changes in lifestyle and conviction brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is a pertinent issue regarding evangelistic literature because the information offered cannot be amended to match the experience and questioning of the respondent.

This study of assurance of salvation has led to a warning that the wording of evangelistic literature can result in misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation. For example, there is a danger of fostering misconceptions about the relationship between feelings and assurance. While acknowledging that conversion will be an emotional life-changing experience the respondent must be protected from the idea of basing assurance on feelings. Another issue which was considered is the place of the human will in response to the Gospel and the danger of asserting that assurance can be based solely on our own action. Notwithstanding this, it has been demonstrated that even if we hold to a view that asserts that people are in control of their own destiny, misconceptions about assurance can arise from giving the impression that the required response to the Gospel is restricted to a simple prayer and not to faith in Christ. These issues will be carried over into the examination of my qualitative research in the next two chapters.

Section D. Evangelism

Introduction regarding Evangelism

My observations and reading led to the concern that including a suggested prayer of response in evangelistic literature can be unhelpful because it can lead to less professional practices in evangelism. This section will seek to define what is meant by evangelism. It will then identify three possible less professional practices in evangelism which could be caused by the use of a suggested prayer and consider ways these could be avoided. Issues will be raised within this section which will facilitate my qualitative research

It is vital to define what is meant by evangelism for, as Abraham states, 'our conceptions of evangelism have a profound effect on our evangelistic practices and the way we evaluate them.'⁴⁷² Consequently, if a concept of evangelism was seen as encouraging people to say a suggested prayer, this could affect our methods of outreach. Although the word 'evangelism' is not found in the English Bible, a study of the New Testament Greek words reveals that εὐαγγελ means 'gospel' or 'good news' and εὐαγγελίζω meaning literally 'to carry good news'.⁴⁷³ This causes Coleman to say that 'evangelism announces that salvation has come'.⁴⁷⁴ If we stopped there, evangelism would be viewed as simply declaring the Gospel or 'one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread'.⁴⁷⁵ Having said this, other definitions of evangelism go beyond mere 'declaration' of the Gospel.

⁴⁷² William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p.164.

⁴⁷³ Payne, *Evangelism*, pp.6-7. see W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), pp.497-498. D.B. Knox, 'Evangelist' in *New Bible Dictionary Third Edition*, 1996, pp.347-348. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1968) p.184

⁴⁷⁴ Robert E. Coleman, 'Evangelism' pp. 341-344 in A. Scott Moreau [Editor], *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) p.341. The rest of Coleman's article amplifies evangelism as being an announcement of the good news. He does touch on the need for 'a caring presence in society or seeking to rectify injustice'. However, he separates declaring the Gospel in evangelism from the need for a social presence although he sees both as necessary.

⁴⁷⁵ The beggar quote originates with: D.T. Niles, *That They May Have Life* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1951), p.96. quoted in Michael Green, *Evangelism through the Local Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p.8. See too: Dever, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, p.55: 'We evangelize by preaching the Word and spreading the message' and pp.69-82 where he

For example, having examined New Testament word usage, Payne defines evangelism as ‘the communication of the good news of Jesus, with the desired outcome of seeing others follow Jesus and serve him as faithful disciples together in local Churches.’⁴⁷⁶ This carries the essence of the often-quoted Church of England definition that evangelism is ‘to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church.’⁴⁷⁷ We can see that if this was our definition of evangelism it would not suffice to lead someone in a prayer of response without the process of helping people to become mature disciples.⁴⁷⁸ Bosch’s long definition agrees that evangelism must bring people into a Christian community but also adds that people should be challenged to a ‘radical reorientation of their lives’ which includes being ‘enlisted into God’s service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth; and being committed to God’s purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ’.⁴⁷⁹ Applying this would mean that those involved in evangelism would need not only to explain this but also be living examples of what it means in practice. A suggested prayer could be used to express such a commitment but it would need to be more comprehensive than the prayers we have examined in previous chapters.

says that giving of a testimony or engaging in social action or political involvement is not evangelism.

⁴⁷⁶ Payne, *Evangelism*, p.7. See also Pete Gilbert, *Kiss and Tell: Evangelism as a Lifestyle* (Farnham: CWR, 2003), pp.25-66 on ‘What is Evangelism?’.

⁴⁷⁷ Towards the conversion of England (1945), being a report of a Commission on Evangelism appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York pursuant of a resolution of the Church Assembly passed at the summer session, 1943. See also Watson, *I believe in Evangelism*, p.9. See also a similar but fuller definition in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p.420. Which includes encouraging people responding to the Gospel in ‘embracing Christ as Saviour and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the Church.’

⁴⁷⁸ Philip Jinadu and David Lawrence, *Winning Ways* (London: Authentic, 2007), pp.118-140 particularly p.119.

⁴⁷⁹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991) p.420. Bosch’s full definition says: ‘...we may, then, summarize evangelism as that dimension and activity of the church’s mission which, by word and deed and in the light of particular conditions and a particular context, offers every person and community, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of their lives, a reorientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as Saviour and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the Church; being enlisted into his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth; and being committed to God’s purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ.’

What are less professional practices in evangelism?

By 'professional' I do not mean 'paid employment' but a standard of excellence.⁴⁸⁰ The British legal profession defines 'professional practices' as 'being competent and skilful and behaving in an ethical way'.⁴⁸¹ I considered what it would mean to apply the legal professions' standard of 'professional' to evangelism. There would be a need to be truthful and sure that the message of the Bible was being shared accurately.⁴⁸² While doing this there would need to be a maintenance of the high standards of compassion encouraged and demonstrated by Jesus.⁴⁸³ The code of conduct for evangelism of World Council of Churches includes the statement that: 'Christians are called to conduct themselves with integrity, charity, compassion and humility, and overcome all arrogance, condescension and disparagement'.⁴⁸⁴ The following section of this dissertation examines whether it is possible to maintain such a standard, while encouraging the use of a suggested prayer as part of the

⁴⁸⁰ Oxford Dictionaries definition of professional
<<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/professional?q=professional>> [accessed 26.10.2012] 'worthy of or appropriate to a professional person; competent, skilful, or assured'.

⁴⁸¹ What it means to be a professional? <<http://www.totalprofessions.com/more-about-professions/what-it-means-to-be-professional>> [accessed 30.5.2012]. Also, many professions have guidelines as to what would be considered professional. For example the legal profession in the United Kingdom. "Paragraph 301 of the Code of Conduct states that: A barrister...must not engage in any conduct whether in pursuit of his profession or otherwise which is; dishonest or otherwise discreditable to a barrister; prejudice to the administration of justice or likely to diminish public confidence in the legal profession or administration of justice or otherwise bring the legal profession into disrepute." Ros Carne (Editor), *Professional Ethics* (Oxford: University Press, 2010), p.1.

⁴⁸² Watson, *I believe in Evangelism*, pp.64-81 dealing with the use of the Bible and p.105 dealing with integrity.

Derek Tidball, *Using the Bible in Evangelism* (Swindon: Bible Society, 1993) Particularly pp.45-53. Chapter 5 'Can we still use the Bible?'. David Springs, *Feasting on God's Word* (Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2002) particularly pp.123-139 'Doing It' and pp.141-152 'Give it Away'. On Integrity see also: Roger Carswell, *And some Evangelists* (Fearn: Focus, 2000) particularly pp. 153-169 'The Temptations of the Evangelist' and pp.171-178 'Problems, Principles and Parables for the Evangelist'. John Peters, *The Evangelist's Notebook* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2002) pp.68-87 'Evangelists and Their Lifestyle'.

⁴⁸³ Jerram Barrs, *Learning Evangelism from Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2009), pp.12. 31-32, 47, 62, 75, 80, 98, 108-109, 123-124, 135, 155 and 225. Benavides, *Breaking the Evangelism Code*, pp.29-40.

⁴⁸⁴ 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct. Principle 3. World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Evangelical Alliance', 2011. Downloaded from:
<http://www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian_Witness_in_a_Multi-Religious_World.pdf> [accessed 23.10.2012] For background information see also
<<http://www.christianpost.com/news/first-global-code-of-conduct-on-evangelism-to-go-online-51601/>> [accessed 23.10.2012].

response to the Gospel.⁴⁸⁵ We will consider this by examining three possible ways (numbered 7 to 9) that the use of a suggested prayer could lead to less professional practices in evangelism. That including a suggested prayer could result in these less professional practices arises from the observations and reading of the researcher.

7. The first less professional practice in evangelism is thinking the aim of evangelism is getting people to say a prayer.

Koukl says that the representative of Christ must not have the goal of encouraging people to 'pray a prayer'.⁴⁸⁶ He highlights that 'when we emphasise deciding for Christ instead of living for Him we often get spiritual miscarriages instead of spiritual births'.⁴⁸⁷ This challenges a style of evangelism which concentrates on securing a momentary response rather than engaging with the long-term spiritual life of those being served.⁴⁸⁸ What then must Christians be aiming to do in evangelism? Commenting on the 'converts' of Acts 15:3, Downes says: 'The modern-day practice of leading a person in a prayer to receive Christ and assuming that was the end of the matter would have been alien in a time where people were baptised to symbolise a profession of faith.'⁴⁸⁹ He goes on to say that baptism marked the start of a new life and that this was 'lived out in the community they had been baptised into'.⁴⁹⁰ This suggests that the aim of evangelism should be to add and integrate new converts into the Church. While agreeing that the desired outcome of evangelism is new Church members I would suggest that having this as our initial aim further increases the pressure on Christians to look for a significant immediate response to their witness. Richardson's answer would be to suggest

⁴⁸⁵ For a positive answer see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.717. For a negative answer see O'Neal < <http://www.brothermike.com/sinner.html> > [accessed 7.1.2013] or Washer < http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dc5lY9YP_bE > [accessed 7.1.2013].

⁴⁸⁶ Koukl, 'Is the Sinner's Prayer Effective?'

⁴⁸⁷ Koukl, 'Is The Sinner's Prayer Effective?'

⁴⁸⁸ See Rob Frost, 'Evangelism beyond the fringes' in Steven Croft and Rob Frost and Mark Ireland and Anne Richards and Yvonne Richmond and Nick Spencer, *Evangelism in a spiritual age* (London: Church House, 2005), pp.98-125, where Frost describes how his methods of mission have changed from securing decisions to engaging with present day spiritual hunger in the British population.

⁴⁸⁹ Downes, 'What does it really mean to "become" a Christian?', p.53 [Greg Downes is Director of the Centre for Missional Leadership and Lecturer in Evangelism and Apologetics at the London School of Theology].

⁴⁹⁰ Downes, 'What does it really mean to "become" a Christian?', p.53.

that we should be bringing people into the community of the Church regardless of where they are on their faith journey.⁴⁹¹ He advocates that people come to faith in Christ mainly in the context of the Christian community, therefore he sees the aim of evangelism as helping people to belong to the community before they believe.⁴⁹² This would not eliminate the use of a suggested prayer at some point in the process but it would shift the emphasis of evangelism from encouraging a total stranger to pray a suggested prayer, to cultivating an ongoing relationship between them and the Christian community. This suggests the aim of evangelism should be more about building relationships and less about encouraging people to pray a suggested prayer of response.⁴⁹³

While building trusting relationships with people is part of evangelism there is also the need to communicate something of the Christian message through our actions and words.⁴⁹⁴ Henderson says that because modern-day evangelism has reduced conversion to a transaction, the 'mystery and wonder' of it has been removed.⁴⁹⁵ This calls for a restoration of passion in the lives of Christians resulting in witnessing being an overflow of what God is doing in their lives rather than just an act of duty.⁴⁹⁶ McLaren amplifies this in saying that the loss of wonder is due to the use of 'canned formulas' and states that in our communication we must go beyond logic and arguments to our 'own humbled sense of wonder, passion and love'.⁴⁹⁷ Rather than aiming to get someone to repeat a suggested prayer, Christians involved in evangelism should be so communicating the Christian message that others may want to know the reason for their hope

⁴⁹¹ Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism, inviting friends on a spiritual journey* (Bletchley: Scripture Union, 2006), p.27.

⁴⁹² Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, pp.51-54.

⁴⁹³ Chris Duffett, *Smack heads and fat cats: being the Gospel to all* (Malton: Gilead Books, 2009), pp.144 to 185 on loving people particularly pp. 168-171 on 'A new approach: from us and them' to 'us'.

⁴⁹⁴ Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), pp.219-220.

⁴⁹⁵ Jim Henderson, *Evangelism without additives* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2007), pp.131-139.

⁴⁹⁶ Bill Hybels, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Amersham-on-the-hill: Scripture Press, 1994). Particularly section 2, 'The Prerequisite of High Potency', where Hybels expands on the need for authenticity, compassion and self sacrifice in the life of the Christian. See Duffett, *Smack Heads and Fat Cats*, pp.77-82 where Chris talks about the need to get the 'zing' [genuine passion] back into our lives in order to become useful witnesses to people around us.

⁴⁹⁷ McLaren, *More ready than you realise*, p.154.

Henderson remembers the exact date, place and time when he prayed a suggested prayer to accept Jesus as his personal Lord and Saviour.⁴⁹⁸ A specific point for conversion worked for him but he does not talk about that now because culture has changed and we need to see conversion as a process.⁴⁹⁹ He warns against the danger of sharing a 'four-point contract' which worked in the past but is not seen as relevant by today's spiritual seekers.⁵⁰⁰ Therefore, instead of aiming to arrive at the point where someone can be encouraged to say a suggested prayer, Christians must aim at discovering where people are in their thinking and experience and using the opportunity to share with them an appropriate aspect of the Christian message.⁵⁰¹

8. The second less professional practice in evangelism is manipulating people into making a decision.

Manipulation can happen in a very pressurised way of almost making people say a prayer 'parrot fashion' or in a very gentle way that suggests 'all you need to do is pray this prayer and everything will be fine'.⁵⁰² Part of the resolution supporting the use of The Sinner's Prayer passed by the United States Southern Baptist Convention in June 2012 states that it should 'never be manipulatively employed or utilized apart from the articulation of the Gospel.'⁵⁰³ A dictionary definition of 'manipulate' is 'to control or influence somebody, often in a dishonest way so that they do not realize it' which sounds the opposite to behaviour expected of a Christian.⁵⁰⁴ Maybe those who manipulate are equally unaware of the dishonest nature of their actions. Currin asserts that relationships with non-Christians should never be manipulative because this

⁴⁹⁸ Henderson, *Evangelism without additives*, pp.131-139.

⁴⁹⁹ Henderson, *Evangelism without additives*, pp.138-139.

⁵⁰⁰ Henderson, *Evangelism without additives*, p.139.

⁵⁰¹ Dick Innes, *I Hate Witnessing* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1985), pp.167 to 183 emphasis on meeting people at their point of need. Ronald Johnson, *How will they Hear if we don't Listen?* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman,1994), p.16.

⁵⁰² For the forceful approach see: Dr Joe Mizzi, *The Sinner's Prayer* <<http://justforcatholics.org/a26.htm>> [accessed 3.1.2011]. For the more gentle approach see: Bill Bright, *Witnessing Without Fear* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993) pp.130-131. Also Bill Bright, *Come Help Change the World* (San Bernardino: Here's Life, 1985), pp.26-28 and Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), pp.58-59.

⁵⁰³ See Appendix 3 p.219.

<<http://sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1221>> [accessed 2.7.2012].

⁵⁰⁴ Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

<<http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/manipulate>> [accessed 23.10.2012].

causes people to realise when love is not genuine.⁵⁰⁵ Applying the section of the Southern Baptist Convention resolution quoted above would also involve asking whether the Christian message has been explained adequately and understood before encouraging a response and this is a question that must be asked of literature which includes a suggested prayer.

Metzger exhorts Christians involved in evangelism to trust the Holy Spirit to help a person to respond and thus objects to the use of any 'physical action including the repeating of a prayer' and warns against salesmanship tactics which put people under psychological pressure.⁵⁰⁶ To combat the danger of such manipulation, Richardson calls for a rethinking of the practice of evangelism from Christians seeing themselves as 'travelling sales-people' aiming to close a deal, to travelling with people as guides on a spiritual journey.⁵⁰⁷ Nevertheless, I would suggest that at some point in the journey there must be the response of faith and repentance and we need to consider whether this could include the use of a suggested prayer of response.⁵⁰⁸ We must bear in mind that at every stage there is the danger of manipulating people into making a decision by saying a suggested prayer. The writers of *Christianity Explored*, which is a seven-week course for non-Christians, exhort Christians to share that Jesus Christ is Lord 'without deception or emotional manipulation while remaining faithful to the word of God'.⁵⁰⁹ For this to be effective those involved would need to understand what was considered to be manipulation because without such help they may be guilty of being manipulative in ignorance. If they did understand the nature of manipulation then such guidance would safeguard against a suggested prayer being used in a manipulative way.

⁵⁰⁵ Jim Currin, *Sharing Faith the Jesus Way* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2011), p.78.

⁵⁰⁶ Metzger, *Tell the Truth*, p.75-76. Ray Comfort, *How to Live Forever Without Being Religious*, (Orland: Bridge-Logos, 2006), p.22. Comfort also states that 'leading a person in a suggested prayer may be encroaching on the work of the Holy Spirit'.

⁵⁰⁷ Richardson, *Evangelism without additives*, pp.15, 19 and 67-73.

⁵⁰⁸ Kevin Deyoung and Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), pp.135-136.

⁵⁰⁹ Rico Tice, Barry Cooper and Craig Dyer, *Christianity Explored, Leaders Guide* (New Malden: The Good Book Company, 2011), pp.31-34.

Thiessen's book on the ethics of evangelism, based on his doctoral studies, includes guidelines of how to practice evangelism in an ethical way.⁵¹⁰ He suggests that ethical evangelism should involve non-coercive persuasion.⁵¹¹ He says that the tendency in recent ethical theory is to focus on character asserting that 'ethical persons follow ethical principles'.⁵¹² On the contrary I would suggest it could be possible for Christians with a high ethical standard to misuse a suggested prayer because they sincerely want to see someone respond in the way their tradition dictates. This could stem more from their lack of understanding about salvation and evangelism than a tendency to be manipulative. However, their methods could result in coercion and instilling fear regarding what happens after death.⁵¹³ Thiessen would answer that ethical evangelism avoids 'excessive psychological manipulation' and preserves the dignity of the individual by allowing them to make an informed decision based on the communication of truthful information.⁵¹⁴ He warns against making false promises which we have seen is a danger when it comes to the statements in evangelistic literature regarding the implications of praying a suggested prayer.⁵¹⁵ Thiessen states that the primary motivations for evangelism should be love for people and obeying God.⁵¹⁶ In responding to Thiessen I see a need to encourage Christians to keep a balance between love of people and obeying God, because ironically well-meaning Christians may make obeying God by evangelising an excuse for disregarding the rights of the individual. Porter suggests Thiessen would have produced a stronger book if he had linked his arguments with scriptural standards of evangelism.⁵¹⁷ This is evidenced by similar high ethical standards being suggested by writers who exhort us to

⁵¹⁰ Elmer Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011). Thiessen regards the terms 'evangelism' and 'proselytizing' as synonymous and they refer to 'any activity in which a person or organisation is trying to convert another person'. See pp 1-17 particularly p.10. My references to this work sometimes substitute the words 'evangelism' or 'evangelise' where Thiessen uses the word 'proselytizing'.

⁵¹¹ Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, pp.159-160.

⁵¹² Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, p.160.

⁵¹³ For example Ray Comfort, *The Way of the Master* (Alachua: Bridge-Logos, 2006) with his emphasis on judgement and hell. See particularly pp.26-27; 69-70; 87-88 and 187-197.

⁵¹⁴ Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, pp.167, 169-170.

⁵¹⁵ Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, p.162. See pages 8, 34 and 86 of this dissertation.

⁵¹⁶ Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, pp.200-201.

⁵¹⁷ Ray Porter, 'Sensitive Alarm Sounding', in *Evangelicals Now* July 2012.

follow the example of Jesus in his evangelistic dealing with people.⁵¹⁸ For example, Jesus constantly encouraged people to follow him but never in an uncaring way which deprived the individual of the dignity of choice.⁵¹⁹

9. The third less professional practice in evangelism is counting decisions not disciples.

Green states that ‘the practice of calling for decisions, rejoicing to count them and then going away and leaving them untended is one of the most scandalous aspects of modern evangelism.’⁵²⁰ Such evangelism concentrates on ‘closing the deal’ by getting the ‘customer’ to pray a ‘brief prayer of commitment’.⁵²¹ The motivation here is often being able to facilitate a good report to one’s organisation or supporters because of the pressure to be seen to be successful in winning others for Christ.⁵²² Chris Wright calls us back from the reporting of questionable statistics and trying to build on what are dishonest foundations to integrity.⁵²³ Therefore, we must resist the temptation to report those who said the suggested prayer rather than those who are seen to be in the process of becoming authentic followers of Jesus. As Pippert warns, ‘our emphasis must not be on numbers or techniques but on authenticity, credibility and spiritual power’.⁵²⁴ There is a need for a change of mindset from counting decisions to being committed to aiding people in their journey of following Jesus.⁵²⁵

⁵¹⁸ Barrs, *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*, pp.17-18; 29-32; 46-51; 60-66; 76-80; 94-99; 110-115; 123-127; 139-146; 155-160; 172-177; 185-189; 199-203; 213-216; 226-231; 243-248.

Each chapter deals with an incident from the Gospels followed by ‘Lessons for Evangelism’ from the example of Jesus. See also: Benavides, *Breaking the Evangelism Code*. Jim Currin, *The 360 Gospel of Jesus* (Cambridge: Grove books, 2011).

⁵¹⁹ Currin, *Sharing Faith the Jesus Way*, pp.52-65.

⁵²⁰ Michael Green, *How can I lead a friend to Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p.38.

⁵²¹ Peace, *Conversion*, p.345.

⁵²² Michael L. Simpson, *Permission Evangelism* (Colorado Springs: NexGen, 2003), pp.151-164; particularly p.155. Roger Carswell, *And Some Evangelists* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000), pp.161-164.

⁵²³ Chris Wright, ‘Calling the Church Back to Humility, Integrity, Simplicity’ in J.E.M. Cameron (Editor), *The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization: Christ Our Reconciler* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2012), pp.152-153.

⁵²⁴ Rebecca Manley Pippert, ‘Sharing the Irresistible True Christ’ in J.E.M. Cameron [Editor], *The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization: Christ Our Reconciler* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2012), p.46.

⁵²⁵ McLaren, *More Ready Than you Realise*, pp.105-123. Carl Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus: the art of not-evangelism* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2011), pp.63-76. Robin Gamble, *Jesus the Evangelist* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2009), pp.204-233. Steve Hollinghurst, *Mission Shaped Evangelism* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), pp.245-256.

In line with this, Booker and Ireland define evangelism as ‘the process by which people become disciples of Jesus Christ’.⁵²⁶ Hollinghurst takes this even further by asserting that ‘evangelism should be understood as discipling not-yet Christians’.⁵²⁷ If evangelism is seen as leading to or incorporating discipling there would be no room for counting decisions and abandoning those who decide. McLaren would prefer to help people be disciples regardless of where they are in the conversion process.⁵²⁸ Richardson agrees and says that we should not talk about who is ‘in’ or ‘out’ but ask in which direction people are going.⁵²⁹ While agreeing with the need to make evangelism more about discipling along the way there will be moments of decision and it is at these times that a suggested prayer could still be of help to people on their journey.

However, Wright, a leading British theologian, speaks against evangelism which focuses on encouraging people to pray a particular prayer which promises heaven with nothing more to do on earth.⁵³⁰ Rather he believes we should share about Jesus’ lordship and the new creation gained by his death and resurrection, which means that to confess him as Lord is to be surrendered to painful reshaping leading ‘to genuine human life in the present and complete, glorious, resurrected human life in the future’.⁵³¹ Here is an antidote to considering success in terms of how many people say they will start the journey. There is a need to see results in terms of ‘obedience to Christ, incorporation into His Church and responsible service in the world.’⁵³² For this to be the case evangelism needs to be a part of what the Church is doing to live out the call to change the world through living the standards of God’s kingdom while continuing to submit to the ‘painful reshaping’ of their lives.⁵³³

⁵²⁶ Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, *Evangelism - which way now?* (London: Church House Publishing, 2003), p.2. See also Deyoung and Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church*, pp.43-48 and 62.

⁵²⁷ Steve Hollinghurst, *Mission Shaped Evangelism* (London: Canterbury Press, 2010), p.168.

⁵²⁸ Henderson, *Evangelism without additives*, p.137. Transcript of interview with Brian McLaren.

⁵²⁹ Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*, pp.141-142 and 161. see also McLaren, *More Ready than you Realize*, pp.139-148. Carl Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus: the art of not-evangelism* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2011), pp.63-76 ‘In or Out’.

⁵³⁰ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p.241.

⁵³¹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p.241-242.

⁵³² The Lausanne Covenant <<http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html>> [accessed 25.10.2012].

⁵³³ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p.241, as quoted in my previous sentence.

Conclusion regarding evangelism

This section has demonstrated that it is possible that the use of a suggested prayer could result in less professional practices in evangelism. This depends partly on our concept of evangelism and what we are aiming to achieve as we evangelise. The aim of evangelism was seen not as encouraging people to say a prayer but more about cultivating an ongoing relationship and drawing people into the Christian community regardless of where they are on their faith journey. The Gospel still needs to be communicated but this needs to be undertaken out of a passion that conveys something of the wonder of the Christian message. However, it is still possible that a suggested prayer could be appropriate at some point in their spiritual journey.

This section has encouraged the rethinking of the way Christians do evangelism by seeing themselves more as guides travelling with people on a spiritual journey. While they interact with people in genuine relationships Christians must maintain ethical standards which guard against manipulating people into praying a suggested prayer and protect the dignity of the individual and their right to make unpressurised informed choices. Imitating the way Jesus dealt with people could be the way of achieving this.

One of the dangers of the use of a suggested prayer is the temptation to count decisions instead of focusing on developing disciples. The misuse of a suggested prayer in this way can be eradicated if evangelism is part of the life of a local Church where the question is not who is 'in or out' but rather which direction people are going. The use of a suggested prayer may well be part of a response to the Gospel but it is not a prerequisite to belonging to the Christian community. Such warnings have highlighted the possibility that the use of a suggested prayer could lead to less professional practices in evangelism. Issues raised in this section will be carried over into my qualitative research.

Concluding Theological Reflection

During my theological enquiry the debate between Lordship and Free Grace views regarding salvation was encountered but has not been discussed so far within this chapter.⁵³⁴ Those who hold to a free grace position believe that: 'The sole condition for receiving everlasting life is faith alone. No act of obedience, preceding or following faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, such as commitment to obey, sorrow for sin, turning from one's sin, baptism or submission to the Lordship of Christ, may be added to, or considered part of, faith as a condition for receiving everlasting life. This saving transaction between God and the sinner is simply the giving and receiving of a free gift'.⁵³⁵ In response to this those who hold the lordship view argue that receiving Christ involves repentance, which they see as part of faith, and a submissive commitment to obey Christ as Lord.⁵³⁶ They would also maintain that progressive sanctification and perseverance must follow conversion.⁵³⁷ This section will consider some of the opposing opinions of these two views and how they may impact on the adoption and content of suggested prayers of response.

Some proponents of a lordship view of salvation are against the use of suggested prayers of response because they see them as representing the easy believism they associate with the free grace position.⁵³⁸ For example

⁵³⁴ Some see this as purely a debate between Calvinists and Arminians. Anthony B. Badger, *Confronting Calvinism: A Free Grace Refutation and Biblical Resolution of Radical Reformed Soteriology* (Marston Gate: Amazon, 2013). Michael S. Horton [Editor], *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipe, 1991). Lou Martuneac, *In Defense of the Gospel: Biblical Answers to Lordship Salvation* (Maitland, Florida: Xulon Press, 2010). This dissertation looks at the debate as a separate discussion. Calvinism and Arminianism are considered on pp. 59-64

⁵³⁵ An abridged version of part of the Salvation section of the Affirmations of Belief of the Grace Evangelical Society. <<http://www.faithalone.org/about/beliefs.html>> [accessed 20.11.2013].

⁵³⁶ John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003) pp.6-14. Since 1969 John MacArthur has been pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California, USA. He is a prolific author and the main opponent of the free grace view.

<<http://johnmacarthur.org/>> [accessed 22.11.2013]. Paul Washer, 'A Biblical Alternative To The Sinner's Prayer by Paul Washer'

www.sermonindex.net/modules/myvideo/photo.php?lid=2443 [accessed 22.11.2013]. Alan P. Stanley, *Salvation is More Complicated Than you Think* (London: Paternoster, 2007), p.18.

⁵³⁷ John F MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp.27-28. Stanley, *Salvation is More Complicated*, pp.151-177.

⁵³⁸ MacArthur, *Hard to Believe*, pp.12-13 'Listening to a seeker-sensitive evangelical preacher today, we're likely to think that it is easy to be a Christian. Just say these little words, pray this little prayer, and poof! You're in the club.' p.12. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, pp.27-28. See also Paul Washer, 'A Biblical Alternative To The Sinner's Prayer by Paul

MacArthur, who takes a lordship position, teaches that ‘salvation isn’t gained by reciting mere words. Saving faith transforms the heart, and that in turn transforms behavior. Faith’s fruit is seen in actions, not intentions... The life we live, not the words we speak, reveals whether our faith is authentic’.⁵³⁹ Whereas Hodges, for many years the main advocate of the free grace position, defines calling on the Lord as appealing to him rather than submitting to him.⁵⁴⁰ On the other hand Greear is against the idea that someone can be saved regardless of their lifestyle.⁵⁴¹ He says that ‘salvation is not a prayer you pray in a one-time ceremony’ but ‘a posture of repentance and faith’ that begins at a ‘certain point and is maintained for the rest of our lives’.⁵⁴² This thinking results in some of those of a lordship position rejecting suggested prayers while those of a free grace position would see them as articulating an acceptance of the gift of salvation.⁵⁴³

Hodges takes issue with how much someone has to know and accept in order to make an effective response to the Gospel.⁵⁴⁴ He states that ‘people are not saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross’ but by believing Jesus is the one who guarantees our eternal destiny’.⁵⁴⁵ Hodges accuses those who teach lordship salvation of adding to the Gospel because ‘the disciples of Jesus were saved without knowledge of the death and resurrection of their Master.’⁵⁴⁶

Washer’ <www.sermonindex.net/modules/myvideo/photo.php?lid=2443> [accessed 22.11.2013].

⁵³⁸ John MacArthur, *The Gospel; According to the Apostles* (Nashville: Nelson, 2000), pp.176-185.

⁵³⁹ John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), p.93.

⁵⁴⁰ Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969). Hodges was professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary. For nearly 50 years he was the pastor of Victor Street Bible Chapel in Dallas. He was a founding member of the Grace Evangelical Society. Since the 1980s his books and articles have made a major contribution to the debate between Lordship Salvation and Free Grace. He died in 2008.

<<http://recollections.liblog.wheaton.edu/2010/03/21/zane-c-hodges/>> [accessed: 21.11.2013].

⁵⁴¹ J. D. Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart* (Nashville: B and H Publishing, 2013), pp.1-12.

⁵⁴² Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart*, p.5.

⁵⁴³ David Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology* (Xulon Press, 2010), pp.172-173.

⁵⁴⁴ Zane C. Hodges ‘How to Lead People to Christ: Part 1. The Content of Our Message’ *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. Autumn 2000 Vol 13.25.

<<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2000ii/Hodges.htm>> [accessed 21.11.2013].

⁵⁴⁵ Zane C. Hodges ‘How to Lead People to Christ: Part 2. Our invitation to Respond’ *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. Spring 2001 Vol 14.26.

<<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2000ii/Hodges.htm>> [accessed 21.13.2013]

Zane C. Hodges ‘How to Lead People to Christ: Part 1. The Content of Our Message’.

⁵⁴⁶ Zane C. Hodges ‘How to Lead People to Christ: Part 1. The Content of Our Message’.

This has led to the accusation that Hodges taught a 'crossless' Gospel.⁵⁴⁷ However, Hixson makes it very clear that this is not a view held by all free grace theologians.⁵⁴⁸ He sees 'an understanding that Jesus is the Son of God who died and rose again' as non-negotiable components of the Gospel.⁵⁴⁹ MacArthur sees the cross not only as central to the Gospel but also as an indication of the life of sacrificial self denial which constitutes the Gospel call to follow Jesus.⁵⁵⁰ From this it can be seen that whereas those of a free grace position would accept a simple suggested prayer those of a lordship position would demand something more robust which spoke of the ongoing effect of committing one's life to Christ.⁵⁵¹

Another area of this debate which impacts on the content of any suggested prayer of response is whether that prayer should express sorrow for sin and a commitment to turn from wrong and live a life which is pleasing to God. For advocates of free grace theology repentance is not a necessary prerequisite to salvation.⁵⁵² Therefore any prayer they adopted might not mention a commitment to a change of lifestyle. Contrary to this MacArthur sees repentance and 'utter surrender to Christ' as prerequisites to salvation.⁵⁵³ There is a fine line between expecting converts to live a transformed lifestyle and

⁵⁴⁷ Thomas L. Stegall, *The Gospel of the Christ, a Biblical Response to the Crossless Gospel Regarding the Contents of Saving Faith* (Milwaukee: Grace Gospel Press, 2009), p.32.

⁵⁴⁸ J.B. Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong* (USA: Xulon Press, 2008), pp.152-155.

⁵⁴⁹ Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong*, pp. 85-86.

⁵⁵⁰ MacArthur, *Hard to Believe*, pp.8-18.

⁵⁵¹ For example the prayer in the Four Spiritual Laws says 'Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.'

<<http://www.campuscrusade.com/fourlawseng.htm>> [accessed 22.11.2013]. Hixson sees Bill Bright [author of the Four Spiritual Laws] as advocating a Lordship salvation position because of the diagrams he uses depicting becoming a Christian as putting Christ on the throne of one's life. Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong*, pp.306-308. D. James Kennedy is also criticised by Hixson as a Lordship Salvationist because the prayer in his booklet 'How to Know for Sure You are Going to Heaven' says; 'Lord Jesus, come into my life, take control of my life'. Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong*, pp.309-310.

⁵⁵² Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, pp.145-146). Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), pp.372-387. [Google Books] <<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=b-JfSYC8HSMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=lewis+sperry+chafer&hl=en&sa=X&ei=WHqPUqKUGtOQhQejmIDYCQ&ved=0CEgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=repentance&f=false>> [accessed 22.11.2013]. For example: 'The New Testament does not impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation.' p.376. According to Grudem this view originated with Chafer, See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.714. footnote 5. This chapter has already stated that this is Hixson's view, p.73.

⁵⁵³ MacArthur, *Hard to Believe*, pp.86-87.

giving the impression that holy living is a prerequisite for salvation.⁵⁵⁴ This calls for very careful wording of any suggested prayer so that the reader does not get a wrong impression regarding the author's intention.

There is too a difference in what is accepted as a definition of repentance with the free grace group seeing it as nothing more than a 'change of mind'.⁵⁵⁵ Whereas those holding to a Lordship view would see repentance as 'turning away from sin, hating it, and resolving by God's strength to forsake it, even as we turn to him in faith'.⁵⁵⁶ According to Stewart such teaching is a corruption of the meaning of the word repentance and results in self righteousness.⁵⁵⁷ He argues that a gospel presentation that requires repentance as well as faith is really preaching salvation by works.⁵⁵⁸ To which Anderson would answer that repentance is 'an internal resolve to turn from one's sins'.⁵⁵⁹ Grudem says that 'scripture puts repentance and faith together as difference aspects of the one act of coming to Christ for salvation.'⁵⁶⁰ The content of any suggested prayer would be affected by which side of this argument the author stood. The free grace group might be happy with a prayer that expresses nothing more than a decision to accept Jesus.⁵⁶¹ While those of a lordship position would expect any such prayer to be an act of confession and a statement of resolve to turn from all known sin as part of an ongoing commitment to follow Christ.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁴ Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong*, pp. 301-330. Kim Riddlebarger, 'What is faith' in Horton, *Christ the Lord*, pp. 81-105.

⁵⁵⁵ Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology*, p.138.

⁵⁵⁶ Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), p.99.

⁵⁵⁷ David J Stewart, *Don't mess with the Gospel* <http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Basics/dont_mess_with_gospel.htm> [accessed 22.11.213]. Stewart has been one of the most prolific internet campaigners against Lordship Salvation.

⁵⁵⁸ David J Stewart, The Curse of Lordship Salvation. <<http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/False%20Doctrines/Lordship%20Salvation/lordship.htm>> [accessed 22.11.213]. For a more robust argument see: Hixson, *Getting the Gospel Wrong*, pp.301-320. He refers to MacArthur on pp.304-36.

⁵⁵⁹ David Anderson, *Free Grace Soteriology* (Xulon Press: 2010), p.139.

⁵⁶⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.713.

⁵⁶¹ Martuneac, *In Defense of the Gospel*, pp.72-75.

⁵⁶² Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart*, pp.53-73. 'Repentance is not simply praying a prayer that acknowledges our sinfulness and asks for forgiveness... it is a motion of the heart in which we abandon our posture of rebellion and adopt one of submission toward Christ.' p.57.

Conclusion to Chapter 4

This chapter has engaged with contemporary theological literature, and material from the internet, to evaluate the issues raised by the four statements of my hypothesis regarding the possible relevance of including a suggested prayer of response in evangelistic literature. There is support within the literature for the positive statement in the hypothesis that including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature might help some people express their response to the Christian Gospel.

Whether the use of a suggested prayer can lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion was considered by examining three possible false impressions. Saying a prayer was seen as an inadequate response to the Gospel which should involve faith and repentance. No evidence was found that a suggested prayer has replaced baptism as a mark of initiation into the Christian Church. It was seen that conversion is not just about securing a place in heaven but that it also related to living a transformed life of usefulness and service to God here on earth, therefore it was wrong to promise people heaven on the strength of praying a suggested prayer. Conversion is not always a sudden experience as could be suggested by the use of a prayer of response and the most common experience would be a process which could include a sudden experience. While agreeing that the use of a suggested prayer could lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, it was also seen that a suggested prayer could prove helpful at some point within the conversion process.

Three possible misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation were considered to evaluate whether these could be caused by the use of a suggested prayer. The bases for assurance of salvation were seen to be the work of Christ and the evidence of God's life-transforming work in the believer. Therefore, assurance should not be based on the actions of the respondent, including having said a suggested prayer. Different views of eternal security were examined and it was found that no view supported basing eternal security on just the praying of a suggested prayer.

Whether using a suggested prayer can lead to less professional practices in evangelism was considered by examining three possible unprofessional practices. The aim of evangelism was seen as incorporating people into the Christian community and this could not be accomplished solely by encouraging the use of a suggested prayer. The ethics of evangelism were considered and it was seen that coercing people to pray a prayer would deprive them of their right to make unpressurised informed choices. The use of a suggested prayer was also seen to lead to counting decisions when we should be focusing on disciplining those who respond.

My scholarly investigation has supported the positive intent that adopting suggested prayers of response in evangelistic literature might help some people express their response to the Christian Gospel. However, the literature consulted demonstrates that it can be unhelpful because it can lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation, and less professional practices in evangelism.

The issues raised in this chapter have been used to facilitate a questionnaire which has formed the basis of interviews with writers of evangelistic literature which will be examined in Chapter 6.⁵⁶³ The insights gained from this scholarly investigation have also been applied to current evangelistic literature which is the subject of the next chapter.

⁵⁶³ While the broader issues of conversion, assurance and evangelism are covered by the interview questionnaire the nine statements used in chapter 4 were not fully formulated until after the questionnaire was submitted to the University ethical committee.

Chapter 5: Methodology

Introduction of hypothesis

Reflecting on my observations as a practitioner and my reading resulted in the questions examined in the previous chapter. As an author of evangelistic literature my intention in including a suggested prayer is to help the reader express their response to the Christian Gospel. However, talking with some people who had read the literature revealed that they were of the impression that all they needed to do to respond to the Gospel was to say the prayer in the booklet. This was not my intention and the discovery led me to question whether including a suggested prayer could be unhelpful.

My observations of the practices and beliefs of Christians involved in evangelism added to my concern. For example, it was observed that when a respondent was being helped at the end of an evangelistic meeting all that was asked of them was the saying of a prayer in an evangelistic booklet. Even if the Gospel outline in the publication was shared with the respondent the aim of the Christian worker was not to encourage repentance and faith but to get the respondent to say the suggested prayer from the booklet. In reporting back Church leaders have shared that people have said the suggested prayer and thus were regarded as having been converted. Another disturbing observation was seeing Christians approach a complete stranger and after a brief conversation regarding the content of a booklet show them the prayer in that booklet and encourage them to pray it. All who responded in this way were then counted as converts. Those who said the prayer were encouraged to base their salvation on this action.

If Christians involved in evangelism could misunderstand my purpose in including a suggested prayer might the isolated reader be in danger of misconceptions as a result of authors adopting such prayers. I began to consider whether writers of evangelistic literature could be in some way responsible for misconceptions regarding the significance of providing a

suggested prayer. Therefore, my experience as a practitioner and the investigations of the previous chapters of this dissertation led to formulating the following research hypothesis.

Although the intent of the author in including a suggested prayer of response in evangelistic literature may be to help people express their response to the Christian Gospel, a thorough evaluation demonstrates that it could lead to, false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation, and less professional practices in evangelism.

Practical Theology

This research was undertaken within the discipline of Practical Theology and follows the unending pastoral cycle of ‘experience, exploration, reflection and action.’⁵⁶⁴ The research started from experience and observations of the use of a suggested prayer of response and concerns regarding author intention, which were explored through the historical and scholarly investigations leading to the formulation of the hypothesis and reflected on throughout empirical research which led to guidelines for improved actions.⁵⁶⁵

As the use of a prayer of response is widely accepted this study will fulfil the aspect of Practical Theology which challenges ‘accepted assumptions and practices’.⁵⁶⁶ Although during this project I was able to utilise the understanding of being an insider, I realised the need to consciously step back from what is familiar in order to be a subjective observer using a hermeneutic of suspicion.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action : Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, (London: SPCK, Second Edition 2008) pp.71 and 81-95 and Mark Cartledge, *Practical Theology, Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007) pp.20-24. For further definitions of Practical Theology see Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), p.22. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, (London: SCM press, 2006), pp.6-7. Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology an Introduction* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), pp.10-12.

⁵⁶⁵ Ballard and Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action*, p.45-58. Also Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, p.248, where Empirical Theology is defined as ‘Theology which is experience orientated usually through the investigation of the beliefs, values and practices.’

⁵⁶⁶ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, pp.6-7.

⁵⁶⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p.10. Helen Cameron, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies and Frances Ward, *Studying Local Churches, a Handbook*

This research did not collect scientific measurements but comments about religious beliefs and experiences.⁵⁶⁸ It, therefore, brought together the disciplines of Practical Theology and Qualitative Research to investigate authorial intention in adopting or excluding prayers of response in evangelistic literature.⁵⁶⁹

Qualitative Research

This study uses qualitative research methods to investigate a hypothesis because the aim is a greater understanding of the subject rather than just proving a set of statements.⁵⁷⁰ Usually in qualitative research a hypothesis emerges from data collected during the process of research.⁵⁷¹ However, this study starts with a hypothesis which is deduced from the observations of the researcher during many years of involvement in evangelism. Maxwell advocates the use of such a hypothesis in qualitative research giving tentative answers to the questions raised by the researcher.⁵⁷² In accordance with his description the hypothesis in this study is based not on the analysis of data but grounded in lessons from reflection on experience and the possible outcomes of providing a suggested prayer which were tested against new evidence from qualitative research.

Although the hypothesis states my starting position, this project is a genuine quest to understand all aspects and opinions relating to the adoption or exclusion of suggested prayers in contemporary evangelistic literature. Consequently, having gained a deeper understanding of the subjects referred to in the hypothesis through historical and scholarly investigation, this was tested by analysing current evangelistic literature and listening to the views of experts

(London: SCM Press, 2005), p.21. Here Richter discusses the difference between qualitative and quantitative research in Sociology.

⁶¹ Cameron, et al, *Studying Local Churches*, p.21 [Where Philip Richter discusses the difference between qualitative and quantitative research in Sociology].

⁵⁶⁹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, pp.73-98.

⁵⁷⁰ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, pp.44-46. See also Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology a Step by Step Guide for Beginners* (London: Saga Publications, 2010), p.88.

⁵⁷¹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p.52.

⁵⁷² Joseph A. Maxwell, *Applied Social Research Methods Series Volume 41* (London: Saga Publications, 2005), p.69.

in the field through semi structured interviews. Therefore, as the aim of this research is to gain an understanding of the issues surrounding the use of prayers of response during the process of the research, qualitative methods were most appropriate.⁵⁷³

Qualitative research methods

Introduction

This study used two methods of qualitative research to investigate the hypothesis regarding author intention in adopting or excluding a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature. Documentary analysis was used to access current evangelistic booklets and the opinions of authors of evangelistic literature was gathered through in-depth interviews.

Why reader Impact was not included

This study did not necessitate gathering direct evidence of reader impact of adopting or excluding a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature because the focus is on author intention and not the reaction of the reader. Having said this the aim of the study is the formulation of guidelines to help authors critically reflect on the theological and practical issues associated with this form of evangelism and the resulting actions will benefit the reader. The reader may not realise that the literature is in danger of giving confusing impressions. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the writer to seek to guard against possible misunderstandings on the part of the reader. Consequently the focus of this study is on the intent of the writer.

Document Analysis

Document Analysis as a qualitative research method usually relates to the examination of such documents as correspondence or minutes of meetings but it can also refer to the study of publications, including books.⁵⁷⁴ Evangelistic literature comes in the shape of tracts, booklets and books. Christians give

⁵⁷³ Grant McCracken, *The Long Interview*, (London: Sage, 1988), pp.16-17.

⁵⁷⁴ Colin Robson, *Real World Research* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.348 refers to books. Cameron, Richter, Davies and Ward, *Studying Local Churches*, p.28 refers to publications.

these publications to people who show interest in the Christian faith.⁵⁷⁵ Having said this, suggested prayers are more commonly found in booklets that aim to include enough of the Christian message for a response of commitment to be made. It is particularly this type of publication that was chosen for closer study. Among this genre of evangelistic literature are the booklets published by Bridge Builders, including those I have written.⁵⁷⁶ Some authors, while aiming to communicate enough details regarding the Christian gospel for it to be appropriate to encourage the reader to respond, do not include a suggested prayer. The study examined both booklets that included a prayer and those which did not include a prayer.

Selection of booklets

Using the researcher's knowledge as an experienced practitioner there was an attempt to obtain a sample of every evangelistic booklet in current use in this country whether or not they included a suggested prayer. Samples of current publications were obtained from British organisations which publish evangelistic literature or purchased by the researcher from Christian bookshops in London and Merseyside between September and December 2011.⁵⁷⁷

The Composition of the sample

The study examined two groups of booklets. Group A is composed of thirty-seven booklets of varying sizes which include a suggested prayer of response and group B is comprised of seventeen booklets which do not contain

⁵⁷⁵ John Chapman, *Know and Tell the Gospel* (New Malden: Good Book Company, 1998), p.127. 'Bridge Builders' newsletter June 2011 available at <<http://www.bridgebuilders.net/current/pdf/newsletters/2011june.pdf>> [accessed 30. 6. 2011].

⁵⁷⁶ <<http://www.bridge-builders.net>> 'about us' and 'tools' sections of the website. [accessed 9.7.2012].

⁵⁷⁷ Literature was obtained from: Bridge Builders, 32 Edenpark Road, Birkenhead, CH42 9JP. Deo Gloria Trust, Selsdon House, 212-220 Addington Road, South Croydon, Surrey, CR2 8LD. Roger Carswell, The Evangelist Website, <<http://www.theevangelist.org.uk>> [accessed 30.6.2011]. Metropolitan Tabernacle, Pastor Street, Elephant & Castle, London, SE1 6SD. SGM Lifewords, 75 Westminster Bridge Road, London, SE1 7HS. The Good Book Company, Unit B1, Blenheim House, 1 Blenheim Road, Epsom Surrey, KT19 9AP. The Open Air Mission, 4 Harrier Court, Woodside, Slip End, Luton, LU1 4DQ. Telit, 144a Ferry Road, Edinburgh, EH6 4NX. The Evangelical Tract Society, c/o St. John's Wood Road Baptist Church 39 St. John's Wood Road, London, NW8 8QX. and also purchased at Christian Literature Crusade Bookshop, 3-4 Ave Maria Lane (off Ludgate Hill), London, EC4M 7AQ. Southport Christian Book Centre, 3 Wesley Street, Southport, Merseyside, PR8 1BN. The Christian Bookshop, 14 Grange Road West, Birkenhead, CH41 4DA and Wesley Owen Bookshop, 8A The Mall, Bromley, BR1 1TR.

a prayer. The publications are listed in Appendix 1.⁵⁷⁸ All these publications were available to buy in this country at the time of the study.⁵⁷⁹ It is not known what percentage it is of all such publications used in the United Kingdom. However, it does include at least one booklet from each author and publisher discovered by the researcher.

Asymmetry of sample balance [booklets and interviews]

The reason for the asymmetry of sample balance between the two groups of booklets is solely determined by the number of booklets of each group discovered by the researcher. This study would suggest that there are far more evangelistic booklets available in this country which do contain a suggested prayer and this is reflected in the lack of balance between the two sample groups of booklets. As the main focus of this project is author intention in adopting or excluding a suggested prayer it was decided not to reciprocate the same imbalance when it came to interviewing authors. Therefore, two equal groups of writers were interviewed; seven who include a suggested prayer in their writing and seven who exclude such prayers.

Quantitative elements

Holloway warns that social research is complicated and that the use of hard categories will lead to oversimplification as qualitative research will always involve quantitative elements.⁵⁸⁰ Therefore, it was recognised that analysing the content and context of prayers in evangelistic literature would produce quantitative as well as qualitative data. For example, how many of the considered documents were judged to give the impression that praying a prayer

⁵⁷⁸ The reason that seven booklets by Roger Carswell are included in the group is because he is the most prolific British writer who includes a suggested prayer and this is only a representative sample of his many publications. There were differences found between these booklets. For example two out of the seven were judged to give the impression that praying a prayer is enough to constitute conversion. There are only three categories out of nine where the result is the same for all seven booklets.

⁵⁷⁹ The group only includes five booklets which are not published in the UK. *Two Ways to Live*, *Two Roads* and *Who is the King?* are published in Australia but they have a wide circulation in the UK through The Good Book Company <<http://www.thegoodbook.co.uk>> [accessed 12.9.2012]. *This was your Life* is published in America by Chick Publication but is widely used in the UK see footnote 593 on p.124 of this dissertation. *God's Plan to Save You*, is another American publication available to purchase in the UK.

⁵⁸⁰ Adrian Holliday, *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 2007), p.2. By 'hard categories' he means terms such as 'qualitative' and 'quantitative'.

is enough to constitute conversion or how many of the booklets were found to encourage the respondent to base their assurance of salvation on what they have done rather than what God has done for them. Therefore, content analysis was used to examine themes within the evangelistic literature. This aspect of my research had the advantage of being unobtrusive and non-reactive, in that the documents are not affected by being analysed.⁵⁸¹ The understanding gained from analysing contemporary evangelistic literature was further investigated by consulting those who are involved in writing evangelistic literature.

Stand-alone criteria

While believing that evangelism is best carried out in a relationship situation a great deal of evangelistic literature is distributed with little or no interaction with the recipient. For example large quantities of Bridge Builders booklets are pushed through letter boxes or given away by Christians to strangers.⁵⁸² For fourteen years I worked as an evangelist among Merchant Seamen which involved distributing literature to men on ships which within a few hours sailed out of the area. In all these situations the person reading the evangelistic booklet might not have contact with a Christian who could answer their questions or correct their misconceptions. It was because of this that I imposed on the analysis of booklets a stand alone criteria. Hodges put forward a scenario of a man finding a verse from the Bible written on a scrap of paper on a desert island.⁵⁸³ I supposed that, like the people on the desert island judging Christianity solely from the words on the scrap of paper, the reader of these booklets had no other source of information. Having said this even if the reader has relational contact with Christians there is a possibility of them being misled by the literature without realising and thus never asking questions in order to receive clarification. Therefore, the booklets were judged keeping the stand-alone criteria of the isolated reader in mind.

⁵⁸¹ Robson, *Real World Research*, pp.348-359.

⁵⁸² See Bridge Builders Newsletter, particularly June 2011 and Summer 2009. <http://www.bridge-builders.net/current/newsletter.php> [accessed 29.6.2012]

⁵⁸³ Zane C. Hodges, 'How to Lead People to Christ: Part 1. The Content of Our Message', *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. Autumn 2000 Vol 13:25 <<http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2000ii/Hodges.htm>> [accessed 20.11.2011].

One possible limitation of the stand alone criteria is that it does not ask the opinion of authors regarding their intended meaning. The authors who took part in this study had to remain anonymous to comply with the ethical standards of the University.⁵⁸⁴ Therefore, it was not possible to compare the text of booklets with the opinions of the authors of those booklets and the author's intentions had to be judged solely by analysing the text of the booklets. Another limitation is that the stand alone criteria masks the belief of the researcher that evangelism in a post-Christendom era should aim to be relational.⁵⁸⁵ This view is found in other parts of the study but during the analysis of the booklets it is assumed that there is no such contact with Christians.

Interviews

In-depth interviews with writers of evangelistic literature were undertaken to evaluate further authorial intention in adopting or excluding prayers of response in their literature. Because of the time constraints on this project, and the quantity of interviews that allowed, it was decided to use a diverse sample of a limited number of interviewees representing only the two views of 'for' and 'against' the inclusion of such prayers.⁵⁸⁶ An equal number of interviewees were taken from those writers who include a prayer and those who do not include a prayer. The interviewees were selected on the basis of being people most able to help answer the research questions because they are the authors of literature which has been widely distributed.⁵⁸⁷ The advantage of such interviews was the flexibility to expand ideas and clarify responses. Often the tone of the answer conveyed information which would not be discovered in a written response.⁵⁸⁸ Although some of the interviewees had written about their work the use of interviews brought more up to date comments which, through the questions, were directly related to my research.

⁵⁸⁴ That the interviewees remain anonymous was a requirement of the Bangor University Ethics Committee. May 2011.

⁵⁸⁵ Dave Bennett, *A study of how adults become Christians*, pp.54-58

⁵⁸⁶ Nigel King and Christina Horrocks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 2010), p.29.

⁵⁸⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, p.56.

⁵⁸⁸ Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project, Fourth Edition*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), p.157.

The interviews allowed me to gain insights into the thinking behind the writing of evangelistic publications and allowed the writers to give reasons for the content of their publications. However, van der Ven advocates that when using only qualitative methods there are issues of truth and genuineness. He highlights the difficulties of discerning whether the feelings, attitudes and explanations people give are, in fact, true and whether interviewer or interviewee can contaminate the data by misrepresentation or manipulation.⁵⁸⁹ Therefore, this study used the list of open-ended questions approved by the Ethics Committee, written in proper sentences, to facilitate these semi-structured interviews.⁵⁹⁰ This guarded against the use of leading questions and the danger of imposing on the interviewees the views of the researcher.⁵⁹¹ The interviewees were given the questions in advance to ensure that they were fully aware of what the interview involved and would have the time to consider their answers.

From the interviews additional insights were gained to compliment the data collected through the analysis of evangelistic literature. As the interviewees shared the reasons behind their thinking and practice, their answers were used to clarify my own thinking and fuel my theological and professional reflection.

Analysing data

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically.⁵⁹² The issues raised by interviewees were identified and this information placed in categorised computer files. The data produced by analysing interview transcripts was placed alongside information gained through analysing evangelistic literature in order to arrive at a full and deep description of the issues surrounding author intention in adopting or excluding prayers of response in evangelistic literature.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁹ Johannes A. van der Ven, 'An Empirical or Normative Approach to Practical Theological Research', pp.101-135, in Johannes A. van der Ven and Michael Scherer-Rath, *Normativity and Empirical Research in Theology*, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp.114-116.

⁵⁹⁰ King and Horrocks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, pp.35-38.

⁵⁹¹ McCracken, *The Long Interview*, pp.28-38.

⁵⁹² King and Horrocks, *Interviews in Qualitative Research*, pp.149-150.

⁵⁹³ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, p.73.

Formulating suggested guidelines

The final stage of this project involved further reflection on all the findings of the qualitative research in order to formulate guidelines to help practitioners engage in critical self-reflection regarding the theological and practical issues associated with this form of evangelism.

Conclusion

This research is the work of a practitioner involved in the production and distribution of evangelistic literature who has identified a problem. The adoption of a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature can prove helpful but may also be problematic. The research is driven by a hypothesis derived from the researchers experience and the investigations of the previous chapters. The hypothesis was tested using the qualitative research methods of analysing current evangelistic booklets and interviewing writers to evaluate authorial intention in adopting or excluding suggested prayers. The aim of this study was to gain a clearer understanding in order to formulate guidelines to aid practitioners in critical self-reflection regarding the theological and practical issues associated with this form of evangelism.

Chapter 6. Document Analysis

Introduction

This chapter provides detailed examination of a selection of contemporary evangelistic literature used in Britain to consider to what extent the content of these booklets could render the hypothesis to be true. It therefore asks whether the suggested prayer in each publication could help a person to express their response to the Christian Gospel. The content and context of the prayers were examined to evaluate whether their use could lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation, and less professional practices in evangelism. Similar evangelistic literature which does not include a suggested prayer of response was also examined to determine what was included instead of a suggested prayer and whether the statements of the hypothesis could be equally true of these publications.⁵⁹⁴

Note on Authorial Intention

The 'death of the author' is a concept in literary criticism that asserts that the details of authorial intention are not available and that all we have is the text itself.⁵⁹⁵ Howe says, that the intention of the author is in the meaning of the text and if the meaning is misunderstood by the reader it could be because the author 'simply did not adequately convey the meaning he intended'.⁵⁹⁶ This study is unable to connect the analysis of evangelistic booklets with comments from contemporary authors because of the requirement to preserve their anonymity. Bennett and Royle advocate that 'even if we were to go to a living author and ask what they meant by a particular text, all we would get would be another text, which would then, in turn be open to interpretation'.⁵⁹⁷ While this

⁵⁹⁴ A full explanation of the way booklets were chosen and of the reason for why there is an asymmetry of sample balance between the two groups of booklets can be found in the Methodology in chapter 5. pp.

⁵⁹⁵ Andrew Bennett & Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature Criticism and Theory* (Harlow: Pearson, 2009) pp.21-22.

⁵⁹⁶ Tom Howe *Authorial Intention* <<http://tahowe.wordpress.com/2011/12/23/authorial-intention/>> [accessed 5.8.2013]. Tom Howe is Professor of Bible and Biblical Languages at Southern Evangelical Seminary <<http://ses.edu/academics/faculty/thomas-howe>> [accessed 5.8.2013]. He holds a Ph.D. from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

⁵⁹⁷ Andrew Bennett & Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature Criticism and Theory* (Harlow: Pearson, 2009) p.22.

chapter analyses current evangelistic literature the researcher is examining the author's intended meaning as it is revealed in the text. Therefore, the questions used to assess the literature focus on the intention of the author because it is assumed that the meaning given in the text reveals the intention of the author.

Literature which does contain a prayer of response

The study examined thirty-seven booklets of varying sizes which include a suggested prayer of response. The publications are listed in Appendix 1.⁵⁹⁸ All these publications were available to buy in this country at the time of the study.⁵⁹⁹ It is not known what percentage it is of all such publications used in the United Kingdom. However, it does include at least one booklet from each author and publisher discovered by the researcher who include a suggested prayer of response in their publications.⁶⁰⁰ In this sense the sample could be termed as purposive because I have identified and used publications which I believe are typical of this particular type of evangelistic booklet, in that they try to convey enough of the Christian message for a response to be appropriate and they call for a response which includes a suggested prayer.⁶⁰¹

This study asked whether the content and context of suggested prayers in these publications could support the statements of the hypothesis. As explained in the methodology the booklets are assessed keeping in mind a

⁵⁹⁸ The reason that seven booklets by Roger Carswell are included in the group is because he is the most prolific British writer who includes a suggested prayer and this is only a representative sample of his many publications. There were differences found between these booklets. For example two out of the seven were judged to give the impression that praying a prayer is enough to constitute conversion. There are only three categories out of nine where the result is the same for all seven booklets.

⁵⁹⁹ The group only includes five booklets which are not published in the UK. *Two Ways to Live*, *Two Roads* and *Who is the King?* are published in Australia but they have a wide circulation in the UK through The Good Book Company <<http://www.thegoodbook.co.uk>> [accessed 12.9.2012]. *This was your Life* is published in America by Chick Publication but is widely used in the UK see footnote 593 on p.124 of this dissertation. *God's Plan to Save You*, is another American publication available to purchase in the UK.

⁶⁰⁰ A fuller explanation of how and why this sample was chosen is given in chapter 5 pp.111-112

⁶⁰¹ Martin Brett Davies, *Doing a Successful Research Project* (Basingstock: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.57-58.

stand alone criteria because this type of literature is often distributed to strangers who may not have contact with a Church.⁶⁰²

The study first examined the booklets to ascertain whether their content would support the assertion in the hypothesis that the intent of the author in adopting a suggested prayer is to help people express their response to the Christian Gospel.

Support for the positive aspect of the hypothesis

Six writers suggest that the prayer they provide could help readers articulate their response which suggests this was the author's intent.⁶⁰³ For example, Carswell says that 'many have found that praying a prayer similar to the one below has helped them to put their trust in Jesus'.⁶⁰⁴ He also speaks of the need 'to bring words to God' by praying from our heart.⁶⁰⁵ However, by saying this is similar to a couple making wedding vows which 'change their whole personal standing' suggests that it is words rather than any actions which are required. Contrary to this, faith and repentance are clearly explained elsewhere in this booklet. The issue of the prayer being 'from the heart' is taken up by Roberts who says 'you may find it helpful to use this prayer and make it your own'.⁶⁰⁶ Several booklets advise the reader to use the suggested prayer of response as a template for praying in their own words.⁶⁰⁷ This raises the question of whether it would be just as helpful to suggest what might be included in such a prayer without providing a model to use. The Avanti booklet has a stronger tone suggesting that praying the prayer is imperative rather than

⁶⁰² pp.113-114

⁶⁰³ Paul Adams, *CrossCheck* (BeaconLight, 2010). As with many of these booklets there are no page numbers. Warren, *Journey into Life*, p.12 'It might help you to say this prayer, phrase by phrase, quietly, thoughtfully, thinking carefully what you are saying, and what you are doing'.

⁶⁰⁴ Roger Carswell, *Grill a Christian* (Chorley: 10Publishing, 2011), p.95 Carswell says something similar in all his publications I examined other than *Jesus is the Shepherd* which is for children. In that booklet he says: 'You could pray this prayer if you want to ask Him into your life'.

⁶⁰⁵ Roger Carswell, *Things God Wants Us to Know* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2007), p.58.

⁶⁰⁶ Vaughan Roberts, *Missing the Point?* (London: Authentic, 2007), p.36.

⁶⁰⁷ Peter Woodcock, *Crossover* (New Malden, The Good Book Company). 'Read the following prayer and think about it. If you understand it, and really want to pray it yourself, read it again. Then pray it in your own words to God.'

just helpful.⁶⁰⁸ This proposes that it is the actual suggested words and not the response of the heart which are important, which is not what other writers are saying. For example, other writers present the prayer as a gentle suggestion such as: 'you could pray something like this' or 'you may like to use this prayer'.⁶⁰⁹ However, the very inclusion of a suggested prayer of response would indicate that the writers believe this would help the reader in their response. It is difficult solely from the content of these booklets to gain conclusive support for the positive statement of my hypothesis regarding authorial intention.

There is, too, the need to balance any possible benefit to some readers with what is found to support the negative aspects of using a suggested prayer of response and it is these negative aspects of the hypothesis which will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Support for the negative aspects of the hypothesis

The booklets were then examined to see if their contents would support the negative statements of the hypothesis that including a suggested prayer of response in an evangelistic publication could lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and less professional practices in evangelism. In this section the nine statements used in chapter 4 are changed into questions and this chapter follows the same structure. Therefore, these questions are listed as 1 to 9 in this section in the same way the statements are in Chapter 4. Questions 1 to 3 deal with conversion, 4 to 6 deal with assurance of salvation and questions 7 to 9 deal with evangelism.

False impressions as to what is involved in conversion

1. Do the authors give the impression that praying a prayer is

⁶⁰⁸ *Heaven: Why some good people will not go.* (Southend On Sea: Avanti) p.65 asks the questions: 'Is there any reason why you shouldn't turn and surrender right now?' and 'Would you like to turn and surrender right now' and then says 'Please pray this prayer with me'.

⁶⁰⁹ Palau, *What is a Real Christian?;* Rico Tice and Barry Cooper, *The Real Jesus* (New Malden: Good Book Company, 2011), p.12.

enough to constitute conversion?

23 out of the 37 booklets (62%) were judged to give the impression that praying a prayer is enough to constitute conversion. The criteria used to assess this was whether there was any statement that suggested conversion would take place if the suggested prayer was used. For example, comments such as 'If you could say this prayer and really mean it what a difference it would make to your life' or 'If you said those words to Jesus Christ, you've started an amazing new eternal life'.⁶¹⁰ Kandiah ends his booklet with the heading 'How to be saved' and then gives a commentary on a suggested prayer ending the booklet with 'amen' which gives the impression all the reader needs to do is pray the prayer. This illustrates how a false impression as to what is involved in conversion can be conveyed by what is not included in the instructions on how to respond.

On the other hand, Hughes illustrates how some instructions could reinforce the misconception that praying a prayer is enough to constitute conversion. He says: 'If you would like to surrender your life to Jesus, a special prayer has been prepared to help you do this'.⁶¹¹ He then encourages the reader to 'pray the prayer sincerely and from the bottom of your heart'.⁶¹² After his lengthy suggested prayer comes a place to record the day on which the reader received Christ. He instructs the reader to keep this in a safe place because it is their 'birth certificate into God's kingdom'.⁶¹³ This recording of when one prayed and being encouraged to see that as the moment of spiritual birth does give the impression that all that is involved in conversion is the praying of a prayer.

I would suggest that a more balanced view is needed which helps the reader grasp that conversion involves more than just praying a prayer. Curley demonstrates this in his well illustrated activity booklet aimed at children, in

⁶¹⁰ Krish and Miriam Kandiah, *How to Save a Life: Becoming a Christian* (London: Authentic, 2009), p.11. Carl Laferton and Tim Thornborough, *The Real Easter* (New Malden: The Good Book Company, 2009), p.11.

⁶¹¹ Selwyn Hughes, *Discovering the Way* (Farnham: CWR, 2009), p.29.

⁶¹² Hughes, *Discovering the Way*, p.29.

⁶¹³ Hughes, *Discovering the Way*, p.29.

which he says about responding to the Gospel: 'It is easy because all you have to do is talk to God and really mean it' but then goes on to say 'It is hard because we need to be really sorry for our sins and really want Jesus to help us stop doing wrong things'.⁶¹⁴ This type of clear statement could help the reader see the need for repentance and the start of pleasing God by a change in lifestyle. Having said this the prayer is still prominent in this booklet and could still result in the misconception that all that was needed was the saying of a prayer if the reader has not understood the previous comments.

In Chapter 4 we questioned whether baptism should be part of the suggested response to the Gospel. Only two booklets mention baptism. Hodge advises in his steps for new Christians that they are 'baptised in water as soon as possible' and uses Acts 10:48 to support this.⁶¹⁵ Green encourages those who respond to 'get baptised if you have never been – it's the badge of belonging'.⁶¹⁶ However, he does not see baptism as necessary to salvation stating after his suggested prayer that 'real Christianity starts with a prayer like this' which gives the impression that all that is needed for the reader to experience conversion is to pray this suggested prayer.⁶¹⁷

2. Do the authors give the impression that conversion is only about securing a place in heaven rather than the beginning of a transformed life on earth?

Only 5 out of 37 booklets (14%) gave the impression that conversion is just about securing a place in heaven rather than the beginning of a transformed life on earth. The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet focused on the afterlife at the detriment of encouraging discipleship. For example, the Chick booklet *This was your Life* focuses on being judged by God after death and the consequences of not having said a suggested prayer being a place in hell.⁶¹⁸ This booklet illustrates graphically that if you said the

⁶¹⁴ Gordon Curley, *Let's Talk* (South Croydon: Deo Gloria), p.9.

⁶¹⁵ Peter Hodge, *Turn to God* (Cardiff: Open Air Campaigners, 2010) back page. 'So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.' Acts 10:48 New International Version.

⁶¹⁶ Michael Green, *Yes* (Chorley: 10Publishing, 2011), p.11.

⁶¹⁷ Green, *Yes*, p.9.

⁶¹⁸ *This was your life* (Chick Publications) The full booklet can be seen on the Chick Website

prayer your name is in the book and God allows you into heaven. Admittedly Chick does show that the person who prays a prayer of commitment will have a transformed life but his focus is clearly on what happens when you die.⁶¹⁹ This type of presentation is in danger of giving the reader the misconception that conversion has more to do with a comfortable eternity than making a difference here on earth.

The majority of the booklets (32 out of 37) (86%) give the impression that conversion is the start of a transformed lifestyle. For example Jensen and Payne advise the reader to respond by asking God to help them 'change from being a rebel to being someone who lives with Jesus as their ruler'.⁶²⁰ Following their suggested prayer they say, 'having prayed the sort of prayer above, you will want to start putting it into practice – that is, actually submitting to Jesus' and there then follows advice on living a transformed life which they advise needs to continue with God's help for the rest of the person's life.⁶²¹ This is a clear indication that the writers see conversion as more about living for God rather than securing a place in heaven. As such advice is found in all but 5 out of 37 booklets there is minimal support that including a suggested prayer can result in the false impression that conversion is more about eternity than discipleship in this life.

3. Do the authors give the impression that conversion is always a sudden event thus not allowing for a gradual process?

All the booklets gave the impression that conversion is always a sudden event rather than a gradual process. The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet gave the reader a promise or impression of instant conversion. For example Palau tells a story of a man who prays and changes instantly saying, 'now I know that Christ has really received me and forgiven

<http://www.chick.com/reading/tracts/0001/0001_01.asp> [accessed 12.9.2012].

⁶¹⁹ See also testimonies of people becoming a Christian through Chick publications in Jack Chick, *He Never Told Us* (Ontario: Chick Publications) and on the Chick website

<<http://www.chick.com/testimonies.asp>> [accessed 20.7.2012].

⁶²⁰ Philip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, *Two Ways to Live* (Kingsford NSW: Matthias Media, 2003) p.15 see also page p.13 'If we turn back to God and appeal for mercy, trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection, then everything changes'.

⁶²¹ Jensen and Payne, *Two Ways to Live*, pp.15-16.

me'.⁶²² This is reinforced by comments in other booklets such as 'you have eternal life from the moment you invited Jesus into your life'.⁶²³ Talking about a renewed relationship with God, Gumbel says that praying a suggested prayer 'will be the start of that relationship'.⁶²⁴ While there are many such comments about the immediacy of conversion, this study did not find any reference to the possibility of conversion being a process. In Chapter 4 it was stated that some scholars would view conversion as a process and if we take this into account, presenting conversion as always a sudden event would constitute false impressions as to what is involved in conversion.⁶²⁵

Conclusion regarding conversion

Taking all three questions into consideration there are 61 positive answers out of a possible 111 (55%) in support of the statement of my hypothesis that using a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature could lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion. Over half the booklets were judged as in danger of giving the impression that praying a prayer is enough to constitute conversion. Only 5 of the booklets gave the impression that conversion is just about securing a place in heaven rather than the beginning of a transformed life on earth but all the booklets suggested that conversion was usually a sudden experience. Therefore, there is some support for the proposition that adopting suggested prayers could lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion.

Misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation

4. Do these authors encourage the respondent to base their assurance of salvation only on having said a prayer with sincerity?

21 out of 37 of the booklets (56%) encouraged the respondent to base their assurance of salvation only on having said a prayer with sincerity. The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet promised those who said the suggested prayer sincerely that they had eternal life as a present

⁶²² Palau, *What is a Real Christian?*, p.22.

⁶²³ *Knowing God Personally*, p.15.

⁶²⁴ *Knowing God Personally*; Gumbel, *Why Jesus?*, p.18.

⁶²⁵ See pp.87-88.

possession. For example, The Navigators booklet says ‘if you pray sincerely, asking, “Lord Jesus, please come into my life and be my Saviour and Lord. Please forgive my sins and give me the gift of eternal life”, He will do it’ and ‘if you have invited Jesus Christ into your life, the Bible says you now have eternal life’.⁶²⁶ This is based on an isolated verse taken out of context which some would regard as having nothing to do with individual salvation.⁶²⁷ The booklet does not explain repentance or faith, so consequently the reader could be in danger of basing their salvation solely on having prayed the suggested prayer.

Warren suggests that if the reader is not sure about their salvation they should say his suggested prayer ‘phrase by phrase, quietly, thoughtfully, thinking carefully about what you are saying, and what you are doing’.⁶²⁸ This does suggest that Warren believes that saying the prayer in the correct way is a key to having assurance of salvation. Having said this, it also opens the way to suggesting that the prayer could be used more than once. The difficulty here is that a respondent may, for some reason, feel that they do not have salvation and therefore they use the prayer on repeated occasions. It could be to guard against this that some of the booklets have statements about not basing one’s salvation on emotions such as, ‘It may not feel very different at first. Trust in God’s promises rather than your feelings’.⁶²⁹ However, this could rebound, resulting in the respondent returning to basing their salvation on having said a prayer.

5. Do the authors encourage the respondent to base their assurance of salvation on what they have done rather than what God has done for them?

34 of the 37 booklets (92%) were found to encourage the respondent to base their assurance of salvation on what they have done rather than what God has done for them. This was evaluated on examination of the language used in the suggested prayers which gave the impression the respondent was in

⁶²⁶ *Bridge to Life* (NavPress, 2006), pp.11-12.

⁶²⁷ Revelation 3:20. See Bennett, *The Sinner’s Prayer*, pp.16-17 and 112-113.

⁶²⁸ Warren, *Journey into Life*, p.13.

⁶²⁹ Roberts, *Missing the Point?*, p.38.

control, such as ‘Please come into my life’.⁶³⁰ The issue is further illustrated by the use of Revelation 3:20 and the concept that Jesus is standing outside the door of the reader’s heart waiting to be invited in.⁶³¹ Adams says: ‘It is as though at the foot of the cross, there is a doorway leading into our lives. We read about this in Revelation 3:20. Jesus is standing outside our heart’s door and knocking to come in. He promises that if we open the door, he will come into our lives.’⁶³² Adams goes on to ask ‘Have you heard Jesus knocking on your heart’s door?’ and he provides a suggested prayer as a way of opening one’s heart door, including the words ‘come into my heart today’. Clearly these booklets depict a situation where the reader is in control and has the power to allow God into their life. The resulting difficulty here arises because the respondent could base their assurance on having followed the instructions and not on what Christ has done for them.

Contrary to this, five booklets did encourage the respondent to base their assurance on what God has done. Hughes encourages the reader to ask God for assurance with the words, ‘Give me the assurance, even now, that you have received me and put into my heart an unshakeable conviction that I am Yours and You are mine’.⁶³³ The final advice given by Jensen and Payne has to do with the relationship between Jesus and the Christian and states that ‘we must never stop relying on him - and him alone - as the means by which we are forgiven and granted eternal life.’⁶³⁴ We see here that such statements could guard against the misleading assumption that we can base salvation on what we have done.

6. Do authors give the impression that once a person has prayed the suggested prayer they cannot be lost?

Only 6 out of 37 of the booklets (16%) gave the impression that if a person had prayed the suggested prayer they cannot be lost. The criteria used

⁶³⁰ Adams, *CrossCheck*.

⁶³¹ Carswell, *Things God Wants Us to Know*, p.60. Curley, *Let’s Talk*, p.10. Green, *Yes*, p.9. Warren, *Journey into Life*, p.11. *Knowing God Personally* (Birmingham: Agape, 2006). *Steps to Peace with God* (Billy Graham Association, 2009).

⁶³² Adams, *CrossCheck*.

⁶³³ Hughes, *Discovering the Way*, p.30.

⁶³⁴ Jensen and Payne, *Two Ways to Live*, p.16.

to assess this was whether the booklet made statements about salvation being permanent for those who had prayed the suggested prayer. For example, Coekin states after his suggested prayer that 'If you have said this prayer and meant it God has heard you and you are saved forever!'.⁶³⁵ The Avanti booklet *Heaven* suggests that when the reader prays, God replaces the record of their sin with the record of Christ's perfection and this will be what the person is judged by regardless of how they live the rest of their life.⁶³⁶ Although the booklet *God's plan for Man* does not include such a direct statement about saying the prayer it does state that 'God has welcomed you into His family through faith in Jesus. Nothing on earth or in heaven can break that bond'.⁶³⁷ The idea is being put forward here that once someone has prayed the suggested prayer they will go to heaven regardless of their lifestyle. However, the majority of the booklets (31 out of 37) (84%) do not comment on whether a person can lose their salvation.

Conclusion regarding assurance of salvation

Taking all three questions into consideration there are 61 positive answers out of a possible 111 (55%) in support of the statement of my hypothesis that using a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature could lead to misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation. Over half the booklets gave the impression that the reader could base their assurance on having said a prayer. The majority of booklets gave the impression that salvation depended on the action of the reader rather than the work of God. Having said this only 6 booklets gave the impression that a person who prayed the prayer would gain a salvation which they could not lose.

Less professional practices in evangelism

7. Is the aim of the author to get someone to pray a prayer?

29 out of 37 of the booklets (78%) were judged to be aiming to get the reader to say a suggested prayer. The criteria used to assess this was whether

⁶³⁵ Richard Coekin, *His Passion for Life* (New Malden: The Good Book Company, 2009), p.11.

⁶³⁶ *Heaven: Why some good people will not go*, pp.43-44.

⁶³⁷ *God's Plan to Save You* (Wheaton: Good News Publications, no date), pp.14-15.

the content of the booklet led to the climax of encouraging the reader to use a suggested prayer. In most of the booklets the suggested prayer was within a couple of pages of the end of the booklet. All that usually followed was advice to those who had responded. Because in the majority of the booklets the prayer seemed to be the climax of the presentation, they give the impression that the intent of the writer is to get the reader to use the suggested prayer. This being the case these booklets could lead to the less professional practise in evangelism of aiming to get the reader to just say a prayer.

8. Does the author manipulate or pressurise the reader into praying a prayer?

After a first analysis, none of the booklets were found to be manipulative or pressurise the reader into praying a prayer.⁶³⁸ The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet included statements compelling the reader to pray the suggested prayer. At first the conclusion was drawn that literature does not manipulate or pressurise in the way a preacher could.⁶³⁹ I then asked whether any of the booklets talked about hell and judgement in such a way that it could be putting pressure on the reader to respond. Two booklets were found to contain material about hell and judgement which could pressurise the reader into responding.⁶⁴⁰ For example, the Avanti booklet *Heaven Why Some Good People Will Not Go*, has a strong emphasis on avoiding hell and gaining a place

⁶³⁸ *This Was Your Life* (Ontario: Chick publications) Chick Publications 2001 first published 1964. Although Chick Booklets are published in America they are available in this country and approximately 120,000 are distributed annually in the United Kingdom. (Letter from the UK distributor of Chick Publications B.McCall Barbar, 28 George iv Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1ES received 19th July 2012.) In a telephone conversation with the proprietor Dr. T.C. Danson-Smith on 17th July 2012 he informed me that they have a stock of 400,000 Chick booklets in about 140 titles. 149 Chick titles were examined during this study all of which had a suggested prayer in the inside back cover. 71 booklets also contained a prayer of commitment in a speech bubble in the context of someone becoming a Christian. An additional 9 booklets showed a person kneeling in a prayerful posture while becoming a Christian without giving the words they said. All these booklets were judged to support the negative aspects of my hypothesis and *This Was Your Life* is a typical Chick booklet and chosen to represent Chick publications because it is one of their most popular titles. See Bob Fowler, *The World of Chick?* (San Francisco: Last Gap, 2001), pp.8-9. See also <<http://www.chick.com/catalog/assortments/0915.asp>> [accessed 17.7.2012]. *This Was Your Life* is the only booklet in this study of booklets that contained a suggested prayer which was judged to give a positive response to all nine questions.

⁶³⁹ John F. MacArthur, *Altar Calls* (Copyright 1992) Transcript of talk given at Grace Community Church in Panorama City, California.

<http://www.jcsm.org/StudyCenter/john_macarthur/ALTAR.htm> [accessed 2.8.2012].

⁶⁴⁰ *Heaven: Why some good people will not go*, and *This was your life* (Ontario: Chick publications Chick Publications).

in heaven.⁶⁴¹ However, whether you regarded this as manipulative would depend on your view of hell and whether you believed people needed to be warned about a judgement to come.⁶⁴²

Further consideration involved introducing the concept I have called 'gentle manipulation' and the outcome was very different.⁶⁴³ By this I mean putting forward the saying of a suggested prayer as the only reasonable response. For example 'God has revealed Himself to us, knocking on the door of our lives' or 'The obvious response is to invite Him into our lives.'⁶⁴⁴ In his criteria to distinguish between ethical and unethical evangelism Thiessen states that:

The freedom to make choices is central to the dignity of persons. Ethical evangelism will therefore allow all persons to make a genuinely free and uncoerced choice with regard to conversion.⁶⁴⁵

This caused me to consider whether it was possible to break this criteria by gently advocating that the praying of a suggested prayer was the only reasonable course of action. Talking about death, judgement and hell by using such language as 'God's judgement against rebels is an everlasting God-less death' and the urgency of making a response by saying a suggested prayer was seen as an illustration of what I considered to be 'gentle manipulation'.⁶⁴⁶

When this concept of 'gentle manipulation' was applied 35 out of the 37 (94%) booklets were judged to be in danger of manipulating or pressurising the reader into praying a prayer. Only Hughes was found to guard against this by stating before his suggested prayer: 'But pause again on the verge of this momentous decision and be in no doubt about its magnitude. You are not forced to accept; you are still free to say 'no''.⁶⁴⁷ Having said this, the concept

⁶⁴¹ *Heaven: Why some good people will not go*, pp. 8-10 and 46-51. There are six references to hell in this booklet.

⁶⁴² See William Crockett (Editor), *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), particularly pp.12-13 and 22-27 on eternal punishment and pp.135-178 on annihilation.

⁶⁴³ In this context this is a term of my own making. It is used by the medical profession with reference to procedures such as replacing dislocated bones. See Larry D. Field and Felix H. Savoie, *Master class in Shoulder and Elbow Surgery* (Thieme: New York, 2003) pp.221-224.

⁶⁴⁴ Carswell, *Things God Wants Us to Know*, p.60.

⁶⁴⁵ Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, p.234.

⁶⁴⁶ Jensen and Payne, *Two Ways to Live*.

⁶⁴⁷ Hughes, *Discovering the Way*, p.29.

of 'gentle manipulation' could be interpreted as suggesting that even the very inclusion of a suggested prayer could be viewed as potentially manipulative. There is a danger here that the writer would become so aware of the danger of 'gentle manipulation' that they fail to present the challenge to respond. Therefore, while not being manipulative they would fail in their objective to encourage people to become Christians.

9. Is the author more interested in securing a decision rather than helping someone become a disciple?

23 out of the 37 booklets (62%) were judged as being more interested in securing a decision rather than helping someone become a disciple. The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet led to a suggested prayer at the end of the booklet with no comment about conversion involving a life-long commitment. Some booklets with a prayer in the end pages give in the content of the prayer a clear indication that the writer is aiming at winning a disciple rather than just a decision. For example, Tice and Cooper's suggested prayer includes the request 'From now on, please give me the desire to obey you and help me to follow Jesus - whatever the cost'.⁶⁴⁸ Thus, by careful wording, the reader is safeguarded from the misconception that all that is required for conversion is a momentary decision that lacked a change in lifestyle. More than half the booklets lacked such statements and were judged as aiming to secure a decision rather than helping someone begin to follow Jesus. This was judged as in danger of encouraging less professional practices in evangelism because, as we learnt in Chapter 4, evangelism is the process of bringing people into the Christian community and it continues after someone makes their first faltering steps of faith.

Conclusion regarding less professional practices in evangelism

Taking all three questions into consideration, initially there were 52 positive answers out of a possible 111 (47%) in support of the statement of my hypothesis that using a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature could lead to less professional practices in evangelism. However, reassessing the booklets

⁶⁴⁸Tice and Cooper, *The Real Jesus*, p.12.

taking into account the concept of 'gentle manipulation' saw the support for this aspect of the hypothesis rise to 78% because there were then 87 out of 111 positive answers. Because this concept is my own invention it will be beneficial to further consider in the interviews with writers of evangelistic literature whether such literature can be manipulative.

Conclusion regarding booklets containing a prayer

Taking into account all nine questions there are 213 positive answers out of a possible 333 (64%) in support of the hypothesis. This includes taking into account the concept of 'gentle manipulation'. The findings of this part of the study do support the hypothesis but as the figure without taking 'gentle manipulation' into account is only 178 positive answers out of a possible 333 (53%) it could be regarded as inconclusive.

Literature which does not contain a suggested prayer

The study examined seventeen booklets which do not include a suggested prayer of response in order to ascertain whether these could lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and less professional practices in evangelism.⁶⁴⁹ The publications are listed in Appendix 1. All these publications were available to buy in this country at the time of the study. As with the booklets that contained a prayer it is not known what percentage the sample is of all such publications used in the United Kingdom. The sample is purposive because I have identified and used publications which I believe are typical of this particular type of evangelistic booklet. By this I mean booklets which seek to explain enough of the Gospel for it to be appropriate to call for a response. They give details of how to respond but do not include a suggested prayer. The

⁶⁴⁹ The reason that six booklets by John Blanchard are included in the group is because he is the most prolific British writer who does not include a suggested prayer and this is only a representative sample of his many publications.

sample is smaller than the group containing a prayer because I did not find as many booklets of a similar nature and size to those in the first group.⁶⁵⁰

The booklets were then analysed to ascertain whether they would support the negative aspects of the hypothesis. The same questions were used to analyse this group of booklets as were used to analyse the booklets which contained a prayer. As in the previous section, the questions are numbered 1 to 9. Questions 1 to 3 deal with conversion, 4 to 6 deal with assurance of salvation and questions 7 to 9 deal with evangelism. Where possible the same criteria was used as with the group of booklets that contain a suggested prayer. These criteria are restated or clarified in this section to aid understanding. The main question which I am trying to answer is: 'Would removing the suggested prayer neutralise the negative aspects of my hypothesis?'. Therefore the purpose of the next section is to discover whether these booklets, which do not contain a suggested prayer, can lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and less professional practices in evangelism.

False impressions as to what is involved in conversion

1. Do the publications give the impression that praying a prayer is enough to constitute conversion?

As the booklets do not contain a suggested prayer they were first examined to analyse what, if anything, replaced providing a suggested prayer. Three of the booklets exhort the reader to 'come to God' in surrender. For example in one of his booklets, Blanchard encourages the reader to express their response by 'flinging yourself upon him' in an 'act of personal commitment'.⁶⁵¹

In the other 14 out of a possible 17 booklets (82%) prayer is part of the suggested response to the Gospel. However, the Evangelical Tract Society booklet warns that 'there are no magic words to repeat. He wants from you a

⁶⁵⁰ A fuller explanation of asymmetry of sample balance can be found in the methodology in chapter 5 pp.112

⁶⁵¹ John Blanchard, *Can we be Good without God?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007), p.38.

true cry from the heart “God have mercy on me a sinner”.⁶⁵² Two booklets encourage the reader to pray using their own words. These and one other booklet actually provide a list of what should be included in such a prayer.⁶⁵³ Gale’s list is very similar to the longer suggested prayers in booklets of the other group.⁶⁵⁴ Another similarity with the first group of booklets (which included a suggested prayer) was found in an Open Air Mission booklet advising readers to: ‘Ask Him to come into your life as your personal saviour’.⁶⁵⁵ Banton says that having understood the Gospel he responded by getting down on his knees and calling on Jesus to forgive him and be his saviour.⁶⁵⁶ This, and the photograph of a man praying on the previous page, could give the impression that all that is involved in conversion is to say a prayer.⁶⁵⁷ However, these booklets would not be judged to do this if the same criteria was used as for the booklets that contain a suggested prayer because they do not contain a statement that conversion would take place if the reader prays.

A further difference is seen between the two groups of booklets in that 8 out of 17 (47%) of the booklets that do not contain a suggested prayer encourage a very different form of prayer than was found in the booklets that include a suggested prayer. While that latter group stress inviting Jesus into your life, the emphasis here is on encouraging the reader to seek God. For example, Jeffery says ‘you must seek God while there is still time’ and he recommends this be done by calling ‘upon him in prayer’.⁶⁵⁸ There does seem to be here a tendency to want the reader to have an experience and I question whether such an experience could become the basis of salvation rather than the work of Christ on the cross. Having said this, these booklets have a stronger emphasis on God’s work in conversion than those in the first group. This is

⁶⁵² *Facing the Facts* (Evangelical Tract Society), p.12.

⁶⁵³ John Blanchard, *Ultimate Questions* (Darlington: EP Books, 2010), p.27. Stanley D. Gale, *How can I know eternal life?* (Leomister: Day One Publications, 2010), p.25. *The Unique Jesus* (Luton: Open Air Mission, 2010), p.23.

⁶⁵⁴ Gale, p.25.

⁶⁵⁵ *The Unique Jesus*, p.23.

⁶⁵⁶ Andy Banton, *Why all the Suffering* (Luton: Open Air Mission, 2009), p.23.

⁶⁵⁷ Banton, p.22.

⁶⁵⁸ Peter Jeffery, *Which way to God* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2000), p.26.

illustrated by Blanchard encouraging the reader to ask God ‘to enable’ them ‘to turn from sin and to put your trust in Christ’.⁶⁵⁹

Masters encourages the reader to cry out to God as they seek for salvation.⁶⁶⁰ Chapter 2 of this dissertation stated that Masters is an outspoken opponent to the sinner’s prayer. It is therefore surprising that he includes three suggestions of prayers to pray including: ‘O Lord I repent of my sin; reveal Thyself to me and make me one of your children. Lord, change me and give me spiritual life’. However, contrary to giving the impression that conversion only involves the saying of such a prayer, Masters says that, ‘at the time we pray the blessing is unknown to us’.⁶⁶¹ He sees praying not as an act of accepting salvation but one of pleading with God for salvation. This is the tone of the majority of booklets in this group and it could, to a certain extent, guard against the place of prayer in conversion being misunderstood.

2. Do the publications give the impression that conversion is only about securing a place in heaven rather than the beginning of a transformed life on earth?

Only 5 out of the 17 booklets (29%) give the impression that conversion is just about securing a place in heaven. The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet focused on the afterlife at the detriment of encouraging discipleship. For example Blanchard asks: ‘How can you escape the horrors of hell and enjoy the glories of heaven?’.⁶⁶² In answering this question he mentions repentance, faith and the need to pray but says nothing about living a transformed life. This compares with 5 out of 37 booklets (13%) in the group that includes a suggested prayer giving the impression that conversion is just about securing a place in heaven rather than the beginning of a transformed life on earth

⁶⁵⁹ Blanchard, *Ultimate Questions* p.27. *Jesus Dead or Alive* p.39. *Where do we go from here* p.38, *Why on Earth did Jesus come?* p.38.

⁶⁶⁰ Peter Masters, *How to seek and find the Lord* (London: Sword and Trowel, 1993 Seventh printing 2010), pp.10-12.

⁶⁶¹ Masters, *How to seek and find the Lord*, p.12.

⁶⁶² John Blanchard, *Where do we go from here?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2008), p.38. Banton says, ‘There is tremendous hope and comfort in knowing that you are not only saved from hell, but are on your way to heaven’. Andy Banton, *Why all the Suffering* (Luton: Open Air Mission, 2009), p.1.

3. Do the publications give the impression that conversion is always a sudden event thus not allowing for a gradual process?

In Chapter 4 it was stated that research has indicated that, for many, conversion is a process rather than an event and therefore to suggest that conversion is always a sudden event could be regarded as giving a false impression as to what is involved in conversion. 12 out of a possible 17 of the booklets (70%) did give the impression that conversion is a sudden event and did not allow for the possibility that it is a longer process. The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet gave the reader a promise or impression of instant conversion. For example Masters says: 'One moment I am not a believer, having no consciousness of God and no relationship with him. Then, at conversion, I experience His power in my life and find the eternal and holy God to be full of mercy and kindness. Now suddenly I know...'. While this might be the experience of some, for others conversion can involve a lengthy process and most of the booklets in this group make no allowance for this.⁶⁶³ Therefore, the majority of booklets which do not contain a prayer are in danger of conveying the misconception that conversion is always a sudden experience. This is similar to the result from the booklets containing a suggested prayer, all of which saw conversion as a sudden experience.

Conclusion regarding Conversion

None of the booklets gave the impression that praying a prayer is enough to constitute conversion. However, the majority of the booklets included prayer as part of what they recommended the reader to do in response to the Gospel. Prayer was seen more as calling on God for mercy than inviting Jesus into one's life. Taking the answers to the other two questions about conversion there are 17 positive answers out of a possible 51 (33%) in support of the negative aspect of the hypothesis regarding false impressions as to what is involved in conversion. This compares with 65 positive answers out of a possible 111 (58%) for the group of booklets which do contain a suggested

⁶⁶³ For further discussion of this issue please see my Masters dissertation. Bennett, 'A study of how adults become Christians'. Obtainable at <<http://www.bridge-builders.net/current/whoweare.php>> [accessed 17.9.2012].

prayer. Consequently, as anticipated, there is less support for this aspect of the hypothesis from the booklets that do not include a suggested prayer. Nevertheless, there is some support for the hypothesis from the booklets that do not contain a suggested prayer

Misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation

4. Do these publications encourage the respondent to base their assurance of salvation only on having said a prayer with sincerity?

None of the booklets promised those who prayed sincerely that they would have eternal life as a present possession. This is very different from the result of the booklets that do contain a suggested prayer where 21 out of 37 booklets (56%) encouraged the respondent to base their assurance of salvation only on having said a prayer with sincerity.

5. Do these publications encourage the respondent to base their assurance of salvation on what they have done rather than what God has done for them?

Only 3 booklets (out of 17) encouraged the respondent to base assurance on what they had done. This was evaluated on examination of the language used and whether it gave the impression the respondent was in control, such as, 'If we call on Him we will be saved, which means to be delivered from the power and penalty of sin'.⁶⁶⁴ This could lead to the respondent basing their salvation on having carried out the instruction to pray the suggested prayer. None of the booklets actually use the term 'assurance of salvation'. Contrary to this, the majority of the booklets which do contain a prayer (34 of the 37 booklets) were found to encourage the respondent to base their assurance of salvation on what they have done rather than what God has done for them. Contrastingly, there is only minimal support from the booklets that do not contain a prayer (3 out of 17) to the concept that people are encouraged to base their assurance of salvation on what they have done.

⁶⁶⁴ Victor Jack, *Believe and be Baptised* (Norwick: Hughes and Coleman, 2003), p.9.

6. Do these publications give the impression that once a person has prayed the suggested prayer they cannot be lost?

The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet made statements about salvation being permanent for those who had responded to the Gospel. On this basis, none of the booklets without a suggested prayer gave the impression that a person could lose their salvation. Only 6 out of 37 of the booklets which do contain a prayer gave the impression that if a person had prayed the suggested prayer they cannot be lost. Thus the vast majority of all the booklets did not support this concept.

Conclusion to assurance of salvation

Taking all three questions into consideration there were 3 positive answers out of a possible 51 (5%). None of the booklets encouraged the respondent to base their assurance of salvation only on having prayed sincerely. Support for this aspect of the hypothesis came only from 3 booklets which encouraged the respondent to base assurance on what they had done. This compares with 61 positive answers out of a possible 111 (55%) from the booklets that do contain a suggested prayer. This suggests that the inclusion of a suggested prayer is more likely to lead to misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation.

Less professional practices in evangelism

7. Is the aim of the publication to get someone to pray a prayer?

Only 2 of the 17 booklets (11%) which do not contain a suggested prayer gave the impression that their priority was to encourage the reader to pray. The criteria used to assess this was whether the content of the booklet led to the climax of encouraging the reader to pray. For example the closing words of *Facing the Facts* are 'Ask God to show you your true sinful self. Then call upon him to save you and make you a Christian'.⁶⁶⁵ Contrastingly 30 out of 37 of the booklets which included a suggested prayer were judged to be aiming to get the reader to say a suggested prayer. However, this section shows that there is

⁶⁶⁵ *Facing the Facts*, p.12.

minimal support for this from the booklets which do not contain a suggested prayer.

8. Does the writer manipulate or pressurise the reader into praying a prayer?

The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet included statements compelling the reader to pray a prayer. As with the booklets which do contain a prayer, using this criteria, none of the booklets were judged as manipulating the reader to pray a prayer. I then introduced the concept of 'gentle persuasion' which I used to assess the other group of booklets. By 'gentle manipulation' I mean putting forward praying a prayer as the only reasonable response. 6 out of the 17 booklets (35%) which do not contain a prayer were judged by this criteria to be gently manipulative. For example Blanchard says, 'Do it now! Ideally pray aloud to him'.⁶⁶⁶ The support here is a lot less than the 35 out of 37 (94%) booklets in the other group judged to be in danger of manipulating or pressurising the reader into praying a prayer. Therefore, it would seem from this study that evangelistic literature is less likely to pressurise or manipulate the reader into making a response if it does not include a suggested prayer.

9. Is the writer more interested in securing a decision rather than helping someone become a disciple?

The criteria used to assess this was whether the booklet led to a suggestion to pray at the end of the booklet with no comment about conversion involving a life-long commitment. 9 out of a possible 17 booklets (52%) which do not contain a suggested prayer were judged, using this criteria, to be more interested in securing a decision than encouraging discipleship. This is a very similar result to the 23 out of the 37 (62%) of the booklets that do contain a suggested prayer being judged as more interested in securing a decision rather than helping someone become a disciple.

⁶⁶⁶ John Blanchard, *Ultimate Questions* (Darlington: EP BOOKS, 2010), p.27.

Conclusion regarding evangelism

Taking all three questions into consideration, initially there were 11 positive answers out of a possible 51 (21%) supporting that the contents of these booklets (which do not include a suggested prayer) could lead to less professional practices in evangelism. However, reassessing the booklets, taking into account the concept of 'gentle manipulation' saw the support for this aspect of the hypothesis rise to 33% because there were then 17 out of 51 positive answers. Comparing this with the results for the booklets which do contain a suggested prayer the figures are a lot lower. The results for that group were initially 52 positive answers out a possible 111 (47%) and 87 out of 111 positive answers (78%) when the concept of 'gentle manipulation' is taken into consideration. We can conclude from this that there is some evidence that booklets which do not contain a suggested prayer are not as likely to result in less professional practices in evangelism. The assessment tried to consider the effect of the booklets in a stand alone situation and as most evangelistic literature is distributed by Christians, it is possible they will misuse the literature in the way they encourage people to respond.

Conclusion regarding booklets which do not contain a prayer

Seventeen booklets which do not contain a suggested prayer were analysed using the same criteria used to analyse the booklets which do contain a suggested prayer. Taking into consideration the results for the three negative statements of the hypothesis there were 37 positive answers out of a possible 153 (24%) in support that the contents of these booklets could lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and less professional practices in evangelism. Taking out the concept of 'gentle manipulation' the figure drops to 31 positive answers out of a possible 153 (20%). The results for the booklets which include a suggested prayer were 213 positive answers out of a possible 333 (64%) dropping to 178 positive answers out a possible 333 (53%) when the concept of 'gentle manipulation' is removed. Comparing the two sets of results the proportion of positive answers is 40% greater for the booklets that contain a

suggested prayer. This drops to 33% when the concept of 'gentle manipulation' is removed. Therefore, this study does show that there is a greater possibility of the negative aspects of the hypothesis being true if a suggested prayer is included in evangelistic literature.

Concluding Theological Reflection

The prevailing view of the atonement contained in the analysed booklets is the penal substitutionary view. This is not surprising as this view has been dominant among evangelicals in this country until comparatively recently.⁶⁶⁷ Grogan says this view should not be called a theory because he sees it as biblical doctrine which is not 'optional for Christians wishing to be true to scripture' but, as he points out, this 'evangelical' position is challenged by some contemporary evangelicals.⁶⁶⁸ This section considers how holding different views of the atonement might impact on the adoption and content of suggested prayers of response.

The penal substitutionary view teaches that God put the guilt of people's sins on Christ and that He, on the cross, took the punishment that people deserved.⁶⁶⁹ This is seen as Christ making a full payment for sins, which satisfies both the wrath and the righteousness of God, so that He can forgive

⁶⁶⁷ David Hilborn, 'Atonement, evangelicalism and the Evangelical Alliance' in Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker [Editors] *The Atonement Debate* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) pp.15-33. This book is the report on the London symposium on the theology of atonement which was organised by the Evangelical Alliance in July 2005 in response to Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) in which Chalke & Mann speak against the Penal Substitutionary View. See pp.171-187. Their work was strongly influenced by J. B. Green and M. D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

⁶⁶⁸ Geoffrey W. Grogan, *The faith once entrusted to the saints* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2010) pp.95-102. Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in the New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2000) pp. 23-24, 90-97, 132-133, 153-154, 168-169, 173-175, 2002-2003 and 220-221. David T. Williams, 'Towards a Unified Theory of the Atonement' in Tidball, Hilborn and Thacker, *The Atonement Debate*, p.229 'The symposium on the atonement held at London School of Theology in July 2005 demonstrated that evangelicals are not as united in their support for penal substitution as one might assume'.

⁶⁶⁹ J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In my place Condemned He Stood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007) pp.18, 25-27, 46, 103, 133. Ian J. Shaw and Brian H. Edwards, *The Divine Substitute: The Atonement in the Bible and History* (Leominster: One Day, 2006), pp.40, 42, 56, 84,116,119. See also D. Stephen Long, 'Justification and Atonement' in Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier, *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp.82-83.

sinner without compromising His own holy standard.⁶⁷⁰ Authors of booklets in both groups [those adopting a prayer and those excluding prayers] hold this view of the atonement. If a prayer is adopted this view usually means that the prayer includes an element of thanksgiving that Christ took the punishment for the recipient's sin. The prayer would give the impression that salvation is personal because this view emphasises that 'Christ died for us'.⁶⁷¹

The Christus Victor view teaches that Christ's incarnation, life, death and resurrection were the means by which the powers of evil, that held humankind under their dominion, were defeated.⁶⁷² One of the criticisms of this view is that no explanation is given as to how the death of Christ defeats demons and the devil.⁶⁷³ One possible solution is Origen's view of Christ's death as payment of the ransom to the devil to free people from the power of evil and in so doing totally defeat the powers of darkness.⁶⁷⁴ Opponents of this view dismiss it as crediting the devil with too much power because he has 'no rights over people that God has to honour' and states that the ransom must be paid to God because people are under obligation to him.⁶⁷⁵ Even so Boyd argues that the

⁶⁷⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp.570-579.

⁶⁷¹ Steve Jeffery, Mike Ovey and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for our Transgressions* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2007) pp.21-22. Shaw and Edwards, *The Divine Substitute*, pp.139-140. Where they highlight the preaching of Billy Graham and the words of songs such as Charles Gabriel 'I stand amazed in the presence'. "He took my sins and my sorrows. He made them his very own. And bore the burden to Calvary, And suffered and died alone."

⁶⁷² Gregory A. Boyd, 'Christus Victor View' in James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy [Editors] *The Nature of the Atonement* (Downes Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) pp.23-44, particularly pp.23-25 and 46-47. 'Whereas other models make little or no connection between Christ's life, death and resurrection on the one hand and the warfare motif that runs throughout Scripture on the other, the Christus Victor model expresses this connection and puts it on centre stage.' p.46. Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1931) p.4.

⁶⁷³ Thomas A. Schreiner, 'Penal Substitution Response' in James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy [Editors] *The Nature of the Atonement* (Downes Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) p.52. See also Boyd, 'Christus Victor View' in Beilby and Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp.23-49. For example: 'So too the Christus Victor model can wholeheartedly affirm that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many, but without supposing that Jesus literally had to in some sense buy off either God or the devil'. p.44.

⁶⁷⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.581. See C. S. Lewis, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (London: Fontana, 1980) p.129 where the witch voices this view when she demands payment for Edmond's sin. For a fuller explanation of the views of C. S. Lewis in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* see Boyd, 'Christus Victor Response' in Beilby and Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp.97-105.

⁶⁷⁵ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1986) pp.112-114. Jeffery, Ovey and Sach, *Pierced for our Transgressions*, pp.143-144.

Christos Victor view can accommodate all other views of the atonement 'in one single coherent framework'.⁶⁷⁶

Some contemporary proponents of the Christos Victor view are against the use of suggested prayers of response because they give the impression that conversion is a transaction that does not involve ongoing service.⁶⁷⁷ While this view would not suggest the eradication of suggested prayers holding this view would affect the content of any such prayer. The prayer would need to express allegiance to Christ and give thanks for the freedom secured by his death and resurrection.⁶⁷⁸ The prayer would not need to be a confession of personal responsibility for the sins of the respondent because this view sees salvation more from a cosmic perspective rather than concentrating on the sin of the individual.⁶⁷⁹

The Moral Influence View of the atonement teaches that the purpose of the work of Christ was to bring positive moral change to humanity.⁶⁸⁰ This moral change came through the teachings and example of Jesus and the inspiring effect of his martyrdom and resurrection.⁶⁸¹ Leon Morris says that 'taken by itself this view is inadequate, but it is not untrue'.⁶⁸² However, he is

⁶⁷⁶ Boyd, 'Christos Victor View' in Beilby and Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement*, p.47.

⁶⁷⁷ Chalke, 'The Redemption of the Cross', in Tidball, Hilborn and Thacker, *The Atonement Debate*: p.41. Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) pp.59-62 and McLaren, *More ready than you realise*, p.154. [Having said this McLaren does write about a number of views of the atonement and it is not clear which one he believes. He seems to see positive and negative in each of them.]

⁶⁷⁸ Boyd, 'Christos Victor View' in Beilby and Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp.44-47. Aulén, *Christos Victor*: pp.28-35.

⁶⁷⁹ Thomas A Schreiner, 'Penal Substitution Response' in Beilby and Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp.51-53. and Boyd, 'Christos Victor View' in Beilby and Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement*, p.46

⁶⁸⁰ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, pp.217- 221. Daniel Glynn, 'Theories of the Atonement' (2002) pp. 8-9. <<http://www.1way2god.net/tta.pdf>> [accessed 18.11.2013].

⁶⁸¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.581. Moral Influence Theory, Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry <<http://carm.org/dictionary-moral-influence>> [accessed 18.11.2013].

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, 'How are we saved? What is the moral influence view of the cross?'. Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Downloaded from: <<https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/pt-br/node/262>> [accessed 18.11.2013].

⁶⁸² Leon Morris, *Theories of the Atonement in Walter A. Elwell [Editor]*, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker.2001)*. Downloaded from <<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/atonementmorris2.html>> [accessed 12.11.2013] Morris points out that the 'Hymn – When I survey the wondrous cross, sets forth nothing but the moral view. It is true and important but when it is claimed that this is the total meaning of the atonement it must be rejected'.

concerned that the emphasis of this view is on personal experience and that atonement is not seen as having a broader significance.⁶⁸³ Repentance and faith could be included in any suggested prayer adopted by adherents to this view because these are seen as a correct response to 'the sight of the selfless Christ dying for sinners'.⁶⁸⁴ Any such prayer is likely to focus on the commitment to moral change rather than issues such as eternal life in heaven.

The Governmental view of the atonement teaches Christ died not to take the punishment for the sins of people but to suffer as a penal example whereby the law was honoured and God could therefore forgive humans without them being punished while still maintaining divine justice.⁶⁸⁵ If Charles Finney is taken as an example, of an advocate of this view, then a suggested prayer could contain expressions of repentance and faith.⁶⁸⁶ While the prayer might give thanks for forgiveness it would not say that the respondent's penalty for sin was paid by Christ.

Reichenbach puts forward the healing view of the atonement which centres around the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 which he sees as teaching that Christ on the cross took not only mankind's sin but also our illness and pain. As a result physical healing is available through the atonement. Warrington says,

⁶⁸³ Leon Morris, *Theories of the Atonement in Walter A. Elwell [Editor]*, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker.2001)*. Downloaded from <<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/atonementmorris2.html>> [accessed 12.11.2013]

⁶⁸⁴ Forlines, *Classical Arminianism*, pp.221-233. Leon Morris, *Theories of the Atonement in Walter A. Elwell [Editor]*, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker.2001)*. Downloaded from <<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/atonementmorris2.html>> [accessed 12.11.2013]

⁶⁸⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, 'Penal Substitution View' in James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy [Editors] *The Nature of the Atonement* (Downs Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) pp.68-69. J. Steven Harper, 'A Wesleyan Arminian View' in Horton, Geisler, Ashby and Harper, *Four Views on Eternal Security*, pp.230-231. Having defined the view he states that 'The governmental theory fails to encompass Wesley's doctrine of the atonement'. See also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp.582-586.

⁶⁸⁶ Charles Grandison Finney, *Systematic Theology* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publications, 1994) [Unabridged text of the complete 1878 edition of Finney's Lectures in Systematic Theology.] pp.360-377, 343-348 and 352-358. David H. Linden, Charles 'Finney's Doctrine of Justification' *Reformation and Revival Journal* Vol. 6, No.4 downloaded from <<http://www.grebeweb.com/linden/finney.html#note2>> [accessed 18.11.2013]. See also William Booth, *The Atonement of Jesus Christ*, 1922. Downloaded from <<http://biblicaltruthresources.wordpress.com/2012/08/06/william-booth-on-the-atonement-doctrine-of-the-salvation-army/>> [accessed 18.11.2013]. The teaching of Booth is similar to that of Finney.

that this view is held by many Pentecostals with some believing that 'healing is available to believers today as easily as the forgiveness of sins can be received'. The difficulty in this position is that because all are not healed people may doubt whether all who believe will be forgiven as result of the atonement. Warrington points out that some Pentecostals while seeing healing as part of the atonement believe this 'may not be actualized until after death'. All three other authors who share the book in which Reichenbach states his views agree with him that there is a connection between the death of Christ and healing. This suggests that this view can be added to other views of the atonement and should not be treated as a separate view. Holding to Reichenbach's view could result in the use of a suggested prayer that includes healing. However, the healing aspect of the atonement may also be seen as something to be addressed after initial conversion and therefore any suggested prayer may concentrate on forgiveness of sin rather than physical healing.

Green puts forward the kaleidoscopic view which asserts that the atonement is simply too profound to be comprehended by any one view, even if that model allows for others which are subordinate to it.⁶⁸⁷ Rather than seeking to form an amalgam of views of the atonement Green advocates a position which takes into account all the different New Testament metaphors for the death of Christ.⁶⁸⁸ Holding to such a view would not prohibit the use of suggested prayers of response but care would need to be taken regarding the content of the prayer so that it does not contradict any metaphor of the atoning work of Christ. This could result in a very long and clumsy prayer which attempted to refer to Green's long list of aspects of the atonement.⁶⁸⁹ The resulting complexity could inevitably lead to the exclusion of such prayers because of concern that they would be misunderstood by the reader.

Through reflecting on different views I have come to understand the danger of becoming too entrenched in one particular view of the atonement. For the authors of the booklets examined this could be the penal substitutionary

⁶⁸⁷ Green, 'Kaleidoscopic View' in James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy [Editors] *The Nature of the Atonement* (Downes Grove: IVP Academic, 2006) pp.157-185.

⁶⁸⁸ Green, 'Kaleidoscopic View' in Beilby and Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp.157-185.

⁶⁸⁹ Green, 'Kaleidoscopic View' in Beilby and Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement*, pp.168-169.

view. Gilbert sees the death of Christ as an example, that accomplished reconciliation and victory over Satan but in his opinion all these point to penal substitution which is at the heart of the Gospel.⁶⁹⁰ Williams says that the penal substitution theory taken alone does not give a strong motivation for change of lifestyle.⁶⁹¹ Contrary to this McKnight sees atonement resulting in a living community offering God's love to others in missional practices of justice and reconciliation.⁶⁹² I would therefore prefer a 'multifaceted' view, picturing the atonement as a cut jewel with many surfaces reflecting different aspects of the meaning of the cross of Christ seen in the various views of the atonement. Having said this it is difficult to envisage a prayer which could embrace all views particularly as some are incompatible with each other.⁶⁹³ However, it is clear that the view of the atonement which a writer holds will affect the content of any prayer of response which they suggest.

Conclusion to Chapter 6

This chapter analysed a random but purposive sample of booklets which contained a suggested prayer. As would be expected, these publications supported the positive aspect of the hypothesis that a suggested prayer of response in evangelistic literature might help some people express their response to the Christian Gospel. The nine questions which were considered in Chapter 4 were then used to assess whether these booklets supported the three negative aspects of my hypothesis. There were 213 positive answers out of a possible 333 (64%) to support the suggestion that including a suggested prayer can lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and less professional practices in evangelism. However, during this study a concept which I termed

⁶⁹⁰ Gilbert, *What is the Gospel*, p.68-69. Stephen R. Holmes, 'Ransomed, Healed, Restored, Forgiven' in Tidball, Hilborn and Thacker, *The Atonement Debate*, pp.267-292. 'Generally, evangelicals in Britain have held to penal substitution with a "many metaphors" view of the atonement: penal substitution is one way of speaking about the cross, and perhaps the most significant, but other ways are also valid. This, it seems to me, is less true of American evangelicals', p.267.

⁶⁹¹ David T. Williams, 'Towards a Unified Theory of the Atonement' in Tidball, Hilborn and Thacker, *The Atonement Debate*, p.232.

⁶⁹² Scot McKnight, *A Community Call Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007) pp.1-5 and 134-141.

⁶⁹³ David T. Williams, 'Towards a Unified Theory of the Atonement' in Tidball, Hilborn and Thacker, *The Atonement Debate*, pp.236-237.

'gentle manipulation' was introduced. This put forward the idea that just by suggesting a course of action as the only reasonable and beneficial response the literature could be regarded as manipulating or pressuring the reader. If we discount this concept of 'gentle manipulation' the number of positive answers drops to 178 out of a possible 333 (53%) which renders this part of the study inconclusive.

Later in the chapter, a similar study was undertaken of a random but purposive sample of booklets which do not contain a suggested prayer. This revealed that these booklets were much less likely to lead to the negative aspects of the hypothesis as the booklets which do include a prayer. This suggests that removing the suggested prayer could neutralise the negative aspects of the hypothesis.

The main finding to come out of the study of the second group of booklets is that 14 out of the 17 booklets in this group encouraged the reader to pray as part of their response to the Gospel. The difference seemed to lie only in not actually giving the reader the words to say. The results from analysis of the second group would appear to suggest that some of the issues which were considered as ways booklets could support the hypothesis may be partly eliminated by not providing a suggested prayer. This will be further investigated in the next chapter.

The next chapter will take the issues raised by the hypothesis considered in this chapter and seek to test them against the insights gained from fourteen in-depth interviews with writers of evangelistic literature.

Chapter 7. Interviews

Introduction

Fourteen in-depth interviews were undertaken. The interviewees were chosen because they had written evangelistic literature which had been widely circulated in Britain and was still in publication. The interviewees are separated into two equal groups of seven. Group A are those who *do* include a suggested prayer in their publications and Group B consists of seven who *do not* include such prayers. The whole interview process from the initial contact with interviewees to producing the transcripts for analysis was undertaken in accordance with my ethical application approved by the Ethics Committee of Bangor University.⁶⁹⁴

Sample of interviewees

The sample represents a high proportion of the people currently writing evangelistic literature in Britain. However, as this is based on my search for suitable interviewees, the sample should be seen as a stratified random sample because interviewees were chosen according to whether or not they included a suggested prayer in their publications.⁶⁹⁵ The sample was affected by the decision to keep the two groups of equal size. This decision was made to keep the two groups the same size in order that there would be a fair representation of both views and that it would be feasible to compare the two groups.⁶⁹⁶ It was initially hard to find enough interviewees for group B (those who do not include a suggested prayer) and this did affect the size of the sample.⁶⁹⁷ Therefore, it is a sample of convenience as the researcher contacted writers who matched the criteria. Some potential interviewees were already known because of their

⁶⁹⁴ Approval was granted in May 2011.

⁶⁹⁵ Davies, *Doing a Successful Research Project*, p.60.

⁶⁹⁶ Cohen, Manion and Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, p.279.

⁶⁹⁷ The reason for this was partly due to my being more aware of writers who include a prayer. I also found that there were fewer publications available – particularly in Christian bookshops – which do not include a prayer. To gather distribution statistics to compare the two groups of publications was beyond the scope of this study because the issue being examined was the relevance of including a suggested prayer and not the popularity of this practice.

reputation and others were discovered through studying the author details on publications or by contacting publishing organisations.⁶⁹⁸

Contacting interviewees

All interviewees were approached initially by email. Fifteen writers of evangelistic literature were approached and only one declined the request to be interviewed. The person who did not agree to be interviewed gave pressure of work as the reason. Two agreed to giving shorter interviews of 15 minutes.⁶⁹⁹ Once interviewees had agreed to take part, they were sent the interview questions, consent form and participant information sheet. The interviewee decided the day and time of the interview. In the case of face to face interviews they also decided the location which was their home or office. All interviewees signed a consent form.

Execution of interviews

An interview questionnaire consisting of eighteen questions was used to structure the interviews and ensure that interviews remained relevant to the issues raised by my hypothesis. The questionnaire used in the interviews was also approved by the University. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2. Interviewees were sent the questionnaire at least one week before the interview. Six of the interviews were carried out face to face. However, because of the travelling involved, it was decided to try to interview by telephone.⁷⁰⁰ This proved effective and thus the other eight interviews were undertaken using the telephone. During the face to face interviews I refrained from using gestures or facial expressions to indicate whether I agreed or disagreed with the interviewee in order to safeguard against influencing the interviewee.⁷⁰¹ Consequently, there did not seem to be any disadvantage in

⁶⁹⁸ Loraine Blaxter, Christina Hughes and Malcolm Tight, *How to research, third edition* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006) p.163.

⁶⁹⁹ A5 was face to face and the reason given for a shorter interview was pressure of work. The other was B7 which was a telephone interview and the reason for it being shorter was ill health.

⁷⁰⁰ Interviewees lived an average distance of 234 miles from where I am situated. Only one interviewee from group A lived within 15 miles of my own location and one from group B was interviewed while he was visiting this area. Telephone interviews were facilitated by using the 'Olympus Telephone Pickup TP-7 microphone' which simply fits into the interviewer's ear allowing normal use of the telephone while recording the interview. Olympus VN 8700PC Digital Voice Recorder was used to record all interviews.

⁷⁰¹ McCracken, *The Long Interview*, pp.28-38.

interviewing people by telephone.⁷⁰² Even though the same questionnaire was used to structure all interviews, telephone interviews were shorter. This was due to a tendency that some telephone interviewees were more likely to satisfice.⁷⁰³ This was demonstrated by them giving more to the point answers which seemed to be due to the difference in communication when using the telephone.⁷⁰⁴ For example, telephone interviewees tended not to tell prolonged stories that are common in the face to face interviews. This, and the fact they spoke for less time in-between prompts, could be due to the lack of non-verbal visual communication, such as eye contact.⁷⁰⁵ Having said this, a comparison of the interview transcripts found the interview pattern for the two groups was similar. I repeated the interview question and also reminded interviewees we were thinking about literature not preaching; the amount of such prompting is similar for both groups.

There were 8 hours 50 minutes of recordings. The recordings of group A (those who included a prayer) were 38 minutes longer than those of group B (those who do not include a prayer). I would suggest that the reason for this is because more of the interviews in group B were undertaken using the telephone and, as explained above, telephone interviews tended to be shorter.⁷⁰⁶ I believe the reason for this is pragmatic; I found it more difficult to find people

⁷⁰² Average face to face interview lasted 44 minutes while the average telephone interview lasted 32 minutes.

⁷⁰³ Jon A. Krosnick and Allyson L. Holbrook. 'The Survey Response Process in Telephone and Face-to-Face Surveys: Differences in Respondent Satisficing and Social Desirability Response Bias' (The Ohio State University, 2001) pp.5-6.

<<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/kenwald/pos6757/spring02/tch62.pdf>> [accessed 9.8.2012]. By contrast see Annette Jäckle, Caroline Roberts and Peter Lynn 'Telephone versus Face-to-Face Interviewing: Mode Effects on Data Quality and Likely Causes. Report on Phase II of the ESS-Gallup Mixed Mode Methodology Project', ISER Working Paper 2006-41. Colchester: University of Essex. (August 2006) Which found no evidence for satisficing in telephone interviews. <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/files/iser_working_papers/2006-41.pdf> [accessed 9.8.2012].

⁷⁰⁴ See Cohen, Manion and Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*. pp. 153, 222-223 and 379-382 for discussion and comment on the difference between interviewing on the telephone and face-to-face.

⁷⁰⁵ See <<http://www.collegegrad.com/ezone/21nonver.shtml>>[accessed 28.12.2012] "If you have a habit of looking away while listening, it shows lack of interest and a short attention span." [A telephone interviewee may stop talking because they have no indication whether the interviewer is still listening because they can not have eye contact.] See Gill Hasson, *Brilliant Communication Skills* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2011), pp. 25-26, 69-70, 127-129 and 167 [On the value of eye contact].

⁷⁰⁶ Only two interviews in group A were by telephone but there were six telephone interviews in group B.

who did not include a prayer and these tended to be among the later interviews undertaken, therefore more of these were telephone interviews. I think the reason I found it is easier to find interviewees who included a prayer is that more of these were known to me before I commenced the study. Although the study of circulation statistics is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I did discover more publications that included a prayer: this is evidenced in the fact that the groups of publications studied in Chapter 5 are very uneven, there being thirty-seven booklets which contain a prayer but only seventeen which do not contain a prayer.

Transcription of interviews

The interviews were recorded and transcripts were produced from these recordings. The transcripts amounted to 59,535 words. There were 647 fewer words in the transcripts of group B compared with group A due to the shorter interviews because of using the telephone. Interviews were an average of 40 minutes in group A and 35 minutes in group B. In this dissertation, the transcripts of interviews are referred to by code, A1 to A7 for the group which includes a suggested prayer in their publications and B1 to B7 for the group which do not include a suggested prayer. A number in brackets after the code such as B1[4] refers to the number of the question on the questionnaire that the interviewee is answering.⁷⁰⁷ According to the ethical standards of Bangor University, the interviewees remain anonymous and anything which could help the reader identify them has been removed from the transcripts. Interviewees were sent a copy of the amended transcript of their interview with the content likely to be quoted highlighted. All the interviewees acknowledged in writing their approval of the amended transcript of their interview.

⁷⁰⁷ Thus B1[4] means that it is interviewee B1 answering question 4 on the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2.

Method of Analysing of transcripts

The interview transcripts were analysed thematically to identify comments and insights relevant to the statements of the hypothesis.⁷⁰⁸ The issues raised by interviewees were identified and this information placed in categorised computer files.⁷⁰⁹ The aim of this process was to ascertain whether the interviewees agreed with the statements of the hypothesis and to identify how evangelistic literature could be improved by implementing any findings. The answers of the two groups of interviewees were compared and significant differences were highlighted. The analysis started with the assumption that the two groups would offer very different opinions but, as will be seen, they proved often to be nearer agreement.⁷¹⁰ One of the desired research outcomes of this process was to find indications as to how I may improve my own writing.

Only at the stage of analysing the transcripts was it discovered that some interview questions opened up subjects that were not altogether relevant in answering the questions raised by the hypothesis.⁷¹¹ For example, question 5 on the interview questionnaire asked about the content of the Gospel.⁷¹² By this stage in the research I had realised that my research topic touched on many subjects and there was a need to narrow it down to the points raised by my hypothesis. Therefore, this chapter only covers the analysis of thirteen of the questions on the interview questionnaire.⁷¹³ What follows is not so much a recording of findings arranged as statistics but the gathered opinions and

⁷⁰⁸ King and Horrocks, pp.149-150.

⁷⁰⁹ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, p.73.

⁷¹⁰ For example, before the interview stage it was thought that all those who included a prayer would lean, theologically, towards 'human responsibility' and those who did not include a prayer would lean towards 'divine sovereignty'. Question 15 of the interview questionnaire asked: 'In what ways do you think your views regarding divine sovereignty and human responsibility impact on your evangelistic writing?' What was discovered was that both groups of interviewees had very mixed opinions on this topic and that my preconceived idea was not borne out by the research. Only interviewees A1 and A2 had a bias towards human responsibility and only interviewees B1, B5 and B7 had a bias towards divine sovereignty.

⁷¹¹ Particularly Questions 5, 15, 16 and 17. Question 1 was seen as an introductory question to help interviewees relax and question 18 was designed to pick up comments not shared in answer to the other questions. The full questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix 1.

⁷¹² Question 5 on the interview questionnaire asked: 'What are the essential elements of the Christian Gospel which you feel need to be included in an evangelistic publication?'

⁷¹³ Questions 2 to 14. See Appendix 2 for Interview Questionnaire.

insights shared by the interviewees.⁷¹⁴ The rest of this chapter follows the structure of previous chapters in dealing with the one positive and three negative aspects of the hypothesis.⁷¹⁵

The nine questions used in chapter 6 are not used in this chapter other than for the consideration of less professional practise in evangelism. The reason for this, as stated in the chapter 5 is because the interview questionnaire was formulated before the nine questions totally emerged from the lengthy process of scholarly investigation.⁷¹⁶

Analysis of Transcripts

The Positive aspect of the hypothesis

The interview transcripts were analysed to identify comments for or against the positive proposition of the hypothesis that a suggested prayer of response in evangelistic literature is included by authors because it will help people express their response to the Christian Gospel. Although the interviewees' answers to all the questions on the interview questionnaire were considered, it is the material from questions 2, 3 and 4 which were particularly analysed to provide insights into this aspect of the hypothesis.⁷¹⁷

In answering question 2 on the interview questionnaire, all the interviewees in Group A agreed that such a prayer could help the reader to verbalise their response which indicates that this was their intention in adopting

⁷¹⁴Bell, *Doing your Research Project*, pp.7 and 8: 'Researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world'.

⁷¹⁵ One positive aspect states that including a suggested prayer of commitment in evangelistic literature might help some people express their response to the Christian Gospel. Negative aspects are that including a suggested prayer can be unhelpful because it can lead to: 1. false impressions as to what is involved in conversion; 2. misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation; 3. less professional practices in evangelism.

⁷¹⁶ A fuller explanation of why all nine of the questions used in chapter 6 do not appear in this chapter is given in the methodology on p.66

⁷¹⁷ Question 2 'What are your reasons for including/not including a suggested prayer in your evangelistic literature?' Question 3. 'What do you see as the possible advantages of including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?' Question 4. 'What possible disadvantages do you see in including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?'

suggested prayers.⁷¹⁸ For example, ‘sometimes people need a bit of help to articulate what they’re feeling’.⁷¹⁹ This assumes that a response has to be in audible words and cannot simply be the Spirit-inspired inner groaning of the soul.⁷²⁰

In their answers to question 3 on the interview questionnaire, three interviewees in Group A expressed the need for words as being useful in teaching the respondent to pray by offering them a few words ‘to help them maybe pray the first prayer they’ve ever prayed.’⁷²¹ This point would be strongly contested by three interviewees of Group B (those who don’t include a prayer) in answering question 2 because they would regard providing a suggested prayer as ‘putting words into people’s mouths’.⁷²² Their contention here would be their belief that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to help a person respond and the responsibility of the writer of evangelistic literature ends when they have adequately explained the Gospel including how to respond.⁷²³ In his answer to question 2, interviewee A2 shares that in his experience people have difficulty finding the words to pray and need some guidance similar to that requested by Jesus’ original twelve disciples who asked to be taught how to pray.⁷²⁴ This leaves us with the question as to whether offering a suggested

⁷¹⁸ Question 2 on the interview questionnaire asks: ‘What are your reasons for including/or not including a suggested prayer in your evangelistic literature?’.

⁷¹⁹ A2[2] That is interviewee A2 answering question 2 on the interview questionnaire. See Appendix 2 for copy of questionnaire. This point is also made by all interviewees in group A [those who include a prayer] other than interviewee A4.

⁷²⁰ See Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, pp.292-293 where he comments on Romans 8:26: ‘In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.’ Saying how ‘The Spirit calls from deep within in us, calls on the father, ...calls from... the pain of our hearts.’; See too Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology* p.125 where he comments on the Holy Spirit’s involvement in prayer.

⁷²¹ A7[3] Interviewees A2 and A3 make the same point. For example: ‘whatever you think that prayer actually means in reality and substantially it gets people to the point where they are talking to God,’ A3[2].

⁷²² Interviewees B1, B4 and B6. For example: ‘Another reason [for not including a suggested prayer] would be trying not to put my words in someone else’s mouth.’ B4[2]. Question 2 on the interview questionnaire asks: ‘What are your reasons for including/or not including a suggested prayer in your evangelistic literature?’.

⁷²³ Interviewee B3 says: ‘I fear the prayer is stepping onto the Holy Spirit’s territory a little bit. It’s as though we present the Gospel but that is still not enough to get someone in the Kingdom, that we’ve got to go further and I think that is the territory of the Holy Spirit to go further.’ B3[2].

⁷²⁴ A2 says: ‘I suppose even the disciples said to Jesus, ‘Show us what we should pray, how should we pray?’ Kids or adults have that same sort of, ‘Oh, I’m not quite sure what to say’ and maybe want to pray but not quite sure how to, so it’s just a way of helping people to pray. They maybe aren’t very practised or used to doing that.’ A2[2].

prayer would be an adequate way of supplying this instruction and whether or not such help could be given in a publication without supplying a model prayer. Two interviewees put forward a 'solution' by suggesting what should be included in the prayer, without giving the actual words to be used.⁷²⁵ This could still leave the respondent believing they had done the right thing solely because they followed instructions, which could result in the same negative issues the hypothesis raises regarding the use of a suggested prayer.

Three interviewees in Group A, in their answers to question 3, give additional reasons why a suggested prayer could help someone responding to the Gospel.⁷²⁶ They see the suggested prayer as helping the reader to do something in response to the Gospel and believe it demonstrates the need for a 'definite deliberate act of commitment'.⁷²⁷ However, in answering question 14, interviewees from Group B suggest that asking the reader to pray using their own words would equally facilitate such a response.⁷²⁸ Two of the interviewees from Group A, in their answers to question 3, say using a suggested prayer helps the respondent fix the day when they made a commitment to Christ, helping them to mark the start of their Christian walk.⁷²⁹ The respondent being

⁷²⁵ Interviewee B5 says: 'So I think not including any prayer but just telling them to pray we've got to explain a little bit about what we mean. It is a child's cry to his Father. So it can avoid one disadvantage but it maybe opens up others.' B5[14]. Interviewee A6 says: 'Well you can leave out a prayer – but you want to urge people to acknowledge the Sovereignty of Creator God, acknowledge the fact of personal sin, acknowledge the cross, acknowledge that Jesus is alive, and acknowledge His personal intervention in their lives and their desire to repent and receive Him – so you can write all that out but you might as well put it in a prayer. Because at the end of the day that's probably going to be the easiest way of doing it.' A6[14].

⁷²⁶ A1, A2 and A3. Question 3 asks: 'What do you see as the possible advantages of including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?'

⁷²⁷ Interviewees A1, A2, A3, for example: 'it gives someone something concrete to do as a response' A3[3] and 'helps someone to do something that they want to do but they don't know how to do it.' A2[3]. Interviewee A1 says the suggested prayer: 'makes it clear that there needs to be commitment; a definite deliberate act'. A1[3]. 'If that's what you want to do here's a little prayer to help you.' A2[4].

⁷²⁸ Question 14 on the interview questionnaire asks: What difference do you think it would make if evangelistic literature encouraged a person responding to the Gospel to pray but did not include a suggested prayer? In answer, interviewee B2 says: 'Being able to write a prayer that's going to meet people's needs and connect with what they are feeling is very, very difficult. So I think in some ways it is better just to let people express it in their own words.' B2[14]. Interviewee B5 says: 'So I think not including any prayer but just telling them to pray we've got to explain a little bit about what we mean. It is a child's cry to his Father. So it can avoid one disadvantage but it maybe opens up others.' B5[14].

⁷²⁹ Interviewees A1 and A4 'So I think the Sinner's Prayer just says "I've started, I've started to follow Jesus".' A4[3] Interviewee A1 talks about 'how they can cross over the line, how they can become Christians'. A1[3].

able to say this retrospectively could be helpful but it could also be a hindrance if the person was not genuinely converted.⁷³⁰ In support of this, interviewee A4, in his answer to question 3, advocates that the use of a suggested prayer helps the respondent to mark the beginning of their Christian commitment and to be able to say that they have made a start of following Jesus.⁷³¹ This would support the positive element of the hypothesis that a suggested prayer could help some people express their response to the Christian Gospel. One interviewee in Group A takes support for a suggested prayer to an extreme in saying that praying the suggested prayer is 'essential' while another says it is 'a vital first step'.⁷³² This could result in those who have made a commitment without saying the prayer doubting their own salvation and their conversion being less accepted by Christians. Accepting this view would also result in it becoming imperative in evangelism to get people to say a prayer, giving such prayers an importance beyond offering help. Alternatively, an interviewee from Group B says that: 'there is a danger of slipping into a mechanistic approach to conversion. That if you have prayed this prayer, if you have said the words, you can be confident you're converted rather than focusing on a genuine heart response'.⁷³³ Another interviewee from Group B is concerned that the use of a suggested prayer would lead to 'the problem of easy believism' resulting in someone saying, 'Well, I read a tract and I thought it was good and I said the prayer so I must be a Christian', but they haven't actually quite got it'.⁷³⁴ As two interviewees point out, these issues could be clarified if literature is being used in relational evangelism that allows the Christian who is interacting with the reader to correct any misconceptions gained by reading an evangelistic

⁷³⁰ Jerrold More, New Salem Baptist Church, Kentucky speaking at 2012 Southern Baptist Convention in the USA speaking against resolution 3 regarding the Sinner's Prayer. More points out that every person in the town where he works has at some point said the Sinner's Prayer but they are not living according to scripture, do not attend Church and have not repented and put their faith in Jesus. < <http://mediasuite.316networks.com/player.php?p=gj59id16>>. Recording of 2012 Southern Baptist Convention, Wednesday morning June 20th 2012, Committee on Resolutions, 27.03 minutes into the recording. [accessed 2.7.2012].

⁷³¹ Interviewee A4 says: 'Just that it starts you – it's a way of responding to what has been said. Now I don't know whether that person has repented but it's a way of them drawing a line in the sand and saying 'I'm starting'. So I think the Sinner's Prayer just says 'I've started, I've started to follow Jesus.' A4[3].

⁷³² Interviewee A7: 'But that prayer I think is a vital first step.' A7[2] Interviewee A6 says, 'I don't see it as an advantage. I see it as essential.' A6[3].

⁷³³ B5[2].

⁷³⁴ B4[4].

publication.⁷³⁵ Having said this, there is support from one interviewee for stand-alone criteria used to examine booklets in the previous chapter, because the literature could be read in situations where there is no-one available to offer further help.⁷³⁶

One of the surprises of the study is that while two interviewees from Group B are adamant that there is no possible advantage to including a suggested prayer, the other five interviewees in Group B (those who do not include a prayer) can see some advantage in including a suggested prayer.⁷³⁷ Their opinions are stated in answer to question 3 on the interview questionnaire.⁷³⁸ For example, providing a suggested prayer 'can model for someone - you can show someone what a prayer of repentance looks like - what a prayer of faith looks like and that could be very helpful for people to actually do that'.⁷³⁹ This is very similar to members of Group A saying that people needed help to articulate their response. Also, similar to comments from Group A, one interviewee in Group B, says that offering a suggested prayer 'gives people the first step, it gives them a very tangible response'.⁷⁴⁰ In fairness to the interviewees of Group B, I must point out that these comments about the advantages of a suggested prayer were given in response to a direct

⁷³⁵ Interviewees B2 and B4. Interviewee B2 says: 'So I think the most important thing still is to push people back towards relationship. Yes, if you want to suggest that people pray something that's fine but straightaway try to get them to talk to people, to get them back into Christian community.' B2 [13]. Interviewee B4 says: 'Again the importance of saying to people, 'Go tell somebody'. 'If you've read this and prayed this go and tell somebody who you know is a Christian... I think that is probably the best way to guard against it.' B4[11].

⁷³⁶ For example interviewee B5 says that an evangelistic publication 'could be just reading a leaflet that you picked up on a train and not have any contact with any Christians and just assume that because you have said the prayer you're OK. Never make contact with any Christians, with a Church, never see any radical change in life. All of which is possible, of course, if there isn't a prayer. But if you don't include that prayer at the end then you're not giving people the wrong view that the prayer itself is the fulcrum on which it all swings'. B5[4].

⁷³⁷ Interviewees B1, B2, B4, B5, B6 see an advantage in providing a suggested prayer while interviewees B3 and B7 see no advantage. For example: 'I don't see there being any advantages. If the Gospel has been presented clearly and the invitation of what a sinner needs to do to be made right with God, then I don't see that there are advantages in having a prayer.' B3[3].

⁷³⁸ Question 3 on the interview questionnaire asked: 'What do you see as the possible advantages of including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?'

⁷³⁹ B4[3].

⁷⁴⁰ B2[3] Interviewee B5 adds: 'I suppose it doesn't leave folk high and dry wondering what they are supposed to do next.' B5[3].

question.⁷⁴¹ Interviewee B1 voices caution by saying that, ‘theoretically’, providing a suggested prayer ‘would be helpful’ and says he would want to put any such prayers in ‘very small print’.⁷⁴² In their answers to question 10, two of the interviewees from Group B add a caveat to their favourable comments, such as stating that suggested prayers can ‘soft pedal what the writer tends to think might be the less attractive aspects of the Gospel, particularly repentance and the cost of commitment’.⁷⁴³ This suggests that the interviewees of Group B might accept the use of a suggested prayer if the context and content of the prayer were in line with their own beliefs.

The most significant objection to the use of a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature coming from the interviewees of Group B is lack of biblical support.⁷⁴⁴ Their opinions are given in answer to question 2 on the interview questionnaire.⁷⁴⁵ One of this group admits that there are prayers prayed by sinners in the Bible.⁷⁴⁶ As these prayers are not identical he sees no support for what he calls ‘the sinner’s prayer’ by which he means a special suggested prayer that should be used by those responding to the Gospel.⁷⁴⁷ Another interviewee in the same group states that because there is ‘no formulation of a prayer that you can take from Scripture’ there would be a need to ‘interpret the

⁷⁴¹ Question 3 on the interview questionnaire asked: ‘What do you see as the possible advantages of including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?’.

⁷⁴² B1 ‘I think the theoretical advantages would be that a person who is new to Scriptural terminology might in their heart – I would prefer to have said the Lord might be working in their heart and bringing them towards the point of conversion. And they may feel and it would be a very genuine understandable feeling of ‘I want to get this right – I want to make sure that I’m saying the right things’ and so in theory I could see the argument that that might be helpful to somebody. It might all seem a very esoteric thing to them, they may have no church background and they may say ‘Show me exactly what button I need to press here’. So I would theoretically see that that would be helpful. But then I feel that one would need to be very, very careful as to what that wording said because I think it could get hopelessly mixed up and it could be asking for odd things. I would put it in very small print.’ B1[3].

⁷⁴³ B6[3]. Interviewee B1 says: ‘I feel that one would need to be very, very careful as to what that wording said because I think it could get hopelessly mixed up and it could be asking for odd things’. B1[3].

⁷⁴⁴ B1, B2, B3, B4, B7. For example ‘I don’t think it’s necessary and I don’t think it’s Biblical’. B3[2] or ‘The call of conversion in the Scriptures, as I see it, is to repent and believe and be baptised rather than repent and believe and say a prayer.’ B4[2].

⁷⁴⁵ Question 2 on the interview questionnaire asks: ‘What are your reasons for including/or not including a suggested prayer in your evangelistic literature?’.

⁷⁴⁶ B1[2]. His examples of prayers by sinners are: ‘Return O Lord, deliver my soul’ Psalm 6:4. ‘Hear O Lord when I cry with my voice’ Psalm 27:7. ‘Have mercy on me’ Psalm 51:1/2. ‘Heal me O Lord and I shall be healed’ Jeremiah 17 and ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’ Luke 18:13.

⁷⁴⁷ B1[2].

message and write something in non-biblical material' which they would find unacceptable because of the high level of biblical content in their particular publications.⁷⁴⁸ This is a pivotal issue in this study but rather than reacting by dismissing the use of a suggested prayer altogether, I question whether it is possible to write a prayer which has a context and content which is acceptable to those concerned about faithfulness to the Bible.

Five interviewees of Group A, in answer to a direct question, shared disadvantages to including a suggested prayer.⁷⁴⁹ These opinions were given in answer to question 4 on the interview questionnaire.⁷⁵⁰ For example, two interviewees admit that the suggested prayer could be regarded as 'magic words' which the reader says and instantly the respondent is 'forgiven and has eternal life'.⁷⁵¹ Interviewee A2 even articulates the same concern which is made by the interviewees of Group B that providing a suggested prayer could be 'putting words into people's mouths'.⁷⁵² It is indicated here that those who include a suggested prayer are aware of the potential problems. Having said this, the overwhelming opinion of the interviewees in Group A is that providing a suggested prayer could help someone express their response to the Christian Gospel by providing appropriate words for them to use.

Conclusion regarding the positive aspect of the hypothesis

The views of the two groups of interviewees were very balanced, with the majority of both groups allowing for advantages and disadvantages in supplying a suggested prayer. Only two interviewees from Group A insisted that there are no disadvantages in providing a suggested prayer and similarly only two

⁷⁴⁸ B2[2].

⁷⁴⁹ Interviewees A1, A2, A3, A4 and A7. Question 4 of the interview questionnaire asked: 'What possible disadvantages do you see in including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?'

⁷⁵⁰ Question 4 on the interview questionnaire asks: 'What possible disadvantages do you see in including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?'

⁷⁵¹ A3 and A4 for example 'People can and do and have viewed the saying of the prayer as simply it's magic, you say these magic words and you're forgiven and you have eternal life and that's not, of course, how it works.' A3[4] A4 says 'the disadvantage is people simply pray the prayer, think they're a Christian when they're not. A4[4].

⁷⁵² A2[4].

interviewees in Group B were adamant that there are no advantages in providing a suggested prayer.

Analysis of interviews regarding Conversion

The interview transcripts were analysed to identify comments and insights relevant to the statement of the hypothesis that says providing a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature can be unhelpful because it can lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion. Although interviewees' answers to all the questions on the interview questionnaire were considered, it is questions 10 and 11 regarding conversion that were particularly analysed to discover insights into the interviewees' opinions on this aspect of the hypothesis.⁷⁵³

The place of prayer in conversion

Question 10 on the interview questionnaire asked: 'What part do you think prayer can play in conversion?'. In answering this question all fourteen interviewees say that prayer usually plays some part in conversion. Further analysis of the content of their comments identified that all the interviewees of Group B (those who don't include a prayer) see prayer as more 'essential' to conversion than the interviewees of Group A.⁷⁵⁴ For example interviewee B5 even says that 'conversion is prayer' while B3 says a person 'can not be saved without praying'.⁷⁵⁵ This indicates that any reluctance to include a suggested prayer is not because they see prayer as unimportant. It is possible that those in Group B expressed this view because they were 'compensating' for the fact that they did not include a specific prayer. Whereas those in Group A assumed that, because they had included a prayer, their understanding of the need for prayer was more self-evident and therefore didn't stress it. Having said this, the

⁷⁵³ Question 10 asked: 'What part do you think prayer can play in conversion? Question 11 asked: 'What misconceptions about conversion could arise from providing a suggested prayer and how can we guard against them?.'

⁷⁵⁴ 'Absolutely essential' B1[10]. 'It's the way we articulate our acceptance'. B2[10]. 'I don't think a person can be saved without it'. B3[10]. 'If you don't pray then you won't be converted really'. B4[10]. 'If people don't pray at the end then they are not converted'. B5[10]. 'Prayer, simply because it is communication with God, is essential'. B6[10]. 'There has got to be a response to God which is prayer.' B7[10]. See footnote 679 for question 10.

⁷⁵⁵ B3[10] and B5[10] See footnote 679 for question 10.

overriding view of Group B is illustrated by interviewee B7 who says that ‘they’ve got to come to prayer and the prayer I would say is their own prayer - not a set prayer given to them, but it’s the expression of their own heart.’⁷⁵⁶ The issue here is not whether prayer is a right response to the Gospel but disagreeing with providing a ‘set prayer’. Interviewee B7 seems to advocate that any words from the heart will be more acceptable than using a suggested prayer. I would question whether heartfelt extemporary words which do not express repentance and faith are an adequate response to the Gospel.⁷⁵⁷ In support of this statement, interviewees from both groups actually describe part of the expected response to the Gospel as ‘a prayer of faith and repentance’.⁷⁵⁸

In answer to question 4 of the interview questionnaire, interviewee B3 advocates that the issue is not the sincerity behind the prayer but whether God is working in their hearts.⁷⁵⁹ The problem here is that it is difficult to tell for certain what God is doing in someone else’s life. By contrast, interviewee B6, answering question 12, says that ‘at the end of the day the Lord knows what words are said sincerely and what aren’t’.⁷⁶⁰ Although the interviewees of Group B have reservations about the use of a suggested prayer and have preconceived concepts of the sort of prayer God will accept, they all see prayer as a vital part of the response to the Gospel.

⁷⁵⁶ ‘Whenever anyone came to me to speak, because they wanted to become a Christian, I would ask ‘Why?’ and the answer I’m looking for is, ‘Because I’m a sinner and Jesus is the only Saviour.’ And unless I get that answer I would go back to the beginning and start again. Because that’s the only answer really that’s worth anything.’ B7[9]. The view that such prayers must be sincere and from the heart is not unique to Group B as interviewee A7 says: ‘If it’s a prayer of faith, a sincere cry of the heart. That must be crucial’.

⁷⁵⁷ See Gilbert, *What is the Gospel*, pp.71-83 where he advocates that faith and repentance are the required responses to the Gospel.

⁷⁵⁸ ‘It also means as well for some they may realise they’re not willing to pray that prayer and I don’t want them to feel condemned but I do want them to be aware that they said ‘no’ to praying a prayer of repentance and faith.’ A1[4]. ‘It’s a prayer of repentance, faith – basically it seems to be in the New Testament it says that becoming a Christian involves repenting, believing and being baptised.’ A5[4] ‘Some of the advantages are that you can model for someone – you can show someone what a prayer of repentance looks like – what a prayer of faith looks like. And that could be very helpful for people to actually do that.’ B4[3].

⁷⁵⁹ Question four on the interview questionnaire asks: ‘What possible disadvantages do you see in including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?’. Interviewee B3 answers:

‘We are in danger of putting words in people’s mouths and persuading folk who may be sincere that they’re believers when actually the Lord may not be working in their hearts. We’ve just convinced them to sign on the dotted line and it can be very superficial.’ B3[4].

⁷⁶⁰ B6[12] Question 12 asked: ‘In what ways do you think providing a suggested prayer may affect how those who respond view assurance of salvation?’.

Surprisingly, the interviewees in Group A are not as vehement in their views regarding the part played by prayer in conversion as those in Group B. This is evidenced by their statements in answer to question 10 regarding the place of prayer in conversion not being as emphatic as those made by the interviewees in Group B.⁷⁶¹ This is a reversal of the result I had anticipated, because I had assumed that those who included a prayer in their publications would believe prayer to be a vital aspect of the expected response to the Gospel. However, comments made by interviewees of Group A demonstrated this was not the case. For example interviewee A1 says that praying in response to the Gospel is 'for some people very important but I don't think it is a prerequisite' to being converted.⁷⁶² Interviewee A3 sees prayer not as part of conversion but as an evidence that someone has been converted.⁷⁶³ This resonates with the view of interviewee B7 that their prayer from the heart is 'evidence really that there is a genuine work of grace there'.⁷⁶⁴ So rather than prayer being a prerequisite to conversion, it is seen as a sign that genuine conversion has taken place. Making a similar point, two interviewees in Group A say that entering into a relationship with God will involve prayer and one goes as far as to say: 'There is no way to respond to God as a person apart from talking to Him'.⁷⁶⁵ This sweeping statement does not allow for such responses as giving back money illegally gained or changing one's behaviour in line with becoming a follower of Jesus.⁷⁶⁶ Only one other interviewee in Group A sees prayer as an essential part of the response to the Gospel by saying: 'I think

⁷⁶¹ These are the sort of comments regarding the importance of prayer made by interviewees in Group B: 'absolutely essential' B1; 'It's the way we articulate our acceptance.' B2; 'I don't think a person can be saved without it.' B3; 'If you don't pray then you won't be converted really.' B4; 'If people don't pray at the end then they are not converted.' B5; 'Prayer, simply because it is communication with God, is essential.' B6; 'There's got to be prayer' B7. For the sort of less emphatic comments of the interviewees of Group A see the remainder of the paragraph.

⁷⁶² A1[10].

⁷⁶³ A3[10]. 'So, in that respect, prayer isn't conversion but prayer is an expression of convertedness, if you like. So the person who is converted, who has a restored relationship with God will pray...'

⁷⁶⁴ B4[10].

⁷⁶⁵ Interviewee A5 says: 'I think most people encounter Jesus through relationship and that relationship with God is through prayer. There has to be some kind of element of connection with God and that connection we generally call prayer.' A5[10]. Interviewee A6 says: 'Well, how do you respond to God apart from talking to Him? There is no way to respond to God as a person apart from talking to Him. We call that prayer – so you can't respond unless you talk to Him'. A6[10].

⁷⁶⁶ Barrs, *Learning Evangelism from Jesus*, pp.69-82 commentating on Mark 10:21 and pp.83-99 commentating on Luke 19:8.

prayer plays a crucial role in conversion because basically it's the text, if you like, or it's the words of communicating how you're feeling'.⁷⁶⁷ The danger here is that words could be regarded as actions and the response could be only from the emotions and not involve the will. Interviewee A1 makes the insightful suggestion that the only reason most people include a 'definite deliberate prayer' as part of their response to the Gospel is because this is the method advocated by Christians.⁷⁶⁸ This does highlight the danger that people could regard themselves as having been converted because they have done what was suggested and that because they have done what was suggested they are accepted as converted by the community who gave them the literature. This would support the aspect of my hypothesis that says that a suggested prayer could lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion.

False impressions about conversion

Only one of the false impressions about conversion dealt with in detail in Chapter 4 is found prominently in the answers to question 11 on the interview questionnaire.⁷⁶⁹ All the interviewees from Group B (those who don't include a prayer) and three from Group A say that the provision of a suggested prayer could give the impression that praying a prayer is enough to constitute conversion.⁷⁷⁰ A typical answer would be that 'the misconception is you go through a process, you say a particular prayer and that means you are converted'.⁷⁷¹ Such a response could lead to a false conversion which does not lead to a changed life. As interviewee B4 puts it, there is 'no understanding of further commitment and hearts are never being transformed'.⁷⁷² Another danger in having a suggested prayer is that people could rush into responding without enough consideration.⁷⁷³ Interviewee A4 says that the lack of understanding the need for obedience and the expectation of instantaneous

⁷⁶⁷ A2[10] In response I interjected 'You seem to be saying it's like an essential component of it all – that they would pray' and he answered; 'Yes, I'd say that'. A2[10].

⁷⁶⁸ Interviewee A1 says: 'I think for most people there is a definite deliberate prayer and an act of repentance and faith and commitment. But that may be because of us. It's the way we lead people to Christ.' A1[10].

⁷⁶⁹ Question 11 on the interview questionnaire reads: 'What misconceptions about conversion could arise from providing a suggested prayer and how can we guard against them?.'

⁷⁷⁰ A1, A3, A4, and all from Group B.

⁷⁷¹ B1[11].

⁷⁷² B4[11].

⁷⁷³ A2[11].

change, causes the reader to think nothing has happened and so they repeat the prayer.⁷⁷⁴ This could result in a perpetual cycle of uncertainty because of sole reliance on the saying of a prayer without realisation of the need to repent and believe.

Safeguarding against false impressions regarding conversion

In answering question 11, interviewees indicate, by their comments, how they guard against readers getting this too easy a view of what is involved in conversion.⁷⁷⁵ Interviewee A7 says that the prayer needs to be presented as the first step on a 'redemptive journey' and not include non-biblical terms such as 'invite Christ into your heart' which could give the impression that conversion did not involve a change of lifestyle.⁷⁷⁶ Interviewee A4 says: 'What I tried to do in the prayer in *my booklet* is to make sure all the elements are in there. In other words that if people do pray that prayer they have genuinely repented. "I'm sorry for my sins, I turn away from everything I know that is wrong", is repentance'.⁷⁷⁷ I think that this comment highlights the danger that repentance is not just the saying of words and that an adequate response to the Gospel must involve action. Interviewee A3 answers: 'The way we've done it in the things we've written is not to suggest that this prayer marks a conversion point'.⁷⁷⁸ While interviewee A1 says that he 'always explains the cost' of becoming a Christian. Interviewee B5 advocates that this misconception can be avoided by ensuring that, in the writing, faith and repentance are not separated so readers understand that conversion requires 'not just a change of mind but a heart turning to God'.⁷⁷⁹ Similarly some interviewees suggest that giving the

⁷⁷⁴ A4[11] 'People pray the prayer, think 'that's done' and then they wait for the Lord to do something. They don't realise that what they need to do is have the obedience that comes through faith. So people often say, 'Well, I prayed the prayer and nothing happened so God obviously isn't there'. But actually their hearts were never transformed, there wasn't a miracle done in their hearts. So, yes, the danger is that people have a false assurance, then they get exhausted, because they keep going, 'Well, I've prayed the prayer and nothing's happened, I've prayed it again and nothing has happened'. A4[11].

⁷⁷⁵ Interviewee A1 says: 'I want them to understand that the Lord is the One who defines your life from now on. So I think that's a danger. It's just too easy.' A1[11].

⁷⁷⁶ 'By showing that prayer is a first step in a redemptive journey. Phrases like 'invite Christ into your heart' are not entirely Biblical. So the language or the wording is vital in guarding against the wrong understanding of what conversion is. I think that's my answer.' A7[11].

⁷⁷⁷ A4[11].

⁷⁷⁸ A3[11].

⁷⁷⁹ B5[11] 'Again it's back to what I was saying earlier on that it can lead to people thinking that it is a mechanistic thing or even that it's a shallow thing. That it is no more than 'I've prayed this

impression that all that is involved in conversion is the saying of a prayer can be avoided by the clear presentation of all aspects of the Gospel in the rest of the publication ‘which provides a sound basis upon which people can come to a reasonable view’.⁷⁸⁰ While most interviewees comment about prevention, interviewee B4 says the best way to guard against this misconception is to advise the reader that: ‘If you’ve read this and prayed this prayer go and tell somebody who you know is a Christian or if you don’t know somebody, contact this address and we can point you to someone who lives near you’.⁷⁸¹ While this may be good advice, this does not cover the reader who is isolated and has no contact with Christians. It would also still be possible for a reader to acquire misconceptions without realising and not see a need to contact someone for advice.’

Conversion as a process or a sudden event

In answer to question 11, none of the interviewees commented regarding the possibility that a suggested prayer might lead to the false impression that conversion is always sudden but there are such comments in answer to other interview questions. Interviewee A7 mentions the ‘Engel scale which has 13 stages in the redemptive journey of anyone coming to the Lord. That goes from “I absolutely don’t believe there is a God” to joining a local church - and you don’t know where your reader is on that scale’.⁷⁸² While this may be true, Engel had a point of conversion on his scale and it could be at that point that a suggested prayer may be helpful.⁷⁸³ Interviewee A3 says that although the

prayer’ a kind of easy believism – an Arminian approach. Believing the facts means I’m saved. It’s separating I think faith from repentance in an unhelpful way. So if we link those two carefully in what we’re writing, the need for there to be not just a change of mind but a heart turning to God, if we link those two together I think we are guarding against the danger as much as we can.’ B5[11].

⁷⁸⁰ A6 says: ‘Well, I think that’s taking the suggested prayer out of the context of the rest of the publication. People do not zip straight to the suggested prayer. It’s the rest of the publication I would have thought which provides a sound basis upon which people can come to a reasonable view, reasonable opinion. A6[11] Interviewee A2 says: ‘So you could have misconceptions in people’s minds if they’ve had the gospel partially explained to them and they’ve maybe not understood certain aspects but then have made just a heart response possibly or an emotional response without fully understanding what they were doing, I suppose.’ A2[2].

⁷⁸¹ B4[11].

⁷⁸² A7[5].

⁷⁸³ Interviewee A1 says: ‘In a booklet I’d like it to spell out not just the gospel message but how they can cross over the line, how they can become Christians.’ A1[2] . Interviewee B7 says: ‘You’re writing evangelistic literature for the person who is not a Christian – who’s not saved.

Bible speaks of ‘very clear dividing lines between “here’s someone who is unregenerate” and “here’s someone who is regenerate”... within the reality of people and how we are that is often viewed as a process, as a flower opening or a series of stages’.⁷⁸⁴ Nevertheless, even viewing conversion as a lengthy process does not eliminate the possibility of a suggested prayer helping people to respond to where they are on their journey.⁷⁸⁵ That providing a suggested prayer could result in the misconception that conversion is always a sudden experience could be corrected by presenting the Christian life as a journey of developing faith.⁷⁸⁶ There is, too, a challenge here to produce evangelistic literature which is faithful to the teaching of scripture while remaining relevant to predicted human experience.

Interviewee B2 is the only one to show real concern that the provision of a suggested prayer ‘focuses very much on the decision point at the risk of losing that perspective of becoming a Christian being a longer process than that and of people taking steps towards God over long periods of time’.⁷⁸⁷ He advocates the need for publications which ‘are moving people along a spectrum towards God’ but he acknowledges that ‘there is a point where you cross the line and you make that decision’.⁷⁸⁸ While the comments of interview B2 do challenge the misconception that conversion is always sudden, this is almost a lone voice and this constitutes only marginal opposition to the misconception

You’re writing it to bring them to a point where they see they need to be saved and you lead them to the Bible to see what they must do, which is repent and exercise faith in Christ, and turn to Him in faith.’ B7[13].

⁷⁸⁴ A3[10].

⁷⁸⁵ See *Inspiring Prayer* (London: Lifewords, 2009) pp. 10, 13, 15, 17, 23, 27, 31, 41, 34 for suggested prayers to pray at different times. This booklet is meant to be used in evangelism to encourage people to pray. For example, a suggested prayer for more faith that says: ‘Dear God, Thank you that you do not require us to know all the answers. Thank you that you reward those that earnestly seek you. God, I want more faith, Help me to believe. Amen’. The booklet contains 20 suggested prayers.

⁷⁸⁶ See Booker and Ireland, *Evangelism – Which Way Now?*, pp.5–6, 7-8, 9, 33-46 and 61 for the journey model of conversion.

⁷⁸⁷ B2[4].

⁷⁸⁸ B2[2] The full answer reads: ‘Very few people encounter something for the first time and make a decision straightaway. And for us we want our booklets to be moving people one step closer. Obviously a lot of our materials aren’t necessarily trying to push people across that line. They are trying to encourage people to think, ask questions and to seek God and that final decision point may come later, further down the track, for them.’ B2[2].

which were examined in detail in Chapter 4 that conversion is regarded as a sudden event.

Conclusion regarding conversion

Some support was found in the interview transcripts to argue that providing a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature can be unhelpful because it can lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion. The main false impression commented on by the interviewees was the danger that people could regard themselves as having been converted because they had followed the advice in praying the suggested prayer, thinking that was all that was required to experience conversion. Interviewees suggested this false impression could be prevented by making sure the Gospel was carefully explained in the rest of the publication and by ensuring that the suggested prayer is seen as the start of an ongoing life of discipleship.

Analysis of interviews regarding Assurance

The interview transcripts were analysed to identify comments and insights relevant to the statement of the hypothesis that providing a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature can be unhelpful because it can lead to misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation. Although interviewees' answers to all the questions on the interview questionnaire were considered, it is questions 12 and 13 regarding assurance of salvation that were particularly analysed to discover insights into the interviewees' opinions on this aspect of the hypothesis.⁷⁸⁹

Question 12 on the interview questionnaire asked: 'In what ways do you think providing a suggested prayer may affect how those who respond view assurance of salvation?' In answer, six out of seven interviewees in Group B said that providing a suggested prayer could result in a misleading assumption regarding assurance of salvation because the reader could base their

⁷⁸⁹ Question 12 asked: 'In what ways do you think providing a suggested prayer may affect how those who respond view assurance of salvation?'. Question 13 asked: 'How can evangelistic literature encourage a clearer understanding of assurance of salvation?'

assurance on having prayed the suggested prayer. For example people could think 'I said that prayer and my assurance is in that prayer and what I did'.⁷⁹⁰ At issue here would be the danger of basing assurance of salvation on our own actions rather than on the work of Christ. In answering question 12, interviewee B7 says: 'Potentially I can see how being able to read that prayer for yourself and pray it in your heart could give you an assurance that you have done the right thing'.⁷⁹¹ However, he goes on to question whether saying a written prayer in isolation is actually going to convince you that you've done the right thing and result in assurance of salvation.⁷⁹² At issue here is not whether the publication explains assurance but whether a wrong assumption about assurance is gained through being encouraged to use a suggested prayer and this is the concern of the other interviewees in Group B.

In contrast, five out of seven interviewees of Group A see providing a suggested prayer as having a possible positive impact on the respondents' view of assurance of salvation.⁷⁹³ For example: 'having something substantive like that can help people with assurance, it gives them a moment to look back on'.⁷⁹⁴ There are two exceptions which do not take this line of reasoning. Interviewee A4 considers that the saying of a suggested prayer 'can lead to false assurance if the respondent has not repented and believed'.⁷⁹⁵ This challenges the writer to ensure that these issues are clearly explained before the reader arrives at the suggested prayer.

⁷⁹⁰ B3[12].

⁷⁹¹ B2[12].

⁷⁹² The complete quote reads: 'At the same time is a written prayer said in isolation on your own actually going to convince you you've done the right thing and you have made that first step? I just don't know. I think for some it might give them assurance, for some it might not give anything. I really couldn't say to be honest.' B2[12].

⁷⁹³ A4 and A2.

⁷⁹⁴ 'From one point of view I think it can be enormously helpful for people to have a moment in time that they can look back on. Going back to the previous question it's the way traditionally people have viewed baptism. So Luther's great comment when he was plagued by the Devil, threw an inkpot at him and said "Go away I am baptised". I am converted effectively. So having something substantive like that can help people with assurance.' A3[12].

⁷⁹⁵ A4 is the only interviewee in Group A to say that providing a suggested prayer could have a totally negative effect on the respondent's view of assurance by saying: 'Well, I think that is exactly right, that is the heart of the issue. The danger is that they think I've prayed the prayer therefore I'm a Christian and they're a Christian if they've repented and believed. Often they haven't repented – they've prayed the prayer but they're determined to continue in their sinful way. But the prayer therefore is a false assurance. They think they've started when they haven't – I think that's a worry'. A4[12].

Interviewees of Group A do add warnings to their positive opinions given in answer to question 12.⁷⁹⁶ For example interviewee A1 says that assurance must be based not on having prayed but on trusting in Christ.⁷⁹⁷ While interviewee A7 says that the prayer which can help bring assurance can 'also mislead by not mentioning the issue of repentance and the need to recognise sin in the life of the reader'.⁷⁹⁸ Interviewee A3 goes as far as to say that although a suggested prayer could help with assurance it can also lead to false assurance if the respondent puts their trust solely in the words they have said.⁷⁹⁹ To safeguard against this, Interviewee B5 says that if we are 'putting a suggested prayer in then there has to be some real guardians on the door, as it were, saying what this means'. The interviewee considers that these need to include clear statements before and after the suggested prayer instructing the reader that there is a need to trust in Christ rather than our own actions.

Question 13 on the interview questionnaire asked how evangelistic literature could encourage a clearer understanding of assurance of salvation.⁸⁰⁰ The two groups are very similar in the way they answer. Both groups have one interviewee who says that assurance of salvation is not a matter for evangelistic literature and should be dealt with in a separate publication.⁸⁰¹ While there is a need for such follow-up literature, the issue here is one of preventing misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation gained through providing a suggested prayer in what might be the only Christian publication available to the reader. Five interviewees say that assurance should be based on God's

⁷⁹⁶ Question 12 asked: 'In what ways do you think providing a suggested prayer may affect how those who respond view assurance of salvation?'

⁷⁹⁷ Interviewee A1 says: 'I see the prayer as a mechanism as it were (a horrible word) to bring people to Christ but it's the means whereby they can come to trust Christ, it is not the guarantee of them being saved, the guarantee is that they've trusted Christ.' A1[12].

⁷⁹⁸ Interviewee A7 says: 'A printed prayer in a publication can be very helpful and reassuring. It can also mislead by not mentioning the issue of repentance and the need to recognise sin in the life of the reader. That's my simple answer'. A7[12].

⁷⁹⁹ Interviewee A3 says: 'So having something substantive like that can help people with assurance but it can also give people false assurance, as with everything, 'I said these words therefore it's happened'. Well, it's not the words that make you a Christian.' A3[12].

⁸⁰⁰ Question 13 on the interview questionnaire asks: 'How can evangelistic literature encourage a clearer understanding of assurance of salvation?'

⁸⁰¹ Interviewees A2[13] and B3[13],

promises found in the Bible.⁸⁰² The only illustration mentioned is taken from Revelation 3:20, ‘Jesus says, “I will come in” so you can trust in His promise that He has come in’.⁸⁰³ The danger here is that, as with the use of this example, the reader could be being asked to base their assurance on isolated verses which are taken out of context.⁸⁰⁴ Once again, one of the solutions provided by an interviewee is ‘to explain the Gospel well in the publication and this will encourage a clearer understanding of assurance of salvation’.⁸⁰⁵

In answering question 13 regarding presenting a clearer understanding of assurance, interviewee B2 says the literature should encourage the person who responds to become part of a Christian community in order that they can ‘talk through what becoming a Christian means and what’s expected and what you can expect because assurance is going to come through those things and potentially over a long period of time for some people’.⁸⁰⁶ While I agree that this should, ideally, be the aim of evangelism the challenge of the isolated reader and how they can be linked with Christians must still be faced.

⁸⁰² Interviewees A1, A3, A5, B1 and B6. For example: A1 ‘It’s a great question and I think my only answer is we just have to point them to the promises of God. My feelings go up and down, I struggle with all sorts of terrible emotions at times, I get so low and all the rest but in the end you just have those solid promises of God to rest on.’ A1[13]. A3 ‘It’s not about how well or how nicely or the precise words I used or whether it was half believed and hesitant or confident and loud, it’s about the promises of God.’ A3[13]. A5 ‘Assurance is to do with trusting in the promises of God.’ A5[13]. B1 says: ‘You’re familiar with the trilogy I’m sure, The Word of God, The Work of Christ and the Witness of the Spirit – in other words it’s nothing to do with us. The basis of our assurance is the Word of God’. B1[13]. B6 says: ‘Really, I suppose, by not just explaining them in secular language, as it were, by actually having the Word of God in a sense there backing up the explanation. Or the explanation clarifying the actual Word of God.’ B6[13].
⁸⁰³ A5[13].

⁸⁰⁴ Strom, *The Sinner’s Prayer: Fact or Fiction*, pp. 55-61 for discussion of Revelation 3:20 and other verses being taken out of context.

⁸⁰⁵ Interviewee A6: ‘That is why in my booklet we start with the goodness of Creator God before the fall. Then we teach the elements of the Gospel consequently. So that when people get saved they understand why they are saved. It’s great having a sort of “I woke up in the middle of the night, I knew God was there and all of a sudden everything was alright”. But such people do have huge difficulty with assurance. So it does provide a reasoned understanding as to where they have placed themselves in Christ’. A6[13].

⁸⁰⁶ Interviewee B2: ‘I think the most important thing still is to push people back towards relationship. Yes, if you want to suggest that people pray something that’s fine but straightaway try to get them to talk to people, to get them back into Christian community. Get them to talk through what becoming a Christian means and what’s expected and what you can expect because assurance is going to come through those things and potentially over a long period of time for some people.’ B2[13].

Answering question 12, interviewee B5 says that there is a need to explain that there is such a thing as assurance. He says that there are levels of assurance and that the reader should be encouraged not to be content with a superficial level of assurance 'but to seek some direct assurance from God', something he has never seen recommended in evangelistic literature.⁸⁰⁷ However, this could be seen as depending on an experience for assurance and I would suggest the respondent could confuse a sense of wellbeing resulting from having said a suggested prayer for a genuine fresh work of God in their life. While such experiences may be an aspect of assurance there is a need to focus assurance on the work of Christ.

Conclusion regarding assurance of salvation

The majority of Group B supported the hypothesis in saying that providing a suggested prayer could result in a misleading assumption regarding assurance of salvation because the reader could base their assurance on having prayed the suggested prayer. In contrast, five out of seven interviewees of Group A see providing a suggested prayer as having a possible positive impact on the respondent's view of assurance of salvation.⁸⁰⁸ Having said this they also added warnings to their positive opinions.

When asked how evangelistic literature could encourage a clearer understanding of assurance of salvation, interviewees highlighted a need to refocus assurance onto the work of Christ and the promises of the Bible. A clearer understanding of assurance of salvation could be facilitated by writing which adequately explained the Gospel and taught about assurance. Readers should be encouraged to become part of a Church where they could receive

⁸⁰⁷ B5 says: 'But I think, as well, there are different elements to assurance. There is an assurance that comes from the old, 'God said it, I believe it, therefore I've got it' response. There is an element of truth in that, of course there is, but there is a deeper assurance as well. And I often, in personal conversation, encourage folk not to rest on that but to seek some direct assurance from God. I don't think I've ever seen that done in evangelistic literature. It might not be a bad thing to include. That because conversion is the beginning of a relationship we can expect God to come and do something. A lot of evangelistic literature tends to say the opposite, 'Don't expect a flash in the sky', 'Don't get up expecting to look different in the mirror.' And all of that is true but I think we could encourage people more to seek some genuine experience of God as a way forward.' B5[12].

⁸⁰⁸ A4 and A2.

more teaching and misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation could be corrected.

Analysis of interviews regarding Evangelism

The interview transcripts were analysed to identify comments and insights relevant to the statement of the hypothesis that says providing a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature can be unhelpful because it can lead to less professional practices in evangelism. The analysis in this section uses the three questions considered in the evangelism section of Chapter 6.⁸⁰⁹ The aim of this section is to consider whether the actual literature itself could result in lack of professionalism in evangelism. Although the interviewees' answers to all the questions on the interview questionnaire were considered, it is the material from questions 5 to 9 and 14 which were analysed to provide insights into the evangelistic aspect of the hypothesis.⁸¹⁰

The aim of evangelism

Chapter 4 considered that one of the less professional practices in evangelism, which could result from including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature, is thinking the aim of evangelism is getting people to say a suggested prayer. Therefore, question 6 on the interview questionnaire asked: 'What should evangelistic literature encourage people to do in response to the Christian Gospel?'. In answering this question only three interviewees refer to prayer.⁸¹¹ For example, interviewee B3 says that evangelistic literature

⁸⁰⁹ The three possible less professional practices in evangelism considered in Chapter 4 are: Thinking that the aim of evangelism is getting people to say a prayer; manipulating people into making a decision by saying the prayer and counting decisions not disciples.

⁸¹⁰ The relevant questions of the interview questionnaire used in this section are:

Question 5: What are the essential elements of the Christian Gospel which you feel need to be included in an evangelistic publication?

Question 6: What should evangelistic literature encourage people to do in response to the Christian Gospel?

Question 7: Why do you think there is often no mention of baptism in contemporary evangelistic literature?

Question 8: What do you see as the possible advantages and/or dangers in encouraging someone to make a decision?

Question 9: How can we avoid manipulation and undue pressure in evangelistic literature?

Question 14: What difference do you think it would make if evangelistic literature encouraged a person responding to the Gospel to pray but did not include a suggested prayer?

⁸¹¹ A4, B2 and B3. B3 only says: 'But as I said it should reflect that fundamental invitation to seek God and to ask and to knock.'

should encourage the reader: 'To call on the name of the Lord and be saved. We are encouraging them to pray'.⁸¹² He goes on to say this should not be in the form of a written prayer but in words from their heart expressing repentance and faith. There are similar comments from interviewee A4 who says that people must see themselves as rebels and be encouraged to pray 'O Lord, I'm an offence to you, rescue me'.⁸¹³ He too goes on to say that the Gospel requires the reader 'to repent and believe'. In Chapter 4, repentance and faith were seen as the most common aspects of the called-for response to the Gospel.⁸¹⁴

Encouraging the reader to repent and believe is the dominant theme in answer to question 6, on the interview questionnaire, regarding the response which should be encouraged in evangelistic literature.⁸¹⁵ In answer to question 6, four of the interviewees in Group A see 'repent and believe' as part of the expected response to the Gospel.⁸¹⁶ A typical comment would be that to 'repent and believe is always the response for whatever you're doing evangelistically'.⁸¹⁷ This sweeping statement calls into question whether every piece of evangelistic literature should expect the reader to have progressed enough in their understanding of the Christian message to be ready to make such a response. Having said this, support for 'repent and believe' being part of the expected response to the Gospel comes also from five out of seven interviewees in Group B in their answers to question 6.⁸¹⁸ Taking these comments into account would mean that the aim of evangelism must include

⁸¹² B3[6].

⁸¹³ A4[6].

⁸¹⁴ See pp.81-87.

⁸¹⁵ Question 6 on the interview questionnaire asks: 'What should evangelistic literature encourage people to do in response to the Christian Gospel?'.

⁸¹⁶ Four interviewees from Group A said 'Repent and Believe' in answer to question 6 A1[6] A3[6] A4[6] A5[6]. The other interviewees in Group A said 'Repent and believe' should be part of the response to the Gospel in their answers to other questions from the interview questionnaire. A2[5] [7] A6 [2] [12] A7[12] [5] [8] The interview questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 2.

⁸¹⁷ B4[6].

⁸¹⁸ See footnote 742 for Question 6 on the interview questionnaire. Four interviewees from Group B said 'Repent and Believe' in answer to question 6 B1[6] B3[6] B 4[6] B5[6]. In answering the same question interviewee B6 says 'repent and receive' but also speaks of repent and believe in answers to other questions. B7 uses the term repent and believe in answers to other questions. Only interviewee B2 says something very different in answer to question 6 and never uses the term repent and believe, in fact he says nothing about repentance in any of his answers.

seeing people come to faith and repentance. However, a suggested prayer could still be included if it adequately expressed these aspects of the response.

In answer to question 5 on the interview questionnaire, regarding the content of the Gospel, interviewee A1 says that he may not use the actual words 'repent and believe' but instead say something like: 'God wants us to turn from all that's wrong in our lives and turn to Jesus to ask Him to forgive us and become our Lord and Saviour and friend'.⁸¹⁹ Thus, basically, he is replacing the lesser known, more technical words with expressions the reader may find easier to understand. Alarming, in doing this, prayer replaces believing and that prayer is not an expression of belief or faith but a request for forgiveness and an invitation to Jesus to become 'Lord and Saviour and friend'.⁸²⁰ The reader could pray this prayer without actually seeing a need to believe thus illustrating the ease with which the saying of a suggested prayer could be misunderstood by the reader as replacing, rather than expressing, faith.

In answer to question 7 on the interview questionnaire, two interviewees advocated that the called-for response to the Gospel should not be 'repent and believe' but 'repent and be baptised'.⁸²¹ Only interviewee A3 believes that a suggested prayer has replaced baptism as part of the response to the Gospel. To suggest the reader responds to the Gospel by getting baptised would eliminate the danger of the aim of evangelism being to encourage the reader to say a suggested prayer. Having said this, the overwhelming reason that interviewees believe that baptism is not mentioned in evangelistic literature is that it is not essential to salvation.⁸²² However, if baptism was included in the suggested response to the Gospel it would be a way of encouraging the reader

⁸¹⁹ A1[5]. Question 5 on the interview questionnaire asks: What are the essential elements of the Christian Gospel which you feel need to be included in an evangelistic publication?.

⁸²⁰ A1[5].

⁸²¹ Interviewees A3 and B4. Interviewee B4 says the response should be 'not just to say a prayer but take part in this physical reality of baptism'. Interviewee A3 adds: 'In Scripture baptism is conversion, the two are inseparable. Peter didn't say to the people, "Pray this prayer" he said, "Come and be baptised".'

⁸²² Ten interviewees are of this opinion: A1, A2, A4, A6, B1, B2, B3, B6 and B7.

to become part of a Christian community which was seen as a possible aim of evangelism in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.⁸²³

Although interviewees say little about prayer in answer to question 6, it would be wrong to conclude that they do not see a suggested prayer as a useful aid to help the reader to respond. Further insights were gained through examining interviewees' answers to question 14 on the interview questionnaire which asked: 'What difference do you think it would make if evangelistic literature encouraged a person responding to the Gospel to pray but did not include a suggested prayer?'

Six out of seven of the interviewees in Group A believe it is better to provide a suggested prayer. They say that not including a suggested prayer is unhelpful or a disservice to the reader.⁸²⁴ Interviewee A2 makes the claim that if a suggested prayer was not included 'then obviously people might not make that final step, even though they want to, because they don't know what to do or don't know what to say, so they don't pray'.⁸²⁵ This makes the prayer more of a necessity than a suggestion and I question whether every reader would find the same prayer relevant to them. In similar terms, interviewee B2 says: 'being able to write a prayer that's going to meet people's needs and connect with what they are feeling is very, very difficult. So I think in some ways it is better just to let people express it in their own words'.⁸²⁶ Following this suggestion would guard against thinking that the aim of evangelism is to get people to say a prayer. However, interviewee A5 raises an objection to such an idea by saying: 'I think most people don't know what to pray at that stage'.⁸²⁷ This brings to the fore the issue of whether what really matters is the right attitude of heart regardless of the words used. On the other hand do the actual words need to be in some way a correct expression of faith and repentance? Interviewee A5 continues: 'Sometimes it's helpful for people, I think, to have a little bit of a

⁸²³ See pp.80-84, 101, 103 and 109-110.

⁸²⁴ For example: 'I think it would probably be a disservice to people because you're not helping them'. A2[14].

⁸²⁵ A2[14].

⁸²⁶ B2[14].

⁸²⁷ A5[14].

structure. To know that if you pray that prayer – that one works’.⁸²⁸ This is an unusual claim from a well-respected writer who seems to be saying that the wording of his suggested prayer is adequate and effective regardless of the understanding of the reader. While concerned that I may be reading too much into this comment I also see that the comment highlights the danger of elevating such a suggested prayer to a place where getting people to use such a prayer appears to be the writer’s aim.

Only three of the interviewees of Group B are adamant that it would be harmful to include a suggested prayer. For example, interviewee B7 who says, ‘They don’t need a set prayer. The set prayer seems to indicate to them that if you’ve said the prayer that’s all that is required.’⁸²⁹ In contrast to this, interviewee B4 says: ‘There are two possibilities that spring to mind. One is “OK, but what do I pray if you don’t put a prayer” and if you do put a prayer then you give them knowledge of what to pray’.⁸³⁰ This whole debate creeps closer to the misconception that the aim of evangelism is to get someone to pray a suggested prayer.

Manipulation and undue pressure

Chapter 4 considered that one of the less-professional practices in evangelism, which could result from including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature, is manipulating people into making a decision expressed by saying such a prayer. The interview questionnaire therefore asked: ‘How can we avoid manipulation and undue pressure in evangelistic literature?’.⁸³¹ There is a significant difference between the answers of the two groups of interviewees. Six out of seven interviewees in Group A say there is little or no risk of manipulation or undue pressure with literature. For example, interviewee A3 says that literature has the advantage that it is easy for the reader to reject. ‘People can screw it up and throw it in the bin whenever they want, they can

⁸²⁸ A5[14].

⁸²⁹ B7[14].

⁸³⁰ B4[14].

⁸³¹ Question 9 on the interview questionnaire.

disagree with it without personal embarrassment'.⁸³² While interviewee A2 says that in evangelism we can 'avoid pressure and manipulation by personally stepping back on occasions and saying, "Have a think about it, read it through"'.⁸³³ This interviewee assumes that literature will not put pressure on the reader. Interviewee A1 reinforces this by asserting that literature is more passive than a preacher and lacks the tendency found in some preachers to use their personality to pressurise people into responding.⁸³⁴ The comments of the interviewees in this group suggested that the provision of a suggested prayer means that the literature is, by definition, less manipulative because it is merely offering the reader a choice which they can reject.

On the other hand all the interviewees of Group B say that there is the possibility of manipulating or pressuring people through literature and they make no contrary comments. Interviewee B6 says literature can be manipulative by 'almost bullying someone into faith, where it is written, 'You must do this, you must do that''.⁸³⁵ Interviewee B1 says pressure can be put on people when the balance is lost between expressing urgency and presenting a formula.⁸³⁶ It can be seen from his answers to other questions that what he calls a 'formula' is the use of a suggested prayer. I would contend that suggesting the reader pray without giving them the words could exert similar undue pressure. Interviewee B5 goes as far as to say it is good to put pressure on people as long as it is the truth and not just 'emotional stories'. He continues, 'provided it's the truth I think we can be as stark as we want'.⁸³⁷ Maybe he is in danger of losing the delicate balance between persuading people to respond and infringing on their right of freedom to choose.

The two sides of the argument on manipulation can be seen in comparing interviewee A5 with interviewee B3. Interviewee A5 says literature

⁸³² A3[9]. Interviewee A4 says: 'When people are reading a booklet I think they are unlikely to be manipulated or pressurised by something that's written. It's so easy to put down a book.' A4[9].

⁸³³ A2[9].

⁸³⁴ A1 says: 'Of course, literature is colder any way, so you're not having the warmth of the personality and the heaviness of heart that even an evangelist can express and people can pick up and feel 'I can't let him feel like that' and whatever. So it is colder. It's in print.' A1[9].

⁸³⁵ B6[9].

⁸³⁶ B1[9].

⁸³⁷ B5[9].

will not be manipulative if it is truthful and provides people with options. At issue here is that one way salesmen are taught to close a deal is to give the client options making it easier for them to respond.⁸³⁸ The interviewee goes on to say, 'I think the option of praying a prayer is a very non-manipulative thing'.⁸³⁹ This could be an example of the concept of 'gentle manipulation' I introduced in Chapter 5 which said that providing only one option could be manipulative.⁸⁴⁰ By contrast interviewee B3 makes a similar assertion in saying that 'providing a prayer is putting an unnecessary pressure on people and I think so often behind it is our desire to see results'.⁸⁴¹ In his opinion the suggested prayer is introduced because, in a time when few converts are seen, the writer desperately wants to see people responding. He says that 'even if the desire behind introducing a suggested prayer is very genuine, we can, in a sense, be misleading people because we're putting pressure on them'.⁸⁴² Interviewee A1 says he guards against such pressure by never saying 'if you've prayed this prayer you are converted'.⁸⁴³ This led me to revisit and re-examine the interview transcripts for further advice on how we can guard against putting such pressure on people.

Interviewee B7 says that we can prevent manipulating people by not making false promises such as, 'Now you do this and you'll be happy forever'.⁸⁴⁴ Interviewee B4 says, 'We need to be careful that we accurately present the promises of scripture'.⁸⁴⁵ Interviewee A3 agrees that manipulation in writing is about the content of the message. In his opinion, we 'manipulate people by underplaying the hard things' such as 'how costly it is to be a Christian'.⁸⁴⁶ This challenges writers to avoid manipulating people by presenting an accurate picture of Christian discipleship.

⁸³⁸ Sean Moffett, Message 19 Closing the deal by offering options.
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKvkh0gFoQU>> [accessed 5.9.2012].

⁸³⁹ A5[9].

⁸⁴⁰ See Chapter 5 pp.126-127 of this dissertation.

⁸⁴¹ B3[9].

⁸⁴² B3[9].

⁸⁴³ A1[9].

⁸⁴⁴ B7[9].

⁸⁴⁵ B4[9].

⁸⁴⁶ A3[9].

Interviewee B1 calls for precise and accurate writing because, unlike public speaking, writing allows no opportunity to correct information which could lead to misconceptions.⁸⁴⁷ Would it then be possible by careful writing to eliminate any manipulation surrounding the use of a suggested prayer? Interviewee B2 says that: ‘So much of it is in the tone of voice and about whether it retains that sensitive invitation into the Kingdom of God or whether it becomes a pushy thing about how you must make a decision’.⁸⁴⁸ He acknowledges that it is hard to maintain this balance and there is a real danger of the reader finding it ‘a bit threatening, especially for those who aren’t ready to hear it yet and then it becomes a real turn off’.⁸⁴⁹ At this point I interjected a question to clarify if the interviewee was speaking about literature because I associated ‘tone of voice’ with preaching. He affirmed he was speaking about writing and said that he had found examples of evangelistic literature which were ‘aggressive in their tone – where it says “You have to believe this or if you don’t you’re under judgement and you’re facing the wrath of God” and so on’.⁸⁵⁰ It can be seen here that to avoid less professional practices in evangelism involves a high level of professionalism in writing evangelistic literature which will, while adequately explaining the Christian Gospel, not exert unreasonable pressure on the reader.

Encouraging decision making

Chapter 4 considered that one of the less-professional practices in evangelism, which could result from including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature, is counting decisions not disciples. The interview questionnaire therefore asked: ‘What do you see as the possible advantages

⁸⁴⁷ B1: ‘One of the dangers about writing is that people might believe what you write. So you need to be pretty sure of your facts. You could say something in preaching and three minutes later – you’re preaching and your mind is pulling in all sorts of things while you’re saying other words and you could think I better just modify something I said a couple of minutes ago – you can’t do that in a book. It’s in print. So you have to be very precise.’ B1[9].

⁸⁴⁸ B2[9].

⁸⁴⁹ B2[9].

⁸⁵⁰ B2[9].

and/or dangers in encouraging someone to make a decision?'.⁸⁵¹ The main support for the danger of counting decisions came from interviewee A1 who spoke of evangelists being under pressure to vindicate their ministry by gaining converts. He says that this results in pressurising people and the possibility of 'bringing about a spiritual miscarriage'.⁸⁵² This is a startling illustration of lack of professionalism in evangelism which could involve pressurising people to say a prayer. Interviewee A6 says that an emphasis on encouraging people to make a decision can lead to 'scalp hunting'.⁸⁵³ This was one of the main issues which led me to undertake this research because I witnessed Christians encouraging people to say a prayer solely to be able to report results. Four of the interviewees link saying a suggested prayer with encouraging someone to make a decision.⁸⁵⁴ There is then some marginal support here that the provision of a suggested prayer could lead to the less professional practice in evangelism of counting decisions not disciples.

All seven of the interviewees of Group A say that people should be encouraged to make a decision. For example, interviewee A6 says it is 'essential to encourage people to make a decision. It's not an advantage – it's part of the job'.⁸⁵⁵ The issue here may be less about why encouraging someone to make a decision is wrong and more about the nature of that encouraging. Interviewee A3 says that: 'calling on people to respond is a biblical model in writing, which is exactly what Paul does in his letters'.⁸⁵⁶ The

⁸⁵¹ Questions 3 and 4 of the interview questionnaire asked: 3. What do you see as the possible advantages of including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature? And 4. What possible disadvantages do you see in including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?.

⁸⁵² A1[8].

⁸⁵³ A6[8].

⁸⁵⁴ A4, A7, B2 and B6. For example interviewee A4 says: 'Well, the danger is you think you've started when you haven't, you haven't really repented and believed. There hasn't really been a miracle of God's work in your heart. That's the danger. So people say 'I've prayed the prayer, therefore I am a Christian so the prayer has done its work'. A4[8]. Interviewee B6 says: 'Like is there is any danger if someone's house is on fire telling them to get out of the house quickly?. Well, some people say, 'Ah well, people can say the prayer and there are false conversions' and that's true. But that's not a danger in as far as - well, I suppose it is a danger if people are just rushing for scalps'. B6[8].

⁸⁵⁵ A6[8].

⁸⁵⁶ In answer to interview question 8 interviewee A3 says: 'There is a call to respond in Scripture, repent and believe the good news. Paul in Athens, God ignored the ignorance in the past but now he calls on men everywhere to repent. So calling on people to respond is a biblical model for both preaching in public and in writing, which is exactly what Paul does in his letters and the literature of the New Testament does.' A3[8].

issue in my mind was not whether it is right to persuade but whether that persuading might be being done in an unprofessional way.⁸⁵⁷

I had anticipated that the interviewees in group B would be against persuading people to make a decision, because I thought that this would be the reason they did not provide a suggested prayer but, in fact, five of them say people should be persuaded to make a decision.⁸⁵⁸ For example, interviewee B6 says that ‘without doubt the advantage of encouraging someone to make a decision is their salvation’.⁸⁵⁹ Here again just what is meant by a decision is not clear because in answer to question 6 this interviewee says that to ‘Repent and receive Christ’ is the correct response to the Gospel.⁸⁶⁰ Interviewee B5 goes as far as to say: ‘I don’t think there are any disadvantages in calling people to make a decision’.⁸⁶¹ This is an astonishing claim coming from an interviewee who, according to his answer to question 15, is a strong believer in divine sovereignty.⁸⁶² I would have expected this opinion to come from interviewees in Group A in line with them providing a suggested prayer to facilitate such a decision. This raises an issue regarding the relationship between theological belief and life action which the practical theologian must evaluate in order to complete the pastoral cycle or Osmer’s four tasks of Practical Theology which was considered in Chapter 1.⁸⁶³

⁸⁵⁷ See Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism*, pp. 55-59, 81, 147, 170, 190, 217, 238 for a discussion of persuasion as an acceptable aspect of evangelism.

⁸⁵⁸ Interviewees B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5 answering question 8.

⁸⁵⁹ B6[8].

⁸⁶⁰ Interview question 6 asks: ‘What should evangelistic literature encourage people to do in response to the Christian Gospel?’. Among the verses used to substantiate that repent and believe is the ‘correct’ response to the Gospel are: Mark 1:15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” Acts 3:19 “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,” Acts 26:20 “First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

⁸⁶¹ B5[8].

⁸⁶² Interviewee B5’s answer to question 15 includes: ‘My own convictions are reformed evangelical therefore I do believe both in the over arching sovereignty of God and in the God given responsibility of people to respond to that, to the call of the Gospel. I don’t think I consciously set out to say I must bring both of that into what I’m writing. But I don’t think I can avoid either of those. It is so much a part of me.’ B5[15].

⁸⁶³ See p.14.

Eleven out of the fourteen interviewees of both Groups do list dangers in encouraging someone to make a decision in their answers to question 8 on the interview questionnaire.⁸⁶⁴ The main danger that interviewees mention is inadequate or false conversion. For example, interviewee A2 says there is a danger of ‘encouraging somebody to make a decision that hasn’t been thought through’.⁸⁶⁵ Interviewee B7 is concerned that ‘very often if you encourage people to make a decision you’re almost pushing them to that point and it’s a false profession’.⁸⁶⁶ For this interviewee the issue is the balance between the work of God in conversion and human responsibility. The possible misconception that can be conveyed through providing a suggested prayer is an imbalanced view of human responsibility whereby the respondent’s focus is not the saving work of Christ but the saying of a simple prayer.⁸⁶⁷ Having said this, the actual wording of such a prayer could convey a reliance on the work of God. In answer to question 15 the same interviewee says: ‘I believe that God alone can save but I’m responsible to tell them. They’re responsible to respond to what they have heard. These issues are complimentary not antagonistic’.⁸⁶⁸ The challenge is how to achieve such a balance. Interviewee A2 says that one of the advantages of literature is that it gives the reader an opportunity to count the cost and decide how they should respond.⁸⁶⁹ However, this needs to be placed alongside the concern that literature can be manipulative which was considered in the previous section.

Conclusion regarding evangelism

In this section the interview transcripts were analysed to address the three possible less-professional practises in evangelism suggested in Chapter 4. The first less-professional practice in evangelism considered was the possibility that getting people to say a suggested prayer could become the *aim*

⁸⁶⁴ Only interviewees B1, B3 and B5 do not list dangers in encouraging someone to make a decision.

⁸⁶⁵ A2[8].

⁸⁶⁶ B7[8].

⁸⁶⁷ Payne, *Evangelism*, p.127; Gilbert, *What is the Gospel?*, pp.101-111; Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right*, pp.109-122.

⁸⁶⁸ B7[15]. Question 15 on the interview questionnaire asked: ‘In what ways do you think your views regarding divine sovereignty and human responsibility impact on your evangelistic writing?’.

⁸⁶⁹ A2[8].

of evangelism. The interview questionnaire therefore asked a number of questions regarding the possible place of a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature. Only three of Group B were adamant that providing a suggested prayer would be harmful. All the other interviewees saw an advantage in including a suggested prayer. The interviewees of Group A thought that not including a suggested prayer was unhelpful or a disservice to the reader even to the point of preventing the reader from responding because they might not know what to do. Encouraging the reader to repent and believe were the most dominating aspects of the expected response advocated by interviewees. Interviewees thought that baptism was not included in evangelistic literature because it was not salvific and was also controversial.

The second less-professional practice considered in Chapter 4 was manipulating people into making a decision that would be expressed by saying such a prayer. There is a difference between the answers of the two groups of interviewees regarding avoiding manipulation and undue pressure in evangelistic literature. Six out of seven interviewees in Group A said there is little or no risk of manipulation or undue pressure with literature. While all the interviewees of Group B said that there is the possibility of manipulating or pressurising people through literature and make no contrary comments. There was also a clash of opinions between a suggested prayer being a non-manipulative option or something used to pressurise people into making a decision because of the desire for results.

The third possible less-professional practice considered in Chapter 4 was counting decisions not disciples and this section considered the answers interviewees gave regarding the possible advantages and/or dangers in encouraging someone to make a decision. There was a warning that there is a danger that those involved in evangelism could be pressured into recording decisions to vindicate their ministry. Having said this, all seven of the interviewees of Group A and five in Group B said that people should be encouraged to make a decision. However, all the interviewees of both Groups

list dangers in encouraging someone to make a decision, including the possibility of pressurising someone into making a false profession.

Doctrine and practice

Interviewees were asked: 'In what ways do you think your views regarding divine sovereignty and human responsibility impact on your evangelistic writing?'. The aim of this question was to test the theory that those who used a prayer tended to be Arminians (emphasizing human responsibility) and those who did not include a prayer tended to be Calvinists (emphasizing divine sovereignty) because their doctrine impacted on their practice.⁸⁷⁰

Four out of Group B did say they were Calvinistic or Reformed.⁸⁷¹ The other three interviewees in this group did not really answer the question and one even said the issue was not relevant.⁸⁷² Having said this, one interviewee in Group B had stopped using a suggested prayer because of a change of view to what he regards as a more 'biblical view of the Sovereignty of God'.⁸⁷³ He now sees his role as 'commanding people to repent and believe' and leaving the results to God. His preference for Calvinistic doctrine is seen in that his 'view of the atonement is that atonement was secured by Christ on the cross for the elect'.⁸⁷⁴ Interviewee A3, critiquing such a view, says that 'the Calvinist doctrine of Limited Atonement alters the way you can talk evangelistically and the assurance that you can give'.⁸⁷⁵ One implication that I have observed as a

⁸⁷⁰ Daniel Spratlin, 'What are the basic differences between Calvinism and Arminianism?' (Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry). <<http://carm.org/main-differences-between-calvinism-arminianism>>[accessed 27.12.2012]. Matt Slick, 'Calvinism', (Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry). <<http://carm.org/calvinism>> [accessed 27.12.2012]. Definitions of Arminianism on the same website. <<http://carm.org/dictionary-arminianism>> [accessed 27.12.2012] and Calvinism <<http://carm.org/dictionary-calvinism>>[accessed 27.12.2012]. C. Gordon Olson, *Getting the Gospel Right: A Balanced view of Salvation Truth* (New Jersey: Global Gospel Ministries, 2005) particularly pp.18-30 on the Sovereignty of God. For a more academic treatment of the subject from the viewpoint of Biblical scholarship see: D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspective in Tension* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002) [This is a version of Carson's Doctrinal Dissertation presented to Cambridge University in 1975 edited for a wider readership].

⁸⁷¹ B1, B3, B5, and B7.

⁸⁷² B2 says: 'it is not really a dichotomy I see myself.' And 'so I haven't really thought about it as to whether I should be allowing either a sort of Divine Sovereignty angle or a human responsibility angle to inform my writing really. I've just been getting on with it' B2[15].

⁸⁷³ B1[16].

⁸⁷⁴ B1[16].

⁸⁷⁵ A3[18].

result of such theology is the inability to tell people that God loves them because of a belief that God only really loves the elect. The majority of interviewees who do not include a prayer state that they are Calvinistic in their doctrine, which gives some support to my theory that this would be a dividing factor between the two groups.

Only two interviewees in Group A stated Arminianist views.⁸⁷⁶ Three interviewees in this group don't really answer the question but make statements such as 'I believe 100% in Divine Sovereignty and I believe 100% in human freedom'.⁸⁷⁷ In answer to another question one interviewee in Group A calls himself a Calvinist.⁸⁷⁸ This does demonstrate that the interviewees who include a prayer are a diverse group. Nevertheless one interviewee in Group A did represent my preconceived stereotype of the interviewees who would include a prayer. He states that, in his opinion, 'to be a real evangelist you have to believe that God loves everyone and that everybody needs to be saved and can be saved if they repent and believe'.⁸⁷⁹ This view flows from his belief that Jesus 'came to be the propitiation for sin – the sin of the whole world – not just for those who were going to be converted'.⁸⁸⁰ 'I want to draw them in, whoever they are, to read, to understand and to be converted'.⁸⁸¹ Such an open view of who can be saved does leave one freer to urge people to respond and in the case of this interviewee providing a suggested prayer is part of that response. However, this interviewee cannot be regarded as typical of the group because

⁸⁷⁶ Interviewee A2 says: 'I think we do have a choice and I think we need to decide to live for God or live for ourselves. Obviously a Calvinist would say that it's not really worth doing evangelism because the people who God wants to save He'll save any way so I'm more in the other camp to say they need to be given a choice and that people need to take responsibility.' A2[15]. For an outline of Arminian views see: Robert A Peterson and Michael D. Williams *Why I am not an Arminian* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004) particularly pp.136 -161 on Freedom and pp.162-172 on Inability. For a fuller more academic study see: F. Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism – A Theology of Salvation* (Nashville: Randall House, 2011).

⁸⁷⁷ A5, A6 and A7 all in answers to question 15. For example: 'I believe 100% in Divine Sovereignty and I believe 100% in human freedom. I think they are both just there, like Jesus is 100% God and 100% man. They're both true. Truth is found not in the middle but in both extremes'. A5[15].

⁸⁷⁸ 'It just happens I'm only a Four and a half point Calvinist – I've got a bit of a wobbly 'L' in my TULIP' A3[18].

⁸⁷⁹ A1[15].

⁸⁸⁰ A1[15].

⁸⁸¹ A1[15].

most interviewees in Group A make statements about keeping these doctrines in tension but do not articulate how their view affects what they write.

On reflection, the interview question was not direct enough to encourage interviewees to state how their views on divine sovereignty and human responsibility impact on their evangelistic writing. The result was therefore inconclusive but it did reveal that the theological perspective held by some interviewees might affect their use of a suggested prayer.

Concluding Theological Reflection

An issue which has been alluded to in this dissertation is the difference between a Cross Centered Gospel and a Kingdom Centered Gospel.⁸⁸² The former focuses on the salvation of the individual while the latter concentrates on the part which should be played by the Christian community in the transformation of the world, particularly in the area of social justice.⁸⁸³ A key issue is the need for a conversion that results in a change of lifestyle and this has been discussed previously in this dissertation.⁸⁸⁴ This section looks at these two different approaches to the Christian Gospel and asks how they might affect the acceptance and content of suggested prayers of response.

The Cross Centered approach to the Gospel advocates that the message of Christianity is the work of Christ in coming to this earth to die for the sins of mankind and to rise again from the dead to secure salvation for those who come to God through him.⁸⁸⁵ Holders of this view believe in the centrality

⁸⁸² pp.76-77

⁸⁸³ Gary Gilley The Crossless Gospel - Part 1. (Southern View Chapel. February/March 2011 - Volume 17, Issue 1) <<http://www.svchapel.org/resources/articles/23-doctrine/699-the-crossless-gospel>>. [accessed 7.11. 2013]. Dr. Gary E. Gilley holds a Th.D from Cambridge Graduate School. He has been pastor of Southern View Baptist Church Springfield, Illinois for 33 years. See also Scot McKnight, *One Life* (Grand Rapids: Zonervan, 2010) pp.11-17. For McKnight the difference is a 'personal practices of piety plan' or a 'kingdom holiness plan' of how to live the Christian life. His challenge is to give our one life to 'the kingdom dream of Jesus'.pp.22-23. Scot McKnight holds a Ph.D from Nottingham University UK. He is currently Karl A. Olsson Professor in Religious Studies at North Park University, USA. <http://www.theopedia.com/Scot_McKnight> [accessed 9.11.2013].

⁸⁸⁴ pp.21, 29, 81-82, 84, 102-103, 122-123, 127, 130, 163

⁸⁸⁵ Gilbert, *What is the Gospel*, pp.29-36.

of the Cross in the presentation of the Gospel.⁸⁸⁶ They base their thinking on passages in Romans and First Corinthians.⁸⁸⁷ Critics accuse those who hold this view of focusing on the afterlife rather than a transformed life on earth.⁸⁸⁸ This research found only marginal support for this accusation.

In evangelistic booklets the Cross Centered Gospel is often presented using the bridge illustration.⁸⁸⁹ It is recommended as a witnessing tool by respected writers on evangelism and is probably the most well known Gospel illustration.⁸⁹⁰ Contrary to this Fitch says it portrays conversion as a 'consumer transaction' in which God has done everything and that it does not illustrate an ongoing life with God.⁸⁹¹ All the authors who use the bridge illustration, which were examined during this research, adopted a suggested prayer and this prayer is usually a direct response to the cross centered teaching regarding the death of Christ in punishment for mankind's sin.

However, those holding to a cross centered view of the Gospel may or may not adopt a suggested prayer for reasons that have already been examined in this dissertation. The content of any prayer suggested by those who hold this view is likely to focus on the individual's need for forgiveness and

⁸⁸⁶ Gilbert, *What is the Gospel*, pp.101-111 'One of the greatest dangers the body of Christ faces today is `the temptation to rethink and rearticulate the gospel in a way that makes the centre something other than the death of Jesus on the cross in the place of sinners'.

⁸⁸⁷ Gilbert, *What is the Gospel*, pp.27-36. Gilbert advocates a four point Gospel outline [God – Man – Christ and Response] which he asserts is taught not only in the first four chapters of the book of Romans but also in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 and in the sermons of the book of Acts.

⁸⁸⁸ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, pp.206-213.

⁸⁸⁹ *How to know God personally* (Birmingham: Agape) *Bridge to Life* (New Maiden: Navpress) *Steps to peace with God* (Billy Graham Association, 2006) *Love is the Bridge* (Birkenhead: Bridge Builders, 2012).

It is also found on many evangelistic websites and numerous evangelistic training sessions on youtube:

<<http://www.navigators.org/us/resources/illustrations/items/The%20Bridge%20to%20Life>>

<<http://gracecommunity.tv/gospel/bridge.htm>> <<http://www.damascuscc.org/bridge.htm>>

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwexJCCljjs>>

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyulbR0LnYY>> [accessed 14.8.2011]

<<http://www.navigators.org/us/resources/illustrations/items/bridge>> [accessed 15.8.2011].

⁸⁹⁰ Bill Hybels, *Just walk across the room* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) pp.135-136.

Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999) pp.263-267.

⁸⁹¹ David Fitch, 'The Bridge Illustration an Idea whose Time has Come'.

<<http://www.reclaimingthemission.com/the-bridge-illustration-an-idea-whose-time-has-come-and-gone-2/>> [accessed: 15.8.11]. David Fitch is professor of Evangelical Theology at Northern Seminary. He holds a Ph.D. from Northwestern University in Theological Ethics, Church and Society. <<http://www.seminary.edu/about/faculty/david-fitch/>> [accessed 14.8. 2011].

gratitude to Christ for dying to pay the punishment for the sin of the respondent. At best the prayer may also include the elements of repentance, faith and commitment to a change in lifestyle.

In recent years theologians and practitioners in evangelism have called into question whether the Cross Centered Gospel is true to scripture and relevant to postmodern culture.⁸⁹² Their alternative has been the Kingdom Centered Gospel which focuses on Christ preaching 'the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news'.⁸⁹³ Proponents of this view see the Gospel not as the means by which individuals can go to heaven when they die but a proclamation that through Jesus the God of Israel has become king and has begun the process of transforming the world.⁸⁹⁴ They focus their thinking more on the Gospels rather than the writings of Paul.⁸⁹⁵ The Gospel call is to join the community of those who are building the kingdom of God on earth.⁸⁹⁶ However, Anderson would say that it is more about kingdom living than kingdom building.⁸⁹⁷

Generally speaking proponents of the Kingdom Centered Gospel would reject the use of suggested prayers of response because, in their opinion, such prayers are focused on personal salvation and the securing of a place in

⁸⁹² James Choung, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In* (Downes Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2008), pp.195-200. Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) pp.61-77.

⁸⁹³ Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2010) p.210. "This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and of his servant/apostle Paul: the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news. Be reconciled". Scot McKnight, *One Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) pp.28-31. Tom Wright, *Simply Jesus* (London: SPCK, 2011) pp.69-70 and 135.

⁸⁹⁴ Stephen Kuhrt, *Tom Wright for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2011) pp.48-49
Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006) pp 84-85, 128, 160, 203-204. Christianity Today. The Justification Debate: A Primer <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/june/29.34.html?start=2>> [accessed 8.11.2013]. Tom Wright says: 'The gospel is the royal announcement that the crucified and risen Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again according to the Scriptures, has been enthroned as the true Lord of the world. When this gospel is preached, God calls people to salvation, out of sheer grace, leading them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the risen Lord.'

⁸⁹⁵ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, pp.183-192.

⁸⁹⁶ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, pp.236-242 'the call to find out where in the total project one can make one's own contribution.'

⁸⁹⁷ Ray S Anderson, *An Emergent Theology* (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007) pp.95-114.

heaven.⁸⁹⁸ Often writers advocating this view do not show conversion as a needed experience but suggest rather that the reader joins those who are serving king Jesus in establishing the kingdom of God on earth.⁸⁹⁹ Having said this there is a strong emphasis on repentance in response to the call that the kingdom of God has come on earth.⁹⁰⁰

After the completion of analysis of booklets reported on in chapter seven I discovered a booklet entitled *Based on a true story* which, unlike all the publications I had examined, puts forward a kingdom centered presentation of the Gospel using an intriguing original set of four diagrams.⁹⁰¹ Choung presents *The Big Picture* as more culturally and scripturally relevant than the bridge illustration.⁹⁰² While there is no suggested prayer in this booklet there are two examples of prayers of commitment in the larger work which supports this booklet.⁹⁰³ The striking thing here is that Choung's suggested prayer differs in content from any of the prayers in the booklets examined in chapter 6 because it says nothing of the work of Christ on the cross nor does it refer to the afterlife. It does focus on transformation and asks: 'Help me to be an agent of healing for the world, with your people'.⁹⁰⁴ Throughout Choung's thought provoking presentation there is an emphasis on becoming part of a community of the kingdom of God set free to change the world by their radical lifestyle.⁹⁰⁵

⁸⁹⁸ Bell, *Love Wins*, pp.1-7. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, pp.37-38.

This comment is also based on my observations during the analysis of current evangelistic literature reported on in chapter 6. See also N. T. Wright's comments on p.57 of this dissertation.

⁸⁹⁹ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, pp.238-239.

⁹⁰⁰ McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, p.184.

⁹⁰¹ James Choung, *Based on a True Story* (Downs Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2008). The four diagrams depict that people and the world were: Designed for Good, Damaged by evil, Restored for better and Sent together to heal. See p.26.

⁹⁰² Choung, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In*, pp.28-34. This book is based on part of James Choung's D.Min dissertation. James Choung, *A Narrative Approach to Developing World-Changing Leaders in the Postmodern Cultures* (Doctor of Ministry Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2008) pp.80-101.

⁹⁰³ Choung, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In*, pp.142 and 217.

⁹⁰⁴ Choung, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In*, p.34 The whole prayer says: 'Jesus, I have been chasing my dreams and living for myself. It's not only hurt my own soul but others. Please forgive me. I now give you leadership of my life, Jesus. I trust you and want to be aligned with your purposes. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen'.

⁹⁰⁵ Choung, *True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In*, pp.32-34, 44-47, 150-169.

This is an ongoing issue with a recent work by Wright, who holds a kingdom centered view, explaining how this includes the cross and stating that in the Gospels there is a 'close fusion' between cross and kingdom.⁹⁰⁶ There is no indication that this should influence attitudes towards the use of suggested prayers. The insights and criticisms regarding the Cross Centered View by those teaching a Kingdom Centered Gospel have been responded to by suggesting that both these views need to be held together.⁹⁰⁷ Having said this aspects of the Kingdom view seem to be lost.⁹⁰⁸ This amalgam would affect the content of any suggested prayer of response, in that it would need to include a commitment with God's help to ongoing transformation. In line with this it has been a recurring assertion within this dissertation that any suggested prayer and the surrounding context should encourage commitment to an ongoing life of discipleship.⁹⁰⁹

Conclusion to Chapter 7

This chapter has considered the analysis of the transcripts of fourteen in-depth interviews with writers of evangelistic literature. There are two equal groups of interviewees: Group A who include a suggested prayer in their publications; and Group B who do not include a suggested prayer. The chapter was structured around the four statements of the hypothesis.

⁹⁰⁶ Tom Wright, *How God became King* (London: SPCK, 2012) pp.175-178 and 211-249. see also Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) pp.61-77. Scot sees a separation between the Gospel and the plan of salvation. For example: 'When the plan gets separated from the story, the plan almost always becomes abstract, propositional, logical, rational, and philosophical, and most importantly, de-storified and unbiblical. We separate ourselves from Jesus and turn the Christian faith into a System of salvation.' p.62.

⁹⁰⁷ D. A. Carson 'What Is the Gospel? – Revisited' in Sam Storms and Justin Taylor [Editors], *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010) pp.147-170. Sandy William, 'What is the Gospel' in D A Carson and Timothy Keller [Editors], *The Gospel as Center* (Wheaton: Crossway,2012), pp.115-134 and Stephen Um, 'The Kingdom of God' in Carson and Keller, *The Gospel as Center*, pp.191-208. Deyoung and Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church*, pp.91-113.

⁹⁰⁸ For example the emphasis on community rather than the individual and focus on world transformation rather than the salvation of the individual. See Carson and Keller, *The Gospel as Center*, p.136. Gilbert, *What is the Gospel*, pp.101-111.

⁹⁰⁹ pp.62, 71, 77, 81.104

The evidence of these interviews proved inconclusive that a suggested prayer was helpful to the respondent. However, it is clear that this is the intention of those interviewees who adopted suggested prayers.

Some support was found in the interview transcripts that providing a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature can be unhelpful because it can lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion. The main false impression commented on by the interviewees was the danger that people could regard themselves as having been converted because they had followed the advice in praying the suggested prayer and thinking that was all that was required to experience conversion. Interviewees suggested this false impression could be prevented by making sure the Gospel was carefully explained in the rest of the publication and by ensuring that the suggested prayer is seen as the start of an ongoing life of discipleship.

Regarding assurance of salvation the majority of Group B supported the hypothesis in saying that providing a suggested prayer would result in a misleading assumption regarding assurance of salvation because the reader could base their assurance on having prayed the suggested prayer. In contrast, five out of seven interviewees of Group A see providing a suggested prayer as having a possible positive impact on the respondent's view of assurance of salvation.⁹¹⁰ Having said this, they also added warnings to their positive opinions. The interviewees believed that a clearer understanding of assurance of salvation could be achieved by refocusing assurance onto the work of Christ and the promises of the Bible. The section did indicate the possibility that a suggested prayer could result in misleading assumptions about assurance of salvation.

There was some support that providing a suggested prayer could result in less professional practices in evangelism. Most of this support came from the interviewees of Group B who are unanimous that there is the possibility of manipulating or pressurising people through literature. The interviewees of

⁹¹⁰ A4 and A2.

Group A saw little or no risk of manipulation or undue pressure with literature, while the majority of interviewees say that we should encourage people to make a decision. However, all the interviewees of both Groups list dangers in encouraging someone to make a decision, including the possibility of pressurising someone into making a false profession. Therefore the aim of evangelism should not be getting someone to say a prayer but encouraging the reader to repent and believe.

Interviewees indicated that the negative aspects of the hypothesis could be safeguarded against by writing that explained the Gospel adequately. In addition, there is a challenge to write for the reader and not just to please Christians who will distribute the literature. Further such research outcomes will be outlined in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

Introduction

This research makes a unique contribution to the study of evangelism carried out by British Christians. It examines the authorial intention in adopting or excluding prayers of response in evangelistic literature. It is the first project to look at this subject from a British perspective by examining the history and use of evangelistic literature used in this country during the past 112 years. Through in-depth interviews I have listened to the voices of those who write evangelistic literature in order to reflect on all aspects of the subject. The historical enquiry which formed part of this study has discovered unique and surprising facts about the origin of such prayers in British evangelistic literature.

The first four chapters provided background, insights and understanding which were used to formulate the research hypothesis and nine questions that formed the basis for analysing current evangelistic literature in Chapter 6. These chapters also laid a foundation for producing a questionnaire which was used to facilitate the in-depth interviews with writers of evangelistic literature, which is reported on in Chapter 7.

This final chapter will begin by outlining the results of the historical enquiry and the research findings. This is followed by the outcomes of the research presented as a series of guidelines for use by writers and distributors of evangelistic literature. These are divided into generic considerations that apply to all theological approaches; and specific considerations that apply to differing approaches to the theology and practice. The purpose of these guidelines is to generate critical reflection on the practice for authors who do and do not use prayers of response. Finally, these guidelines are used to make connections with other methods of evangelism.

Findings of the Historical Enquiry

This research discovered that the first evangelistic publication available in this country which contained a suggested prayer of response was *Becoming a Christian* by John Stott, published in 1950. This disproved Bennett's suggestion that such prayers were introduced to Britain by the Billy Graham Association as *Steps to Peace with God*, their first publication to contain such a prayer, was not published until at least 1955. This conclusion is similar to that reached by Chitwood whose research shows that the first American Tract Society publication to contain a suggested prayer appeared in 1955. Having said this, Stott's booklet *Becoming a Christian* was published five years before this and thus could be the first evangelistic publication in the world, in general circulation, to contain a suggested prayer.

It was discovered that all the early British writers to include a suggested prayer were Anglican Clergymen who were influenced by Eric Nash. The dissertation puts forward the suggestion that these men could have been comfortable with using a suggested prayer because of their familiarity with liturgy.

The research discovered evidence to support McIntyre's suggestion that early prayers in evangelistic literature developed from decision pledges. The main reason for this was the similarity between pledges and prayers in evangelistic publications found in the archives of The Pocket Testament League.

This aspect of my research has left me with many questions regarding the impact of some of the people who are mentioned in Chapter 3. There are, too, many issues for further research, including seeking to discover what led Stott to introduce a suggested prayer in his booklet.

Answering the hypothesis

This research has found support for the one positive and three negative statements regarding adopting suggested prayers in evangelistic literature contained in the following hypothesis which has driven this project.

Although the intent of the author in including a suggested prayer of response in evangelistic literature may be to help people express their response to the Christian Gospel, a thorough evaluation demonstrates that it could lead to, false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading assumptions regarding assurance of salvation, and less professional practices in evangelism.

An examination of current evangelistic literature and interviews with authors were used to test this hypothesis. Booklets which contained a suggested prayer were compared with similar literature which excluded prayers. Two groups of authors were interviewed representing those who adopted prayers of response and those who excluded them.

There was support for the assertion that the intention of authors in including prayers was to help people express their response to the Christian Gospel. The majority of interviewees who excluded prayers saw some possible benefit in providing such prayers. The booklets which excluded prayers encouraged the respondent to pray. The differences between the two groups of booklets and interviewees revolved around whether it was right to provide the words to say.

Taking all the results from analysing both sets of booklets there is far more support for the negative statements of the hypothesis from the booklets that contain a suggested prayer. The percentage of positive answers to the questions used to analyse the booklets is 40% less for the booklets which don't contain a suggested prayer. This part of the research suggests that the negative aspects of the hypothesis could be eliminated by not providing a suggested prayer. However, the majority of the booklets which do not contain a suggested prayer do encourage the reader to pray as part of their response to the Gospel. Having said this, it must be borne in mind that not including a

suggested prayer would mean the loss of any positive benefit this could be to the respondent.

The analysis of the interview transcripts supports the three negative statements of the hypothesis. The majority of interviewees believed that supplying a suggested prayer could give the misleading impression that all conversion involved was the saying of a prayer. Analysis of the interviews suggests that including a suggested prayer means a publication is in greater danger of leading to false assurance. When it came to questions about evangelism the two groups of interviewees were very divided. However, analysis of the interviews suggested there was a greater risk of less professional practices in evangelism if a suggested prayer was included.

My conclusion regarding whether the research proves the negative statements of the hypothesis is that there is enough support for this to be a cause for concern but not enough to totally reject the practice of providing a suggested prayer. The question this raises is whether it is possible to improve the content and context of suggested prayers so that they are more acceptable to authors and greater benefit to readers.

Guidance for critical reflection by authors

Introduction

This study found that authors include a suggested prayer because it is their intention to help the reader make an appropriate response to the Christian gospel. However, this study has shown that the adoption of such prayers can lead to the reader misunderstanding the intention of the author and gaining wrong impressions regarding the purpose of the provision of such prayers.

The previous section concluded that while this research has not found enough support for the negative aspects of the hypothesis to suggest that the use of suggested prayers should be totally eradicated from evangelistic literature, there is enough to cause concern. Therefore, the following guidelines have been compiled directly from reflecting on the qualitative research.

The aim of these guidelines is to encourage authors to critically reflect on the purpose and use of suggested prayers in order to minimise the negative aspects of my hypothesis and increase the possibility of the provision of suggested prayers in evangelistic literature being helpful to those wanting to respond to the Gospel.

Reflective guidelines to authors

The purpose of providing a suggested prayer should be re-evaluated in order to remove any impression that the aim of the author is just to encourage the reader to pray the prayer.

Carefully worded statements should be added before and after any suggested prayer instructing the reader regarding the purpose of such a prayer. Authors need to consider the clarity of these statements by reflecting on such issues as the use of isolated verses of scripture and non-Biblical terms such as 'asking Jesus into your heart'. Readers should not be told that the praying of a prayer means they are converted and now have eternal life.

Such statements should make it clear that salvation is not given on the basis of praying the prayer with sincerity but because of faith in Christ. The author should avoid statements suggesting that salvation is permanent, with a guaranteed place in heaven, for those who have prayed the suggested prayer.

Authors should consider moving the prayer from the last few pages of their publication to a more central position in order to change the focus onto the actions the respondent should be considering as a result of the commitment expressed within the prayer.

The intention of the authors represented by this study is to help people experience conversion which results in a transformed lifestyle. There is a need for authors to critically reflect on how this can be achieved without the respondent basing their assurance of salvation solely on changes in their lifestyle

This study found that repentance and faith are the most appropriate responses to the Christian Gospel. Therefore, authors need to critically reflect on what part prayer can play as an expression of repentance and faith while making it clear to the reader that these issues require more than just praying. This should include some explanation of the nature of repentance and faith.

Having said this, the authors interviewed and booklets examined in this study saw prayer as part of the response to the Gospel. Authors were only divided on whether it was helpful or harmful to supply the actual words to be prayed. There is a need for all authors to critically reflect on how to encourage the reader to pray without them gaining misconceptions regarding the purpose of such a prayer. For example, thinking that all that was necessary to be converted is the saying of a prayer.

This research has put forward the suggestion that there is often a moment of decision within the conversion process. The suggested prayer could be seen by the reader as part of a sudden event or transaction that requires no ongoing change in the life of the respondent. This impression could be wrongfully reinforced by asking the respondent to record when they said the prayer. Therefore, authors need to reflect on how, through careful wording of the content and context of the suggested prayer, they can help the reader to consider costly life-long discipleship rather than just the making of a momentary decision. Consideration needs to be given as to how a suggested prayer can be presented as one step on a redemptive journey and not an end in itself.

All authors [whether or not they include a suggested prayer] need to consider what they see as the basis for assurance of salvation and how they can share this with their readers. The authors involved in this study saw the need to guard against prayer being seen as the basis for assurance. The consensus was that the work of Christ and the promises of scripture should be the basis of assurance. The outcome of such reflection needs to be including content that will explain why the reader must not base assurance only on having prayed.

This study suggests that providing a suggested prayer can result in gentle manipulation because praying a prayer is presented as the only way to respond. Authors need to reflect on how they can include within their publication an element of choice. For example, this could be between praying the prayer and seeking further information.

Consideration needs to be given as to what advice should be included in the publication for those who wish to respond. One area which should be covered is an explanation of the place of feelings in conversion and the Christian life. Authors need to reflect on how to put in place suggestions which may result in help for the respondent in order to correct any misconceptions they may have gained from the publication. This could include advising the reader to talk about their response with a Christian and providing ways of obtaining support for those who may not have contact with Christians. Consideration also needs to be given as to how they can encourage readers to become part of a Christian community in order to gain help and guidance regarding assurance of salvation and ongoing discipleship.

This study has encountered authors who hold approaches to theology which result in them being cautious about the use of prayers of response. I would suggest, in the light of this study, that they critically reflect on whether a suggested prayer of response could be helpful if they were able to agree with the content and context of such a prayer.

For example, those who hold to a Kingdom centered view of salvation need to consider whether, within the ongoing process of joining those who are seeking to extend the Kingdom of God on earth, there is a crisis point when a decision is made to serve the King. If there is such a moment then they should consider whether the use of an appropriate prayer of response would be relevant at that point. A priority for them would be whether such a prayer could help express an ongoing commitment to service which helped stimulate the respondent to action.

It has been observed that those holding to a Reformed view of theology are more likely to exclude the use of suggested prayers of response. However, in the light of this study may they consider whether such a prayer could express deep conviction of sin and a surrendering of oneself to the mercy of God while trusting in Christ. I would encourage them to take a fresh look at whether it is possible to provide the words to pray without taking the focus off trusting in the sovereign God for salvation.

However, the closing statement of this section must I feel challenge those who are most comfortable with the use of suggested prayers of response. They need to heed the call to critically reflect on how they could refine the context and content of such prayers to guard against the misunderstandings that have been examined during this study.

Relating research to other methods of evangelism

This study has looked at the use of suggested prayers of response in Christian literature. However, such prayers are used in other forms of evangelism including personal faith sharing, altar calls, television and internet evangelism. The findings of this study and the suggested reflective guidance in this chapter could be used by practitioners of these other forms of evangelism.

Internet evangelism could well be the area where suggested prayers are most in danger of resulting in the misconceptions examined by this research. United Christian Broadcasters, a British organisation, has launched a new website for those seeking to know God.⁹¹¹ This includes a prayer to pray and a button to click if you have prayed the prayer. While this site does include some excellent follow up material the position and wording of the prayer could give the impression that all that is needed to guarantee salvation is the saying of this prayer.

⁹¹¹ <<http://www.lookingforgod.>> [accessed 20.1.2013] The prayer on this website says: 'Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life. I ask for your forgiveness. Thank you for dying on the cross for me to set me free from my sins. Please come into my life and fill me with your Holy Spirit and be with me forever. Thank you Lord Jesus. Amen'.

Global Media Outreach has a number of websites which include a suggested prayer and a button to press to indicate response. They recorded over 10 million decisions through their websites in 2009.⁹¹² Their top website has a short Gospel outline and then asks people to say a suggested prayer; after this they can indicate whether they have said the prayer by clicking on a button. The next page says, 'Welcome to the Family'.⁹¹³ While there are excellent follow up facilities connected to this website the way the prayer is used and this following statement could be open to misconceptions.

I would therefore suggested that those engaged in this method of evangelism could gain from the guidance for reflection in this chapter. The placing of clear explanatory statements before and after the suggested prayer is particularly relevant and could help guard against those who use these websites thinking that salvation is guaranteed at the press of a button.

Another area of evangelism which is closely linked to this study is personal faith sharing because it is in this context that a great deal of Christian literature is distributed. While the authors of such literature may have diligently guarded against the reader gaining misconceptions the Christians distributing the literature may give the impression that the only response to the Gospel is the saying of a prayer. They could, too, exert pressure on people to respond which is absent from the actual literature. The guidelines above could be used by those involved in this form of evangelism. Particularly relevant is the suggestion that people should always be offered a choice of ways to respond which can safeguard against wrong impressions as to the purpose of a suggested prayer and present undue pressure.

⁹¹² Global Media Outreach recorded over 10 million decisions through their websites in 2009. <http://www.globalmediaoutreach.com/about_us.html> [accessed 11.1.2011]. Global Media Outreach is part of Campus Crusade for Christ. <<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20091218/ccc-media-ministry-records-over-10m-decisions-in-2009/>> [accessed 12.1.2011].

⁹¹³ <<http://www.jesus2020.com/>> [accessed 11.1.2011] On another of their websites decisions worldwide are recorded as they are made - over 24,000 on 11th January 2011. Extensive follow-up material is available through the website and those who asked for further help are contacted by a counsellor using email. They had 4000 requests on one day in 2011. <<http://www.greatcommission2020.com/>> [accessed 11.1.2011]. See also: <<http://www.lookingforgod.com/a-simple-prayer.>> [accessed 20.1.2013].

Suggestions for further study

A further study could engage with questionnaires and/or interviews of as many recent converts as possible to test whether a suggested prayer played a significant part in their journey to faith. The aim would be to further test my hypothesis against the experience of these new Christians.

Another area of research would be to investigate the use of a suggested prayer by those who have not continued to be part of a Church. For example younger people who were known to have used a suggested prayer in a summer camp situation but had since lost contact with the Church.

This present study assumed that evangelistic literature was having to stand alone and that the reader had no other help or information. However, such literature is distributed by Christians and they may influence the way the reader responds. Therefore, another area of further study is the use of a suggested prayer in evangelism other than through literature. This would involve a questionnaire or interviews with evangelists and other Christians involved in evangelism to ascertain if the statement of my hypothesis could be true of the way they use a suggested prayer in helping those wishing to respond to the Gospel.

During the interviews it was suggested that the clear presentation of all aspects of the Gospel in the rest of the publication will eliminate misunderstandings regarding the suggested prayer. However, there is at present a lot of debate as to what exactly are the true aspects of the Gospel.⁹¹⁴ Because this opens up another enormous subject the present research was limited to the response to the Gospel. However, one area for further research is the true content of the Christian Gospel. This will facilitate further consideration of the relevance of providing a suggested prayer. I would suggest that the

⁹¹⁴ Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology* (Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007); James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Editors), *The Nature of the Atonement* (Downes Grove: Inter Varsity Fellowship, 2006); Tom Wright, *How God became King* (London: SPCK, 2012); D.A. Carson & Timothy Kelly (Editors), *The Gospels as Center* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012); Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Grogan, *The Faith Once Entrusted to the Saints*.

conclusions of this further study would affect the content of evangelistic publications and that of any suggested prayer.

This present study looked at the relevance of providing a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature. A further study could apply the same principles and hypothesis to examining the use of a suggested prayer of response in other areas of evangelism, particularly the internet.

The present study has touched on an aspect of the history of evangelism. During my research I did not discover a comprehensive book on the history of evangelism in Britain. The works I consulted which looked at the history of evangelism from a global perspective only provided an outline rather than going into the subject in detail.⁹¹⁵ There is, therefore, much work to be done in the area of the history of evangelism. There are works which deal in detail with individuals or particular periods of time but there is a need for a more detailed treatment of the subject as a whole.⁹¹⁶

As suggested in the historical section above, further research may uncover what motivated John Stott to include a suggested prayer in his booklet. The suggestion that early writers who included a suggested prayer could have been influenced by their familiarity with liturgy could be further investigated by interviewing those early writers who are still alive.

Final Conclusion

According to this study, the intention of authors in adopting the use of suggested prayers is to help people express their response to the Christian Gospel. However, the evaluation carried out during this research suggests that there is a possibility that providing such prayers can be unhelpful because it can lead to false impressions as to what is involved in conversion, misleading

⁹¹⁵ Terry, *Evangelism a Concise History*; Robert G. Tuttle Jr, *The Story of Evangelism: A History of The Witness To The Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006).

⁹¹⁶ For example: Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*; Green, *Adventures of Faith*. Michelle P. Brown, *How Christianity Came to Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Lion, 2006); Iain H. Murray, *Revival & Revivalism* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002).

assumptions regarding assurance of salvation and less professional practices in evangelism.

This study does not suggest that the practice of providing a suggested prayer should be abandoned. Instead, the conclusion has provided guidance to help authors engage in critical reflection on the use of such prayers in order to minimise the disadvantages of the use of such prayers. It is hoped that the outcome of this reflection will result in providing evangelistic literature which will help people to use a suggested prayer when they cry out to God, in order to enter into an ongoing relationship with Him, without incurring the misleading issues discussed during the course of this study.

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Appendix 1

Booklets analysed for Chapter 5

Booklets which include a suggested prayer

Adams, Paul, *CrossCheck* (BeaconLight, 2010)

Carswell, Roger, *Grill a Christian* (Chorley; 10Publishing, 2011)

Carswell, Roger, *Jesus is the Shepherd*

Carswell, Roger, *The Mystery of Christmas*

Carswell, Roger, *Things God Wants Us to Know* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2007)

Carswell, Roger, *Trust in Christ* (Lees: Tell me More)

Carswell, Roger, *Who is Jesus* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2011)

Carswell, Roger, *Why Me* (London: Authentic, 1993)

Chrispin, Gerard, *How can I Find God Today?* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2008)

Coekin, Richard, *His Passion for Life* (New Malden: The Good Book Company, 2009)

Curley, Gordon, *Let's Talk* (South Croydon: Deo Gloria)

Green, Michael, *Yes* (Chorley: 10Publishing, 2011)

Gumbel, Nicky, *Why Jesus?* (London: Alpha International, 1997 reprinted 2009)

Hodge, Peter, *Turn to God* (Cardiff: Open Air Campaigners, 2010)

Hughes, Selwyn, *Discovering the Way* (Farnham: CWR, 2009)

Jackopson, Vic, *Just Grace* (Market Harborough: Evangelism Explosion, 1997)

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Laferton, Carl and Thornborough, Tim, *The Real Easter* (New Malden, The Good Book Company, 2009)

Nodder, Marcus and Thornborough, Tim, *The Real Christmas* (New Malden, The Good Book Company, 2011)

Palau, Luis, *What is a Real Christian?* (Farnham: CWR, 2006)

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Roberts, Vaughan, *Missing the Point?* (London: Authentic, 2007)

Tice, Rico and Cooper, Barry, *The Real Jesus* (New Malden: Good Book Company, 2011)

Warren, Norman, *Journey into Life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1998)

Woodcock, Peter, *Crossover* (New Malden, The Good Book Company)

Bridge to Life (NavPress, 2006)

God's Plan to Save You (Wheaton: Good News Publications, no date [uses ESV First Published in 2001])

Heaven: Why some good people will not go. (Southend On Sea: Avanti)

Jesus = Friendship Forever (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, 2005)

Knowing God Personally (Birmingham: Agape, 2006)

Love is the Bridge (Bridge Builders, 2005)

Steps to Peace with God (Billy Graham Association, 2009)

The Key to Life (Bridge Builders, 2006)

This was your life (Ontario: Chick publications)

Two Roads (Kingsford NSW: Matthias Media, 2003)

Who is the King? (Kingsford NSW: Matthias Media, 2004)

Booklets which don't include a suggested prayer are on the next page

Booklets which don't include a suggested prayer

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- Benfold, Gary, *Reach Out to Him* (Leomister: Day One Publications, 2006)
- Blanchard, John, *Can we be Good without God?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007)
- Blanchard, John, *Jesus Dead or Alive* (Darlington: EP BOOKS, 2009)
- Blanchard, John, *Where do we go from here?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2008)
- Blanchard, John, *Why on Earth did Jesus come?* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2009)
- Blanchard, John, *Why the Cross?* (Darlington: EP BOOKS, 2011)
- Blanchard, John, *Ultimate Questions* (Darlington: EP BOOKS, 2010)
- Chrispin, Gerard, *How can I become a Christian?* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005)
- Gale, Stanley D., *How can I know eternal life?* (Leomister: Day One Publications, 2010)
- Jack, Victor, *Believe and be Baptised* (Norwick: Hughes and Coleman, 2003)
- Jeffery, Peter, *Seeking God* (Bridgend: Bryntiion Press, 1980)
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- Facing the Facts* (Evangelical Tract Society)
- The Unique Jesus* (Luton: Open Air Mission, 2010)
- You Matter* (London: SGM Lifewords, 2011)

Appendix 2

Questions for interviews



David Robert Bennett

Doctor of Ministry

Researcher

1. How did you get involved in writing evangelistic literature?
2. What are your reasons for including a suggested prayer in your evangelistic literature?

Or

What are your reasons for not including a suggested prayer in your evangelistic literature?
3. What do you see as the possible advantages of including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?
4. What possible disadvantages do you see in including a suggested prayer in evangelistic literature?
5. What are the essential elements of the Christian Gospel which you feel need to be included in an evangelistic publication?
6. What should evangelistic literature encourage people to do in response to the Christian Gospel?
7. Why do you think there is often no mention of baptism in contemporary evangelistic literature?

8. What do you see as the possible advantages and/or dangers in encouraging someone to make a decision?
9. How can we avoid manipulation and undue pressure in evangelistic literature?
10. What part do you think prayer can play in conversion?
11. What misconceptions about conversion could arise from providing a suggested prayer and how can we guard against them?
12. In what ways do you think providing a suggested prayer may affect how those who respond view assurance of salvation?
13. How can evangelistic literature encourage a clearer understanding of assurance of salvation?
14. What difference do you think it would make if evangelistic literature encouraged a person responding to the Gospel to pray but did not include a suggested prayer?
15. In what ways do you think your views regarding divine sovereignty and human responsibility impact on your evangelistic writing?
16. In what ways does your view of the atonement affect your presentation of the Gospel?
17. What do you see as the future of evangelistic literature?
18. Is there anything else you would like to share with me which you feel would be helpful to my research?

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Appendix 3

**Resolution passed by the
Southern Baptist Convention of the United States of America Wednesday 20th
June 2012 in New Orleans, Louisiana⁹¹⁷**

**AN AFFIRMATION OF A “SINNER’S PRAYER” AS A BIBLICAL EXPRESSION OF
REPENTANCE AND FAITH**

WHEREAS, The Gospel of Jesus Christ offers full forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God to anyone who repents of sin and trusts in Christ; and

WHEREAS, This same Gospel commands all persons everywhere to believe this Gospel and receive Christ as Savior and Lord (Mark 1:15; John 1:12; 6:25–52; Acts 17:30); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures give examples of persons from diverse backgrounds who cried out for mercy and were heard by God (Luke 18:13; Acts 16:29–30); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures also give numerous examples of persons who verbally affirmed Gospel truths but who did not personally know Jesus in a saving relationship (Luke 22:47–48; John 2:23–25; 1 Corinthians 10:1–5); and

WHEREAS, Empty religion and formalism, of whatever kind, apart from personal relationship with Christ, cannot wash away sin or transform a heart (Matthew 7:21; 15:8; John 3:3); and

WHEREAS, The Bible speaks of salvation as including both a confession with the mouth that Jesus is Lord and a belief in the heart that God has raised Him from the dead (Matthew 16:16; Romans 10:9–10); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, June 19–20, 2012, reaffirm our Gospel conviction that repentance from sin and personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are necessary for salvation (Acts 20:20–21); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we affirm that repentance and faith involve a crying out for mercy and a calling on the Lord (Romans 10:13), often identified as a “sinner’s prayer,” as a biblical expression of repentance and faith; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a “sinner’s prayer” is not an incantation that results in salvation merely by its recitation and should never be manipulatively employed or utilized apart from a clear articulation of the Gospel (Matthew 6:7; 15:7–9); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we promote any and all biblical means of urging sinners to call on the name of the Lord in a prayer of repentance and faith; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we call on Southern Baptists everywhere to continue to carry out the Great Commission in North America and around the world, so that sinners everywhere, of every tribe, tongue, and language, may cry out, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 1

⁹¹⁷ Downloaded from <<http://sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1221>> [accessed 2.1.2013]