

Word and Spirit: the vital partnership in Christian leadership

Will Donaldson (BRF/CPAS, 2011)

Which is more important? Seeking God's manifest power, or studying and proclaiming his Word? This book is a passionate call for those who emphasise one or the other of these to see the truth of the other 'side' and to acknowledge the 'vital partnership' of Word and Spirit in Christian leadership. The author, Director of Christian Leadership at Wycliffe Hall, writes in his introduction: 'This book is written in the deep conviction that the Word and the Spirit are God's two greatest resources for Christian leadership and that godly leadership requires us to sit humbly under the authority of both.'

The first section looks at 'contemporary considerations', and the need for this book: a desire for unity within evangelicalism, the challenges of postmodernism, and the opportunity for theological education to weld Word and Spirit together in the minds and hearts of future leaders in the church. The author then moves on to biblical and historical perspectives, looking at how Word and Spirit have come together through the Bible and church history.

In the rest of the book Will Donaldson outlines the leadership implications of Word and Spirit for seven key areas of Christian leadership: preaching and teaching the Bible, developing and implementing vision, working in teams and mentoring leaders, mobilising every member into ministry, enabling worship and prayer, providing pastoral care and nurture, and motivating evangelism and mission. I found much that was inspiring in these chapters, as the author draws on his experience as a vicar in West London, illustrating the 'vital partnership' which he seeks to promote. My only caveat here would be that the situation he describes was clearly quite a well-resourced church, so as I read about some aspects of church life I realised how different these were from the experience of many leaders: those, for example, who lead multi-parish benefices, where they are the only paid clergy person with charge of a number of churches, and who could only dream of a 'staff meeting' or financial resources such as the author describes.

Reading it as a woman, I was struck by the parade of male names from past centuries, including the twentieth, who were given as exemplars of the uniting of Word and Spirit. To me the need for Word and Spirit together in Christian life and leadership has always seemed so obvious; so who were those who wanted to focus on Word to the exclusion of Spirit, or Spirit to the exclusion of Word? More male names. I began to wonder if Simon Ponsoby's use of the term 'warring brothers' in the Foreword was in fact an even more appropriate phrase than he might have realised. The debate does appear to be about 'warring brothers'! As someone partially excluded from both 'camps' by virtue of being a woman (for some on the Word side I should not be ordained; on the other hand, I'm not married to a leader) the debate at times felt somewhat remote to me. But I realise that in many quarters this is a live issue which is confusing for many women as well as men, and for them this book is very timely.

The author is well-read, drawing on his experience and understanding of the strengths of each 'side', and the book is written with the passion of a pastor's heart. Read it for a salutary reminder of what can happen when Christians 'major' on minor matters (cessationist theology being one example), and for an intelligent restating of the central aspects of Christian leadership and how these can be lived out in the life of the local church, informed by the Word and empowered by the Spirit. To buy a copy, click [here](#).

Rosie Ward, © CPAS 2011

