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***With  
Broken Heart  
and  
Contrite Sigh***

Congregational Studies  
Conference 2015





**With  
Broken Heart  
and  
Contrite Sigh**

**Gervase Charmley,  
Tom Brand,  
Bob Cotton**

**Congregational Studies Conference  
Papers 2015**

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The papers are printed in the order in which they were given at the Conference; as usual the contributor is entirely responsible for the views expressed in his paper.



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*Photographs by Dr Digby L. James*

# Foreword

This year's conference took place in the lecture room of the Dr Williams's Library, which also houses the Congregational Library.

As always, we are grateful to our speakers for the time they spent in preparation in order to give us insights into these different areas. Each author is responsible for the views they express and this does not necessarily imply an endorsement by EFCC.

Gervase Charmley told us of the life and work of Richard Henry Smith, a former minister of his own church (as well as others, including one in Suffolk, connecting us with Bob Cotton's paper). There is a tendency amongst evangelicals today to be suspicious of art, in spite of the more positive views of Francis Schaeffer and Hans Rookmaaker. Smith showed, among other things, how art could be used evangelistically and for teaching.

Tom Brand gave us a stimulating paper on an aspect of the Trinity and the atonement. Anything on this subject has to avoid the problem of being rationalistic and denying the basic truth that God is three persons in one godhead. But Tom handled the subject carefully and there was a stimulating discussion afterwards. Tom is planning on studying this subject for a doctorate and we hope that the fruits of his labours will be at least as great a blessing as this paper was.

Bob Cotton gave us a glimpse of 'a Suffolk Worthy', Cornelius Elven. We all have a tendency to focus on the great names of church history. Bob reminded us that there were a great many other notable men who laboured in the gospel, but are now little heard of. This should be an encouragement to those of us who feel we live in a 'day of small things' and think that our labours are of no great effect.

The day proved a blessing to those who attended, not least because of the fellowship enjoyed amongst us.

God willing we will be meeting again next year on 15 March 2016 in Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission in City Road, London, opposite Bunhill Fields. Dr Michael Haykin (Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality and Director of The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) will be speaking about Asahel Nettleton (the great 19th century New England Congregational evangelist), Philip Doddridge and Isaac Watts. In each case he will be bringing to us not just the history but also the relevance of these people to modern church life.

**Dr Digby L. James**

***Quinta Church, Weston Rhyn***

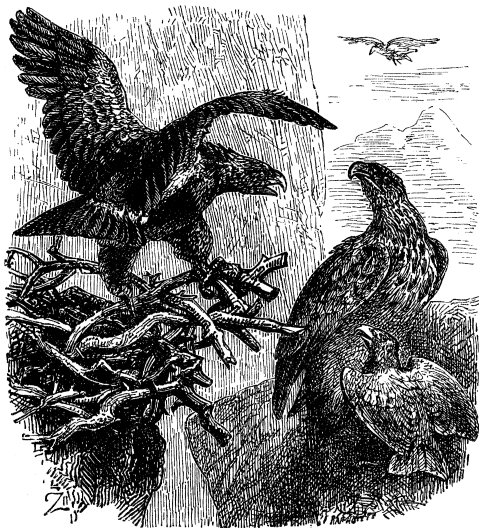


# TWIGS FOR NESTS

OR

## Notes on Nursery Nurture

*By the Author of 'The Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael,' etc.*



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN GRAPHOTYPE

LONDON

JAMES NISBET & CO. BERNERS STREET

1866

# Richard Henry Smith: The Gospel, Art and the People

**Gervase Charmley**

## **The Gospel, Art and the People**

Grafton Terrace, Kentish Town, is a street the main claim to fame of which today is that between 1855 and 1864 number 46 was the residence of none other than Karl Marx, co-father of modern Communism.<sup>1</sup> But the year that Marx left the street another man moved in—Richard Henry Smith. Whilst it is tempting to imagine that he took over the former Marx residence, and this is certainly a possibility, the evidence is lacking, so all we can say is that he moved in to the same street. He was an experienced pastor, having served four previous churches, one of which was a church-planting operation in Surbiton, and had come to Kentish Town to repeat his church-planting work in North London with the goal of establishing a new Congregational Church in the growing suburb of Gospel Oak. At the first service in the house in Grafton Terrace, the minister announced his text, ‘We are fools for Christ’s sake.’ It stood as the text not only for the new venture, but for the whole of Richard Henry Smith’s life. He was indeed, ‘a remarkable man.’<sup>2</sup> It is that remarkable man we are going to consider in this paper. Our subject was one of my predecessors in the pastorate in Hanley; I came across him when writing the history of our Church back in 2012, and found him the most interesting of the men to have served in the pastorate of our Church in its two hundred year history. Reading his books, I became aware of a man who was unlike any of the other men to have served our Church. Artist, preacher, author, Church-planter and writer on childcare, he was a man of many parts; perhaps he was the Tim Keller of the 19th century. We shall consider first his life and work as a Church-planter, then consider his message as presented in his books.

### **Life<sup>3</sup>**

Richard Henry Smith was born in London in February of 1821.<sup>4</sup> His father, also called Richard Henry Smith, was a preacher but not yet a minister. Described as being ‘of Hackney’, he may have attended the Hackney Theological Academy, but in 1821 he was living in Stepney and teaching to support his wife and family while he sought a pastorate and preached in the Congregational churches of the metropolis and surrounding areas. In 1833 he was ordained to the pastorate of the Congregational Church at Upminster, Essex, now a London suburb, but then a rural village.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, the family found the move from the inner city to village life challenging at first, but eventually they settled in to their new life.

On the whole 19th century Congregationalists took the idea of a divine call to the ministry extremely seriously. The idea that his son might become a minister may have occurred to the elder Smith, but it was for the Holy Spirit, not a human father, to make that decision. As the young man showed a love of books and literature, he was apprenticed to a bookbinder, perhaps a relative, in the Oxfordshire town of Bicester,<sup>6</sup> where there was a Congregational Church of great antiquity which had begun as a Presbyterian meeting after the Ejection of 1662, and stood firmly in the Puritan tradition. It had become Independent at some point during the 18th century, when most of those English Presbyterian congregations which did not lapse into Unitarianism became Congregational.<sup>7</sup> It was there that young Richard began to engage in specifically Christian work, probably at first in the Sunday school, and then in preaching in the villages around Bicester.

At some point before 1845 he attended Highbury College, an institution for the training of the ministry founded in 1778 at Mile End, and relocated to Hoxton in 1791. It had moved to a new and splendid building in Highbury in 1826. Here he came under the influence of Rev. John Hensley Godwin, who taught English literature, philosophy, logic and Biblical criticism. A graduate of Highbury and of Edinburgh University, Godwin combined intellectual rigour with deep piety, and made a great impact on many students. The other tutors were Ebenezer Henderson, who taught theology, and William Smith (of the Bible Dictionary) who taught classics. The courses taken by students varied in length according to the students' ability to fund their education, their educational needs, and other matters such as personal health and circumstances.

Then, as now, many students passed through theological colleges only to find the future uncertain once the course was over. This was, for some reason, the case with Richard Henry Smith. A suggestion as to why this may have been the case is given by his biographer, co-worker and friend, J.W. Sedcole, who writes, 'Although one could not fail to recognise his intellectuality and to admire his manifest earnestness, there was so much reserve and independence in his manner, as to check, rather than to elicit, the confidence of those with whom he came into contact for the first time. Further, his contempt for superficiality, which was so evident in his preaching, was equally marked in his social intercourse, and effectually barred anything approaching to freedom on the part of strangers.'<sup>8</sup> Not the sort of man likely to appeal to a diaconate or a church after a single Sunday's ministry, one feels!

Unsure of the future course of his ministry, Smith settled in Brading, on the Isle of Wight. Here there was a small Congregational church, a mere handful of people, with an old meeting-house in a back lane surrounded by sewers.<sup>9</sup> In that unprepossessing place he began a quiet work, and in 1845 the

Church called him to be their pastor, paying him only £28 a year, without a manse. 'He was pre-eminently a man who needed to be known to be loved,' Sedcole writes from personal experience. Having come to know him, the Brading Church came to love him as well.

Such a first pastorate could have been either the making or the breaking of Smith. Having formed a high ideal of the ministry, and a settled idea of how the Church ought to be supported, he might have been disillusioned by the failure of the people to share his vision, but instead he found a receptive people. The old meeting-house in its unpleasant and out-of-the-way location was replaced by 'a Gothic nave, with accommodation underneath for the minister, the elevated position and sloping character of the ground making such an arrangement possible.'<sup>10</sup> A high Anglican incumbent insisting on all scholars at the town's school being taught the Anglican Catechism led Smith to begin a campaign to found a British School, a building for which was provided next to the new chapel along with residences for schoolmaster and schoolmistress. When the incumbent refused burial to a Nonconformist, Smith encouraged the purchase of land behind the chapel as a burial ground. These experiences settled his Congregationalism and also showed him as a leader.

In 1850, Smith received a call to the pastorate of the Independent Church in Halesworth, a 'considerable market town'<sup>11</sup> in Suffolk. Founded in the late 18th century from Walpole Old Chapel, Halesworth Church already had a substantial and commodious chapel, built in 1836 in a prominent location in the town—indeed it is a landmark to this day. The official history of the Church states that, 'During his ministry at Halesworth, the Church appeared to maintain a steady progress.'<sup>12</sup> He increased the size of the diaconate and replaced the old system of collections and subscriptions with a weekly offering on the Lord's Day. Smith's ministry in Halesworth was however to be of short duration, as illness forced him to resign in January of 1853.<sup>13</sup>

Smith was forced to spend the rest of 1853 resting, but by the following year he was fit enough to resume gospel ministry. With the support of Kingston Congregational Church, Surrey, he began church-planting in Surbiton, a suburb that had sprung up around the railway.

Today the Church-Planter has a certain special glamour about him; he is the pioneer, the man who headlines conferences, while the pastor who has to keep what someone else planted from falling apart is often overlooked, though his job may be harder. There is, we may say, a certain mythology about the Church-Planter, a mystery that is not altogether healthy when it emphasises the man rather than the message. Looking at a Church-planter of the 19th century, we have a lesson in how these things actually work.

Richard Henry Smith lived in the era when our industrial cities were growing as never before, and as the industrial cities of Victorian Britain expanded, people flooded in from the countryside to take up employment that paid better and was seen to have more chance of advancement than agricultural labour. This created a challenge for the churches, as these new city-dwellers were uncoupled from traditional networks, including churches. Some settled in inner-city districts, where they formed a challenge for existing churches, while others settled in new estates and suburbs that had just a little time before been green fields. At the same time, the middle classes moved from the inner cities to new suburbs such as Hampstead and Surbiton, the places where Smith did his church planting work. Several old inner city churches moved out to the new suburbs, rural churches like the one Smith's father had pastored at Upminster found themselves becoming suburban; and where suburbs developed on green field sites, there was a call for new suburban churches to be founded. This is where the Church-planter came in. The term had of course not yet been coined, but it describes well what Richard Henry Smith did in Surbiton and Gospel Oak. 'Mr Smith was one of those men who love pioneer work. He would rather build up a cause than settle down in a church already established.'<sup>14</sup> But how were causes built up in the first place?

While Congregational principles suggested that the work of planting a church ought to be carried out by local churches, the reality was that these churches were often under-equipped and most did not know how or where to begin. What is more, establishing a new Church costs money; a place of meeting must be rented, eventually a new chapel has to be built, all daunting costs. Though there was a Congregational Home Missionary Society, most of its efforts were directed towards helping existing and often rural churches, while church planting was all too often a matter of what amounted to private enterprise. While the local churches in the cities formed committees and held conferences, the work of actually establishing new churches was very often left to concerned individuals, both in regard to finance and evangelism. At the same time, the figure of the ministerial Church Planter, so often seen alone, can be quite misleading; establishing a new Church requires a team able between them to deliver organisation, finance and outreach. The man who is seen is usually the minister, but he could not accomplish anything without the help of organisers and financial backers.

Rev. Henry Byrnes, pastor of Kingston Congregational Church, was the first man to identify the need to plant a church in Surbiton. As he watched the development of the suburb around the railway station, he spoke to his congregation about the possibility of raising money for 'building a place of worship'<sup>15</sup> to minister to the growing population. A circular setting out the need came into the hands of the wealthy Mr W. Leavers of Islington, from

whom it came to Smith. Leavers became one of the primary backers of the church plant, paying for a temporary chapel, and contributing generously towards the building of the permanent church.<sup>16</sup> Moving to Surbiton himself, Leavers became treasurer of the building fund, and eventually paid a further £500 to cancel the mortgage on the building.<sup>17</sup> His importance to the founding of Surbiton Park Church is underlined by the fact that he laid the foundation stone of the building. The symbolism corresponded to the reality; he would remain a financial keystone of the work until his death in 1867.<sup>18</sup> The other great name associated with the early years of Surbiton Park Church is that of J. Carvell Williams, later M.P.,<sup>19</sup> who was for fourteen years Church Secretary.<sup>20</sup> Best known for his work as Secretary of the Liberation Society, Carvell Williams' status in Congregationalism may be gauged from the fact that he was Chairman of the Congregational Union in 1890, and one of the men profiled in Albert Peel's *A Hundred Eminent Congregationalists* in 1927. Described as 'an organizer of uncommon force,'<sup>21</sup> he would have been a great asset to a new and developing church. With his connections through the Liberation Society, with which he had been associated since 1847, Carvell Williams would have been invaluable to the new Church, drawing attention to its needs where these things were noticed and where funds would be forthcoming.<sup>22</sup> He was later involved in a similar church-planting project at Stroud Green, Middlesex, and was one of the men responsible for establishing a Congregational Home Missionary Society.

The new work had to begin by gathering a congregation. Having found a suitable house, Leavers offered to pay the rent; and there the work began, with Smith preaching in the front parlour. His first congregation consisted of only three people, but he persevered, and the congregations soon outgrew the house. Since there was no suitable public room available for rent, they built a temporary wooden chapel seating 130 in the back garden, and services were held there until a freehold site could be secured and a handsome chapel that would also do duty as a hall built on it. When Smith left Surbiton in 1861, this had been achieved, and 'there was every promise of rapid and prosperous development.'<sup>23</sup> A church was built by his successor not long after Smith left Surbiton. He left, 'a memory of organising ability and personal effort' that in 1908 was 'still a cherished tradition of the church.'<sup>24</sup>

The growing strength of the Surbiton Park congregation reflected Smith's own growing strength. While his biography is afflicted with the regrettable Victorian tendency to minimise or ignore altogether the minister's wife, so that apart from incidental references to his children, the subject might as well not have ever married at all, it is probable that he married while at Surbiton, and the family began to grow. While it may be that her profile was low, Lydia

Smith was his co-labourer in the rest of his work, and his great support in his afflictions.

In 1860 he accepted a call to the pastorate of Hope Chapel, Hanley, in the heart of the Staffordshire Potteries. Founded in 1812, the Church stood in what had already become a run-down part of the town. 'Arnold Bennett was born in Hope Street, a street less hopeful it would be hard to imagine', Margaret Drabble wrote<sup>25</sup> of the Potteries novelist who was born in 1867, in a flat over a pawn shop at the other end of Hope Street from Hope Chapel. Hope was a solid red brick building with oak pews and tall pulpit that spoke of the wealth that had built it back when Hope Street did not yet exist, and all around were meadows. It had once bid fair to overtake the old Tabernacle on the High Street (now Town Road) as the main centre of Congregationalism in the town, but those days were long gone, and in the dark oak pews saw few of the class of wealthy potters who had founded the church.<sup>26</sup>

The working people of Hanley welcomed the minister and his family, and Smith threw himself into the work with his customary vigour. There were new meetings for men on Sunday afternoons, at which he spoke on the Parables with a painting illustrative of the text behind him. But it was not to last long; one of his children was taken ill and died, and two more began to show signs of ill health.<sup>27</sup> The smoke of the potbanks all around made for a poor environment for sickly children, and so he removed to the elevated ground of Hampstead, to plant a new Church in the new suburb of Gospel Oak.

As London's northern suburbs continued to expand, Free Church people living in the area of Gospel Oak had begun to feel the need for a place of worship within the area. As Church extension is a matter for local churches, the responsibility to meet this need very properly was referred to the Free Churches in the area. The Associated Churches of Kentish and Camden Towns, a total of five congregations, considered the needs of the area, held a meeting on the question of establishing a committee to consider the matter, but actually established nothing. It was left to Mr James W. Sedcole, a member of Kentish Town Congregational Church who lived in Mansfield Road, to press the needs of the area on the Churches and on Samuel Morley, M.P., the 'knitting millionaire' who provided so much for the extension of the churches. At first Sedcole approached Morley personally, but Morley insisted that the local churches had to be involved in any plan that he was going to support. Sedcole and two friends, Mr John Lee and Mr James Sangster, a publisher and a deacon at Kentish Town, began both to pray and work towards establishing some sort of work in Gospel Oak. As at Surbiton, it was the work of a few committed and concerned individuals with the connections to raise both awareness and funds.<sup>28</sup>

At first Smith had merely known that he wanted to leave Hanley and settle somewhere with a healthier environment for his family, preferably in the suburbs of London. He approached the leading London pastor, Thomas Binney of the King's Weigh House Church, then located on Fish Street Hill in the City of London, asking if he knew of any location where he could perhaps repeat the work he had done in Surbiton. Binney put him in touch with Samuel Morley M.P., who was a member of Binney's Church at the King's Weigh House. Impressed by Smith's proven track record at Surbiton, Morley approved, and put Smith in touch with Sedcole and his friends in north London. Following a meeting with them in which Sedcole explained their plans, Smith decided that Gospel Oak would be the location of his efforts. Sedcole and his friends paid the rent for the house in Grafton Terrace, and formed the nucleus of the new congregation.

Sangster had cards printed for distribution, advertising the meetings at Grafton Terrace, and the band of pioneers went out distributing them, no doubt pushing them through letterboxes, but also engaging in conversations, and telling their friends and neighbours about the work. Those like Sedcole who lived locally had contacts, and used them. The first congregation at Grafton Terrace was no doubt small, but that was to be expected.

The congregation meeting in the house grew quickly, and a Church with sixteen members transferred from other churches was formed on the first Sunday in April 1865. The three men who had begun the work were of course among the members; Sedcole was a widower, and his daughter Emma was among the founding members, along with James Sangster's wife Annie.

With aid from the London Congregational Chapel Building Society and Samuel Morley, a handsome chapel in the Lombardic style was built in Southampton Road and opened on November 2nd 1865. It is pleasing to read that among the contributions towards building the church were some from the churches in Surbiton, Hanley and Bicester. What was built was a chapel, without vestries or halls, and with pews only on the ground floor (and even this was something of an afterthought). With a permanent place of worship, new activities could be begun, and the first of these was a repeat of the earlier men's meetings in Hanley, which were begun in January of 1866. A Sunday school was organised, using various corners of the building for different classes, and curtains as partitions. By the end of 1867, all the costs of building the chapel had been met, and it was possible for work to begin on other facilities. A vestry and lecture room were added in 1868, allowing a monthly lecture to parents and children to be instituted, and a young men's club to be commenced; pews were finally installed in the galleries. Since no self-respecting Victorian chapel could be without a Sunday school building, in 1874 land was purchased behind the chapel for buildings to be constructed for



the schools. But it would be a mistake to think that Smith's work was preoccupied with bricks, mortar and ornamental stonework; the chapel was a necessary 'base of operations' for the various activities of a busy Victorian Church. Nor was the wider community forgotten; in 1873 the Church appointed a paid nurse for the poor. In those days before the National Health service, healthcare was often beyond the reach of the poor, and a nurse supported by the church could mean the difference between life and death.

Sangster returned to the Church at Kentish Town in 1866, feeling that his work at Gospel Oak was completed, but Sedcole remained connected with the Gospel Oak Church for the entire duration of Smith's ministry there. Sangster's place was taken by Henry King Lewis, also a publisher. Lewis 'possessed unusual ability as a teacher and trainer of young children', and with Smith edited *Hymns and Songs for Little Children*. He seems to have been particularly involved in the musical side of the book, for he not only helped to pay for an organ to be installed in the chapel, but when it was installed he became the church's first organist.<sup>29</sup>

The building of a chapel meant that the house in Grafton Terrace was no longer needed as it had been when the work was begun. The addition of a manse to the church property was desirable, but there was no suitable site nearby. The need was eventually met by the generous gift in 1870 of a house at 28, South Hill Park, by Mrs Rogers of Clapham, who had witnessed Smith's work in Surbiton. This allowed Smith to leave the rented property in Grafton Terrace for a house on elevated ground, perfectly located for his health concerns.

For the first decade of the church's existence, worship was of a puritanical plainness—and we must remember that our Victorian forefathers would not have regarded the term as one of necessary opprobrium. David Davies, a deacon and Sunday School superintendent of the Church, recalls the first service he attended there, in 1867, 'The minister appeared upon the platform wearing the Geneva gown, and supported on either side by two laymen; one giving out the hymns and the other leading the singing; there being neither harmonium nor organ to support the voices.'<sup>30</sup> To a man brought up in Anglicanism like Davies, 'the effect was certainly very chilling', but the preacher more than counter-balanced that effect. And such was quite normal in the Congregational churches of the era; the sermon was central. But the times were changing, and 1875 saw the appearance of an organ in the Church, paid for by George Powell and Henry K. Lewis. As Lewis was a gifted musician as well as a Sunday School teacher, he had a very personal interest in marking the completion of the first decade of the Church in this way.

By 1879 it was clear that Smith's health was beginning to give way once more. William Boyle Barbour, a Scottish merchant with interests in South

America,<sup>31</sup> offered to take him on an extended holiday to Buenos Aires, where he spent several months in the hope that the climate would help him to recover his strength. Whilst he did experience some benefit, it was fleeting, and in the middle of 1880 he tendered his resignation, citing his failing strength and voice as reasons why he could no longer continue his ministry. The Church, not unnaturally, did not want to see him leave, and a special church meeting offered to provide whatever help he needed, if he would withdraw his resignation. Touched by the feelings of the people, he withdrew it.

But his hope that he could continue proved to be vain; his health continued to deteriorate, and in June 1881, Smith sent a letter to the Church Meeting:

To the Church of Christ at Gospel Oak.

My Dear Friends

It is now more than twelve months since, at your request, I retracted the resignation which I had placed in the hands of our brethren, the Deacons.

I have tried meanwhile to continue my ministry among you, but I have at last found my strength unequal to the effort, and therefore I am obliged at great expense of feeling again and finally to resign the pastorate.

It is now more than forty-three years since I preached my first sermon, and, having been called to a ministry which had involved a continuous strain upon my energy, we need not be surprised at the issue.

We have now to comfort and strengthen ourselves by remembering that our times are in God's hands. I pray God that He may have us all in His holy keeping.

My dear friends, the brethren who remain in office among you, as your Deacons, deserve and will require faithful and loving loyalty to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and with strong personal attachment to each and all of you, I hereby commend you to His grace, who is sufficient for us.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Yours Affectionately,

Richard H. Smith.

Recognising that the time had indeed come for Smith to lay aside the pastorate, the Church accepted the resignation, not of course without regrets. It was arranged that he should remain resident in the Chapel House at his pleasure, so that he would not be in any haste to find a place to live. A successor, Mr Henry Le Pla, a student at New College and the son of the

pastor at Park Church Lanelli,<sup>32</sup> was elected in November of 1881. Smith was one of the ministers who took part in the ordination and induction services of Mr Le Pla on Wednesday May 3rd 1882.

Richard Henry Smith planned to spend his retirement writing and exercising an itinerant ministry, but it was not to be. In October 1883 he suffered a serious stroke that resulted in serious paralysis down his right side. A second stroke followed in March of 1884, and on 13 November he died peacefully; his last words were, 'It is all right!'<sup>33</sup> David Davies remarked on 'that spirit of calm and quiet which possessed his soul, sure promise of the brighter day that had now dawned upon him.' He was sixty-three. The funeral was held at the church that he had built, and he was laid to rest in the West Hampstead cemetery. The service was conducted by Rev. Henry Le Pla, Rev. T. Fison of Hendon, and Rev. Prof. Godwin, his old mentor. The following Sunday, Rev. Edward White preached his memorial sermon at Gospel Oak.

The Church sought a permanent memorial for their founding pastor, and a marble bust was placed in Gospel Oak Church with the text 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever' inscribed upon it. It was perhaps a better text for a monument than 'We are fools for Christ's sake', though the latter would have been (properly understood of course) just as appropriate.

### **The Message**

The driving force in Richard Henry Smith's life was the Gospel. The reason why he threw himself into the work of church planting was the conviction that above everything else, what the world needs is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Everything else was subsidiary to that.

### **Preaching**

The Victorian age has been described as 'the Golden Age of preaching'; a Victorian minister was a preacher before he was anything else, whether he was evangelical or not. Even the leading figures of the Oxford Movement were *preachers*, and published volume after volume of sermons. As an evangelical Nonconformist, Richard Henry Smith had a ministry that was firmly based on preaching, both indoors and in the open air.<sup>34</sup> The Church was built on the preaching ministry, and all other activities were secondary to it.

Taking this emphasis on preaching into account, and the fact that Smith planted two churches and revitalized a third, it is all the more remarkable to find that men who worked with him for many years at Gospel Oak emphasise that he was not a 'popular preacher' in the sense of one whose style and message were intended to court popularity. Sedcole writes, 'Although one could not fail to recognise his intellectuality and to admire his manifest earnestness, there was so much reserve and independence in his manner, as to check, rather than to elicit, the confidence of those with whom he came into

contact for the first time. Further, his contempt for superficiality, which was so evident in his preaching, was equally marked in his social intercourse, and effectually barred anything approaching to freedom on the part of strangers.<sup>35</sup> Today we would probably classify him as an introvert. Davies gives his impression, ‘The sermon lacked eloquence of speech, and was somewhat stern in tone; but it had a remarkable breadth of view, and was most suggestive of fresh thought.’<sup>36</sup> The author of his obituary in the 1885 Congregational Year Book was more conventional, writing, ‘Mr Smith’s preaching was remarkable for its suggestiveness and great spiritual power. He had formed a high ideal of the Christian life, and condemned departures from that ideal with a pungency of expression which sometimes gave to his ministry an air of sternness and severity.’<sup>37</sup>

Sadly none of his sermons seem to have survived, so our only sources for the content of his teaching are his published books. *Sunday Half-Hours*, published early in his ministry at Gospel Oak, yields a number of passages that suggest what a Richard Henry Smith sermon would have been like; we begin with one from the chapter on ‘Easter Day’.

The resurrection of our Lord is a fact established by many infallible proofs, and these proofs are necessary, as it is a fact lying at the foundation of our faith.

If Christ had not risen, there could have been no ground for the hope of forgiveness of sin, or for the alteration of our nature. There would have been no consolation under bereavement, and no prospect of a glorious resurrection to everlasting life.

There is a very common, but a very erroneous opinion, that the faith commanded in the Scripture is the belief of one who readily assents to anything without a careful and candid inquiry into evidence. The very opposite disposition of mind to this is what our Lord and His apostles praised. An inquiry into the report of the Roman soldiers will result in the conclusion that it was an idle tale.<sup>38</sup>

We immediately note both the intellectual content and the lack of rhetorical flourish here. This is a man who is preaching the Bible to an age in which doubt and faith were found together.

The Congregational pastor was a preacher of the Bible before anything else; it is significant that the church planting work in Surbiton and Gospel Oak began with preaching services. Timothy Larsen describes the Victorians as ‘A People of One Book’,<sup>39</sup> and that book was the Bible—and the Protestant Bible at that. Every part of the Bible matters, and every part is profitable for Christians.

It was in little things as well as in mighty works that our Lord revealed Himself. And these things are written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of these Scriptures may have hope.<sup>40</sup>

This was of course not to deny that nature was also a revelation of God. No, rather, 'The revelations which God has given and is giving of himself are divers and manifold. He speaks to us in various ways, and is ever uttering the same truths. The revelations supplement each other. The works of God explain and confirm His words. The Bible is ever taking us into the open air.'<sup>41</sup>

And the Bible is not an easy book, for faith is not an easy thing, 'The words of God to many, and sometimes to us, are hard sayings. The promises of the Bible seem to be such as are unlikely to be fulfilled, and the precepts such as are impossible to be performed. The miracles look like cunningly devised fables; and the prophecies look like idle dreams.'<sup>42</sup> Doubt is a reality faced by this thoughtful Victorian preacher. But it is a reality to be faced and fought, not celebrated. Smith knew his Tennyson, and happily quoted *In Memoriam*. But he would not end his quotation with the words,

There dwells more faith in honest doubt,  
 Believe me, than in half the creeds,  
 Rather, he would go on,  
 He fought his doubts and gathered strength,  
 He would not make his judgement blind;  
 He faced the spectres of the mind,  
 And laid them.<sup>43</sup>

The preacher's aim was not (as some today imagine) to make people comfortable with doubt, but to furnish reasons for faith. Smith was not an apologist in the modern sense of the word, but apologetic formed a serious aspect of his ministry. The renewal of nature in the spring suggested that the resurrection was not after all completely contrary to reason, but rather, 'We have in the seen and temporal a parable of the unseen and eternal.'<sup>44</sup>

The Gospel is ultimately a message of grace, and the subject of the Psalms of David gives Smith an opportunity to enlarge upon this fact:

David's perception of the goodness of God as *mercy*, affords us common ground of communion with him. In all his Psalms, and especially in his last, there are manifestations of his having known and felt the *grace* of God. A touch of nature makes the whole world kin, and a touch of grace makes the whole church one.

The life of David is full of sin, as well as danger, and his psalms are full of penitence, as well as faith and hope. As he still continues his trust in the Providence of God, notwithstanding all the perils to which he was exposed, so in the midst of all his terrible memories of his heinous crimes, he yet believes in that mercy which endureth for ever.

Without faith it is impossible to please God, and, possibly, it was because David believed to the uttermost in the love of God, that he was spoken of as a man after God's own heart.<sup>45</sup>

Protestantism stands on the Bible, and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular follows from this fact. The Victorians celebrated 'Our English Bible', and so it is no surprise that in his *Sunday Half-Hours*, Smith has a chapter of 'Wycliffe's Bible'. Typically for him, he refers to Frederick W. Yeames' 1867 painting 'The Dawn of the Reformation'<sup>46</sup> Smith emphasises the *cost* of the English Bible, those who suffered to bring it into our hands. The history of the Bible, as well as the history *in* the Bible, had a great romance that should excite us; we should not take the Bible for granted.

Richard Henry Smith was an orthodox evangelical, and preached a Jesus who is both Divine and human. The Saviour is both God *and* man, and these two are seen together in the Gospel accounts. Referring to Chapters 3 and 4 of John's Gospel, he writes:

Our Lord is brought before us in both cases, in His human nature; requiring the rest which is a common necessity to all. But He is seen here, as ever, and especially when compassed about with human infirmity, manifesting His Godhead—the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'.<sup>47</sup>

The observation is an important one, the incarnation is a real incarnation. 'Whenever He is brought before us compassed about with our infirmities, we are ever reminded by some manifestation of His glory, that He is none other but the Son of God.'<sup>48</sup>

The evangelical conception of the nature of the Christian life is expressed plainly in the words, 'Christianity consists, more than is commonly supposed, in an intimate personal acquaintance and communion with our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>49</sup> The preacher's aim therefore is twofold, first of all to bring those who do not possess such 'an intimate personal acquaintance and communion' to Christ, and secondly to strengthen that relationship where it already exists. The means of that work was of course the Bible. 'There is a close connection in Scripture between seeing God and being nourished, and Christ is the perfect image of God, and therefore the Bread of life. To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, is to be filled with all the fulness of God.'<sup>50</sup>

The atonement stands at the centre of evangelical preaching; the crosses on the gables of Gospel Oak Congregational Church expressed an evangelical conviction that it was what happened at the cross that was the centre and the culmination of Christ's work. So what was the Cross in Richard Henry Smith's teaching? Whilst we speak of 'theories of the Atonement', the reality is that Christ's work on the cross has various dimensions. Thus from one angle it is, 'that great struggle in which the Captain of our salvation conquered for us.'<sup>51</sup> Its end is the forgiveness of sins.

Smith believed firmly in the reality of the miracles of Scripture, 'Our Lord's miracles were intended to serve as proofs of the Divinity of His mission.

They were also parables. They were not only attestations of the revelation He came to make, but they were integral portions of that revelation. And, further, they were prophecies.’<sup>52</sup>

‘Prophecies are miracles; and Christianity, which is a supernatural religion, is attested by supernatural proof.’<sup>53</sup> Whatever the spirit of the age, we are not be ashamed of the truth.

The Bible also provides examples for our imitation; the narratives of the Bible are narratives written for us. The Bible saints are among other things models for our imitation, the sinners are warnings. This is real history with a real point:

We are apt to regard the other Apostles as saints, and as such beyond our imitation, and in Judas we think we have an example of inimitable guilt. All the Apostles were men of like feelings and passions with ourselves, and no temptation befell them but what is common to us all. We have in the case of Judas, a warning of the danger of sinning in the midst of privileges. He doubtless fell as others, little by little. He held the truth in unrighteousness. Day by day he felt less of the awe of the presence of Christ. He had contracted an unholy familiarity with holy things.<sup>54</sup>

And not only are the Apostles and saints of the Scriptures our examples, but Christ himself is our example as well as our Saviour (for it is only a particularly shallow theology that puts the two in opposition), ‘While our Lord was none other but “the only begotten of the Father,” He was made in all points like unto us, and was tempted like as we are. And He watched and prayed. There are ever exhibitions of the divinity of our Lord shining through His humanity, and there are mysteries in His life which pass knowledge, but He has still left us an example that we should walk in His steps.’<sup>55</sup>

And the Christian is not alone, but is aided by unseen forces, ‘By the command of their Master and ours, the angels watch over the feeblest of His brethren; rejoice over the tears of a penitent sinner; bring before God the remembrance of alms and prayers; and carry up the souls of the faithful departed into paradise.’<sup>56</sup>

The Christian is one who knows that this life has an end, and yet that death is the entrance into another and greater life, ‘The Christian Church has never tired of dwelling on the resemblances between the exodus and the wanderings in the wilderness, and the entrance into the Promised Land; and the exodus of the soul, the pilgrimage of life, and the better country, that is the heavenly.’<sup>57</sup>

To an heir of the Puritans, the *Pilgrim’s Progress* of John Bunyan was almost as well-known as the Bible, so it is no surprise to find that it is alluded to in his reflections on the death of the Christian, ‘And there is a city beyond the river, and it may be with us as it has been with others:—the opening of its gates may give us, for the moment, a glimpse of its glory.’<sup>58</sup>

As well as personal eschatology, there is general. Smith accepted as literal the words of Christ concerning his return,

At the end of the world, as we gather from the New Testament, when the Son of Man shall come in the clouds, with great power and glory, then shall He send His angels, and shall gather together His elect; and the angels shall come forth, and they shall gather together out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and they shall sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire, where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.<sup>59</sup>

Preaching was the main part of Victorian Congregational worship, but of course it was not the only part. The Gospel as understood by Richard Henry Smith is found in his choice of hymns and in his prayers.

‘Those who had the privilege of worshipping at Gospel Oak Chapel shortly after its being opened, will remember with gratitude the devoutness and satisfaction which marked all its services. The originality of style and the practical character of the teaching, with the pastor’s manifest earnestness, gradually won the confidence of the hearers. The heartiness of the singing, which was then, and for so many years, led by Mr Robert Harris, added to the brightness of the meetings,’ wrote Sedcole.<sup>60</sup> In an example of how different people see things differently, his fellow author, in his portion of the work, wrote, ‘The effect was certainly very chilling to one accustomed to worship in the Established Church.’<sup>61</sup> But that is how it is; appreciations of a service will vary according to what people are used to.

The faith of the Church is expressed in its hymns, and so the hymns quoted by Smith in his works are significant. They are drawn from every era of the Church, from the early centuries to the 19th century. In *Sunday Half-Hours* one whole chapter is made up of nothing but the quotation of a large part of Bernard of Cluny’s ‘The Heavenly Jerusalem’ in the translation by John Mason Neale,

Jerusalem the golden,  
     with milk and honey blest!  
 Beneath thy contemplation  
     sink heart and voice oppressed.  
 I know not, O I know not,  
     what joys await us there,  
 What radiancy of glory,  
     what bliss beyond compare!

They stand, those halls of Zion,  
     all jubilant with song,  
 And bright with many an angel,  
     and all the martyr throng.



The Prince is ever in them,  
 the daylight is serene.  
 The pastures of the blessed  
 are decked in glorious sheen.

There is the throne of David,  
 and there, from care released,  
 The shout of them that triumph,  
 the song of them that feast;  
 And they, who with their Leader,  
 have conquered in the fight,  
 Forever and forever  
 are clad in robes of white.

Smith's books plunder the treasury of sacred song, from the ancient to his own day. We find from the German, Paul Gerhardt's 'O Sacred Head, Once Wounded', and Zinzendorf's 'Jesus, Still Lead On'. John Keble supplies 'When God of Old Came Down from Heaven', and Dean Alford. 'Come, ye Thankful People, Come'. The old Evangelical stalwarts are not neglected either; as we might expect, Isaac Watts is laid under heavy tribute, and Newton and Cowper's *Olney Hymns* are made to give up their riches. Bishop Ken's Morning and Evening Hymns find their way into Smith's *Children's Services*, and James Montgomery makes his own contributions. Reginald Heber's missionary hymn, 'From Greenland's Icy Mountains', James Edmeston gives us 'Lead us, Heavenly Father, Lead us', and William Chatterton Dix gives 'As With Gladness Men of Old.'

### **Books**

Having begun his working life as a bookbinder, Richard Henry Smith graduated, as pastor, to writing books. While most ministers who became published authors began with volumes of sermons, Richard Henry Smith's first venture into authorship was with illustrated books on fine art. The first book, *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael* began as a series of articles contributed to the *Christian Spectator* in 1859.<sup>62</sup> These proved popular enough to warrant their publication separately as an attractive illustrated volume by Nisbet and Co. the following year. Two sequels, *Expositions of Great Pictures* and *Expositions of Raphael's Bible* followed in 1863 and 1868 respectively. Whilst *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael* and *Expositions of Raphael's Bible* are based on distinct sets of pictures, *Expositions of Great Pictures* is a more diverse volume featuring pictures by a variety of Old Masters, including Michaelangelo, Correggio, Rubens, Leonardo Da Vinci, and of course his favourite Raphael.

The Victorian Sunday was a day of rest, for many people the only day of rest in the week, and it was also a day of worship, the Lord's Day. It was the

day on which most people had the most time for reading, and the feeling that books for Sunday had to be suited to the day's character created a demand for attractive and uplifting books on Christian subjects. At the same time advances in printing technology made illustrated books cheaper and easier to produce, and this led to a positive flood of books designed to 'make the Sabbath a delight', as one might say. 'We blink a little at the sumptuous and gilded bindings, the illustrations, the general *size* and *room* of these books,' says Frank Cumbers, surveying the Methodist contribution to this literature.<sup>63</sup>

The imperative for a Victorian Sunday book was that it had to be on a suitable subject or subjects for the Sabbath day; it had to be in a broad sense Christian. Smith's art books fulfilled this criterion by dealing with pictures on Biblical themes and dealing with the Bible story as well as the painting. *Sunday Half-Hours*, published by his Gospel Oak deacon and fellow-worker James Sangster, begins with a brief 'Advertisement' in which Smith writes,

On Sunday, in most homes there are HALF-HOURS when the conversation may be turned to topics which are in keeping with the time. In the following chapters, subjects are suggested for every Sunday in the year.<sup>64</sup>

This of course excites our interest. What are suitable subjects for Sunday conversation? Turning to the title page, we find that there are no fewer than eight chapters on English cathedrals and great churches, chapters on Biblical topics, drawn mostly from the New Testament, and a number of biographical sketches. There are also chapters on Easter Day, Whitsuntide and Christmas, a few on natural history related topics ('The Gazelle', 'Cedars', 'Bible Animals' and 'Insects'), one on 'Wycliffe's Bible', and several biographical chapters on such diverse subjects as William Cowper and Lady Rachel Russell. Whilst some are simply Biblical, others are topics that require a reasonably educated readership for them to be useful subjects for Sunday conversation. The book builds on the pattern set in his art books, as expressed in the opening of his first book, *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael*, 'We would invite those especially to join us who are heads of households, suggesting the use of the photographs, during some point of the Sunday leisure, as a thread on which may be strung some happy and holy words.'<sup>65</sup>

Among other things, Smith's art books are interesting as very early examples of the use of photographs as illustrations thanks to the work of Negretti and Zambra.<sup>66</sup> They are not of course photographs of the original works, but rather photographs of early engravings of the original pictures. His other works are more conventionally illustrated with engravings, all of good quality. *Sunday Half-Hours*, published by James Sangster during Smith's Gospel Oak ministry, boasted 'Illustrations on every page and sixteen tinted engravings'.<sup>67</sup> Whilst some illustrations are clearly from stock, it is cheering

that very few seem to be there simply to make good on the title page's promise. *Twigs for Nests* has very well chosen engravings that perfectly illustrate the text.

## Art

The Puritan tradition to which Congregationalists are heirs has always had a rather ambivalent approach to the visual arts in particular. Ours is very much a religion of words, founded on the Bible and centred on the word preached, read and sung. A typical evangelical place of worship displays almost no visual art at all, with even a simple cross regarded with suspicion by many. There are still many evangelical Protestants who regard any visual depiction of Jesus as a breach of the Second Commandment, even when the picture is not intended, or used, as a focus for worship.<sup>68</sup> Richard Henry Smith was convinced that the visual arts have a real place, subordinate of course to the written word, in teaching the people of God. Just as Bible pictures could be used to teach children before they were able to read, so they could continue to be used to teach adults. 'Bible pictures were our first means of grace. We have good reason to be grateful that we have had, from the earliest childhood, the Holy Scriptures pictorially represented to us.'<sup>69</sup> And the usefulness of pictures did not end when the child was able to read, or even when he or she became an adult.

Richard Henry Smith's mother was an amateur artist and passed on both her taste and her talent to her son.<sup>70</sup> His books reveal an appreciation of art and a conviction that the arts, both visual and literary, can make a real contribution to Christian work. Not only did he first venture into print as a writer on fine art, but his books are all illustrated and filled with discussions on the subject of art both ancient and modern. *Sunday Half-Hours* includes a chapter on 'The Finding in the Temple' that is based on the picture of Holman Hunt by that title, and as we have seen, the chapter on 'Wycliffe's Bible' makes reference to Yeames' 'Dawn of the Reformation'. It was not 'art for art's sake'; it was art for Christ's sake. 'As an amateur painter, his only aim was to serve Christ and his fellow-men—indeed, he rarely used his brush for any other purpose. His work was intended to set forth, in pictures, the Gospel history and the Christian life.'<sup>71</sup> His conception of Christian art was that it was a form of preaching; it is not surprising to find that he combined the two, both in his books and in his ministry.

Smith shared the evangelical conviction that the preacher must himself have 'felt the power of the truth he delineated,'<sup>72</sup> and that meant that Christian art was to be done by Christians; an atheist could not even begin to enter in to the meaning of the Biblical text in a way that would allow him to accurately depict it. 'There is much common ground between painting and speaking. We all remember that it is laid down, by one of the first of the ancient writers of oratory, that a good speaker ought to be a good man. Goodness, as well as genius, seems to be as great a requisite for the artist as for the orator.'<sup>73</sup>

‘Pictures should be good as well as true. A good picture must have a good subject. The picture may be correct in its drawing, natural in its colouring, and clever in its composition and treatment; but, except its story tells you some truth that appeals to your better nature, so that you are the better man for having seen, and understood, and felt, the artist’s work, it had been better if the picture had never been painted.’<sup>74</sup> We note that appreciation of art is a matter of work, the person looking at the picture must not just see the image, but understand and feel it. And art has a power over people; Smith recounts his experience in the Cartoon gallery at Hampton Court one Whitsuntide, when contrary to his expectation, the crowds in the gallery did not just rush through, but paused and looked and thought. ‘Some lingered as if they would never leave. Those who possessed scriptural knowledge sufficient to make them recognise the subjects of the pictures were evidently highly pleased to enlighten those who were at fault; and those who were unacquainted with the Bible narratives seemed determined to shew, by their remarks, that, though they had not read the Bible, they could read the cartoons.’<sup>75</sup>

The origin of *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael*, the first of Smith’s art books, is explained in the book’s preface. If we do not at first connect Surbiton with art, the fault is ours; it is practically on the doorstep of Hampton Court Palace, the home of many masterpieces. A lover of art such as Smith could make full use of the opportunities presented to him for visiting the Palace and its extensive art collection. Smith’s conviction that art could be a ‘handmaid of piety’ led him to concentrate on those pictures with an explicitly Christian theme, and particularly the great cartoons of Raphael prepared for the tapestries in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.<sup>76</sup> Depicting events in the lives of the Apostles Peter and Paul, they have been described as ‘The Parthenon sculptures of modern art.’<sup>77</sup> The cartoons had languished in relative obscurity until they were photographed in 1858; Smith was part of their Victorian ‘rediscovery’. Writing according to the convention of the time in the third person, he explains, ‘Becoming, year after year, more interested in the cartoons, as he became more familiar with them, he was led to search the Scriptures from which Raphael selected his subjects. The present book is the result of his investigation of the sacred record of the various scenes, and of his study of their treatment by this “divine” painter.’<sup>78</sup> The paintings were a gateway into the Scriptures to Smith; as they had led him to study the Bible texts behind them, so they could others. The point of the book was not just history and art criticism, though these were there, but, ‘to represent ... without any pretence, his conception of the purpose of Raphael in this series of Bible pictures.’<sup>79</sup> ‘It was left for Raphael to be the first painter to produce accurate and vivid representations of the incidents recorded in Holy Scripture, and it has remained for photography to give faithful impressions of his works. Raphael may be

regarded as having photographed the Bible,<sup>80</sup> Smith writes, showing that his conception of art was that it should be naturalistic. At the same time, the metaphor of photography has its limits; symbolic realism was quite acceptable, indeed in Christian art it was almost unavoidable that certain conventions should be followed. Replying to those who objected to the introduction of the keys and the sheep in Raphael's 'The Charge to Peter', he writes, 'A sufficient answer to such affected Puritanism is found in the fact, that there were no other means of making the incident intelligible. The keys and the sheep form a great part of the whole story; they tell the tale as it could be told by nothing else, and they are in perfect keeping with the metaphorical teaching of our Lord.'<sup>81</sup> At times also realism had to be sacrificed in the interest of clarity. Here the painter was better than a photographer, for the painter can show not just the outer events, but also something of the inner meaning.

After giving the Biblical text on which the painting is based, each picture, having been described, is then discussed, bringing out the Biblical themes. Writing on 'The Miraculous Draught of Fishes', he notes the lesson, 'The painter lays the foundation for Peter's new life, in a perception that Jesus is the Son of God. The painter recognises the connexion between a call from God and godliness. Grasping this great truth, he still keeps his eye upon any details that may serve to complete its expression.'<sup>82</sup> Raphael's depiction of Christ receives high praise, 'The figure of the Lord is an incarnation of Divinity. The form and the features, even the drapery, distinguish Him as someone who is more than man.'<sup>83</sup> 'We are often pained with some verbal, as well as with some pictorial representations of the Redeemer. It is a rare gift to "set Him forth evidently" before men. Raphael's success in painting may be envied by ministers in preaching. Here Christ is the first object of attention; and all the interest of the picture radiates from Him as the great centre.'<sup>84</sup> And even when Christ is not in one of the pictures, 'though you do not see Him, you feel that you are in His presence.'<sup>85</sup> Each picture has a message, the writer's aim is to bring that message out and to explain it. Thus 'The photograph of "The Charge to Peter" has brought us to that fountain of mercy, where the apostle slaked the thirst of his guilt. We have "on this wise," our Lord shewing himself to *us*. The manifestation is for all, for "all we like sheep have gone astray;" and it may be the Saviour's purpose, thus to seek and to restore some one who has denied and deserted Him.'<sup>86</sup> 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

It was received well by the reviewers; the reviewer in the *Nonconformist* wrote, 'The religious thought is as robust and manly as the artistic comment is discerning and suggestive. The work is one, consequently, not merely to be added to the elegances of the drawing-room, but to be used in the family,—a mother's treat for the children on a Sabbath evening at home, or a lonely hour's pure pleasure when other "means of grace" are denied.'<sup>87</sup> The *Patriot*

said, 'He has made the Cartoons preach the Gospel fully and impressively, yet without the least approach to cant.'<sup>88</sup>

*Expositions of Great Pictures* was a direct sequel to *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael*, which had proved popular enough to show that there was a market for it. It follows the same lines as the first book, except that the pictures chosen are not all by one artist (though Raphael still predominates), and they represent the life of Christ. A piece of poetry is placed before each picture, so that after John's account of the raising of Lazarus, Smith quotes Tennyson,

Behold a man raised up by Christ!  
The rest remaineth unreveal'd—  
He told it not: or something seal'd  
The lips of that Evangelist.<sup>89</sup>

Raphael's *La Madonna Della Seggiola* gives the opportunity to talk about the Virgin Mary, her depiction in art, and the proper attitude towards her. The subject of the Madonna and Child is a challenging one; the subject of a mother and child is such an ordinary one that 'Few seemed to see how simple and ordinary an object could be treated as to inspire reverence and devotion. Hence, perhaps, the accessories, the gilded glories, the suns, and moons, and stars, and other mystic symbols of the Madonnas painted during the reign of faith, and the mere animal beauty or artistic excellence of the succeeding reign of taste.'<sup>90</sup> The *Madonna Della Seggiola*, however, shows Mary as a peasant girl with her son, a thoroughly human picture with yet a divine dignity. 'Raphael has proved, by his treatment of sacred subjects, and especially by this Madonna, that the spiritual in art can only be fully developed in the degree in which the painting is natural.'<sup>91</sup> The subject gives an opportunity for a thoroughly Protestant complaint about the cult of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church. He traces its source to the failure to understand that our Lord remains fully human as well as fully Divine, and to comprehend what that means. It means that he is not just an enthroned king that we must come to through mediators, but himself the mediator and older brother to whom we come without any mediator between. 'The proclamation of the truth about Our Lord is sufficient in itself to destroy the error about his Mother. Our Lord has only to be set forth in His perfect humanity, and the axe will be laid to the root of this tree ... Our Lord became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and the record of His life upon earth abounds with facts which prove that He really did take upon Him the nature of man. We have in Him what we want, an incarnate God. He is God and He is man. His humanity is as great a fact as His divinity.'<sup>92</sup> 'As our Mediator, He is, as in everything else, all, and in all. His advocacy with the Father leaves nothing to be desired. Our souls do safely trust in Him. The worship of the Virgin is superfluous.'<sup>93</sup>

Again the reviewers appreciated the book, the *Nonconformist* saying, 'It is artistically and religiously instructive; always pleasant and refreshing to read; and satisfyingly beautiful to look upon.'<sup>94</sup>

The third in this series of art books, *Expositions of Raphael's Bible*,<sup>95</sup> was a still more direct sequel (Smith even uses the word in the preface) to *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael*, being based on Raphael's frescoes in the Loggia of the Vatican. That so many of the artworks Smith writes of in his books are by Roman Catholic artists in Roman Catholic settings is surely significant; there simply was no great Protestant tradition of 'sacred art'. Perhaps to guard against the idea that he was moving towards Rome, the Italian paintings in this book are counterbalanced by quotations from Shakespeare that preface each chapter, reminding us that the Victorians had a great regard for the Bard of Avon. We find here again a call for art to be interpreted in its own context, not an alien one, 'Raphael's Bible would naturally receive its title from the times and circumstances of the people for whom it was painted, and to be understood and appreciated, it must be read in the light of the early and middle ages.'<sup>96</sup>

What is notable about Richard Henry Smith's art books is that, for all their appearance and subject, they are popular books for ordinary people, not erudite tomes for scholars; the idea of the art books is to help ordinary people better appreciate art while also using the art to explain the Gospel and help people enter in to the narratives of the Bible. There is a refreshingly democratic note in Smith's books on art; he never talks down to the reader, he always treats the reader as his equal. The end of the art is always worship, never just taste or entertainment. The aim is neither to impress with knowledge, nor simply to make people more cultured, it is always to teach the Gospel.

What he attempted in his books, Smith also attempted in person. Surbiton and Gospel Oak were both predominantly lower- and middle-middle class churches; the sort of people who formed the bulk of Free Church congregations in the Victorian era, and who, if we are honest, tend to form the bulk of Evangelical (and indeed non-evangelical) congregations in Britain today. In Brading and Halesworth, Smith was in mixed rural congregations, with long-standing traditions, while at Hanley he was in a congregation in what amounted to a slum district. Though Smith would be most associated with Gospel Oak, it was at Hanley, in the old red-brick chapel blackened by the smoke from the kilns of the New Hall Pottery next door, or in the schoolroom behind it, that he began these lectures, speaking to the working men who laboured in the potteries. There, in either the chapel or the red-brick schoolroom behind it, he would speak about the work of Christ and illustrate it with a picture painted by himself after one of the artists he admired. Sedcole describes these lectures as they were repeated at Gospel Oak:

These became very attractive, and brought many to listen to Gospel teaching who would not otherwise have been seen in a house of prayer. The lectures were illustrated by almost life-size paintings (the pastor's own work) which were hung behind the platform, and though very rarely pointed to, they added much to the force of his verbal explanations of the parables.<sup>97</sup>

These were not original compositions, but copies of works by famous artists both old and modern, like the two that were given to the Gospel Oak Church by his widow in 1891, 'Painted after some woodcuts by Millais,<sup>98</sup> as illustrations to the parables of "The Good Samaritan" and "The Finding of Hid Treasure."<sup>99</sup>

Where art comes closest to worship in his works is in Smith's contribution to the literature of family devotion, *Children's Services*.<sup>100</sup> The subtitle, *A Book of Pictorial Family Worship*, adequately describes the purpose of the work; it is a book for family worship that is filled with pictures so as to make it particularly interesting to children. 'The illustrations can be easily expounded, and their exposition may be found to serve as an attraction to the exposition of the various Scriptures.'<sup>101</sup> The rationale behind it is the inclusion of young children in family worship in such a way as to make it enjoyable for them, 'Less attention, possibly, has been given to our little ones, at our family altars, than they deserve. These *Children's Services* are offered as aids to Divine Worship in homes where there are children. They have been compiled under the conviction that Family Prayer, in such homes, should be a child's service. They are published at the request of many who have felt the difficulty of conducting daily worship where the majority of the worshippers are young.'<sup>102</sup> Each service consists of a hymn, a Bible reading from either the Old or New Testament, and a prayer. These are united by a common theme, so for example the first service has the theme of 'The Creation'; it begins with Watts', 'I Sing the Almighty Power of God', the reading is Genesis 1:1-26 and the prayer is a meditation on the theme of God's creation and his care for what he has made. In the readings, there is care taken for the capacity of children, so Smith states, 'The authorized version is followed, except where it has been found to need revision; and in the revision, special regard has been paid to the latest results of Biblical study. Obsolete, and unusual words and phrases, have been rendered by synonymous terms, with which children are familiar.'<sup>103</sup>

The main original work of Smith in this book is found in the prayers; though in 1866 he registered his dislike of books of devotion with forms of prayer, by the time *Children's Services* was written, he had relaxed his position and provides a form of prayer for each service. We only have time for one example in full, chosen from Chapter 19, on 'public worship':

O thou who hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all come. We bless Thee that Thou dost receive us when we come to Thee alone. Thou dost draw us unto Thyself, and we get alone and pray to Thee in secret; and we find the comfort of pouring out our hearts to Thee. And Thou dost hear and answer our prayers.



We bless and praise Thee, O our God and Father, that Thou art the God and Father of our family. We thank Thee that we worship Thee in our home. We come together, day after day, and we come together, day after day, and we kneel together and offer our home prayer. And Thou dost thus prepare us to go to Thy House, and Thou dost make us ready to worship Thee with the great congregation.

O our God, Thou art greatly to be feared in the assembly of Thy saints, and Thou art to be had in reverence of all who are about Thee. Give to us and to all the spirit of worship. Thou art a Spirit, and they that worship Thee must worship Thee in spirit and in truth. Leave us not to ourselves, lest we draw near to Thee with our mouth, and honour Thee with our lips, while our hearts are far from Thee.

O our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, without whom we can do nothing, we look to Thee. Thou hast said where two or three are gathered together in Thy name, there Thou art in the midst of them. Help all to remember Thy presence. Let all yield themselves up to Thy power. So shall we all be of one mind and one heart; and, offering common prayer and praise, we shall be those whom the Father seeketh to worship Him.

Give, we pray Thee, O God, the message to Thy ministers, and give to us the hearing ear and the understanding heart. Let the word of the Lord come to us to-day, and come to all. We would be convinced of sin. We would be taught what Thou wouldst have us to do. We would remember the judgement to come. We confess that we have often been hearers only of Thy word; and not doing Thy will, we have forgotten what Thou hast said to us. May Thy word today come to us in great power. May Thy Holy Spirit take the things of Christ and show them to us. May we believe in them, and do Thou work mightily in us, as Thou dost in all who believe.

Thou hast revealed to us the higher and holier worship of the heavenly world. Thou wouldst have us to worship Thee with the multitude that no man can number, who are before Thy throne, and serve Thee day and night in Thy temple. O, our Father, prepare us, make us fit to meet Thee face to face. We would pray without ceasing, in our closets and in our homes. We would be ever found worshipping with Thy people in Thy house. We would wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. And by Thy good hand upon us, we shall reach the land that is very far off, and see the King in His beauty. And our voices shall be heard, saying, 'Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever.' *Amen.*<sup>104</sup>

What is notable is that this is full of both quotations and allusions to the Bible; Smith believed firmly in storing the mind with Scripture, so that we are never at a loss what to say to God, as we can bring his own words to him.

We take a short extract from the prayer in Chapter 21, ‘The miraculous draught’.

O Lord our Saviour, in Thee, Thee alone, is our help to be found. To whom can we go but to Thee; Thou hast the words of eternal life. Without Thee can we do nothing. Speak the word only, and it will be to us as life from the dead. We believe in Thee as the Saviour of the world. With Thee is the forgiveness of sins. O Christ, be a Saviour to us. Come to us, and keep with us. In Thy presence is power. Thou canst teach and train us; and Thou alone. None of us can help ourselves; and none, alas, can help another. All power belongeth to Thee. Oh save us and redeem us, for Thy mercies’ sake!<sup>105</sup>

For all that has been said about visual art, it must be noted that Smith remained a Puritan and an Evangelical in his emphasis on the Word. The pictures are pictures of Biblical and religious subjects, and they are never on their own; they are always presented with an interpretation, and the Biblical text on which they are based. The idea of pictures as a sort of Bible for the illiterate is one that he had no sympathy for—what the illiterate need is education so that they will be literate! The visual arts are subordinated to the Word, written and preached; art itself needs to be explained. Even *Children’s Services* has more words than pictures, and the parent leading worship (ideally the father), is expected to be using the picture as a basis for exposition.

### **Children**

It has been said, that the Victorians invented the concept of childhood as we understand it today, and whilst it is an exaggeration, it is one with some truth behind it. The Victorian era saw a greater sentimentalizing of childhood, and an increased emphasis on the nuclear family, at least among the middle and upper classes.

Smith both wrote and lectured on the subject of the raising of children. The Gospel is for children as well as adults; Jesus does indeed love the little children.

The gospel of the infancy and childhood of our Lord is, especially, the gospel for children. Our Saviour in his human constitution followed the general course of human development. We might have thought that he would have come into the world as an adult, without father, without mother, without descent. There would have been no promise in such an advent to us, and still less to our children. Now the story of his birth can be spoken of to our little ones, and the tale of Bethlehem can be understood by the least among them.

From the very first they may become acquainted with the Scriptures that testify of Him. And those who were happy enough to receive ‘this nurture and admonition of the Lord,’ will remember that the Infant Saviour formed the frequent subject of their first visions and earliest dreams.<sup>106</sup>

*Twigs for Nests: Or Notes on Nursery Nurture*<sup>107</sup> is Smith's contribution to the literature of child-rearing. The pervasive stereotype of the Victorian home, presided over by a stern *paterfamilias*, where 'children are to be seen but not heard' makes us surprised to find that Smith, the stern and severe pastor, is as far as can be imagined from sternness and strictness. He aims in the book to present a Gospel-based approach to parenting, the central idea of which is Christian love. That is something that is all too often lacking even in modern evangelical works on parenting, and another area where we can learn from Smith on the application of the Gospel.

He gives his *apologia* for putting pen to paper to write such a book, 'Any who have been happy enough to have received Christian nurture themselves, and who have attempted to repeat, in a home full of their own children, that system of training, will have something to say which any parents who are understanding and accepting their responsibility will be glad to hear.'<sup>108</sup> 'These "Notes on Nursery Nurture" are the result of an intimate acquaintance with two generations of children, and are presented without any pretence either to originality or completeness. The writer has had no intention of exhausting his subject. He speaks only on those principles and plans which he has himself known and which he has himself tried; and he offers the experience of his home life as a contribution to what he conceives to be the most important branch of social science.'<sup>109</sup>

The book has eight short chapters, 'Babies' Crying'; 'Family Prayer'; 'Nursery Nonsense'; 'Children's Birthdays'; 'Children's Faults'; 'Children's Sundays'; 'Children's Hobbies'; and 'The Parent's Pattern.' As may be expected, the moral of the first chapter is that learning not to cry is part of growing up, 'We are to learn to be quiet, and to bear our own burdens.'<sup>110</sup> Children are to be loved, but not spoiled. 'If the first cry of the first child be responded to with alacrity and intelligence, if it be regarded, as indeed it is, as the first oral summons to understand and sustain parental responsibility, nursery nurture will never become vested with insuperable difficulties, and nursery cries will never be uttered in vain.'<sup>111</sup> 'Family Prayer' begins with the great quote from Tennyson's *Morte d'Arthur*,

More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day;  
For what are men better than sheep or goats,  
That nourish a blind life without the brain?  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
For so the whole world round is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

There was a concern that as it became the norm for father to 'go out to work', family prayer would be neglected. Just as this same concern would lead Smith to provide a book to help family worship, so in *Twigs for Nests* he gives suggestions as to how it is to be conducted. Family prayer is to be both solemn and delightful to the child, at a time when he is fit for it, after rather than before meals. The Bible is to be read, and where necessary a few remarks made on what has been read. The reading is to be selected taking the children's capacities into account, which means that narrative passages will be preferred. The challenge will be to keep it fresh and interesting, for, 'any religious engagement which is perpetually recurring at regular intervals, is a severe test of the character of our Christianity.'<sup>112</sup> 'A particular and distinct recognition of the blessings which we are ever receiving from the hand of God, and the sins we are constantly committing, instead of any general acknowledgement of these things, and a careful avoidance of vain repetitions, will be found to awaken the attention and to sustain the interest of our children. The amazing variety of events and circumstances, within and without, and the analogies which are authorised by revelation, will suffice to prevent the service from becoming barren or monotonous.'<sup>113</sup>

'Nonsense' is a perfectly acceptable thing; *Alice in Wonderland* and such like books have a place in the Christian nursery. There is nothing wrong with parents playing with their children or telling silly stories to amuse them. 'The step from the sublime to the ridiculous, must be often taken by those who are leading divine and human lives.'<sup>114</sup> Indeed, 'Instead of there being any contradiction between religion and amusement, they are closely connected. They are not only not antagonistic, they are even auxiliary. Holiness leads to humour. Our best men are often our best wits. Those who have read our old divines, and who have numbered among their friends or relatives any who are thoroughly Christian, will understand what we mean.'<sup>115</sup>

Children's birthdays are gifts from God, to be celebrated as such, and also to remind us of the birthday of the best child of all, Jesus of Nazareth. 'We have found children's birthdays to be holy-days.'<sup>116</sup> The Christian parent will always be looking, until the child is converted, for a second birthday to come, and 'Birthdays may be times when children are born again.'<sup>117</sup> The final words in the chapter are a reminder that child mortality was a great deal higher in England in the Victorian age, for Smith writes from experience that, 'Days when children have been brought into our homes will remind some of days when they have been taken away. We will not trust ourselves to speak of what we have felt in the past, or what we feel now. There is, and has ever been, to us a mystery about these early deaths.'<sup>118</sup>

In dealing with the question of children's faults, Smith warns that they must not be dealt with too harshly; parental discipline must be wise and kind,

as God's discipline of his children is, 'We must pity our children, as the Lord pities those who fear Him, knowing their frame, and remembering that they are but dust.'<sup>119</sup> 'It may be very provoking for us to be disturbed by the constant chattering, or the occasional racket and uproar of the little tribe, but we have only to blame ourselves if we be annoyed by these things. God has connected noise and children, and what He has joined together no one must put asunder.'<sup>120</sup> There is no 'Little children must be seen and not heard' here! 'Quietness is to be the exception and not the rule.'<sup>121</sup> Children are after all *children*, and it is quite foolish to try to make them into anything else. 'The carelessness of children supposes the carefulness of parents, and it is evidently designed, amongst many other arrangements and ordinances, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents.'<sup>122</sup> 'The evil that is in children is no more to be eradicated by fault-finding and force than it is in adults. It is only by the goodness of our Heavenly Father that we are led to repentance, and it is only little by little that old things pass away, and all things become new.'<sup>123</sup> 'It will be only so far as we have succeeded in bringing before them the love of God, that they will know anything of a happy and endless career of spiritual progress.'<sup>124</sup> He gives an example from his own family life; his young daughter Maria had been asked to post some letters inviting men to a public meeting, and had lost one of them on the way to the post-box. She came at once with the letters to apologise, and he was annoyed, but kept himself from speaking harshly to her. Later in the day, he asked her to come into his study, and he spoke with her about what she could learn from the accident. First of all, he pointed out what she had done right; she had come back with all the letters so that he knew which one had been lost, and she had told him what had happened right away so that a new letter could be written and they could all be posted in time. Then came the question of what she could learn from this. 'You will have learnt that when we get ourselves into any trouble there is often something that we may do, if we have our wits about us. However bad matters may be, there is a way of making the best of them. I was glad, very glad, Maria, that you were not afraid to come at once and tell me; and if ever, even when you are a woman, you get into trouble, come at once to me, and if you cannot come, always write. But there, Maria, I may be gone where no letter will reach me; and I have been thinking that perhaps God kept me from speaking quickly and harshly to you this morning, that you might be disposed not only to trust and to come to me, but what is far better, to trust to Him and to go boldly to His throne of grace.'<sup>125</sup> 'Children, as well as adults, are to be treated as innocent until they are proved to be guilty'<sup>126</sup> Smith recounted how, not long after the family had moved to Upminster, an uncle from Stepney who was visiting had accused him of knocking an apple off a tree, 'He had never, it

would appear, met with such a thing as a windfall, and, unfortunately for us, the experience of our parents was equally limited. We were convicted on circumstantial evidence, and suffered punishment, because there was more in nature than was dreamt of in our home philosophy.<sup>127</sup>

‘The Sunday question, happily for our children, is one of the questions of the day which has been fairly re-opened for discussion, and there is no class in the country which will derive better advantages, if the investigation should lead to a better understanding of the origin, and the obligation, and the observance of the Lord’s Day.’<sup>128</sup> Smith was neither in favour of a ‘Jewish Sabbath’, the keynote of which was a cessation from work, nor a ‘Continental Sunday’, the keynote of which was a day of secular pleasures. ‘We have either to put a veto upon the playfulness of our children, or to tolerate and guide it.’<sup>129</sup> It is quite clear that Smith’s preference is to tolerate and guide the playfulness of children. In the minister’s house in particular, Sunday play often turned out to be the children ‘playing at Church’. On page 96 of *Twigs for Nests* there is a delightful picture of a group of Victorian children doing just that! ‘We fulfil our mission, for instance, in reference to Sundays, if we can make it is happiest day of their week.’<sup>130</sup> ‘On Sunday afternoons, when we have our children in our arms ... we may begin to speak of Him who spoke of children, as He took them up, as belonging to the kingdom of God. A few coloured Bible pictures, a child’s hymn sung to a child’s tune, and a child’s prayer, will answer the highest purposes. A Sunday with such an hour in it will never be regarded either as a weariness or a holiday.’<sup>131</sup> ‘The day is to be occupied, as far as it can be, as an opportunity for setting forth Christ evidently before our children.’<sup>132</sup>

A hobby is a good thing, and every child should be encouraged to have one. The Victorian girl had one at hand, ‘In her scissors and paper, and needle and thread, in the dressing of her dolls and the management of their home.’<sup>133</sup> Something congenial, be it botany or philology, engineering or wood-carving or painting, should be available for children. Here he spoke from experience, for Smith was both an amateur artist and an amateur engineer. God has given us all various faculties and abilities, and he has given them to be used, not to be neglected.

Ultimately, the parent’s pattern is God himself, ‘The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.’<sup>134</sup> ‘If the great God be verily our Father, and if He be acting the part of a perfect Father toward us, then, as we are often at a loss what course to pursue in the management of our children, we may safely follow His example and adopt His principles and His plans.’<sup>135</sup>

‘There is a mystery belonging to our near relationships which has led some to search those Scriptures which refer to homes, and those instincts which are

to be found there.’<sup>136</sup> ‘The book which contains the revelation of “*The Father*,” and “*The Father’s house*” may naturally make its way into every home where there are children, and those who are parents will necessarily know more than others of “The Fatherhood of God.”<sup>137</sup> ‘The revelation of heaven as a home will have an indirect tendency to turn the home into a heaven.’<sup>138</sup> ‘The child is to receive its first notion of God from its parents, because He is “The Father.”’<sup>139</sup> The parents are to love their children so that the children are able better to understand the love of God, ‘We love our children, and would spare nothing for their sakes, and they are thus to be induced to believe that God loved the world, and spared not His only-begotten Son, but freely gave Him up for us all, and that He is willing, with Him, freely to give us all things.’<sup>140</sup> The goodness of God, the mercy of God, the love of God, all these are examples for the Christian parent. And the aim is always to lead the child to God, ‘Our purpose and glory will be their *holiness*. They will perceive, from the providence and law of our home, that we are so ordering all things that they may know God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.’<sup>141</sup> This is all the more important because the home on earth is passing away. ‘The home, for a while, is a tabernacle of witness, reared in the wilderness of the selfishness of this world, but the tent is struck; our parents die, and the home is broken, and were not God our Father, we should be orphans, and if there were no heaven, we should have no home.’<sup>142</sup>

Whether the book or the lectures came first is unclear. What is clear is that Smith wanted the Christian home to be a place of freedom and joy for children, where parents model to their children the love of God, and seek their salvation through that love.

## Conclusion

Richard Henry Smith was by no means a famous man, even in his own day. He was never Chairman of the Congregational Union, his books sold, but were not best sellers, he was pastor of five churches, two of which he planted, and while all had respectable congregations, he never drew the crowds like his contemporaries Joseph Parker and C.H. Spurgeon. In an age when we have evangelical celebrities so often presented to us as the great be-all and end-all, a man like Richard Henry Smith is a breath of fresh air. He planted churches without pandering to the lowest common denominator or resorting to sensationalism to gather crowds. He wrote on art for everybody without speaking down to anybody, encouraged a sane attitude to children and child-rearing, and he loved Christ and people. A Spurgeon is beyond our emulation; Smith is closer.

What can we learn from Richard Henry Smith? First of all, I would suggest, we can be encouraged that a man who was not a ‘popular preacher’ in the usual sense could still be used to establish two notable suburban churches. The

modern Church attaches far too much importance to the charismatic (using the word in its secular sense) man of ready speech, irrespective of his ability to handle the Biblical text, and far too little to the Apostle's criterion that the preacher must be one 'Rightly dividing the Word of God.' But no lasting results can be achieved by anyone but the preacher and the lover of the Bible. Yes, today we have to work harder than the Victorians did to gather a congregation, but nothing lasting will be achieved by methods that just draw a crowd!

Second, we are again reminded that behind every successful minister are good deacons and/or elders. It took J.W. Sedcole to move the discussion of church-planting in Gospel Oak from talk to action, and William Leavers to actually start work in Surbiton. J. Carvell Williams' organisational ability complemented Smith's preaching, and James Sangster's publishing business not only published Smith's books, but also partially funded Gospel Oak Church. The myth of the church-planter needs to be challenged, and the history of Richard Henry Smith helps us here.

What do we do with the visual arts? Richard Henry Smith shows one way to use art as a way of sharing the Gospel and helping people to enter in to the narratives of the Bible. But the Bible is never forgotten in the art; art is never an end in itself, but in the hands of the preacher, it is another way of preaching. We must remember that he is not dictating to artists; Smith's primary calling was as a preacher and pastor, and everything else was subordinate to that, but still, the Christian surely cannot engage in 'art for art's sake'; rather we do all for the glory of God. He is also a good precedent for using visual aids in lectures and children's talks, should we feel the need of one! But of course he also reminds us that they should be *good* visual aids.

Smith's vision of the Christian home and family is a breath of fresh air, not faddish, not legalistic, but about parents showing the love of God. Let children be children, and parents be involved in their upbringing. While we cannot change the heart, we can at least show to children that 'God is love', and that the heart of the Gospel is the revelation of the love of God in Christ. Since it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance, goodness must be the keynote of the Christian home. The Gospel, not the Law, is to be the centre of the Christian home.

The Gospel: that is what Richard Henry Smith would want to leave us with, for the message of God's free grace was what he lived and died upon. He was indeed, 'a remarkable man', and may God help us to learn of him as he followed Christ.



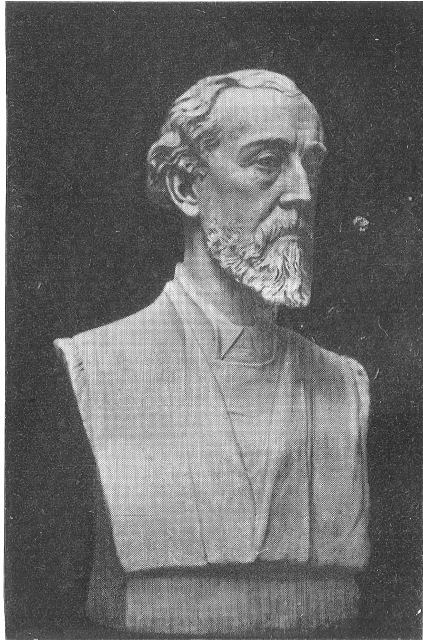
## Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.kentishtowner.co.uk/2012/04/11/wednesday-picture-karl-marx-woz-ere-and-ere-and-ere/> Accessed 06/02/2015.
- 2 Edward E. Cleal, *The Story of Congregationalism in Surrey* (London, James Clarke and Co., 1908), pp. 301–2.
- 3 The chief source of biographical information on Smith is J.W. Sedcole and D. Davies, *The Story of Gospel Oak Church* (London, 1899). pp. 5–28 are by Sedcole and pp. 29–52 by Davies. Both authors were deacons at Gospel Oak and closely associated with Smith in the work there.
- 4 <http://surman.english.qmul.ac.uk/display/cards.php?id=26289> Accessed 06/02/2015.
- 5 <http://surman.english.qmul.ac.uk/display/cards.php?id=26288> Accessed 06/02/2015.
- 6 Smith's book, *Expositions of Raphael's Bible* (London, Arthur Miall, 1868) was printed by 'Josiah Smith, Bicester and Winslow', but of course the surname is too common to be certain. It would certainly explain why a young man whose family background was in Stepney and whose father was a pastor in Essex ended up in Oxfordshire.
- 7 Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England: *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England* (London, 1986), p. 171.
- 8 Sedcole and Davies, p. 14.
- 9 *Ibid.* p. 11.
- 10 *Ibid.* p. 12. The building is now a private house.
- 11 James W. Newby (ed.) *A History of Independency in Halesworth and District* (Halesworth, 1936), p. 65.
- 12 Newby, p. 89.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Cleal, p. 300.
- 15 *Ibid.* The phrase is telling!
- 16 Frustratingly, I have not been able to find what the source of Mr Leavers' wealth was, though it was undoubtedly some form of business.
- 17 Cleal, p. 301.
- 18 *Ibid.* pp. 302–3.
- 19 Elected as a Liberal in 1885, and then again in 1892. Albert Peel, *The Congregational Two Hundred* (London, Independent Press, 1948) pp. 198–9.
- 20 Cleal, p. 301.
- 21 R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962* (London: Independent Press, 1962), p. 277.
- 22 Church finance was an issue that Williams thought about deeply, and he was one of the men who founded the Church-Aid and Home Missionary Society in 1877 (Jones, p. 312).
- 23 Duguld Macfadyen, *Alexander Mackennal: Life and Letters* (London, 1905), p. 29. Mackennal succeeded Smith in the pastorate at Surbiton.
- 24 Cleal, p. 301.
- 25 Quoted at <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Arnold-Bennett-Biography-Margaret-Drabble/dp/0571255094> Accessed 06/02/2015. The street is of course named for the chapel, which predated it by at least two years.
- 26 See Gervase Charmley, *The Hope in Hope Street* (Hanley: 2012).
- 27 Sedcole and Davies, p. 13.
- 28 An issue that J Carvell Williams and others sought to address in the formation of the Church-Aid and Home Missionary Society in 1877.
- 29 Sedcole and Davies, p. 28.
- 30 *Ibid.* p. 34.
- 31 And later an MP.
- 32 Huw Edwards, in *Capelli Lanelli* (Carmarthen: 2009), pp. 60–61, confuses father and son.
- 33 Quoted in Charmley, p. 91.
- 34 Sedcole and Davies refer to open-air preaching in 1866 on p. 25.
- 35 Sedcole and Davies, pp. 13–14.
- 36 *Ibid.* p. 34.
- 37 Quoted in Charmley, p. 84.
- 38 Richard Henry Smith, *Sunday Half-Hours* (London: James Sangster, no date), pp. 59–60.
- 39 Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 40 *Sunday Half-Hours*, p. 19.
- 41 *Ibid.* p. 42.
- 42 *Ibid.* p. 44.
- 43 *In Memoriam*, XCV.
- 44 *Sunday Half-Hours*, p. 44. This is a deliberate echo of Bishop Butler.
- 45 *Ibid.* p. 126.
- 46 Referred to as exhibited at the Royal Academy 'a year or two since', suggesting

- that the book was published in about 1870. *Sunday Half-Hours*, p. 139.
- 47 *Sunday Half-Hours*, p. 18.
- 48 Ibid. p. 177.
- 49 Ibid. p. 20.
- 50 Ibid. p. 138.
- 51 Ibid. p. 95.
- 52 Ibid. p. 93.
- 53 Ibid. p. 121.
- 54 Ibid. p. 46.
- 55 Ibid. p. 47.
- 56 Ibid. p. 166.
- 57 Ibid. p. 182.
- 58 Ibid. p. 183.
- 59 Ibid. pp. 164–5.
- 60 Sedcole and Davies, pp. 23–4.
- 61 Ibid. p. 34.
- 62 Ibid. p. 22.
- 63 Frank Cumbers, *The Book Room* (London, Epworth Press, 1956), p. 44.
- 64 *Sunday Half-Hours*, ‘Advertisement’ (page not numbered).
- 65 Richard Henry Smith, *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael* (London, James Nisbet and Co., 1860), p. 3. Though art galleries were still as a rule closed on Sundays in 1860, it is not hard to see how one might argue from the propriety of reading a virtual art gallery on Sunday to that of visiting the real thing.
- 66 John Hannavy (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Routledge, 2013), p. 986.
- 67 Smith, *Sunday Half-Hours*, Title page. This is not strictly accurate, p. 79 and p. 140 are nothing but text, and several other pages have nothing in the way of illustration beyond an illuminated letter. That it is a very highly illustrated book is however quite true.
- 68 Wrongly, in the opinion of the present author; the Second Commandment forbids the making of images for the purpose of bowing down and worshipping them, not the mere making of images of created things.
- 69 *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael*, p. 3.
- 70 Sedcole and Davies, p. 23.
- 71 Ibid. p. 23.
- 72 *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael*, pp. 3–4.
- 73 Ibid. p. 4.
- 74 Ibid. p. 4.
- 75 Ibid. p. 6.
- 76 That the Cartoons however were in the safely English setting of Hampton Court Palace meant that they were not off-limits as Roman Catholic.
- 77 Quoted on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael\\_Cartoons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_Cartoons) (accessed 21/2/2015).
- 78 *Expositions of the Cartoons of Raphael*, p. iii.
- 79 Ibid. p. iv.
- 80 Ibid. p. 3.
- 81 Ibid. pp. 16–17.
- 82 Ibid. p. 8.
- 83 Ibid. p. 9.
- 84 Ibid. p. 10.
- 85 Ibid. p. 30.
- 86 Ibid. p. 21. Emphasis in original.
- 87 Quoted in an advertisement in the back of *Twigs for Nests*.
- 88 Advertisement in *Twigs for Nests*.
- 89 *In Memoriam*, Section XXXI.
- 90 Richard Henry Smith: *Expositions of Great Pictures* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1863), p. 6.
- 91 *Expositions of Great Pictures*, p. 7.
- 92 Ibid. p. 10.
- 93 Ibid. p. 11.
- 94 Advertisement in the back of *Twigs for Nests*.
- 95 *Expositions of Raphael's Bible* (London: Arthur Miall, 1868).
- 96 Ibid. p. 12.
- 97 Sedcole and Davies, p. 25.
- 98 Sir John Everett Millais (1829–1896), Pre-Raphaelite and Londoner. His use of symbolic realism would have appealed greatly to Smith. Millais and Holman Hunt both painted in Surbiton.
- 99 Sedcole and Davies, p. 47.
- 100 Richard Henry Smith, *Children's Services: A Book of Pictorial Family Worship* (Douglas, Isle of Man: Doig, no date)
- 101 Ibid. p. iv.
- 102 Ibid. p. iii.
- 103 Ibid. p. iv.
- 104 Ibid. pp. 120–121.
- 105 Ibid. pp. 132–133.
- 106 Ibid. p. 19.
- 107 Richard Henry Smith: *Twigs for Nests: Or Notes on Nursery Nurture* (London: James Nisbet and Co. 1866).
- 108 Ibid. p. vii.
- 109 Ibid. pp. vii–viii.
- 110 Ibid. p. 4.
- 111 Ibid. pp. 10–11.
- 112 Ibid. p. 21.
- 113 Ibid. p. 29.
- 114 Ibid. p. 36.

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- 115 Ibid. p. 38.  
 116 Ibid. p. 53.  
 117 Ibid. p. 63.  
 118 Ibid. pp. 63–64. In passing we note that a few years ago workmen in the old burial ground at Hanley uncovered a child's grave from the Victorian era.  
 119 Ibid. p. 70.  
 120 Ibid. p. 70.  
 121 Ibid. p. 71.  
 122 Ibid. p. 72.  
 123 Ibid. p. 74.  
 124 Ibid. p. 74.  
 125 Ibid. p. 77.  
 126 Ibid. p. 78.  
 127 Ibid. pp. 78–79.
- 128 Ibid. p. 86.  
 129 Ibid. p. 87.  
 130 Ibid. p. 94.  
 131 Ibid. p. 97.  
 132 Ibid. p. 97.  
 133 Ibid. p. 104.  
 134 Ephesians 3:14–15.  
 135 *Twigs for Nests*, pp. 135–6.  
 136 Ibid. p. 130.  
 137 Ibid. p. 129.  
 138 Ibid. p. 137.  
 139 Ibid. p. 137.  
 140 Ibid. p. 138.  
 141 Ibid. p. 139.  
 142 Ibid. p. 134.



*Photo by]*

*[E. M. Davies.*

RICHARD H. SMITH.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF A LIFE-LONG SERVICE TO  
 OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.  
 FIRST AT BRADING, AFTERWARDS AT HALESWORTH,  
 SURBITON, AND HANLEY;  
 AND, FINALLY, FOR SEVENTEEN YEARS AT GOSPEL OAK.  
 ENTERING INTO REST NOV. 13TH, 1884.

*“He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”—I JOHN II. 17.*

# Christ's Cry of Dereliction: The Trinity and the Cross

**Tom Brand**

## **Introduction**

In 1884, schoolmaster Edwin Abbot published his satirical novella *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*. It is a satire on Victorian society, but its lasting impact has been in the study of dimensions. Come with me in your mind to Flatland; a two dimensional world. One can travel forward and backward, left or right. There is no up or down. One is entirely flat in Flatland. Imagine what it would look like to see a sphere pass through our two dimensional plane. One would initially observe a dot as the surface of the sphere first intersects our two dimensional world. Then the dot would expand into a circle whose diameter would increase up to the diameter of the sphere and then decrease to a dot again as the sphere had passed completely through Flatland. We are not in Flatland. Instead we experience three spatial dimensions in our visual perception. But this imperfect analogy illustrates the way in which the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation are shrouded in mystery. When God the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity became incarnate and entered our world, we experienced the equivalent of Flatlanders observing a three dimensional sphere passing through their two dimensional plane.

In what follows we will explore some questions that lie unspoken beneath much of today's preaching and theology. Was God the Son forsaken by God the Father? Did God die at Golgotha? Was the Trinity torn apart for the sake of our redemption? Can God suffer? As we proceed we will discover various methods and tools to use in seeking a biblical understanding of the Trinity and the Atonement. In exploring these issues we will initially set the scene exegetically from the gospels and outline Jürgen Moltmann's understanding of the intra-trinitarian aspect of Golgotha. We will then overview the Reformed doctrine of the Trinity with reference to the impassibility<sup>1</sup> of the Godhead. After this we will look more closely at the person of the Son and the incarnation and see how we relate statements concerning Christ's human and divine natures to Christ's person. Finally, we will offer our conclusion that God the Son as man was forsaken by God the Father and died at Golgotha and see how only such a conclusion can offer genuine hope in human suffering.

I plan, God willing, to undertake doctoral research in this subject and before we explore this rich area of theology I want to emphasise the importance of further study generally and the significance of a number of

people in the Church of Christ undertaking doctoral level theological research. It is imperative that the Church be intellectually equipped and able to offer a defence of the hope that we have. This must be the case with respect to the world and also within our tradition. This goes beyond a strong knowledge of the Bible and seeks to understand how God's Holy Word fits together in a theological framework. It is vital that we do not excuse ourselves from academic rigour in the name of Christian love. We must use our minds to God's glory, just as we must use every other faculty to God's glory. I am just beginning to scratch the surface of these glorious questions in Scripture and theology, but I hope that together we can come to a more precise and coherent understanding of the death of Christ.

### **1. Setting the Scene: Exegetical Data and Jürgen Moltmann's Understanding of the Cross**

One of Jürgen Moltmann's most significant and famous works is *The Crucified God*.<sup>2</sup> It is essentially an extended essay on Christ's cry of dereliction recorded in Matthew and Mark. In the first two Synoptics the fourth word of Jesus from the cross is followed simply by Christ's loud cry at the point of His death. It is important to note that Luke and John do not include this fourth word. Instead, in Luke 23:46, Christ's final words address His Father in committing His spirit to God. John also narrates the final moments of Christ's life as triumphantly proclaiming; 'It is finished' (John 19:30). We must seek to do justice to this diversity as we balance the issues of Christ's death and His cry from Psalm 22:1; recorded by Matthew in Hebrew and by Mark in Aramaic. Additionally we must shape our understanding of Christ's cry of dereliction by the fact that 'My God,' particularly in the context of Psalm 22, is the covenantal cry of one of the Lord's people in time of need. The only time that Jesus does not refer to God as Father, Jesus calls God 'My God.' This is the covenant name of God showing God's desire to dwell with His people, to be their God. In the context of the seven words from the cross spoken across the four gospels, the fourth word is not Christ's final word but an expression of His experience prior to death. This data beyond the immediate context of the fourth word in Matthew and Mark must shape our understanding of the fourth word. Perhaps this can in part be achieved by noting that '*Sabachthani*' in Aramaic is in the perfect tense: it denotes a completed action.<sup>3</sup> And yet at the onset of death in the final words of Christ recorded by Luke and John, Christ again addresses God as His Father.

#### **Psalm 22**

Christ was nailed to the cross at the third hour. After three hours of crucifixion the darkness covers the land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?'

Mark records these words of Christ spoken in Aramaic and transliterated into Greek, followed by his translation into Greek; 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' These are the opening words of Psalm 22. The Psalm vividly portrays the agony of the process of crucifixion but it does so in reverse order to that experienced by Christ. In *The Way of the Lord*,<sup>4</sup> Joel Marcus analyses the parallels between Christ's crucifixion in Mark 15 and Psalm 22. In Mark 15:24 Christ's garments are divided at the beginning of the account. This occurs in Psalm 22:18, towards the end of the Psalm. In Mark 15:29 Christ is mocked. This is described in Psalm 22:7. As we progress in Mark's account, Mark 15:30-31 records the challenge to Christ to save Himself. This occurs in Psalm 22:8. Mark 15:32 records further reviling which happens in Psalm 22:6. Finally, the cry of dereliction occurs in Mark 15:34; the final words of Christ, but the first words of Psalm 22. Therefore when Jesus cried out the opening verse of Psalm 22, surely He knew that the onset of death was imminent.

### **Darkness**

We often compare the three hours of darkness with the three days of darkness during the ninth plague of Egypt. This darkness could be felt, and it was followed in the Exodus account by the tenth plague: the death of the firstborns. This marks the beginning of the Exodus. In the book of Exodus we see the Lord rescuing His people from bondage to slavery in Egypt. The Lord brings the people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and into Canaan. In Christ, the people of God are taken out of slavery to sin in Adam, they go through the waters of baptism and are brought into the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God (Colossians 1:13). The darkness speaks clearly of God's judgement, but it also hides the cross from our speculative view. It seems to prevent us from fathoming the theological depths of the mighty act of redemption brought about by Christ in His suffering and death. During the hours of darkness, all other human activity stops. Does the darkness also signify the limits of our theological understanding of the death of Christ?

In Genesis 47:31 Jacob leant on his staff and worshipped. Perhaps we too should simply acknowledge the limits of speculation and realise that God's saving activity is beyond our limited comprehension. This is often true in theology, especially theology proper: the study of God. But in our case some have ventured into the darkness and proposed theological solutions to some of the deepest mysteries. These speculative solutions threaten to undo the gospel. Worse than this, the majority of contemporary theologians simply assume Moltmann's view of God: a God that truly suffers with us in His very being. When Moltmann returned from the prisoner of war camp after the Second World War he found himself again sitting in the lecture halls studying theology. Moltmann's theology 'after Auschwitz' is markedly different from

historic Reformed theology. Moltmann found that the impassibility of God taught in the creeds and historic confessions did not offer any meaningful comfort in light of the immensity of the human suffering of Auschwitz.

In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann summarises Wiesel's account of a particular episode at Auschwitz.

The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly but the death throws of the youth lasted for half an hour. 'Where is God? Where is He?' someone asked behind me. As the youth still hung in torment in the noose after a long time, I heard the man call again, 'Where is God now?' And I heard a voice in myself answer: 'Where is He? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows.'<sup>5</sup>

Moltmann was himself a prisoner of war and he wrote the following in response to the account.

Any other answer would be blasphemy. There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would make God an annihilating nothingness. To speak here of an indifferent God would condemn men to indifference.<sup>6</sup>

Moltmann very clearly states that God the Son in His divine nature was abandoned and forsaken at the cross by God the Father, that He suffered and died as the cross as God. He is the 'crucified God' who truly suffers in His divinity. Moltmann argues that only a God who truly suffers as God can offer any theology of hope to our suffering. Moltmann has attempted to reach into the darkness at Golgotha and precisely state the mystery of Christ's cry of dereliction. His understanding of the death of Christ has pervaded much evangelical theology. Included to some extent, are such notable and influential works as *The Cross of Christ*<sup>7</sup> by John Stott, and *Christ Crucified* by Donald Macleod.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, this is clearly seen in the contemporary revulsion to the catholic Reformed<sup>9</sup> confessional proposition that God is impassable, that God cannot be affected or altered by anything outside Himself; that God cannot suffer.

How do we respond to this? We cannot simply state the mystery and refrain from rigorous theological investigation. We must respond to Moltmann and indeed to the majority of theologians since the war.

## II. The Reformed Doctrine of the Trinity

'There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.' This is the answer to question six in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. But why do we believe the doctrine of the Trinity when the word Trinity never occurs in the Bible? Bavinck comments in relation to the doctrine of the atonement that the Bible does not give us theology, in the same

way that nature does not give us science.<sup>10</sup> The Bible is abundantly clear that God is one. The Bible is equally clear that there are three persons in God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We must collate the biblical data, hypothesize, and test the hypothesis against the evidence. This is good scientific theology. We believe in one God who exists eternally in three persons. One God in three persons is not a contradiction, it is not logically impossible and it is not self contradictory. Neither is it a paradox which occurs when two mutually accepted propositions are contradictory. Often in such cases a third proposition may resolve the paradox. The proposition that the Trinity is three Gods in one God is contradictory. We do not believe this and the Bible does not teach this. The biblical data makes it clear that God is one being in three persons.

We know that the three persons of the Godhead cannot be severed anymore than God can cease to exist. Therefore God the Father was not existentially separated from God the Son. If this happened God would cease to exist and would therefore not be God.

We know that the Godhead cannot be affected or altered by any external influence. Therefore the persons of the Godhead cannot suffer. Our Triune God is ontologically distinct from us as Kierkegaard asserted by an infinite qualitative distance. He argued that 'The fundamental error of modern times lies in the fact that the yawning abyss of quality in the difference between God and man has been removed. The result in dogmatic theology has been a mockery of God.'<sup>11</sup> God is the creator, we are His creation. For God to suffer as God would be to blur and remove this fundamental biblical distinction.

We know that the three persons of the Godhead are 'ever-blessed.' There is no moment from everlasting to everlasting when the three persons of the Trinity were not or are not or will not be 'ever-blessed' (Romans 4:4).

How do we align this with the biblical data concerning Christ's suffering and death?

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 'But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.'

Acts 20:38 'Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood.'

How do we understand these verses that seem to clearly teach that God suffered and died at Golgotha? To expand the issue, Moltmann makes the following claims.

Here in the relationship between the Father and the Son, a death was experienced which has been rightly described as 'eternal death,' 'the death of



God.’ Here ‘God’ is forsaken by ‘God.’ If we take the relinquishment of the Father’s name in Jesus’ death cry seriously, then this is even the breakdown of the relationship that constitutes the life of the Trinity: if the Father forsakes the Son, the Son does not merely lose His sonship. The Father loses His fatherhood as well.<sup>12</sup>

How do we treat these verses we have read biblically and with integrity, and avoid Moltmann’s error in saying that God died, that the Son lost His sonship, and that the Father lost His fatherhood?

Before we explore a solution to this, we must again, in the words of Bavinck, emphasise the glorious and unbreakable unity of the Godhead, one God in three persons.

The Father is only and eternally Father; the Son is only and eternally Son; the Spirit is only and eternally Spirit. And inasmuch as each person is Himself in an eternal, simple and absolute manner, the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. The Father is God as Father; the Son is God as Son; the Holy Spirit is God as Holy Spirit. And inasmuch as all three are God, they all partake of one single divine nature. Hence there is but one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May He be praised forever!<sup>13</sup>

Our Triune God cannot suffer and cannot die. The thrice holy Trinity was not ruptured or split apart. If that were to happen all of existence would collapse into non-being and God would not be God.

### **III. The Trinity, the Hypostatic Union and the Communication of Idioms**

We have asserted that at the incarnation, the person of God the Son became incarnate; He took to Himself full human nature; a human soul, consciousness and a will, human flesh, bones and blood. This union of divine and human natures in Christ is called the hypostatic union. The biblical data on the deity of Christ and the humanity of Christ is so extensive that they have both been accepted as orthodox and central tenets of the Christian faith in all major (relevant) Church councils. However the union of these two natures is difficult to define and it was only in the Chalcedonian Definition (formulated in AD 451) that the relationship between the two natures was precified and made clear. The Chalcedonian Definition guarded the Church’s understanding of the incarnation against the heresies of Apollinarianism (that the person of Christ had a human body but that His mind and spirit were from the divine nature); Nestorianism (two persons in Christ); and Eutychianism (one hybrid nature of Christ). Additionally, the three patristic statements helpfully summarises the Definition of Chalcedon. 1. It is truly God the Son who is man. 2. It is truly man that the Son of God is. 3. The Son of God truly is man. The three statements summarise much patristic theology and help us to

guard against heresy and navigate a clear biblical path in theological propositions.

When we look at Christ's life and ministry in the gospels and the light shed on them in the Epistles, we can work out how to correctly speak of Christ's two natures. The patristic theologians developed a method based on biblical data called the Communication of Idioms. The inception of the Communication of Idioms is found in Ignatius of Antioch (c. AD 100), but it was technically developed further in AD 431 at the First Council of Ephesus and in AD 451 at the Council of Chalcedon. The Communication of Idioms states that what is said of the divine or human natures of Christ is true of the person of Christ, God the Son. This is not metaphysical speculation, it is rooted in God's Word. We have seen from Acts and 1 Corinthians that the Bible speaks of the death of the Lord of glory and God's blood. The communication of idioms explains the scriptural phenomena that Christ's person is said to have acted when either His divine or human nature acts. This is obvious in every day discourse but it is not entirely intuitive in Christology. For example, if my foot kicks a ball, I kick the ball. In the same way, when Christ ate the last supper with His disciples, it was the person of God the Son as man who ate with His disciples.<sup>14</sup>

Moltmann fails to employ the Communication of Idioms to the detriment of his theology. It ultimately produces nonsense. The proposition 'God died' is a logical contradiction. The communication of Idioms was heavily criticised by Schleiermacher in his work *The Christian Faith*. Schleiermacher influenced Moltmann strongly and it is interesting to see Moltmann's apparent abandonment of the patristic and Reformed method of the Communication of Idioms. This method allows us to understand the biblical data but stops us from saying that God died or that God suffered. The Communication of Idioms allows us to hold the biblical tension without falling into error, heresy, or contradiction.

We are now in a position to ask precisely what happened when Christ died on the cross. As we search the depths of God's salvation plan and seek answers to these deep mysteries we must always proceed with the greatest reverence and awe. Our God is a consuming fire. We must never allow our pride and arrogance to damage our worship and adoration of our triune God as we do theology.

When a human being dies, we know from God's word that death is penal, it is the punishment for sin. When a human dies their soul and their body are separated. 'Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it' (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Human death is the separation of the soul and the body. At death the body becomes a lifeless corpse, awaiting the resurrection of the dead.

Death is the penalty for sin, and we know that God ‘made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf’ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ died on the cross because as the substitute for the elect, Christ took our sin upon his body and bore the punishment that we deserve. Christ died on the cross. Therefore, at Christ’s death, His human soul and His human body were separated. His human body became a corpse that was buried. However we have seen that whatever is said of Christ’s divine nature or Christ’s human nature is true of Christ’s person. This means that while Christ’s human body and soul were separated, each remained united to the person of God the Son. We can meaningfully say that the person of God the Son suffered as a man and died as a man. Moltmann, and many contemporary theologians and preachers have abandoned the Communication of Idioms and this results in meaningless statements of the death of Christ.

What about the fourth word from the cross. Christ’s cry of dereliction? Can the Communication of Idioms help us understand this in a way that is faithful to God’s word but that does not lead us into error?

God is ‘of purer eyes than to behold evil’ (Habakkuk 1:13). At the cross Jesus Christ the one who knew no sin, became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Because of this, in some unfathomable sense, the Father could not countenance the crucified sin bearer. However, in 2 Corinthians 5:19 we read: ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.’ It was as man that the person of God the Son bore the sins of the elect and suffered and died. This is why the Scriptures say ‘He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed’ (1 Peter 2:24).

At this point it is helpful to draw another distinction from the Church fathers that Calvin employed. That is the distinction between the essence of Christ and the person of Christ. This parallels the different roles of the persons of the Godhead and their complete unity. In the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have different roles. Only the Son became incarnate, the Father and the Holy Spirit are not incarnate. But Calvin reminds us that the essence of God is one. The essence of all three persons is unbegotten, eternal, holy. This means that all three persons are equally eternal God. But concerning the persons we must speak of the Father as unbegotten and the Son as begotten and the Son as incarnate and as man suffering and dying at Golgotha. Yet through the hours of darkness, in Christ’s suffering and death he remains eternally God, upholding the Universe by the power of His word. Christ remained constantly one with the Father and the Holy Spirit as one in essence, one God in three persons from everlasting to everlasting.

#### **IV. God the Son as Man was Forsaken and Died at Golgotha: Genuine Hope**

Many statements of the death of Christ are true, but must be carefully qualified. And without the qualification they may become false and meaningless.

Did God die at the cross? Yes and no. No because God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God cannot die. But yes because the person who is God the Son as man died at the cross.

Did God the Son die at the cross? Yes and no. No because God cannot die, but yes because the person who is God the Son became man and died as man.

It is only this Catholic and Reformed understanding of the death of Christ that can give us genuine hope in the face of suffering. Moltmann argues that proclaiming the crucified God can truly give hope in a world of injustice and misery, but Moltmann's theology removes the distinction between creator and creation. In doing this, the Godhead is reduced to the level of creation and the death of Christ is emptied of its power.

Imagine learning that you have a terminal illness. You go to hospital for treatment and you look to the doctor for comfort. The doctor lies down in the bed next to you and says 'don't worry, I've got the same thing.' A God who suffers is not what we need. We need a God to save us, to take away our sin and conquer death and take us to Himself for eternity. We need a God who knows what it is to suffer and die not as God but as man.

#### **Conclusion**

We began by imagining how a three dimensional sphere moving through a two dimensional plane would be perceived by two dimensional inhabitants of the two dimensional plane. We compared this with the mystery of the incarnation, As we have explored these theological questions we have seen that our finite minds are unable fully to comprehend the mystery of the incarnation, but we are told enough in Scripture to know that it is free from contradictions. The understanding of the incarnation and passion of Christ in Reformed theology is biblical and coherent.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

## Further Reading

The best contemporary overview of the doctrine of the Trinity is: Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004).

For an exegetical and theological discussion of the fourth word I recommend: Ed. Stephen Clark, *The Forgotten Christ: Exploring the Majesty and Mystery of God Incarnate* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007).

We have focused on the impassibility of God only in relation to the Cross, however a useful work on this topic in general is: Rob Lister, *God is Impassible and Impassioned* (Nottingham: IVP, 2012).

I have found the most helpful work on this specific subject to be: Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000). This work deals excellently with the impassibility of God in terms of Old Testament texts that are often argued to imply divine possibility. It also grounds its arguments in patristic and Reformed theology.

## Endnotes

- 1 The impassibility of God will be defined in section II. It is important to distinguish the doctrine that God cannot suffer (impassible) from the biblical truth that God is impassioned: possessing divine emotions. The Reformed doctrine of God holds that the Triune God is impassible and impassioned.
- 2 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Croyden: SCM Press, 2001). First German edition published 1972.
- 3 Ed. Stephen Clark, *The Forgotten Christ: Exploring the Majesty and Mystery of God Incarnate* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007), 115.
- 4 Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord* (England: Bloomsbury, 2004), 175. I am indebted to Paul Wells for drawing my attention to many of these subtleties.
- 5 Moltmann, *Crucified*, 273.
- 6 *Ibid.* 274.
- 7 John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1986), 149–156.
- 8 Questioning the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility, Macleod asserts that in some sense the Father suffers in the cross of Christ. He connects this assertion with theological developments since the Second World War. He also states: ‘God was forsaken by God.’ Donald Macleod, *Christ Crucified* (Nottingham: IVP, 2014), 50, 96.
- 9 By catholic I do not mean Roman Catholic, I instead intend to emphasise the universal and historical nature of the Church of Christ.
- 10 Herman Bavinck, *Dogmatic Theology Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 298.
- 11 Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, November 20, 1847.
- 12 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 80.
- 13 Herman Bavinck, *Dogmatic Theology God and Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 306.
- 14 I am grateful to Mark Thomas for helping me appreciate the complexities of the Communication of Idioms.

# A Suffolk Worthy: Cornelius Elven 1797–1873

## Bob Cotton

East Anglia has over the years produced numerous prominent theologians and preachers to serve the Church of God and to be a worldwide influence for the gospel. John Owen (Coggeshall), Charles Bridges (Stowmarket), J.C. Ryle (Stradbroke), Charles Simeon (Cambridge), C.H. Spurgeon and many more. The Lord has, in His wisdom given this insignificant part of the nation men of note, making a huge contribution to our Evangelical heritage and to social change generally.

Such a man was pastor Cornelius Elven of Bury St Edmunds, impacting upon town and country, whose influence remains to this day.

A brief outline of this man's life and ministry will be an inadequate tribute to a forgotten Giant of the Faith.

What calibre of man is it, who could take a church from a meagre membership of 40 to over 600 early in his untrained ministry and then hold such a large congregation together for the 50 year duration of his pastoral life? During this period he baptized 1,500 new converts, sent over 30 young men into the ministry, founded 9 mission preaching stations, 5 of which remain strong to this day.

Elven was born into a working class family in Bury St Edmunds in 1797 and educated locally. The headmaster of his school was a certain Charles Bloomfield, the father of Bishop of London, Bishop Bloomfield—a well-known name in Suffolk. The poet Robert Bloomfield (1766–1823) lived in a village approximately ten miles from Bury. He is well known for his poems *The Farmer's Boy* and *The Fakenham Ghost*.

Upon leaving school Cornelius took leather cutting for his trade. He worked locally and eventually ran his own business.

He was an earnest young man and very early in life was impressed by the preaching of the gospel whilst attending the Congregational Chapel, Whiting Street, Bury St Edmunds. The minister at that time was Rev. Charles Dewhurst, a fine expositor and evangelist. The congregation at Whiting Street grew rapidly under his ministry and the chapel had to be rebuilt to accommodate the growing numbers attending. It appears that revival blessing had come to this fellowship and seems that Cornelius came to faith in Christ during this period. However, although he had been brought up to respect pædobaptist beliefs, through his own independent study he became convinced of believers' baptism by immersion and began to attend the Baptist church, at that time in Lower Baxter Street.

Within a year of his baptism and acceptance into membership, Elven was inducted to the pastorate of the church in 1823, having been the trainee assistant for merely a few months.

For the first 18 years of his ministry, Elven continued his business and trade of leather cutting in order to support his family. He was by this time married and had children but most careful not to drain the financial resources of the fellowship. This is reminiscent of the words of William Carey: 'I am a minister of the gospel and I mend shoes to earn a living.'

Baxter Street Chapel very soon proved too small to contain all the new converts and in September 1833 a plot of land was acquired in Garland Street and purchased for £200 out of Elven's own pocket. The chapel was built for £1,000, with a capacity for 1,200 people. All the workmen were invited to attend the opening in May 1834, which was quite an informal event without public ostentation. The membership of 259 rose to 300 within a few weeks.

Not only did the Baptist preacher become noteworthy in the town but also in the surrounding villages, for which he had great affection. It is in respect of his interest in the village causes and their pastors that he is best remembered and here we see the link and very strong friendship which he had with C.H. Spurgeon.

Elven was one of the first ministers to take the young preacher by the hand and went to preach for Spurgeon at his anniversary services when the young prince of preachers was still in his teens and pastoring his first church at Waterbeach, 25 miles from Bury St Edmunds. Spurgeon recollects that day in 1852. He writes:

'we met at the station, and our guest alighted from a 3rd class carriage, which he had chosen in order to put the friends at Waterbeach to the least possible expense for travelling. His bulk was a stupendous 22 stone and one soon saw that his heart was as large as his body. He gave us much sage and holy advice that day' recalls the young preacher 'his ministry came to me with much the same weight as the apostle Paul's to young Timothy. His sermons were very homely and pre-eminently practical.'

Mr Elven himself liked to tell the story of this visit to Waterbeach. In his diary that evening he wrote:

'have preached today at Waterbeach for CHS—he is a rising star. He will one day make his mark upon our denomination.'

Years later Mr Elven used to say: 'that day I preached for Mr Spurgeon and he gave out the hymns for me. I should be very glad to give out the hymns for him, if he would preach for me.'

The old minister's wish was realised. The great preacher now at Metropolitan Tabernacle stood in Elven's pulpit to expound the truths that both men had come to embrace and love and had brought them together.

Elven's prophecy of the rising star had been abundantly fulfilled in his own lifetime

Cornelius Elven lived a long and useful life to the glory of God and extension of the Saviour's kingdom. He was unashamedly a Calvinist and concurrently an evangelist. To him the two were indissoluble. He was a man of uncompromising character with his eye firmly fixed on the cross and substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. Toward the end of his life, when lying very ill for weeks, he remarked to a friend: 'My religion ends where it began, at the cross of Christ.'

This Suffolk giant of the faith passed into the presence of the Lord on Lord's Day morning of August 10th 1873, aged 77 years. He left behind many memories and many spiritual children—hundreds of souls saved by the Lord through Elven's spirit anointed ministry. In his own words: 'The crown shall be my Saviour's.'

May God grant to us men of today the same godliness and holy zeal. May He be pleased to raise up more East Anglians, young men of like spiritual calibre to serve, to preach and to pastor our needy churches and to plant new ones to His glory.

One of Elven's hymns found in the Methodist hymn book, and now also in *Christian Hymns* is: 'With broken heart and contrite sigh'—based on Psalm 34:18. Elven wrote this hymn for some special evangelistic meetings being held at his church in Bury St Edmunds, 1852.

This is a hymn in which the shameful, trembling sinner, realising that his good works avail nothing, pleads for mercy from an awesome God. In the last verse there is a realisation that in the end God will be merciful to all who believe and receive the Saviour.

- With broken heart and contrite sigh,  
 A trembling sinner, Lord, I cry;  
 Thy pard'ning grace is rich and free:  
 O God, be merciful to me!
- 2 I smite upon my troubled breast,  
 With deep and conscious guilt oppressed;  
 Christ and His cross my only plea:  
 O God, be merciful to me!
- 3 Far off I stand with tearful eyes,  
 Nor dare uplift them to the skies;  
 But Thou dost all my anguish see,  
 O God, be merciful to me!
- 4 With alms, or deeds that I have done,  
 Not one sin's pardon can be won;



To Calvary alone I flee;  
    O God, be merciful to me!

5 And when redeemed from sin and hell,  
    With all the ransomed throng I dwell,  
My raptured song shall ever be,  
    God has been merciful to me!

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