

# The Fraternal

---

January 1986

Vol. 213

---

## CONTENTS

<b>The Power of the Cross</b> .....	<b>3</b>
by Donald M. McKenzie, M.A., B.D. Minister, Fuller Baptist Church, Kettering.	
<b>The Ascension of Jesus Christ</b> .....	<b>8</b>
by Brian K. Donne, M.A., Minister, Trowbridge Baptist Church.	
<b>The Ascension — Its Blessings, Benefits and Challenges</b> .....	<b>18</b>
by Bill Mumby, Minister, Old Lodge Lane Baptist Church, Purley.	
<b>Bereavement, Separation and Resurrection</b> .....	<b>22</b>
by the Patrick Goodland, M.B.E. Minister, Gorsley Baptist Church.	
<b>Book Reviews</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Holidays 1986</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Of Interest to You</b> .....	<b>30</b>

Membership is open to Baptist Ministers, Missionaries  
and Theological Students in Great Britain and Overseas.  
Subscription: £5.00 per annum (or equivalent)  
Due January

# The Power of the Cross

In what does the power of the cross reside? This article has a modest purpose. It is to review in simple terms at passiontide the elements that give the cross its power to reassure and to redeem.

1. The love and grace of God. The cross conveys the love of God. Grace overflows here. At the cross we discover the great love wherewith God loves us.

Few however, will contend that the sole purpose of the cross is to display the love of God so as to awaken a responsive love in us. The old moral-influence theory is logically suspect. "The obvious criticism which has been constantly levelled against Abelard's doctrine is that he gives no clear indication of why the incarnate life and the heroic suffering of the Christ were such overwhelming demonstrations of love."<sup>(1)</sup> It is difficult to see why we should say that the death of Jesus proves God's love unless we can show that this death accomplished something vital in our interest. But this involves us in some further theory about the cross.

Nonetheless the power of the cross is in large measure the pledge and gift it offers of the love that will not let us go. The Bible links together the love and the cross.<sup>(2)</sup> We find here the love that has gone to all lengths to save us.

Around the concepts of 'love' and 'grace' problems gather.

Certain theories of atonement, some will affirm, threaten the very nature of 'love' and 'grace'. Atonement theories often include the thought that Christ accepted in our place the condemnation justly passed by God on our sins. This, in the opinion of some, calls in question the character of love and grace. If we are saved because the requirements of justice have been met, this will be the ground of our forgiveness, not grace. "Can we believe that God's grace needed to wait until a sacrifice should be offered? If so was it pure grace? Or that his forgiveness of us was dependent upon someone's paying the debt we owed? If so can it be truly called forgiveness?"<sup>(3)</sup>

Some in any case are troubled by atonement theories that assume a code of moral requirements to which God himself seems bound to conform. "How can God be constrained by necessities which he himself imposed?"<sup>(4)</sup> Love and grace are surely free and unbounded.

There is of course on the other hand the reverse problem. If some kinds of moral earnestness seem to pose a threat to 'love' and 'grace', 'love' and 'grace' may equally seem to threaten moral earnestness.

The love of God is not indulgent benevolence, theologians have declared, simply passing over our sins as if they were not there. D. M. Baillie drew attention to the candour of love. It is with those who we love that we are most severe. We may ignore the faults of mere acquaintances in order to preserve a casual relationship. But genuine love for another will care too deeply to do this. Baillie quotes with approval "the love of God is without mercy" and "nothing is inexorable but love".<sup>(5)</sup> Reflections of this kind leave room for a decisive act of love on the cross which deals with the guilt of sin and the power of evil.

In all atonement theories the love of God at the cross is the common factor. "Herein is love!"

Those of us who were brought up on "The Mediator" will well remember the stress placed there on the love of God.

Brunner softened the problem, already mentioned, of absolute moral necessities to which even God seems subject. He traced the dual character of God's dealings with us in love and judgement to their source in personal aspects of His nature, namely his wrath and his love.

'Wrath' is God's reaction to sin; a reaction not unaffected by his love for sinners. Love is God's true nature. But corresponding with the reality of sin there is the reality of wrath. It is only at the cross that all is revealed when "we perceive the God of mercy at the place of horror." Wrath is genuine at the cross. But "the divine love 'breaks through' wrath." "Hence this is the meaning of the cross; the reality of wrath (which is yet in some way a subordinate reality) and the far more overwhelming reality of the love of God."<sup>(6)</sup>

2. The triumph over evil. In the closing paragraphs of his influential book, 'Christus Victor', Gustaf Aulen expressed this conviction.

"For my own part I am persuaded that no form of Christian teaching has any future before it, except such as can keep steadily in view the reality of the evil in the world, and go to meet the evil with a battle-song of triumph."<sup>(7)</sup>

It is no problem for us today to keep steadily in view the evil in the world. Evil is too plainly present, not only in the inner world of mind and will, but also in the public world of social structure and political action. Our problem is to meet the evil with a song of triumph, a song that emanates from the cross!

What is the nature of Christ's victory on the cross, contributing to its power? Is it literally a triumph over malevolent spiritual powers as Aulen affirms – and the Bible!<sup>(8)</sup>

Many find it easy to believe quite literally today in demonic forces. Others find a dualism of this kind more difficult to accept. Thus while John Macquarrie favours the Christus Victor view of the atonement ("it seems to me to offer the most promising basis for a contemporary statement of the work of Christ."<sup>(9)</sup>), he feels it necessary nonetheless to demythologise its supernatural elements. "Principalities and powers" then become "the idols that enslave us". By the latter Macquarrie means (in the language of Tillich) less than ultimate matters that have become for us nonetheless matters of ultimate concern. Jesus Christ liberates us by being in bondage to none of these. "The signal climax by which his work completes itself" is his self-giving on the cross. Even self, for Jesus, has ceased to be a matter of ultimate concern. Only "the Father's Authority" is that to Him. "One's own self is the last idol, and to give oneself unreservedly is indeed . . . to have vanquished the last demon."<sup>(10)</sup>

In this way, a contemporary theologian interprets the cross in terms of a triumph over evil. One thing seems missing. It ends with a victory individual and personal in character. One of the virtues of the classical theory on the other hand was that it gave to the victory of the cross a cosmic setting. Larger matters than man's personal redemption were at stake there.

This is the vital thing which the biblical references to Christ's triumph over principalities and powers invite us to believe. The spiritual balance has shifted. Some decisive D Day has arrived even if the final V Day is awaited. However you account for it, the power of evil is broken.

In his classroom, James S. Stewart used to cite by way of illustration the war-time episode of the Jarvis Bay. The little ship was guarding a convoy on the sea-route to Russia. Suddenly a vastly superior German cruiser arrived on the scene. Outgunned and outmanned, the Jarvis Bay adopted the one course of action open to it. The captain headed his little ship straight for the enemy and rammed her. It was suicide, but the convoy was saved. Christ closed with the enemy at the cross. Suicide in a sense. But the long convoy of humanity has been in safe waters, did she but know it, ever since.

3. The Incarnation and the Life of Jesus. The incarnation is a presupposition of the atonement, and theories of the atonement that have no place in them for the incarnation must be weighed carefully.

Let it be admitted that the Christus Victor theory has itself been challenged on this score. "The battle takes place over man's head . . . The theory does not attach any essential significance to the humanity of Christ. Since the powers of evil are of more than human stature, it is only more than human power that can overcome them. Christ is indeed the champion of men, but essentially the divine champion. There seems to be no necessity for the incarnation."<sup>(11)</sup>

This latter charge cannot be laid at the door of those atonement theories that stress the representative work done on man's behalf by Christ. Substitutionary, vicarious atonement is perhaps the doctrine with which most Baptists feel at home, and biblical support for it is scarcely hard to find.

In the various views of vicarious atonement, something saving is done by man towards God. Reparation is made. Satisfaction is given. Man may pay off his debt of honour (Anselm), or humbly accept God's judgements on his sin (Calvin) or offer to God a fitting and perfect repentance (McLeod Campbell). Needless to say, fallen man himself is quite unable to do any of these reconciling things. It is the One who in his incarnation takes man's nature and his part who accomplishes all.

There are problems to face and warnings to heed in such thinking.

We are familiar with the warning against dividing the Trinity. We must not imply that an angry Father is placated by a loving Son. Whatever happened on the cross was the loving work of Father and Son. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." (2 Cor. 5:19) "God has not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by Our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us." (1 Thess. 5:9,10)

Does this mean that there is no place for propitiation, only expiation?<sup>(12)</sup> And there is the question already noted as to whether any quasi-feudal or juridical transaction at the cross will preserve the full quality of grace and forgiveness.

Karl Barth has given a powerfully incarnational exposition of Christ's work.<sup>(13)</sup> He relates the latter both to the 'nature' and 'state' of man.

The incarnation has an ontological concern. It is not simply to make reparation to a just God that the Son of God assumes our humanity. The humanity itself must be saved. Christ takes over our sinful existence; he bears total responsibility for it. He takes it to its bitter destiny of death and God-forsakenness. Not simply to satisfy the demands of divine justice. But to rid us, through judgement and death, from this 'body of sin'. The cross of course is not the end of the story. In his resurrection, Christ provides us with a new life before God.

The incarnation also relates to the 'state' of man's existence. In Philippians 2, the incarnation is a double thrust of grace, 'downwards' and 'upwards'. There is on the one hand the condescension of the Son of God in making himself nothing,

in stooping to assume the nature of a slave and in humbling himself to die on a cross. But there is also the exaltation of Jesus whom God has highly exalted and given the name above every name.

Through the humiliation of God's Son, we share in the exaltation of the man Jesus, who is one with us. There is no mistaking the importance of the incarnation to this explanation of the efficacy of the cross.

Another consideration adds weight to the power of the cross over us. This is the human life of Jesus, the course his ministry follows.

Some theologians like Pannenberg decline to evaluate the death of Christ from the standpoint of the incarnation and some transcendent purpose inherent therein. The death of Jesus has, for Pannenberg, the character of fate rather than destiny.

It is in the public ministry therefore, seen in the light shed by the resurrection rather than by the incarnation, that Pannenberg finds his clues both to the reason for Christ's death and its saving results. For Pannenberg, the open sesame is, on both these counts, Christ's conflict with the Law (cf. Gal. 3:13).<sup>(14)</sup>

It is hard to imagine how the cross of Christ would exercise much hold over us if there were no correspondence between the life and the death of Jesus. Yet sometimes in our preaching we isolate the cross. We present the death of Jesus as if it were divorced from the life that preceded it. An older theologian protested against a presentation of the cross we probably recognise. He wrote, "It was not that God stretched his hand from the sky, seized the mass of human iniquity, transferred it to Jesus by capricious fiat, then chastised him for it."<sup>(15)</sup>

Prior to the cross there is the life of loving identification. Jesus shares our physical growth from infancy to manhood. In the carpenter's shop he shares our working life. As he travels in his public ministry, he reaches out in saving compassion to the sinners and the outcasts, to the diseased and the possessed. In Schillebeeckx's charming phrase, "Jesus' dealings with people liberate them and make them glad."<sup>(16)</sup>

All that is the prelude to the cross. And to all that, the death of Jesus corresponds.

4. The Trinity. Up to this point we have thought of the cross as our means of salvation, as soteriology in other words.

One important modern contribution to our understanding of the cross, Jurgen Moltmann's book 'The Crucified God', treats the death of Christ as "a statement about God"; in other words as theology. "What does the cross of Jesus mean for God himself?" Moltmann asks and expresses the desire to develop a theology "within earshot of the dying cry of Jesus."<sup>(17)</sup>

Moltmann voices the fear, in an early chapter, that our traditional soteriological explanations of the cross serve to reduce its intrinsically harsh reality. Do we make the cross palatable by the good purposes we attribute to it? Do we resemble the Rosicrucians who adorned the cross with flowers? Moltmann's first words are these. "The cross is not and cannot be loved."<sup>(18)</sup> He wishes us to see its stark and raw reality and to stand aghast at the horror of the crucified God.

Because we generally make soteriology our starting-point, we tend to regard the cross as God's death for us. Moltmann, beginning with theology, regards it as our death in God.

In order to ground the cross in the life of God, Moltmann takes a strictly Trinitarian view of God. Indeed he suggests that Trinitarian belief begins at the cross. The cross is an event in the life of God. It is therefore “an event within the Trinity”, “an event between God and God”.<sup>(19)</sup> By this Moltmann does not mean that the cross is anything other than an earthly happening. But this earthly happening decisively affects the life of God.

If we ask in what sense this is so, Moltmann begins, by way of answer, with the cry of forsakenness that Mark records and the concept of ‘giving up to death’ which Paul employs. The Father does not spare the Son but ‘gives him up for us all’ (Rom. 8:31f). Similarly, in a unity of will with the Father, the Son has ‘loved me and given himself up for me’ (Gal. 2:20). This ‘giving up to death’ by Father and Son is the source of our salvation. “Because God ‘does not spare’ his Son all the godless are spared. Though they are godless, they are not godforsaken precisely because God has abandoned his own Son and has delivered him up for them.”<sup>(20)</sup> But in this saving death the Trinity is decisively implicated.

The death and abandonment of the Son, Moltmann argues, cannot leave the Father unscathed. The Father does not suffer or die in any patipassian sense. But “he suffers the death of the Son in the infinite grief of love.” “The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father.”<sup>(21)</sup>

All this is clearly believers’ country. We are far removed from the world of public knowledge and empirical verification. These are insights offered to faith.

Moltmann’s thesis is that the death for sinners, which is our death, is an element within the life of the Trinity. It is difficult to imagine a more secure ground for our salvation than the life of God. Moltmann writes, “Only if all disaster, forsakenness by God, absolute death, the infinite curse of damnation and sinking into nothingness is in God himself, is community with this God eternal salvation, infinite joy, indestructible election and divine life.”<sup>(22)</sup>

5. Subjective or Objective? How much or how little any Christian believes of our theorising about the cross will vary greatly. To entertain objective certainties at all will prove difficult to some. Our words about the death of Christ can appear relative to the age and the culture that produces them, pictorial in kind and highly conjectural, beyond reasonable proof. For some only the subjective cross remains, the sense of personal release or the conviction that alternative possibilities exist for us and for the world.

Although one’s own inclination is to welcome the objective, the subjective response is important also.

John Bunyan’s pilgrim lost his burden at the cross. He gave three leaps for joy and burst out singing. We know very little about the atonement or the power of the cross without the three great leaps for joy and the spontaneous song of the redeemed.

**D.M. McKenzie**

## References

1. F. W. Dillistone – The Christian Understanding of Atonement – Nisbet – 1968 – p.327
2. John 3:16, Rom. 5:8, Rom. 8:32, 1 John 4:9,10.
3. John Knox – The Death of Christ – Fontana – 1967 – p.126
4. Don Cupitt – Crisis of Moral Authority – Lutterworth – 1972 – p.27.
5. D. M. Baillie – "God was in Christ – Faber – 1961 – p.173.
6. E. Brunner – The Mediator – Lutterworth – 1934 – p.520.
7. Gustaf Aulen – Christus Victor – S.P.C.K. – 1931 – p.176.
8. 1 John 3:8, John 12:31,32, Heb. 2:14,15, Col. 2:15.
9. John Macquarrie – Principles of Christian Theology – S.C.M. 1966 – p.317.
10. Ibid – p.319.
11. G.S. Hendry – The Gospel of the Incarnation – S.C.M. 1959 – p.123.
12. cf. Leon Morris's discussion of propitiation in The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross – Tyndale Press 1960 – p.184.
13. Karl Barth – Church Dogmatics – The Doctrine of Reconciliation Vol. I – T. & T. Clark.
14. W. Pannenberg – Jesus – God and Man – S.C.M. 1968 – Part 2, chapter 7.
15. H. R. Mackintosh – The Christian Experience of Forgiveness – Fontana 1961 – p.179.
16. E. Schillebeeckx – Jesus – Collins 1979 – p.200.
17. J. Moltmann – The Crucified God – S.C.M. 1974 – p.201.
18. Ibid – p.1.
19. Ibid – p.249.
20. Ibid – p.242.
21. Ibid – p.243.
22. Ibid – p.246.

## The Ascension of Jesus Christ

Heinrich Paulus, professor at Heidelberg from 1811- 1851 has a truly extraordinary interpretation of the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus Christ which one imagines not even the most liberal theologian would be prepared to consider seriously today. For him, the Resurrection was nothing more than a resuscitation, with the loud cry heard from the Cross just before Jesus was thought to have died, showing how much strength he really had left. When he was removed from the Cross, he was only in a death-like trance, and the coolness of the tomb, the spices with which Joseph of Arimathea embalmed him, all worked to bring Jesus out of this trance. He exchanged the grave-clothes for those of the gardener (one wonders what the gardener made of this when arriving for the day's work to discover a shroud instead of overalls or whatever was worn in those days!), and so it was that Mary Magdalene mistook him. Jesus summoned what strength he had left to meet his disciples during the forty days when he tried to recuperate, but then, realising that death was near, and with a cloud on a mountain where he and his disciples were, provided him with a chance to make a grand exit. So he walked away from them into the cloud, and then went off somewhere and died. But the disciples believed that he had ascended into heaven! <sup>1</sup>

Of course, we smile at such ingenuity of interpretation, but Heinrich Paulus does nevertheless have one merit to commend him, since he is prepared to accept that there was a distinction between the Resurrection and the Ascension, with a forty days interval separating the two events. It was in 1892 that the German scholar, Adolf von Harnack concluded

THE  
**BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY**  
IS YOUR AGENCY  
FOR PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL OVERSEAS

IT COUNTS ON YOUR SUPPORT

In prayer  
In giving  
In promotion

IT IS READY TO HELP WITH THE MISSIONARY  
EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN YOUR CHURCH

Write to: Rev R.G.S. Harvey  
93 Gloucester Place, London W1H 4AA

AVAILABLE FROM  
**BAPTIST PUBLICATIONS**

**Baptist Church House  
4 Southampton Row  
London WC1B 4AB**

A Leading Question	By Paul Fiddes	£1.50
Turning the Tide	P. Beasley-Murray/A. Wilkinson	£2.25
A Call to Mind	Essays	£1.25
A Patriotism For Today	K. Clements	£4.95
Sunset on Calvary	A. Hodge	£2.00
To Be A Pilgrim	W.M.S. West	£4.95
The Small Church Workbook		50p.
The Lay Pastor's Workbook		50p.
Leaflets:	Discovering the Gifts of Church Members	12p
	Little Less Than God	80p.
	Six Studies in Biblical Stewardship	

*Orders over £8 post free.  
Send for our complete list.*



that the Ascension was undifferentiated from the Resurrection, and said that to give the former any prominence at all was to be guilty of a deviation from the original Gospel! So popular were Harnack's views that within a year, his publication had run into twenty five editions, including an English translation the following year.<sup>2</sup> Although Harnack's 'solution' was met with a spirited scriptural challenge by the Cambridge theologian, Professor H.B. Swete in 1894<sup>3</sup> and subsequently in the first decade of the present century, it would be true to say that Harnack's views have very largely influenced thinking on the Ascension for the greater part of this century as can be seen by the paucity of literature on the subject.

This article seeks to deal summarily with what has been written more fully elsewhere, considering first the historical basis of the Ascension, followed by the theological implications, and finally its relevance for today.<sup>4</sup>

The Scriptures declare that Jesus of Nazareth, incarnate, crucified, buried and raised again the third day, was seen by many witnesses, and the aliveness of his presence is an evident feature of the New Testament. Moreover, however much his body was transformed and glorified, there must have come a time when the Risen Lord ceased to be seen by the disciples, and when they themselves knew that it was the last time even though they were aware of his continuing, unseen presence with them in another form.

If the Gospel of Luke were the sole narrative of the Ascension, we would conclude that it occurred on the evening of Easter Day since 'Mark' 16:19 (the longer ending of the first Gospel to have been written), together with John 20:17, Acts 1:2 and 9-11, all assume this to be the case. But supposing this were so, it would still mean that there were two events, separated by a matter of hours instead of forty days as Acts 1:3 clearly states. The apparent difference raises a number of problems which can only be looked at briefly, chief of which is to enquire why the Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles by the same author, Luke, appear to differ in the time interval. There are two explanations generally given, namely (a) that Luke received information between the writing of the Gospel and the Acts, and did not make the necessary correction to the former, or (b) that the purpose of the Gospel and the Acts is different, since the first is doxological with Christ as a 'Blessing Priest', and the second as being historical and ecclesiastical and leading into the future with the expansion of the Church. It does need to be noted that the omission of the words "and was carried up into heaven" as well as "they worshipped him" (Luke 24:51-52) occurs only in one Greek MS and the Western Text, leaving us with no explanation of the disciples' joy, whereas the full text read with the vast preponderance of authorities, tell of the final parting of the Lord at Bethany as he returned to the Father. Recent versions of the Bible, e.g. N.I.V., G.N.B., and the Living Bible, all include the full text which is most encouraging! Further, it is important to note that the 'staying with them' has the alternative rendering 'eating with them' (Acts 1:3) as being generally preferred, and this would give added support to his "eating and drinking with them after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:31). There are no textual grounds whatever for excising the reference to the

forty days in Acts 1:3, and both Professors B.M. Metzger and C.F.D. Moule,<sup>5</sup> and others as well, have shown how this period fits the time between Passover and Pentecost when the Lord was present with them until his finally taking leave of them. Indeed, to attempt to delete the forty days creates more problems than it seeks to solve.

For the vast majority, the problem of the manner of our Lord's departure is greater than the length of the interval between his Resurrection and Ascension. In a post-Copernican age, and with our ever increasing understanding of the universe, how are we to think of the Ascension today? Taking into account that the Risen Lord was no longer subject to the limitations of space and time in his transformed and glorified body, he was still nevertheless recognisable, tangible, and personally communicated with those whom he met, speaking about the things relating to the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). When that period of time came to an end, we are faced with the fact that his going had to be portrayed in a manner understandable to those who witnessed his departure, and that an ascension upwards would convey the necessary impression. As Metzger says, "The Ascension of Jesus follows necessarily as part of the logic of his bodily resurrection",<sup>6</sup> for it was "as they were looking on" (Acts 1:9), with the cloud symbolising the Shekinah glory of the presence of God, that showed it to be 'not a fog cloud hiding a mystery, but a royal chariot showing the reality of the disappearance of Christ'.<sup>7</sup> There are of course, many similarities between the Ascension and the earlier Transfiguration where the cloud was also present, but it does not seem to me any easier to accept the idea that, whereas at the Transfiguration, Jesus entered the cloud of the divine presence, but did not remain there, while at the Ascension, he again entered the cloud to abide forever with the Father,<sup>8</sup> and was therefore, seen no more. Since an upward movement would indicate 'exaltation' far more than a disappearance on top of a mountain into space, it would seem preferable to accept the Lukan account as it stands, in spite of our difficulties of interpretation today. As Professor F.F. Bruce says, "We need not be alarmed by the ascension story being bound up with a pre-Copernican conception of the universe, and that therefore, it is obsolete. Anyone appearing to leave the earth's surface must appear to spectators to be ascending, and so, when the cloud enveloped the visible form of the Lord, his disciples stood 'looking steadfastly into heaven as he went'".<sup>9</sup>

Space prevents our examining in detail the rest of the New Testament, except to say there is a clear distinction between the verbs 'rise' and 'ascend', the former referring to a recall back from death to life, whereas the latter, without exception, even in secular usage, always means a rising upwards to another level. Moreover, as Cullmann tells us, the fact that Psalm 110:1, "The Lord says to my lord, Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool", is cited more than any other Old Testament passage, often being repeated without direct reference,<sup>10</sup> shows how the emphasis is found upon the Exaltation of Christ as distinct from his being raised and seen in this world. It would indeed, be going beyond the evidence to attach the same historical importance to the event as Luke does, (or for that matter 'Mark' 16:19, though this in itself does give proof of a first century

belief in the Ascension), but it is clear that in the New Testament as a whole, a definite distinction is made between the two events — “it is indeed one thing to say that Christ is risen, meaning that death and corruption no longer hold him: it is another thing to say that he has ascended, meaning that he is not only alive but sovereign”.<sup>11</sup>

### **Theological Implications of the Ascension**

The truths enshrined in the Ascension far outweigh questions concerning either the length of the interval between the Resurrection and the Ascension, or the manner of the Lord's departure from the disciples for the last time. Already we have noted that the Ascension indicates the Exaltation of Christ, and since it is from this standpoint that the whole of the New Testament was written, its importance cannot be overestimated. In the Coronation Psalms, 24, 47, 68, 110, 118, the New Testament authors saw a prediction fulfilled in the Exaltation of Christ since these Psalms sung at the Autumnal Festival of the Jewish New Year celebrated the enthronement of Yahweh as the universal King, and at his Ascension, Christ is enthroned as Lord and King forever, Christians rightly believe in the ultimate reign of Christ universally because of his present reign as the Ascended One, anticipating the day of his open victory. It is a status afforded him, implying dignity and honour since he is seated at the right hand of the Father. As Karl Barth points out, the past tense is used of all other actions of Christ, but the present tense is used of his position now ‘He sits’.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, while fully recognising that the phrase ‘the right hand of God’ is metaphorical language for divine omnipotence and omnipresence, reigning with full authority as Lord and King, such symbolical language avoids the two extremes of being naively literalistic or of falling into vagueness whereby the figure of the Glorified and Exalted Lord ceases to be portrayed as personal.

The Ascended Lord is King exalted at the Father's right hand, and is at the same time the “eldest among a large family of brothers” (Roman 8:29 NEB). His ascension means that he has taken our humanity, which he assumed at the Incarnation, to the very throne of the Godhead and there he wears it nevermore to lay it aside. He forever bears the stigmata, the glorified scars of our redemption, in eternal union with us as our Representative, for though he is Lord and King, he is still Man who always lives to make intercession for us. And though the Heavenly Intercession is found predominantly in the Letter to the Hebrews, it is nevertheless a fundamental idea in the whole of the New Testament, and its importance for early Christianity cannot be overstated.

Yet it has to be asked how we are to think of his Heavenly Intercession. As our Great High Priest, he continues forever, having offered himself once and for all, but his perpetual presence in the heavenlies on our behalf, is the standing guarantee of the acceptance of all who draw near unto God the Father through him. As Milligan shows so clearly, the intercessory life of the Ascended Lord in the eternal world is more than prayer since it is the total life of the Lord himself, entering into his people at every point of our life and circumstance on earth.<sup>13</sup> This is an emphasis which has been sadly lacking

**THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY P.L.C.  
4 SOUTHAMPTON ROW,  
LONDON, WC1B 4AB  
Telephone No: 01-405 4084**

**To the Readers of the Fraternal.**

Dear Friends,

**“X” is for Excesses**

This is the nearest I could get to “X” in my insurance alphabet.

Insurers apply excesses or “deductibles” to claims for a number of reasons. Excesses prevent very small claims being made and thus reduce administration costs. They are also applied as an alternative or in conjunction with higher premiums to offset greater than average risk. A risk can be brought nearer to normal from the insurer’s point of view if the Insurer is asked to contribute more to the cost of a claim.

Excesses are commonly applied to Burst Pipes, Storm and Malicious Damage claims. For risks other than private houses many insurers now apply £100 excesses. For standard Church risks, we have maintained £15.00 excesses for Storm and Burst Pipes and £10.00 for Malicious Damage. Claims experience has been deteriorating with severe weather during recent winters and widespread vandalism. However, even where we have been obliged to recognise higher than average risk because of locality or other features, the excesses we have applied have rarely reached the level which most other insurers regard as normal.

Yours sincerely,

**M.E. PURVER  
General Manager**

for some time and one which has contemporary relevance in every age. The Christ whom we worship is not only a Living and Reigning Lord, but One who continually concerns himself with the whole of human affairs and existence being no longer confined or restricted by limitations of space and time. "It is so real and falls so well within the range of Christian experience that every believer can test for himself the truth of our Lord's work in heaven ... communion with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit is not a theory or a dogma, but a fact of personal knowledge to which tens of thousands of living Christians can testify as the most certain of actualities":—<sup>14</sup>

'Though now ascended up on high,  
He bends on earth a brother's eye;  
Partaker of the human name,  
He knows the frailty of our frame'.<sup>15</sup>

The Ascended Christ mediates himself to his people on earth now through the Holy Spirit, the means of his continuing presence which he promised when he would be no longer endowed with a mortal existence in our world. To meet in his Name is to meet in his presence, for as the Acts of the Apostles shows, the Name is Luke's way of describing the presence of Christ among us now.<sup>16</sup>

The descent of the Holy Spirit is dependent upon the Exaltation of Jesus Christ (John 7:39), and though some have seen the words of the Risen Lord on Easter Day to the disciples in the evening, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22) as evidence that the Ascension had by then taken place, this is by no means necessarily the case. None of the other accounts of the Resurrection appearances tell of the giving of the Holy Spirit on Easter Day, and with Luke's claim to have narrated accurately events as they occurred (Luke 1:1-4), his account whereby the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, ten days after the Ascension, is much more likely to be historical.<sup>17</sup> In any case, to accept that the Resurrection, the appearances, the Ascension and Pentecost all took place in a single day would be impossible! It is also important to recognise that the creation of the Christian Church by the coming of the Spirit is therefore, accounted for by the Ascension as much as it is by the Resurrection, and that the existence of the Church is also proof of the Ascension as well as of the Resurrection. It gives testimony to the fact that Christ was raised from the dead, but did not remain on earth since he ascended into heaven, and the fellowship of believers who constitute the Body of Christ are those who "do believe Thy only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens ... also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell".<sup>18</sup>

When Christ ascended into the heavenlies as our Representative, the 'embodiment of the human race, he pioneered the way for us which means that the Ascension plays equally as an important part in the Christian Hope as does the Resurrection.<sup>19</sup> It is because of Christ's total obedience to the Father's Will that both his body and spirit were taken up by the re-creating power of God, and that in this one unique self-offering there is anticipated the ultimate ascension of all who are in Christ. As C.F.D. Moule expresses it, "the resurrection and the ascension of Christ are two moments in the

anticipation of the ultimate home-gathering of the whole people of God".<sup>20</sup> Both together are vitally important for our understanding and interpretation of the life hereafter for believers.

The Ascension marks the end of the Lord's stay on earth and the beginning of his universal reign which points forward to the open manifestation and confession of Christ as Lord of all at the end of history. His 'coming' (parousia) will be the unveiling of his already existing 'presence' (parousia), and the Exaltation of Jesus, as seen and interpreted by the Ascension, avoids an undue emphasis upon the present as though the End were of little or no significance on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it does not dismiss the present as being merely a waiting time for a future kingdom which is unrelated to the present dispensation. 'Now, not yet, present and to come' is the resounding theme of apostolic christianity and the kerygma of those who lived in the faith of the ever-present Lord and Saviour, Crucified, Risen, Ascended and Glorified, truly King, Priest and Prophet.

### **Conclusion**

In this brief article, an attempt has been made to show the great importance which the apostolic church attached to the Ascension, either directly or by implication in holding together the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith as St. Augustine boldly affirmed when he said, "This is that festival which confirms the grace of all festivals together, without which the profitableness of every festival would have perished. For unless the Saviour had ascended into heaven, his nativity would have come to nothing ... and his passion would have borne no fruit for us, and his most holy resurrection would have been useless".<sup>21</sup> The Ascension can rightly be described as indicating the separation of the earthly and the heavenly life of Christ, and at the same time, the uniting together of the two inseparably forever, since Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection demand it, and the gift of the Spirit, the Heavenly Intercession and the Parousia are inexplicable apart from it. It keeps before us the Transcendent Lord on the one hand, and the nearness of the unseen and eternal order on the other hand, encompassing the earthly and temporal order of our day. The doctrine of the Ascended Lord holds the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith together, refusing to allow us, either to relegate him to the past as a mere figure of history, or to interpret his presence among us now as something vague and impersonal. Worship without an awareness of the Ascended Lord and Interceding Christ, becomes barren, mundane, impoverished and formal, whereas looking up to the Ascended and Exalted One, ever-present with his people, they discover their involvement through him in a world of need in loving and compassionate service. In an age when many rival claims are being made, the Ascension reveals the Exalted Lord as being, not one among many of the great religious leaders, but as being unique, "the image of the invisible God ...in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15). Moreover, it enables us to recognise in an age when the powers of evil seem to hold sway that "Christ's ascent to heaven is simultaneously the act of subjugating the demonic world rulers ... hence, the whole cosmos — heavenly, earthly, subterranean beings — must pay homage to the Exalted Lord (Phil. 2:10)".<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile,



# WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

York House 409 Barking Road,  
Plaistow. E13 8AL

Patron: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother

Dear Fellow Ministers

It was a pleasant socio-ecclesiastical occasion — (and Induction tea!!) — and I was innocently engaged in balancing a cup of tea in one hand, a plate in the other — and wondering how to convey the sausage roll from the plate to my mouth with “no hands”.

While I was agonizing over this problem — an old acquaintance approached — “Hello, Trevor, — how are things going at the Mission? I saw your advert in the B.T. last week — still asking for money, I see!” My first instinct was a defensive one — to deny the charge — but I knew that there was truth in it. Yes, we **are** still asking for money, and we shall continue to do so.

The fact is that, if we are to pay our staff — if we are to meet heating and lighting costs — if we are to buy food for our guests and patients — WE NEED MONEY, and a great deal of it. Some of that money comes from Local Authorities who use our services — but, apart from the regular, generous support of our fellow Christians, the work simply could not continue.

**BUT** — and it's a very big 'but' — we need much more than money. We need the INFORMED and CONSISTENT PRAYERS of our many friends. We need the encouragement of knowing that thousands of people CARE about our work and want it to prosper for God's glory.

Indeed, I've got a feeling that, when people **care** and when they **pray** for us in that way, the Holy Spirit will do the rest and all the money we need will be forthcoming. May I rely on you and your people to support us, first by **prayer**, and then as the Lord leads.

God bless you in all your work for Him.

Yours sincerely,

**Trevor W. Davis,**  
Superintendent Minister.

the powers of evil have their day, and appear to control events as though they have the last word. But the Ascension proves otherwise to those with faith in the glorified Lord and Saviour, now exalted in heaven, for to use Cullmann's analogy, such powers are, as it were, tied to a rope which sometimes is shortened, sometimes lengthened, but still the rope by which such powers are held, thereby signifying the sealing of their ultimate doom.<sup>23</sup>

In the Ascended Lord there is found the basic answer to man's search for the meaning of life, here and hereafter, his relation to the universe of which he is a part, and his relationship with his fellowmen in the life and society of his day since 'Christ is indeed our Contemporary in whom we may trust'.<sup>24</sup> It is the writer's strongly held conviction that the Ascension of Jesus Christ is theologically and empirically at the very heart of the New Testament, and that the more we seek to exalt him, both personally and corporately as believers, the nearer he comes to us in every part of life.

.....

## NOTES

1. D.P. Fuller, **Easter Faith and History** (1965 p.38f.)
2. Nineteenth Century (XXXIV; Translation by Mrs. Humphrey Ward 1893 pp. 158-76)
3. H.B. Swete, *The Apostles' Creed* (1894 p.64f.)
4. B.K. Donne, 'The Significance of the Ascension of Jesus Christ in the New Testament' in **Scottish Journal of Theology** (Vol. 30. No.6. 1977 pp. 555-568)  
.... **Christ Ascended** (Paternoster Press, 1983, passim)
5. B.M. Metzger, 'The Ascension of Jesus Christ' in *Historical and Literary Studies, Pagan, Jewish and Christian* (1968 p.82)  
C.F.D. Moule, **Essays in New Testament Interpretation** (1982 p.58)
6. Metzger, op. cit. (p.82)
7. P.A. van Stempvoort, 'The Interpretation of the Ascension in Luke and Acts' in **Society for New Testament Studies**, Vol.5 (1958-9 p.38)
8. J.G. Davies, **He Ascended into Heaven** (1958 p.63f.)
9. F.F. Bruce, **Commentary on the Book of Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes** (1954 p.41)
10. O. Cullmann, **The Christology of the New Testament** (ET. 1959 p.88)
11. Davies, op. cit. (p.171)
12. K. Barth, **Dogmatics in Outline** (ET. 1966 p.124)
13. W. Milligan, **The Ascension and High Priesthood of our Lord** (1892 p.152f.)
14. H.B. Swete, **The Ascended Christ** (1916 p.45)
15. M. Bruce, **The Baptist Hymn Book** (1962 No.178 v.3)
16. H. Conzelmann, **The Theology of St. Luke** (ET. 1961 p.178)
17. R.N. Flew, **Jesus and His Church: A Study in the Idea of the Ecclesia in the New Testament** (1938 p.145)
18. Book of Common Prayer, (1662 Collect for Ascension Day)



19. T.F. Torrance, 'Royal Priesthood' in **Scottish Journal of Theology** Occasional Papers No.3 (1955 p.43)
20. Moule, op. cit. (p.62)
21. Davies, op. cit. (p.170)
22. R. Bultmann, **Theology of the New Testament**, Vol.1 (ET 1952 p.171)
23. Cullmann, op. cit. (p.225)
24. Davies, op. cit. (p.174)

Brian K. Donne

## The Ascension — Its Blessings, Benefits and Challenges to me a Believer.

In my early teaching and training, my college attendance and beginning years in the ministry I somehow cannot remember being impressed by or even recognising Ascension. No doubt, because it was a mid-week event and not a Sunday Special, or that it was celebrated by my separated brethren and therefore of no great concern to me.

It was coming to Purley in 1975 to join the Team Ministry that Ascension came into prominence. At Purley Baptist Church there was an annual event called Thanksgiving (this was a time when the church gave monetary gifts to pay off its debts which it had acquired by becoming a Team Ministry and extending its premises and buying manses). Thanksgiving was always held on Ascension Day. So year after year I was faced with this extraordinary festival and like "roses" it grew on me until now every year I celebrate Ascension on the Sunday nearest to it.

### What it Teaches Me

Ascension teaches me that there is humanity in the heart of God. He understands me not only as my Creator and Master, King and Saviour, but also as a fellow human being! This does not lead me into heresy, but brings me great consolation, peace and security. I don't have to explain things to Him because He knows, He has walked where I walk, hurt as I hurt, been tested and tempted as I am, "the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind." I find the *It is finished* of the crucifixion is for me visually clarified in the Ascension because it looks more finished then. Its completion can be more easily seen.

Ascension teaches me that the distance between time and eternity is a mere hair's breadth or 1000th of a second in time. Having learnt this I find that, like so many Biblical truths, it is confirmed in so many ways and places to me. For example in God **speaking** to His people of old from Adam through Abraham through to the Kings and prophets. God **sending** His angels to His people from the earliest days into the New Testament and even nowadays. God **making statements** about His Son at His baptism (Matt. 3:17) and transfiguration (Matt. 17:2) and before the crucifixion during Holy Week in John's Gospel, (12:28).



**Baptist  
Housing  
Association** LTD

### **John Chadwick House**

On Saturday 2nd November 1985, the Reverend Norman Wright, President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, performed the Official Opening Ceremony at John Chadwick House, Seven Kings, Ilford, Essex, in front of a large gathering of local dignitaries, church folk and tenants.

John Chadwick House, which was designed by Kenneth Cheeseman ARIBA, and built by John G. Smith (on Thurock) Limited, is a substantial property providing sheltered accommodation for 28 people. It has a resident Warden and is built with the thoughtfulness and attention to detail which characterises Baptist Housing Association properties. There is a large and cheerful communal lounge, and lift service to the upper floors. The house stands on land purchased in 1899 by the Reverend John Chadwick, and was for 82 years, the site of a Baptist Church. The present United Free Church, in which the dedication service was held, came into being through the joining together of the local Baptist and United Reformed Churches in 1982.

For further details of the Association's work or properties, please write to:

**The General Secretary  
Baptist Housing Association Limited  
Baptist Church House  
4 Southampton Row  
London WC1B 4AB**

### **How it Helps me**

It helps me in my worship, taking communion to housebound, visiting in hospital or counselling the sick, sad and sorrowing. In my worship because I sing and believe "Jesus stand among us in Thy risen power, let this time of worship be a hallowed hour." It is good to see Him standing in church in all His might, majesty and power Sunday by Sunday. In communion because where two or three are gathered together there is He in the midst. In counselling because so many have never had, or never been taught, or do not understand that He is closer than breathing and He is objective as well as subjective to the believer. That He sits in the chair and talks to us, as well as listening to every one of our words.

I am excited that Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus and that Ananias held a conversation with Him. That Peter had his vision, that Jesus was as real after the Ascension as He was before. I am sad that we have sent Him away in so many ways. The Ascension shows me how time and distance though they are barriers to me are no longer barriers to Him. He can be with each of His children individually and collectively. The Ascension reveals to me that the world in which we live has meaning and purpose and plan. It is not under the absolute control of Alien forces, nor is it on its way to destruction, rather, at the accepted time, Christ will come again. When He comes every knee shall bow, every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord.

### **What it says to me**

Jesus had a physical body John 1-4 "The Word became flesh, a human being, full of grace and truth and lived among us." That physical body was perfect and yet was transformed on resurrection day to cope with the demands and expectations of eternity. So it is to be expected that as 1. Cor. 15:53 says, "this mortal must be changed into what is immortal, what will die must be changed into what cannot die". The physical cannot enter the eternal because it involves another dimension, the physical has to change. We shall be given a new body free from the restrictions, deformities and ageing of the old 'tabernacle'. The assurance of Heaven is a great truth in Scripture seen in John 14: 1-3 and read so often at funerals because of its certainty and challenge, comfort and concern. Heaven becomes identifiable because it is where Jesus is, and "Our Father in Heaven" Matt. 6:9. Commenting on that phrase one young person writing answers to questions at baptismal classes said, "Heaven is where God is, where God is there is heaven". That helped me to understand that as believers we live in two different worlds, two dimensions at the same time. Heaven becomes identifiable because it is a person, not a place. I would now like to digress and follow the idea that our Adversary took, as is his wont, a good idea and infected his bias into it so that plays, films, theological language, common understanding concentrates on the place of Heaven and ignores the person of Heaven who makes Heaven, Heaven.

### **A Bag full of Truths**

Hebrews has a bag full of truths for us to realise and enjoy, to apprehend, appropriate and appreciate on Ascension themes. Jesus our Great High

Priest is making intercession for us Heb. 4:14-16, 9:24, 10:12. He is seated, a sign that He is King and that His atoning work is complete, final and sufficient 10:12. He is waiting to return in power and majesty and with justice 10:13. Ascension is not a time for looking back Acts 1:6, but rather a reminder that we are called to walk by faith, live by faith, to so start each day as to live perilously because of the dangers of an uncharted future (which would explain why so many intelligent people accept as believable astrology, but reject the call of God). The early explorers were told that they would fall off the end of the world and that knowledge to us today is nonsense, but in its day it was a real threat to venturing beyond the known borders of acceptability. The future is always a threat, we put our hand in the hand of the God who holds the future in His hand.

If Jesus the risen Lord had not been taken away Luke 24:50-53, then the disciples would not have gone out and about. The enduing power from on high would have meant more introspection and less exposure to and for the world. If Christ had not disappeared out of their sight Acts 1:9 they would not have lived by faith they would have been earth-bound in their attitudes and actions, there would have been no living by power, there would have been no church, no body, but one great conglomerate of individuals. There are some exciting promises associated with the Ascension —

1. The coming again of Christ in power and glory.
2. The coming of the Holy Spirit for ordinary believers to empower them to be as they could not fully be, i.e. servants, witnesses, martyrs, miracle workers, more human, thereby, truly Children of God.
3. The termination of 'post resurrection' appearances so that the disciples and apostles may no longer seek after the flesh and blood Jesus, but might know Him in a new way — the risen Son of God.

The return of Christ to the right-hand side of God to take His rightful place on the bench throne of heaven expresses in a dramatic, and for me clarified, way, the tremendous act of love seen in the deep humility of Christ, in His willingness to go through nine months of gestation, the twelve years of obscurity and the remaining hidden years of training before He burst on the scene with His baptism. The old fairy tale of a king who becomes a pauper and then returns to his kingship is a small insight into what Christ was prepared to undergo and agreed to do before the foundation of the world, before the world was made. Ephesians 1:4.

Christ's individual concern for the believer is shown in the Ascension, not only in His going to prepare a place for us, or His promise to never leave us or forsake us, His being with us always, His presence with believers in their unity, the two or three, Jesus in the midst. It is also seen in His involvement with them in the very work to which he has called them. Matt. 28:18-20.

If there had been no Ascension Christ would be sitting in Jerusalem 2000 years old, venerated? obliterated? worshipped? appearing and disappearing ... The scene becomes too horrendous to push it to its extremes knowing the evil heart of man.

## Conclusion

To nearly finish! A quote from W. G. Channon from a sermon in July 1952. "In my judgement there is no day in the Christian year which is of such supreme importance, and at the same time, so neglected by Free Church people, in the main, as Ascension Day. Certainly no complete view of our Lord is possible unless the Ascension and its consequences are included."

**Before Easter** we recall that His public ministry was preceded by 40 days in the wilderness, in conflict with temptation and the power of evil.

**After Easter** we recall that His ministry on earth was followed by 40 days celebrating His final triumph over the forces of evil and death.

Ascension was —

1. NOT (as on Easter day) in the dim half light of early morning, but in the full blaze of day.
2. NOT (as from the tomb) unseen by human eye, but in company with His disciples.
3. NOT as from the loneliness of the garden, but in the midst of an arresting conversation about the Kingdom — with His disciples, while their eyes were steadfastly upon Him, so that all might see and know and be certain. "He was **taken** up to heaven". Acts 1:9

Hebrews 13:8 declares "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever". It is the same Jesus, the Christ, who has gone into heaven as walked the dusty streets of Nazareth, Capernaum, and Jerusalem. It is the same Jesus Christ who comes to us, abides with us, lives within us and fills us with His power. It is the same Jesus Christ who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Is it any wonder that I delight to sing heartily, "I have such a wonderful Saviour that everybody should know," and rejoice deeply inside when I can tell anybody about Him.

**Bill Mumby**

## Bereavement, separation and resurrection

some pastoral thoughts

On the casket of the late Dag Hammerskjold, sometime secretary of the U.N., there was placed a solitary floral wreath. He was killed in a plane crash in Africa. The lone bouquet of red roses placed there by the immediate family bore one provocative word, Why? The subsequent publishing of the personal diary of this greatly appreciated and esteemed man, recounted his return to the faith of his father. The mysteries of death add to the burden of the bereaved. The 'Why?' questions are usually the difficult ones to answer. Gazing eye ball to eye ball at the bereaved with tears filling and cascading over the eye rims, is not an infrequent occurrence for God's representatives. The shattering numbness of the bereaved, which Paul in a masterly

understatement called 'this slight momentary affliction', appears to be anything but slight from a human perspective. In context, we can agree, at our highest moments of faith, that death is only a minute moment in the light of eternity. However that concept is difficult when evoked to give comfort to the deeply sorrowing. The 'Why?' is often unanswerable in such close quarters with death. There is need of distance, time, and supportive ministry in such an hour.

### **The Reality of Bereavement**

The grief of bereavement is real not imaginary. The very things that bring us close to another person, such as time, space and body are all affected. The sheer, irreparable loss numbs the total personality. C. S. Lewis in his so honest *A Grief Observed* poses the sheer devastation and vulnerability of the bereaved in the early stages of acute loss:

'Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be — or so it feels — welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once. And that seeming was as strong as this. What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?'

It is within the experience of aloneness and forsakeness that grief grips us. The pain becomes too great. A friend's mother, as I write, has lost all sense and personal incentive as she mourns the passing of her husband. They lived for each other in an atmosphere of self-centredness and at a cost of having no close friends or relatives. The shattering parting has left the remaining partner paralysed by a sense of utter emptiness.

There is no uniformity in grief, each case is unique. The immediate shock may cause temporary anesthesia which gives the bereaved the appearance of composure, sometimes even to the point of giving the impression of radiant stoicism. I have observed that this is often a temporary escape from reality. It is unhealthy for the grieving to remain in that state and not to express pent up emotions. For others the torrent of emotion, tears and wailing, is the process whereby grief is released to the benefit of the mourner and the good of all associated with the hurt one.

Grief through separation, however, need not be a negative experience. It needs to be expressed and ventilated in order that emotional balance may be realized and maintained. The danger in bereavement is indulging in a constant welter of self-pity. Grief can become a filter road that leads into a

highway of lucidity and spiritual insights, never before realized or explored. Our generation is notable for its 'paper mountains'. Increasingly we all have access to psychological data and sociological analysis on death and bereavement. They may be accurate in their descriptive clarity but offer no help in terms of healing and wholeness for the broken hearted.

### **The Reality of Christian Hope**

It is the conviction of the Christian Church, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ effectively penetrates the whole arena of human life and death. Paul makes abundantly clear his ambition in life, 'That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and may share in His sufferings; that if possible, I may attain the resurrection of the dead' (Philippians 3:10). The 'dynamics' of God in resurrection, is the quality power He promises to His people. The death of Christ on a crude, jagged cross on Calvary, can drive us down a road of stunted atheism or it can secure us deeper, safer in the arms of God. The Cross, the scene of pain, brutality and tortuous death is not a symbol of God forsakenness but rather of a divine presence, descending into the depths of human despair. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The Cross then placards the unconquerable nature of God's eternal love, even to taking man's totality of evil and giving it a final death blow. The Cross also declares God is with us in our extreme moments of dismay and anguish. He has not withdrawn His love rather it penetrates our own self-love and wretchedness.

The resurrection transforms the death of Christ into a sheer, king of king's size victory. It is history — but also it is received fact. Faith believes not asking so much, 'how?' but declaring 'I know, He's alive, He's active in my life'.

The power of Christ's resurrection is bound up inseparably with the death of Christ. Pain and power can never be separated in this life. The models are the life of Jesus and the subsequent lives of the apostles, following the resurrection.

The raising of Jesus from the dead was a defeat over the suffocating brutality, doubt and destitution of the sinful race. It declared in history, as it assures today, that God is not bound by our sin, death can never be the final victor. In the purpose of God, the church found its first witnesses to be a band of grieving and mystified people. They needed to be convinced about this altogether new phenomena, that a person could rise from the dead. Some of the early appearances present the disciples as filled with apprehension or, as with Thomas, a sense of non-belief at the incredible witness of his fellow followers. The Emmaus duo, mystified and in deep grief, as they walked away from the death city of Jerusalem, find themselves joined by a stranger. Jesus, the unidentified companion until they share a breaking of bread, appears to be processing their minds and personalities, widening their power of appreciation and stimulating their faith. Incredulity gradually gives place to a form of knowledge which is able spiritually to enliven and motivate. The risen Jesus is in a new form, 'he is with them in a new way and therefore in the old terms remote from them'.<sup>2</sup>

While acknowledging the joy and robust enthusiasm of some of the

disciples on resurrection morning, we are aware that Jesus had to work hard on others to convince them that he was their Lord. The elements of doubt, apprehension and sheer disbelief had to be overcome. This is to be expected. The death of Jesus had brought disillusion and had spelt the end of all their hopes. The finality of the cross and burial, dashed their confidence in their teacher's words about a new kingdom and authority. The numbness and grief of disappointed hope, seen in the disciples, is a 'constant' in bereavement, 'I didn't expect it to turn out in this way — I'm shattered, all our dreams and hopes have turned to ashes', those words from a young widow yesterday, were expressing similar thoughts which must have paralysed the disciples on the first Good Friday. In varying degrees, all humanity finds a similar solidarity, especially when the deceased is young and personable. No amount of preparation can shield us totally from death's pain. John in his gospel makes clear that, Jesus conscientiously sought to prepare his followers for his death.

Anticipation may mitigate but never excise the sense of irreparable loss. Professor Blaiklock, after a life of dedicated Christian service writes tenderly in a diary on this theme in *Kathleen*: March 17, came across a note of William Barclay on Revelation 4: 'Out of sorrow, can come bitterness and resentment, but sorrow can produce a faith, and a peace, and a new song'. I am not bitter, only stricken. I am not resentful, because to resent what God has permitted, could only be for me a denial of the reality of God. But I have yet found no new depth of faith, small peace, and certainly no new song to sing. What are the words? ... 'washed woundrously with sorrow ...? I think I do experience a certain cleansing, a new tenderness of conscience, a deeper pain over failure, that might not have come to me save for this tramping in the gloom. With all my heart I could wish Barclay's words to prove true for me. Was he writing from real experience? Did he know? Nothing would I desire more than to say those words and set my seal to them.'<sup>3</sup>

Faith in resurrection does not remove every vestige of sadness and impotence from the believer. It is the unknown, even the remoteness of the quality of resurrection life, which troubles yet excites. Faith explores the twilight zones of partial knowledge. This has the effect of pruning false hopes and illusory security and prepares the way to true liberation in Christ.

Without detracting from the momentous happening of Easter morning, or the remarkable transformation of the dispirited deserters changed into dynamic witnesses, we recognise that the disciples were still very human men. They longed for the physical presence of Jesus, even though they now perceive he was not dead but alive in another form. They were going forward, dimly conceptualizing how the dead body of their Lord could be brought to life. Vision, presence and faith accepted that. By an act of God, the material body had been transfigured and trans-materialised into some kind of spirit body which accords with the very nature of God. The creation of the world and the raising of Jesus have that feel of similarity.

More importantly from a pastoral perspective, 'I want to know more and more of the power of the resurrection', that I may minister to the aching and inconsolable who feel acutely a devastating sense of loss in bereavement.



Taking the disciples as our models in the New Testament and seeking to explore their reactions, unbarnacled by the passage of time and unrealistic triumphalism, we acknowledge their devastation in the hour of death. The root of their confusion and emptiness is due to a deep and loving relationship with the deceased. 'You will sorrow', said Jesus to Mary and Martha as they mourned the death of their beloved Lazarus. Jesus wept with them. This solidarity in sorrow encourages our tears and emotions to express our very real sadness. To love is to be made vulnerable. To love deeply is to be made fragile and potentially broken in the hour of parting. C. . Lewis speaks from experience when he says:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket-safe, dark, motionless, airless — it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable ... the only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers ... of love, is hell'.

Hopeless sorrow can be traced to a sense of meaninglessness, as one contemplates the prodigality of the endless procession into the grave. Death becomes an insatiable monster gobbling up, in a most indiscriminate way the children of this planet.

The conviction of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ has conquered death. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:22 sees a transference. Death is no longer lording it over us but is our servant. With Christian death a gateway is opened into undreamt of expansions of life. In Philippians 1:23, death is said to be much better. Someone has pointed out that the Greek is not a single comparative (better), nor a double comparative (more better), but a triple comparative (much more better). Death will finally be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:52). 'The last enemy to be destroyed is death', in the day of Christ's appearing. Death is still an enemy though already defeated in Jesus Christ. One day death will be destroyed.

Christians still loath this enemy, they do not evade considering its grim reality. It is a hostile force in God's world and at variance with his final purpose. It is in this light that Christians come to terms with death and oppose it. The resurrection of Jesus Christ in bodily form, bringing to birth a new creation, is not an optional belief, but an indispensable doctrine. Paul argues that Christ is the forerunner or the first fruit. At base level he implies that the resurrection was reversing what evil had accomplished in crucifying Jesus. Our firm expectation is not simply survival after death, but glorious resurrection. Death makes it possible to live on.

Acceptance of death, what it is and where it leads, is essential for the grieving mourner. No time scale is suggested, but a gradual absorption of the fact is essential. Wallowing in grief, events and the prosperity of former years is not appropriate. There is no gain without pain. Shrinking from the

pain of parting can be a sign of rebellion against God's plan for our life. Pastorally this requires sensitive, often prolonged counselling of the bereaved. Acceptance is the essential prelude to positive growth. Human crisis can be a potential growing point.

This was true for the early disciples as they accepted that Jesus would no longer be with them in physical presence. It was at the point of submissive obedience 'waiting expectantly in the upper room', that they began to explore the potential of being transformed by the Holy Spirit. So much is unwritten in the Acts of the Apostles. What is patently obvious, is that some of the leading characters on the pathway to evangelise the known world, were themselves being transformed, as they believed with growing assurance, that Jesus was alive and motivating them. It is because of their growth in perception and ability that the early church is seen changing its attitudes and its strategy. Out from the crisis of death, resurrection of personality is taking place and new life is breaking out. By the same token, our bereavement crises offer the Christian the opportunity to be launched into realms of spiritual and physical awareness, hitherto unthought of and probably never anticipated.

In poetic vein, Paul, in Romans 8, delights us with his mounting prose on cosmic transformation. God is at work, he declares, reintegrating a decaying Universe into a glorious new heaven and earth. We stand on tip toe awaiting the completion of the fulness of salvation.

More important however, for the weeping mourner, is to see that by faith through grace, the restoration process is going on, even in the vale of tragedy. This progressive transformation, this releasing through death and resurrection, is an antidote against excessive human grieving and self pity, which is a narrowing and significantly limiting experience.

'Every moment is a beginning  
Every moment is an end.  
And moments of crisis are sacramental of the whole:  
The eternal generation of creation  
Realised in this world of becoming'<sup>4</sup>

Dom Luke Stuart

It is one of the inestimable privileges of life, to observe the overwhelming awareness of Christ in those who sorrow deeply. Such awareness is translated into spiritual growth and widening opportunities of service.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, 'For this reason we never become discouraged. Even though our physical being is gradually decaying, yet our spiritual being is renewed day after day.

And this small temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and external glory, much greater than the trouble. For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts for ever'. (Good News Version).

**Patrick J. Goodland**

1. *A Grief Observed*. C.S. Lewis
2. *Death's Gift*. Nicholas Peter Harvey — Epworth
3. *Kathleen*. profesor E.M. Blaiklock — Hodder
4. Dom Luke Stuart. Quoted in *Death's gift* (as above)

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### **Christian Worship — some Contemporary Issues**

**Zwingli** by H. Wayne Pipkin

(Both books published by the Yorkshire Baptist Association Inc. 1, South Parade, Headingley, Leeds LS6 3LF. at 80p each).

The enterprising Yorkshire baptists are to be congratulated for making both these books available to a wider audience and at a comparatively modest cost. The first, on worship, covers a wide span and has much to say that will be welcomed from people of varying shades of opinion. The Lord's Supper is accorded its rightful place as the central act of our worship, whilst there is wise advice for those who wish to use 'the gifts of the Spirit' in their worship. It is good, too, that the church's ministry of healing is here set within the context of the worshipping community.

Wayne Pipkin's book on Zwingli carries the sub-title, 'The Positive Value of his Eucharistic Teachings'. Pipkin here sets out the case that Zwingli goes beyond the bare memorialism that passes for Zwinglianism in so many baptist and other churches that are in the main sacramental stream of neither Lutheranism or Calvinism. For that reason alone it is to be welcomed. The ghost of Carlstadt stands ever at the door inviting us to play at sacramental iconoclasm. Even the recovery of a decent Zwinglianism would be infinitely preferable to that.

## **HOLIDAYS 1986**

### **HOLIDAY BUNGALOW — MILDENHALL, SUFFOLK**

(Available only to Ministers, Missionaries and others in fulltime  
Christian work)

.....

A fully furnished, updated, three bedroomed bungalow in a quiet cul-de-sac in a small market town on the edge of the Breckland and Thetford Forest. Approximately 12 miles from Bury St. Edmunds and Ely, 22 miles from Cambridge. It is equipped for six people, plus cot. Electric heating and b/w T.V.

Hire charges: £25 per week, plus electricity.

S.A.E. for details: Mrs. E. Parsons, 154, Vernon Avenue,  
Old Basford, Nottingham NG6 0AL.

## **SURREY & NORTH EAST HAMPSHIRE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION**

(Formerly Home Counties Baptist Association)  
(Affiliated to The Baptist Union of Great Britain) & Ireland)

.....

The Surrey & North-East Hampshire Baptist Association has a fully-equipped seven berth 31 foot caravan on a pleasant orchard site on the outskirts of Bognor Regis. Preference is given to ministers, for whom the charges range from £39 to £67 per week according to season. Details from Mrs. E.M. Price 'Grassendale', Ricksons Lane, West Horsley, Surrey KT24 6HU.

---

Two bungalows are available in East Kent as a service to the Ministry for Baptist ministers and missionaries at minimal contribution.

### **LEELANDS, near WHITSTABLE**

Detached and spacious, fully furnished, three double bedrooms (one double bed; four single), large lounge and a dining room and all amenities; central heating, television and the rest. Garden. Country near Whitstable and Tankerton, and five miles from Canterbury. Available throughout the whole year as maintained specifically for this purpose. Bookings from Wednesday to Wednesday.

### **SEACOT, SEASALTER, WHITSTABLE.**

Detached on rural sea front. Can sleep six; fully furnished; central heating; large garden; good sea views. Available most of the year but not during school holidays. Bookings Saturday to Saturday.

Early application advised as some weeks could have been booked several times over in 1985. To Sydney Clark, 73, The Street, Adisham, Canterbury CT3 3JN, Kent. SAE please as it is solely service throughout.

### **HOLIDAY IN NORMANDY?**

A colleague has passed on details of a Holiday/Conference centre in Normandy, which also has full camping facilities, which may appeal to those who like a holiday in company with their fellow christians. It is: Maison Evangelique: 4 Passage Evangelique, BP30 14510, Houlgate, Normandy. Tel (31) 91.17.87. Its only stipulation is that all guests, including campers, should attend evening Devotions.

The colleague writes: "We were very pleased with every aspect of our holiday. It gained my daughter at least one grade in her French 'O' level!" He assures us that the Centre would welcome fellowship with British Baptists: