

# The Fraternal

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# Editorial

In the light of the fact that it was probably his swan song, as far as the U.K. is concerned, perhaps a final comment on Billy Graham and 'Mission 89' is permissible.

The statistics are impressive: 1.25 million in attendance (including live-link) and 80,500 enquirers. By all accounts the response confounded even the best hopes (in the light of tele-evangelist scandals) of the planning committee, motivating an unscheduled 'last big push' at Wembley. The good Doctor himself seemed genuinely surprised that not even a blanket public transport strike could prevent the crowds thronging or the convicted 'getting up out of their seats'.

As to the content of the mission meetings, one was struck by the familiar format, virtually unchanged from what one recalls of his missions in the mid Sixties. There was little concession to current innovation. The old team (with the exception of Don Hustad) were all there, unravaged it seemed by time! If there were any changes it was in a less forceful, more sympathetic approach, with at least one eye on the social context of the gospel. In fact the low key approach throughout may have disappointed those looking for emotional orgasms. No one was swept into the Kingdom on a high tide of emotionalism as far as we could see. It was all very peaceful. The great response being a tribute to the faithful witness borne by family and friends over months, even years.

None of this will cut ice, however, with those who disagree with the very principle of 'mass evangelism' – simplistic answers, highly personalised morality and 'Middle America' values. Yet the issue of the direction of the human will remains central. Once that has capitulated to Christ no one can tell what the repercussions will be in society in general. Or the larger rooms one will enter after passing through the narrow gate. Therefore those whose Christian lives have been influenced and informed by the ministry of William Franklin Graham these forty years are far from ungrateful.

In the current issue Carol Murray begs the question as to what it means to be truly human in the light of an endemic paternalism, in the world and in the Church, rooting her argument not in equality per se, but in the biblical nature of God. A guest article follows from a former Director of the College of Preachers. Of Douglas Cleverley Ford it has been said 'he has done more than any man alive to improve the quality of preaching in the Church of England'.

The synonymy of Charles Haddon Spurgeon and 'preaching' invariably obscures Spurgeon, man of prayer. Mike Nicholls seeks to redress this with 'C.H. Spurgeon and the Life of Prayer'. Then, Jon Woodhouse leads us into the crucial area of 'hermeneutics', in particular the role played by the community in interpretation. Who speaks the authoritative word? In conclusion, Colin Marchant reviews his presidential year. If the role of B.U. president is becoming more strategic and creative, as many perceive, that of 1988-89 has been noteworthy for the wide acceptance of the message of 'Shalom' in all corners of the denomination. Thank you Colin!

# Towards a More God-like Humanity

“And God stepped out on space,  
And He looked around and said:  
‘I’m lonely –  
I’ll make me a world’.  
Then God sat down –  
Till He thought: ‘I’ll make me a man!’  
This Great God,  
Like a mammy bending over her baby,  
Kneeled down in the dust  
Toiling over a lump of clay  
Till He shaped it in His own image;  
Then into it He blew the breath of life,  
And man became a living soul.”

Thus does James Weldon Johnson anthropomorphically picture God in His creative work. But for all its simplicity he expresses a vital component in the creation story – that the God who made all things contained within “Him” the female as well as the male – “This Great God, like a mammy bending over her baby”. This gives the right balance to God and the conception of God. For the first account of creation in Genesis Ch.1 v.27 declares, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”, highlighting the two sexual aspects which combine together to make up the Godhead.

## God’s Inherent Nature

If you take the idea one step back from the image of man to the image of God, He would not be complete, not wholly God, if either maleness or femaleness were removed. To be God both of these aspects must be there, and we see it as He works amongst His people. They recognised both of the sexual traits within the God they knew and worshipped. As the writer of Isaiah says in Ch 66. v13 of God, “As one whom his mother comforts. so I will comfort you”; the eleventh chapter of Hosea likewise highlights the femaleness of God. And there are plenty of examples of the maleness of God as we see Him traditionally expressed throughout the Old Testament. Therefore, as the Bishop of Durham said, “God must be presumed to have all the feminine attributes as well as the masculine”. And these He has in order to fulfil the role of God.

Assuming from this, therefore, that within God both maleness and femaleness dwell, this must contribute to the wholeness that is God’s entity – the unity and equality which is in the Godhead. There cannot be within the Godhead disunity or inequality, or else God would be working against Himself, and the creation would have been born in chaos. Yet the picture we have of creation, the point of creation at its inception, was that it was harmonious, united, all things working together; and this was God’s purpose, “And God saw that it was good” (Genesis Ch.1. v10,12,18,21 etc), thus dispensing with the chaos and bringing the harmony and unity which stems from the being of God. God’s creation displays his characteristics, with humankind as the pinnacle of His creation, and so it is that within humankind are displayed the essence of God – the maleness and the

femaleness. Witness what we see from Biblical evidence – Genesis Ch.1. v27, and from what we know and experience in human creation today.

## **Reflecting the Godhead**

If this thesis is correct, that God contains both male and female within the Godhead, and that the Godhead in itself and in its dealings is united, harmonious and equal – the “us” of Genesis Ch.1 v.26, is it too simple to say that what God is in Himself, He desires in His creation, especially with regard to the pinnacle of His creation – humankind? For as He has made humankind in His own image, male and female, like Himself [for it must be remembered that the Hebrew “sa’lem”(i-mage) means an actual plastic work, a duplicate], He must also accord to both these aspects to His creation – the male and the female – equality and unity on the same basis; not one above another, nor one more equal than the other, but both on the same footing, giving to each a wholeness in itself which is complementary to each other. The idea of humankind is that it finds its fullness in being male and female, not just one or the other – that would be to break the harmony, not one lording over the other – that would be to distort the image. Both male and female in partnership, worth and equality is what is needed to bring about wholeness in living and fullness to the lot of both sexes. And this is what has been marred practically from the beginning of creation, with some exceptions. One sex has dominated, ruled or oppressed the other, so shattering and stultifying the purpose of God, not allowing the full potential of creation to be experienced, or the fullness of life to flower as it should, and was designed to do.

In order for a more God-like humanity, therefore, to appear on the world scene both male and female must be given full rein to express and use their respective talents, gifts, resources and ministries. And as they do so both should be accorded equal worth, equal hearing, equal acceptance, with no disparagement of either side, thus allowing God to display His true image on earth in the people He has made. Their status and worth would come from Him and be acknowledged by each other, and if we do not do this we deny God the ability to express His image in the human race He has created. And it has to be said that this is sometimes the case, especially in the area of female traits, gifts and ministries. They have been put down or put off, dismissed perfunctorily and ignored. And not only with regard to female attributes – the whole sex itself is often oppressed, denied its rights and treated inhumanly. This would seem to deny not only the sex concerned, but to deny God His full image within humanity, subduing what He wills and purposes. And we are not talking here in only localised or national terms, but in a worldwide perspective. God created all of humanity in His image, and it is to all of humanity that the fullness of equality, worth, dignity and justice must be extended with regard to sexuality.

## **Co-Stewardship of Creation**

Keeping all this in mind it must be remembered where this particular concept is set Biblically. It is couched at the end of the first creation account where God has been leading up to that particular moment because humanity is seen to be His pinnacle of all that He has made. And the reason for His humanity, as given here, is that they can care and look after His creation for Him. God is appointing them as His representatives. as His agents, as His ambassadors on behalf of all that has been made. And it is together that they have been given this task – the stewards

of the whole earth – male and female in partnership, in cooperation with God. This is very pertinent for us today for we are aware more than ever of the slow demise of the earth and its creatures and resources, that as stewards we have not been taking our task seriously or been God’s good agents, and perhaps this stems back not just to a mis-care of the world, but beyond that to a misunderstanding of the basic premise of our creation in that we are made in the image of God: that image and that God being male and female. So it is equally and together that we have the task of stewarding and peopling the earth. And until we sort out the inequality of the human race, respecting all for who they are, male and female, giving justice and rights across the board, then the world will not function in peace, harmony and unity which is God’s desire and surely ours too.

So it is that this question of the development and full realisation of God-like humanity is not a nice theological debate set to rumble on for years without consequence; it is a necessity for God’s will to be done and His kingdom to come here on earth. It is for the saving of creation and the world that we must pick up this dormant fact that God’s image is expressed in both the male and female, having endowed this to His creation, and His creation must function as He does within the Godhead, here upon earth. That is, that both sexes should participate fully, equally and worthily in the affairs of the world and the church, in the family and in work, in politics and education, in every area of life, so that God’s full image is brought to bear. Then we can more capably and ably be caretakers of the earth, and fully realise our own potentialities, personalities and status as individuals.

### **Beyond Sexism**

This line of enquiry has taken me into areas I had not expected to go, and opens up a whole new array of possibilities for us as human beings, working together as male and female, with equal rights, as partners, in God’s purposes to restore creation and the earth to the glory He designed. The accepting of each sex by the other, the allowing of each sex by the other to be themselves and project themselves, and to bring their gifts and attributes is not just a moving forward to the liberation of the sexes, but it is God designed and God willed, and needs to happen in order for the earth to be restored and people to attain their God-like humanity. Genesis Ch.1 v27 pleads with us to act positively in this direction, and we dare not ignore it for to do so would only pile up the injustice, the hurt, the insensitivity, and the continuing denial of God’s word.

**Carol Murray**

## **Preaching Today**

I am an Anglican – perhaps I may dare to say, an Anglican preacher – ordained in St. Paul’s Cathedral more than fifty years ago. I take this opportunity, however, to express my debt to some great non-Anglican preachers, one or two of whom I have lived sufficiently long to have seen, and I mean **seen**. I saw them at work, I saw the packed churches when they preached, I saw the rapt attention on the part of the listeners in the pews, heads almost craned forward. And I have

to say that our younger clergy and ministers today, for the most part, and our modern congregations, having never seen preaching of this order, not surprisingly place little store by it. There are more worthwhile pastoral activities, they reckon, than taking much trouble with the pulpit ministry.

And make no mistake, to be effective preaching has to be worked at, so worked at that when in action it appears easy. But so with any skilful performer – a tennis player, a singer, an artist – their expertise seems effortless, but the labour behind the scenes is enormous and continuous. Not otherwise is effective preaching. Campbell Morgan at Buckingham Gate Chapel was the compelling expository preacher who thrilled me and thousands of others, not least because he was a tireless Bible student; Leslie Weatherhead because he took trouble to learn how people ‘ticked’ psychologically; W.E. Sangster because he pursued a rigorous system of searching out and filing striking illustrations for sermons, even enlisting the help of his family. No wonder we heard him gladly.

One characteristic, however, stood out for me above all others, common to all, in spite of their enormous differences in style, this was their grasp and love of the Bible. They were masters of their Biblical material. No wonder they made it live, each in his own way.

## **Priorities**

At this point, perhaps, a disturbing question needs to be raised. In modern training for the ministry is the groundwork for this Biblical mastery being laid now? The Free Churches were once able to boast a formidable list of Biblical scholars on the staffs of their training colleges who also knew of the preaching ministry in experience. Their Biblical studies were not only academic, they had in mind the pastoral ministry, and so fired and sustained those powerful pulpits, some of which some of us encountered. A glance at the Church of Scotland will provide other examples. Great names could be provided, not least James Stewart.

Today, however, we devote more attention to social questions and to the environment in which people are called to live. Work for change here and people will be changed. This is the message. Or, as expressed recently by the President of a leading missionary society, ‘Obedience to Christ often demands change; and above all, of finding ways to ensure that selfishness is transformed to love by a *redeeming of the structures* national and global which dominate so much of human affairs’.(my italics) So improve the circumstances of people and the people will be improved. There is truth in this, and we cannot neglect the social reference of the gospel, but does this message represent the heart of the Christian proclamation? We are not sure. That is our trouble. And so our preaching is downgraded.

## **Preaching at Heart**

But what is preaching? Is it a public counselling (perhaps scolding) session? Is it a theological session? Is it a history lecture? Is it an entertaining or boring, speech? Preaching is good news about God, God in creation and God in redemption; God in relation to the natural order and God in relation to people; and all this overwhelmingly because the Word of God in creation ‘became flesh and



# **WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION**

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Dear Fellow Ministers,

This issue of the Fraternal will be published in my favourite season — Autumn; the “season of mists and mellow fruitfulness”, and as I thought about our ministry, it occurred to me that both elements are present.

There is something romantic about a slightly misty scene — the sharp outlines are softened, and there is a tantalizing sense of mystery. When the mist is more severe, however, it becomes less romantic, more menacing. For most of the time the future is shrouded in mist and we can only move forward step by step. We do not know the shape of our work — we certainly do not know how it will be maintained financially. Yet we press on in faith — trusting in God our Rock and our loving Father, who always provides for His children and for His work.

As to the “mellow fruitfulness” — I am reminded that it is the Lord's will that we should bear fruit, “and that our fruit remain”. There is a kind of fruitfulness that is spectacular and impressive — the “results” of phrenetic effort and feverish activity.

How much better is the mellow fruitfulness that grows from steady, constant work, faithfully done and freely offered to God for His blessing.

So, we trust God for the unknown future — and we offer to Him all our ministries — at Rest-a-While, Greenwoods and Bodey House for His use and His glory.

Have a hopeful — confident and fruitful Autumn.

**Trevor W. Davis**

dwelt among us'. Preaching proper is the presentation of Christ, the living Christ, the risen Christ, the Christ as Holy Spirit, all in this broad context. But I have heard sermons (I am not referring to non-Anglican preachers now), in which God was not even mentioned, let alone the living Christ. I will be blunt – NO preaching was being done on those occasions in spite of the multiplicity of words energetically, or lazily, spoken from the pulpit. Preaching is making the presence of God real by means of the spoken word, and where God is things happen.

I return to the Bible. Those great preachers of two or more generations ago to whom I have paid tribute did not preach the Bible. They preached the living God supremely known in Christ, and they employed the Bible with all the skill of which they were masters to act as testimony to Him. They were not fundamentalists (not even when conservative), and they were not radicals, but they were positive interpreters. As a result their balanced message commended itself to faith and to reason. They were convincing. P.T. Forsyth was an outstanding example of this balance. It is my conviction (for what it is worth) that the great need of the pulpit today is to *go forward* to this kind of positive Biblical study and to use it imaginatively in preaching to proclaim the good news of God in creation and redemption. Preaching is a unique exercise, and it has a unique message. It will not be strong if we drift away from it, nor (I think) will the Church grow.

**Douglas W. Cleverley Ford**

## **C.H. Spurgeon and the Life of Prayer**

C.H. Spurgeon once likened the birth of new Christians to the setting ablaze of gas lamps at dusk, to bring light to darkened streets. This inspired the American historian Craig Skinner to entitle the latest work on Tom Spurgeon: *Lamplighter and Son*. In it he refers twice to C.H. Spurgeon and prayer in the context of revival and tragedy. The great preacher's ministry rose to great strength on the rising tide of a genuine spiritual awakening. Between 1860 and 1870 Baptist churches in London increased by sixty per cent. Of 250,000 members recorded in 1865, almost half had been added as the fruits of the revival. Something of the intensity of this period can be gauged from reports published in the Tabernacle news magazine *The Sword and the Trowel*:

The congregation gathered for a week of intense prayer in 1865, described as a time of deep thrilling power, when all hearts and spirits were bowed down in deep repentance. An appeal to the unconverted resulted in a number of Christians retiring into a room below with many anxious ones, several of whom received peace with God.<sup>1</sup>

He arranged for his deacons to organise and lead three weeks of special services in 1866, with detailed outreach plans, prayer meetings and opportunities for those seeking salvation to receive counsel.

C.H. Spurgeon recorded his own memories of the earliest days, saying: "Shall we ever forget Park Street, those prayer meetings when I felt compelled to let you go without a word from my lips because the spirit of God was so awfully present: that we felt bowed to the dust."<sup>2</sup>



In 1856 C.H. Spurgeon had spent a whole night in prayer. A disastrous fire in the Surrey Gardens Music Hall resulted in a panic in which many were injured and some killed by the stampeding crowds. The young preacher almost lost his reason in the light of unjust criticisms of his part in the tragedy, but finally won through to peace over a long night of agony before God.

When Tom his son sailed for Australia on October 2 1879 his father was equally saddened. He had joyously built high hopes of Tom serving at his side, especially in the light of his own illness. Again he wrestled through a long weary night of similar agony. Again he won the victory.

### **He practised it**

Prayer was central to Spurgeon's life. *He practised it*. He felt it was important – 'Prayer is to me now what the sucking of the milk was to me in my infancy. Although I do not always feel the same relish for it, yet I am sure I cannot live without it.' Even the Slough of Despond can be passed by the supports of prayer and faith.

"What shall I do if you cease to pray for me? Let me know the day when you give up praying for me, for then I must give up preaching and I must cry, 'O my God, take me home, for my work is done!'"<sup>3</sup>

He spoke gratefully of his first extempore prayer:

"I remember the first time I ever sincerely prayed; but I do not recollect the words I used; surely there were few enough words in that petition. I had often repeated a form; I had been in the habit of continually repeating it. At last I came really to pray....The overwhelming splendour of His majesty, the greatness of His power, the severity of His justice, the immaculate character of His holiness and all His dreadful grandeur – these things overpowered my soul and I fell down in utter prostration of spirit; but there was in that prayer a true and real drawing near to God."<sup>4</sup>

Yet he recognised that prayer is a struggle, especially in listening to God:

"When He would have me pray I would not pray: when He would have me listen to the sound of the ministry, I would not."<sup>5</sup>

His experience of blessing was variable:

"I pray as if I did not pray, hear as if I did not hear, and read as if I did not read – such is my deadness and coldness. I had a glorious revival on Saturday and Sunday."<sup>6</sup>

His *Autobiography* contains examples of prayers. Its scope included worship, intercession for those in high office, backsliders, the poor, sick, married and those in Christian service. He was unafraid to challenge the church about believing prayer. Preaching in the Tabernacle in 1867 on 'Believing to see' he commented in connection with the Orphanage:

"I hope the day may soon come when the noble example which has been set by our esteemed brother, Mr Müller of Bristol, will be more constantly followed in all the Lord's work; for rest assured that if we will but 'believe and see' we shall see great things. I cannot forbear mentioning to you tonight what God has enabled us to see of late as a church. We met together one Monday night, as you will remember, for prayer concerning the Orphanage; and it was not a little remarkable that, on the Saturday of that week the Lord should have moved some friend who knew nothing of our prayers, to give five hundred pounds to that object.

It astonished some of you that, on the following Monday God should have influenced another to give six hundred pounds! When I told you of that at the next prayer meeting, you did not think, perhaps, that the Lord had something else in store and that the following Tuesday another friend would come with five hundred pounds! It was just the same in the building of this Tabernacle. We were a few and poor people when we commenced; but still, we moved on by faith and never went into debt. We trusted in God and the house was built, to the eternal honour of Him who hears and answers prayer".<sup>7</sup>

Spontaneity and naturalness characterise his practice of prayer. His diary entries so easily move into prayer.<sup>8</sup> He advises pastors to live in an attitude of prayer, remembering the aid of the Spirit.<sup>9</sup> In times of adversity and pain he found himself driven to prayer, for he had nowhere else to go.<sup>10</sup> His quiet time was never long, because his speedy mind thought of twenty things in five minutes.<sup>11</sup>

### **He preached it**

Spurgeon preached twenty-one recorded sermons on prayer. On August 30 1868 he took Acts 1:14. He reviewed prayer meetings in Acts:

1. United prayer is the comfort of a disconsolate church
2. United prayer is the place to receive divine power
3. United prayer is the resource of a persecuted church
4. United prayer achieves individual deliverance<sup>12</sup>
5. United prayer leads to missionary operation

He observed that prayer meetings can generate devotion and blessing. They can lead to the glory of God, upbuilding of the church and the conversion of sinners. But Spurgeon spoke at length on the hindrance to prayer meetings:

"Unholiness hinders prayer. Discord always spoils prayer; so does hypocrisy. Long prayers hinder prayer meetings; and those who do not pray but preach a little sermon. A want of directness or a want of real earnestness have often spoiled our prayer meetings. But the prayer meeting may also be spoiled after we have been to it, by asking a blessing and then not expecting to receive it. Inconsistency, too, in not practically carrying out your desires will also spoil

the prayer meeting. Earnest prayer is always to be followed up by persevering efforts and then the result will be great indeed".<sup>13</sup>

## **He taught it**

Spurgeon was clear about the Holy Spirit's role in prayer:

"We need the Spirit of God as the Spirit of supplications, who maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. A very important part of our lives consists in praying in the Holy Ghost and that minister who does not think so had better escape from his ministry. Abundant prayer must go with earnest preaching. We cannot be always on the knees of the body but the soul should never leave the posture of devotion. The habit of prayer is good but the spirit of prayer is better. Regular retirement is to be maintained but continuous communion with God is to be our aim. As a rule we ministers ought never to be many minutes without actually lifting up our hearts in prayer. Some of us could honestly say that we are seldom a quarter of an hour without speaking to God and that not as a duty but as an instinct, a habit of the new nature for which we claim no more credit than a babe does for crying after its mother. How could we do otherwise? Now, if we are to be much in the spirit of prayer we need secret oil to be poured upon the sacred fire of our heart's devotion; we want to be again and again visited by the Spirit of grace and supplication."<sup>14</sup>

Yet in his lectures he taught about the mechanics of private prayer and the rudiments of public prayer; abjuring vulgarity and verbosity. He enjoined preparation for public intercession, yet pleaded for heartfelt, varied and relevant delivery.

In his own life he depended upon prayer. He prayed whenever appropriate, especially with others. Fullerton twice recalls him praying with friends<sup>15</sup> whilst out walking; and Williams recalls regular family prayers every evening at 6 at Westward.<sup>16</sup>

## **He encouraged it**

Mr Spurgeon once related to his congregation at the Tabernacle a notable instance which illustrated both the power of the prayer of faith and the usefulness of one of his printed sermons:

"At the close of one of our services a poor woman, accompanied by two of her neighbours came to my vestry in deep distress. Her husband had fled the country; and in her sorrow she had gone to the house of God and something I said in the sermon made her think that I was personally familiar with her case. Of course, I had really known noth-

ing about her: I had made use of a general illustration which just fitted her particular case. She told me her story and a very sad one it was. I said 'There is nothing we can do but kneel down and cry to the Lord for the immediate conversion of your husband'. We knelt down and I prayed that the Lord would touch the heart of the deserter, convert his soul and bring him back to his home. When we rose from our knees I said to the poor woman, 'Do not fret about the matter. I feel sure your husband will come home: and that he will yet become connected with our church.' "17

He continued:

"She went away and I forgot all about her. Some months afterwards she re-appeared with her neighbour and a man she introduced to me as her husband. He had indeed come back and he had returned a converted man. On making enquiry and comparing notes we found that the very day on which we had prayed for his conversion, being at that time on board ship far away on the sea he stumbled most unexpectedly upon a stray copy of one of my sermons. He read it; the truth went to his heart; he repented and sought the Lord; and as soon as possible he came back to his wife and to his daily calling. He was admitted as a member at the Tabernacle, and his wife, who up to that time had not joined the church, was also received into fellowship with us. That woman does not doubt the power of prayer."18

He also prayed regularly for the sick. Some of his congregation testified to physical healing. He always spoke of God's sovereignty in the varied answers he saw. God blesses dependents, not activists. Life in 1989 demands clear strategy and earnest prayer. So did life in 1889.

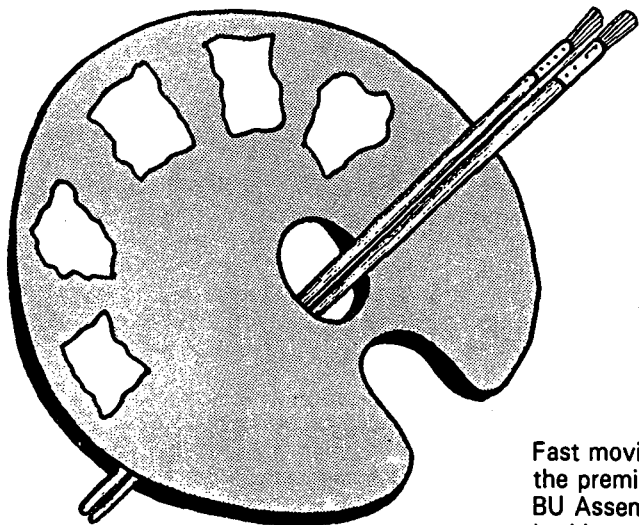
## **Mike Nicholls**

### **Footnotes**

1. *The Sword and the Trowel* 1865 p68
2. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 1875 p441
3. C.H. Spurgeon *Autobiography* (4 vols) II p335
4. *Ibid* I p77
5. *Ibid* p91
6. *Ibid* pp118-119
7. *Ibid* II pp173-174
8. *Ibid* I pp130ff
9. C.H. Spurgeon *Lectures to My Students* chps 3 and 14
10. *Autobiography* III pp247-8
11. W.Y. Fullerton *C.H. Spurgeon* p218
12. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* vol 60. p409
13. *Lectures* 1st Series pp53ff
14. *Ibid*
15. Fullerton p150
16. William Williams *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* pp83-85.
17. *Autobiography* III p329
18. *Ibid*

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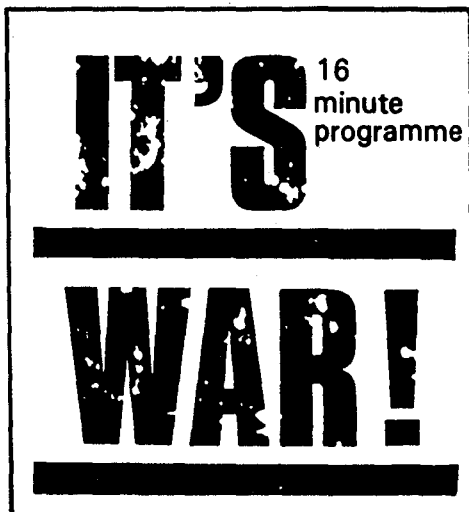
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# Hermeneutics and the Gathered Church

Hermeneutics is a word increasingly heard in theological, philosophical and even literary circles. Traditionally, hermeneutics involved a gathering of the rules for the understanding of an old text, especially the Bible. The interpreter was encouraged to begin with the language of the text, its grammar, vocabulary and style. He would examine the linguistic and historical content of the ancient text, and so traditional hermeneutics began with the recognition that a text was conditioned by a given historical context, but there would never be any special reference to the cultural setting of the modern reader or interpreter.

## 1. The Bomb Drops

It was all so one-sided, supposedly objective and detached. Gradually through the work of Schleiermacher, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur (and a number of other unpronounceables!) the bomb dropped! Surely the *interpreter* has a powerful subjective place in the interpretation of the text. Modern hermeneutics takes the point seriously. In our attempts to understand the Bible today in our own context, culture and church community, there needs to be a recognition that historical conditioning is two-sided. There cannot be a detached, pure, "vacuum"-like interpretation of the text. A.C. Thiselton comments, "The modern interpreter, no less than the text, stands in a given historical context and tradition".<sup>1</sup>

This has had a devastating effect upon interpretation. It is now clear that the understanding of the text cannot be achieved by a mere observance of certain hermeneutical rules. It could well be that a modern reader of a Biblical text could have access to all the necessary linguistic and historical information at his disposal, and even carefully applying that information to the text he could still lack the creative insight to understand it in terms of today's setting. It is now recognised that every interpreter brings to the text the whole baggage of his own culture/conditioning/prejudice and tradition. This is of course equally true for the believing Christian, and modern hermeneutics calls us to be honest about this.

In the publication "Concilium", edited by Kung/Moltmann and entitled "Conflicting Ways of Interpreting the Bible", six Christian leaders including Alan Boesak from South Africa and Carlos Mesters from Brazil, were invited to interpret and apply Mark Ch 6 vv45-52 to their own setting. As you would expect, the differences in the interpretation of that narrative were immense and simply underlined the importance of one's own background and conditioning, which is brought to the text. Try as you might, you cannot avoid this factor in hermeneutics, though there are those who still try short-circuits.

## 2. Short Circuits

The attempt to ignore your own cultural spectacles involves several arguments such as the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Role of Faith, the Timeless Word of God and the Power of the Word of God to suggest that hermeneut-

ics is unnecessary. In fact, none of these short-circuit the necessity of hermeneutics. The very opposite is true. Each of these objections are in fact positive tools in the hermeneutical task which is both relevant and urgent for the culturally diverse Church of Jesus Christ today. The Holy Spirit, Faith, the Power and Timelessness of the Word of God are not independent but indispensable to the hermeneutical task.

### **3. The Role of the Gathered Church**

Recent New Testament studies are revealing that within the New Testament, interpretation of messages was not a matter of merely individual concern. Such an approach would lead to interpreting the message in a purely individualistic and personal way, and leads to Luther's warnings of the Bible becoming "the nose of wax" being pushed into any shape the reader happens to favour.

In contrast to this, it is now becoming clear that there was a community of reference which always helped to shape the interpretation of a message. Moreover, such a community of reference was not a professional guild of highly trained scholars, but ordinary men and women of the living church.

This move in the study of hermeneutics is deeply relevant to the gathered church and should warm the hearts of our Baptist Community of Faith! For it is not merely the preacher/teacher who is involved in the interpretative process, but the congregation, the Body of Christ.

#### **(a) The New Testament**

It is clear that the vast majority of letters written in the New Testament were written to church communities and that includes the Pastoral Epistles. Such believing communities were to interpret and apply the letters.

Within the Revelation of St. John one finds seven letters written to specific Christian communities with clear instructions to those communities which must be interpreted by them.

However, you find also in the teachings of Jesus Himself the necessity of group interpretation and recent New Testament studies are pointing this out.

#### **(i) The Parables in the Gospels**

The example of the Parables of Jesus is instructive in the first place because Jesus Himself underlines the need for some interpretive act or process on the part of the hearers if the parables are to achieve their effect. The meaning of every parable was not immediately apparent, for the disciples enquired about their interpretation (cf Mark 4 vv 10-20; Matt 13 vv 10-23; Luke 8 v 8-15). The parables of Jesus demand from the listeners a readiness to respond, often in group settings.

## **(ii) Audience Criticism in the Gospels**

Here again there is an emphasis in newer studies of the importance of a group or community interpreting the teaching of Jesus. The Huck-Lietzmann synopsis of Matthew, Mark and Luke identifies four hundred and twenty two units of the sayings of Jesus. An audience is clearly shown to be designated in three hundred and ninety five of those units, i.e. 94%. That shows the crucial importance of the community as an interpretive tool. There were different audiences such as the twelve disciples, the larger crowd of disciples, the opponent crowd and so on. Each group can also be further identified with other sub-categories. However, the most important conclusion from the study of audience criticism is the use of the community as a hermeneutical tool.

Baird comments, "The audience was of great importance to those who recorded the tradition because they believed the message of the logia itself was audience centred ... the audience was needed for the correct and meaningful reproduction of His teaching. This means to us that *the audience becomes a hermeneutical factor of the first importance*. It means that we cannot really understand what the logia are saying until we understand the audience to which they are attributed."<sup>2</sup>

## **(b) The Early Church**

The community of faith played an important part in interpretation when it came to the Church Fathers, certainly from Irenaeus onwards. There was the problem of course of heretics and unbelievers attempting to use the Bible in such a way as to defend their opinions. In this context Irenaeus and many of the Church Fathers insisted on two principles of hermeneutics:

- (i)** Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of its own witness as a whole;
- (ii)** valid interpretation depends upon the Christian faith accepted by the Christian community.

This last point is a crucial one. R.P.C. Hanson has written, "The Bible ... was written from faith to faith. It was intended for the context of a worshipping community and outside the context of a worshipping community it is inevitably ... misapplied. It is intended for the use of a living Church."<sup>3</sup> Such a principle, early on in the Church, involving the community of faith in the process of interpretation is a significant and relevant pointer.

## **(c) The Reformation**

All the Reformers were faced with the accusation that they were interpreting Scripture to suit their theology. In this context it is fascinating to see the role which the believing Community was to have as an interpretive tool. Zwingli, the Zurich Reformer, was not exactly a friend of Baptists, but he is an excellent illustration of this point.

The centrality of God in Zwingli's theology and the centrality of the Bible were two sides of the same coin. For Zwingli to turn from the Bible was to turn from God to man, but his opponents accused him of twisting the Scriptures. Zwingli, therefore, appealed to the assembly of the believing community as being a



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**To the Readers of the Fraternal.**

Dear Friends,

You will recall from my letter in the April 1989 issue we had found it impossible to move the Insurance Company to Didcot and we were looking for premises in London.

By the time you read this letter we shall have moved to the above address on the 16th September. We are situated over the Bow Mission where Methodists share worship with Anglicans. Not only is there an ecumenical aspect but as we are sharing a suite of offices with London Baptist Association and Baptist Housing Association occupy the neighbouring offices, we shall be a significant Baptist nucleus in London.

The offices are only a few minutes walk from Mile End station which itself is but two stations on the Central Line from Liverpool Street. We are always pleased to receive personal callers but in practice most of our business is dealt with by correspondence and telephone.

I am confident therefore our service will not be diminished by the change of premises, and I hope in due course we shall be able to proceed with new developments which have naturally been shelved whilst we have been occupied with preparations for the move.

Yours sincerely,

**M.E. PURVER**

crucial interpretive tool of Scripture. He insisted that the interpretation of Scripture through the gathered community of believers was a clear, specific and crucial tool in the theology of interpretation.

This can look suspiciously like Roman Catholic thought, i.e. placing authority in the Church interpreting the Book. However, this is not the case. The authority remains in Scripture, but the Book is applied in each believing/gathered church community.

Put another way, the process of heremeneutics takes place within the context of the believing community rooted in the unique authority of Scripture, not Church or tradition.

#### **4. Movement and Responsibility**

This should have some very practical outworking for gathered communities of Christians and for ministers of those Communities. In applying the Scripture to the 20th Century, and more particularly in the particular culture and setting in which we are, the role of the Church community is an important (though not the only) key in the interpretation. Our Church Meetings and House groups should have a crucial role to play in the interpreting and applying of Scripture to each believing community. This of course means that the interpretation and application of Scripture is never static. It will alter in its expression from place to place, and so we should expect it to do so. For if each believing church community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is genuinely involved in the hermeneutical process we shall not expect Church clones, but discover in a fresh and live way what God is saying to each particular church community.

The practical outworking of this will be unsettling for us ministers. There is a pope inside everyone of us! We may not say so, but we feel deep down that we are always right in our interpretation of Scripture. Because of our calling and theological training and Christian experience, so often we feel that our interpretation of what the Word of God says is the final one. That has a lot to do with security of feelings and bowing to expectations, rather than interpretation of Scripture. If the believing church community should have a relevant role in the dynamic interpretation of Scripture, rather than only an individual preacher/teacher, how do we facilitate that role?

#### **5. Responsible Hermeneutics**

This is not to say that we can do what we like with the text. There is no substitute for careful enquiry into the text and its background, and so the place of theological training and Christian experience are crucial. We are set in a certain time and context, as is the text that we are looking at. We need to attempt to bridge that historical distance. To begin to do so we need to appreciate the positive and indispensable nature of careful Bible study. However, we need to appreciate the clear limitations this will have.

#### **Conclusion**

Modern hermeneutics is far more practical than it sounds and it ought to help us break out of a mere intellectual, individual or static mode of understanding and

interpreting Scripture into a relevant, dynamic and corporate interpretation, involving the immediate believing community and the claims of the Christian faith. It will inevitably lead to changes in lifestyle, structures and mission.

The place of hermeneutics should be a live issue at our Church Meetings, Housegroups, Pastoral Groups and Worship Services, reflecting the importance of the believing community interpreting Scripture and applying it to the particular local setting.

**Jonathan Woodhouse**

### **Footnotes**

1. A.C. Thiselton: *The Two Horizons* p.xi.
2. J. Arthur Baird: *Audience Criticism and the Historical Jesus* p.134
3. R.P.C. Hanson: *The Bible as a Norm of Faith* p.11

## **My Presidential Year**

The Presidential experience has parallels to a space-launch – Take-off, orbit and splash-down! There is a three year process, lifting off in the vice-presidential year, in full swing for the presidency, and then comes the gentle dropping into the ex-presidential phase.

This gives an unrivalled overview that breaks over area and association boundaries, looks into a variety of theological fields, and sets our own Baptist denomination within the wider national and global horizons.

Preparation for this article meant for me a reliving of the events and experiences of a personal pilgrimage between 1987-1990 that has been both exciting and educational. I have worked through the files and scrapbooks, dredged into the memory banks and jotted down the underlying themes or messages. In many ways it has been like the playing back of a very long video!

I have discovered that my sheets of notes fell into five groups and (with a little help from Thesaurus!) that these correspond to the letters of V-I-D-E-O. Vitality, Identity, Diversity, Evangelical/Ecumenical and Opportunity are my headings and they capture 'that which I have received'. So, well aware of the limitations and acknowledging the dangers, I set out in this article the trends, currents and features of Baptist life in England and Wales in the late 1980's — as seen through one pair of eyes.

### **VITALITY**

Message one is refreshing! There is life and vigour in many, often unexpected, places. Sometimes this was spelt out – 'Church Alive' was the theme of a Southern Baptist Association event and 'Alive at the centre' headed a brochure about a new building development at St. Albans.

Often vitality was very evident. Strength of singing, energy of discussions and enthusiasm for mission ran alongside bold projects of social action, fresh patterns of ministry and new shapes of corporate life. Oasis is one sign and ABY (Association of Baptist Youth) another. The number and quality of those training for the ministry and the burgeoning of imaginative lay-training courses are one witness. The scale and motives for building projects reflected this vitality – whether it was the historic Fuller Church in Kettering, facing town developments or the brand new, unusual, ‘Church of the Potter’ in Truro – whether it was adaptation to respond to community needs or extension to house growing congregations.

In four spheres this vitality had broken through – worship, leadership, fellowship and mission. Worship has changed beyond belief and would not be recognised by anyone doing the time-jump from the 1950’s! The freeing effect of the charismatic influences and the cross-fertilisation of the ecumenical movement have worked together. The same forces have questioned and affected our styles of leadership to create more participation and more professionalism (in the best sense). The numerical pruning of our congregations has made fellowship more possible and ‘the peace’ is now a common event. Mission has broken free from the single strand of “evangelism” and has spilt over in all directions.

There is another side to this vitality. Rapid change has led to resistance, division and defection. There are casualties and conflicts. Several times we walked into pastoral minefields, disturbed congregations and hurt memberships. Preaching “shalom” in some situations was not easy and I came to understand far more some of the heavy responsibilities our Area Superintendents pick up. It is no accident that a major initiative on stress in the ministry has just been launched. We also stumbled on decay and even death where the worship was sterile, the atmosphere awful and the visible signs of dissolution all too evident – mercifully these churches could be counted on one hand among the 200 plus I visited.

For the overwhelming message we received is, that contrary to the accepted wisdom of the tabloids, the Church of Jesus Christ is very much alive. There is commitment, concern and spiritual energy at work which is leading to vibrant worship, deepening fellowship and total mission.

## **IDENTITY**

The second message that comes over is centred on our Baptist identity and has overtones of concern and even confusion. Vitality means newness, questioning and change. Older people ask what is happening to the familiar ‘means of grace’ and younger ones fail to appreciate the rooted strength of tradition. The debate about Baptist identity is deeper than we recognise.

Many factors are involved. Population mobility means an accelerating movement (out and in) within local fellowships, many people now put the style of a church before the denominational label, alternative rallying points like Spring Harvest influence the activists, the wave of new urban churches are baptistic but (with rare exceptions) have not joined the B.U. and the Inter-Church Process may delight those in Local Ecumenical Projects, but is a dilemma to others!

Who are we? Where are we going? were common questions. Are we to belong to a comprehensive super-Church or do we continue to carry distinctive notes of witness? When I sat in St. Paul's for the celebrations of the 250th Anniversary of the conversion of John Wesley I was surrounded by ranks of church leaders from every conceivable ecclesiastic branch. Had the Free Churches come home? But as I drove home through East London and thought of the scores of new, often black churches I passed, I asked myself whether I belonged here rather than St. Paul's.

It is no answer to retreat into the isolated individualism of independency – neither biblical mandates nor contemporary pressures will allow that. During my own pilgrimage I received help from many quarters.

Participation in the first residential F.C.F.C. conference with the theme of 'God's growing people' uncovered the shared Free Church heritage that is still strong, conversations with national leaders pointed out the necessity of the Baptist voice (the only authentic Independent group among the mainline churches) and sharing in the Advisory Council of the Anglican Faith in the City brought home the need to emphasise personal evangelism.

Our identity is rooted in Scripture, embodied in our churchship and expressed in mission. That is why there is a need for a clarification of those central, biblical beliefs to which we all assent. Unless Baptists do this they could find themselves drifting apart through the insistent two-edged tugging of the 'evangelical' and 'ecumenical' wings.

There are signs of hope – especially in Association life. I was heartened by the gathering strength of areas as far apart as Yorkshire, Devon and Cornwall and the Southern. I was encouraged by the reality and incisiveness of many Association meetings and by the unity of Fraternalists. I believe that the physical coming together of the B.M.S. and the B.U. at Didcot could draw us together in a wider and deeper sense of mission. I was moved by the depth and grace of the 1989 Assembly debate and vote on the Inter-Church Process.

But I also know that the gathering tide of Muslim militancy, the Pluralistic society to which we belong, the tendency to polarise around personalities and our quickness to judge and categorise are all forces of great potency which have to be faced if we are to be the people God meant us to be – whatever the label we wear!

## **DIVERSITY**

The surge of vitality and the search for the roots that gave us identity have created an incredible Baptist garden containing a diversity of colour, shape, taste and scent! As we journeyed the country we never knew what lay round the next corner.

In Greater Manchester we moved from the compact, multi-racial inner city congregations at Moss Side, engaged in a very liturgical act of worship to the large, almost totally white Altrincham Sunday evening service complete with new songs and much participation. At Bridlington we celebrated 300 years of long-standing witness while in Dibden, Southampton, we watched the induction of a minister in a school on a new estate.

We've sung from Songs of Fellowship, The Baptist Hymn Book, Mission Praise, Hymns for Today's Church and innumerable photocopied collections. Instrumentally we've been led by trumpets and organs (and everything in between). Drama, mime, banners and dancing have gone alongside sermon, bread and wine, and bible reading (from every conceivable version!)

Leadership in our churches varies from autocratic, up-front, 'I'm in charge' (fading) to participatory, team and open (growing). We've met overseers, elders, servants as well as ministers and deacons.

The Assembly Urban walks introduced many delegates to different styles of Baptist witness and a 'church crawl' in a place like Hull (4 churches in 4 hours) left me astonished at how different neighbouring churches can be. Uniformity is out, diversity is definitely in.

It is not always easy to unpack reasons. Theological differences are one key, cultural distinctions another. Ministers are often the agent of change but we kept discovering congregations who were clearly shaping their ministers! While the inner city churches present the most visually obvious diversity in race and cultural terms, suburban church like New Malden in London were learning to live with a Korean congregation worshipping in their building.

But the diversity is far greater than local church or association life. Baptists are very active in (and often lead) para-church groups or projects. They are to be found in leadership roles in both the Evangelical Alliance and LEPs. They are working in the Zebra Project (black and white churches together), Joppa (concern for other faiths) and Solidarity with El Salvador.

Church programmes are now multi-faceted, The traditional 'twice-on-Sunday', Sunday Schools, Women's Meetings and uniformed groups are giving way to one, family style central act of worship spanning many aspects, weekly cell groups and new forms of mission ranging from demonstration to crusade.

To visit the new city of Milton Keynes and the old city-town of Swallow; to share in Fraternal/ College/ Association/ Church/ LEPs/ Baptisms/ Workshops Conferences; to go where Baptists are involved in planning/ industry/ probation social action/ education/ medicine/ other faiths ministry; to sing in Tamil Portuguese/ Welsh/ German/ Dutch; to take part in a debate in the Oxford Union on poverty arranged by Baptists, and to stand with a congregation in a broadcast service – this is diversity with a vengeance!

All these aspects are pointers to the scale and scope of Baptist mission and ministry in our own day. Fences have come down and uniformity has given way to variety. But we have to ensure that diversity does not fracture unity. For although the diversity I have seen is a source of delight and thankfulness it can also be the locale of misunderstanding, stress and even division. This is particularly obvious in the apparently competing and apprehensive worlds of evangelicalism and ecumenicity.

## **EVANGELICAL/ECUMENICAL**

The theological issue for Baptists centres on this axis. The longstanding involvement by Baptists in ecumenical affairs has led towards, and culminated in,

our Assembly decision about the Inter-Church Process at the very time that the evangelical wing of our denomination has grown rapidly in strength and representation. Suspicion about motives and misunderstanding about convictions has often led to polarisation. Sadly, this often seems to lead to division between those majoring on personal evangelism and those engaged in social justice. Happily, we are learning together that it is 'both ... and' rather than 'either ... or'.

Action in Mission is one denominational attempt to hold together, within the orbit of mission, personal faith and social transformation – and I shall always remember the unexpectedly large and enthusiastic gathering for the launch of AIM at the 1988 Assembly. In this we are part of a worldwide movement.

In my journeyings I found Roman Catholics and Protestants at Corrymeela in Northern Ireland, marrying together social concern and living worship. I shared in debate at the W.C.C. Conference on 'Mission – Christ's Way' on the necessity of witness to be alongside work and I know the Lausanne Movement conference for Evangelicals in Manila stressed 'The whole Gospel through the whole church for the whole world'.

With all my heart I wish that we could bury this long-standing and biblically inaccurate division. I become weary of telling one group that evangelicals are not to be equated with fundamentalism and another that the ecumenically minded do pray and read their Bibles! Biblical roots, the example of Jesus and Church History should have taught us by now that shalom is personal, corporate and social.

The evangelical opportunity is so great and the social needs are so immense that we need to join hands and accept, rather than unchurch, each other.

Among British Baptists I have discovered an increasing recognition and reconciliation of these theological tensions. Baptist Councillors in London were meeting with other Christian politicians with the twin agendas of contemporary issues and biblical themes. The Billy Graham Crusade gave the offering to the homeless. A strongly evangelical congregation in the Midlands have worked out a strategy for community involvement, while a church known for its social concern in London employed a Church Army evangelist.

## **OPPORTUNITY**

Everywhere I travelled I saw Baptists facing and grasping opportunities. Doors are opening not shutting. Horizons are widening, not contracting. Possibilities are astonishing and the means of communication amazing. I can only sketch out one list, others will vary according to geography and constituency.

In evangelism, the response to the Billy Graham Crusade, the regional 'Mission 89's, townwide visitation and individual congregational outreach are all signs of a recovery of confidence and a recognition that more are prepared to hear and many are reaching out for the Gospel. A new vocabulary... 'church planting'.. 'resurrected churches'.. is growing up.

In community action the blending of personal ministry, corporate activity and the stewardship of our buildings is spanning and penetrating the whole of life.

The 1988 Assembly resolutions on Alcohol, Racism, the NHS and S. Africa cover personal life, relationships, national and international affairs and that spectrum is now with us all.

In communication we are learning to use both the media and personal witness. I lost count of the interviews, magazine programmes and talks I gave on the radio - almost always at the instigation of a Baptist minister already engaged in this ministry. I went to the launch of the Christian Enquiry Agency which is advertising in the tabloids. Above all I met individuals who were inviting others into faith - like the elderly woman who had brought a dozen pensioners into a northern church in seven years.

In the wider fellowship of Christ's people we are far more aware of each other - locally, nationally and globally. We are learning to accept (from) each other and to join hands in common tasks. There is less judgmentalism and more joy, less isolation and more 'togetherness'.

It has been (and still is) a profoundly moving and life-changing experience to be granted the privilege of being President. I wish everybody could have it! In recent years the Presidents chosen and the themes carried have represented and reflected what is going on around us.

Frank Cooke's lifting of 'One World' was followed by Norman Wright's insistence on 'Fanning the Flames'. The activism of 'Building Bridges' from David Coffey was undergirded by the stress Margaret Jarman placed on 'Prayer and Action - Unbroken Circle'. My own theme of 'Shalom' has been widened and intensified by John Bigg's 'For Such A Time As This'.

All of us will have our own personal recollections of moving among so many of our sisters and brothers. I have played back to you the over-all themes that emerged from my own V-I-D-E-O - Vitality, Identity, Diversity, Evangelical/Ecumenical, Opportunity. This is our agenda and our journey. These are the currents in which I have swum during the busiest and most enriching years of my life.

**Colin Marchant**



# Book Reviews

**Tensions** by H.A. Williams.(Fount,1989,128pp,2.50)

First of all a confession. I was already an enthusiast for Harry Williams' writings before I read "*Tensions*". His autobiography, "*Some Day I'll Find You*", seems to me to be quite outstanding for its honesty and insights, as well as being a fascinating and well-written story. It is a great antidote to too much Christian triumphalism and prosperity theology, and I have recommended it and lent it to more people than any other book, (the Bible excepted).

Second confession. I do not always read books twice before writing a review of them, but this one I have. My wife has read it and enjoyed it too.

"*Tensions*", subtitled, "Necessary Conflicts in Life and Love", is short (128 pages of a fairly large type-face), simple (it is devoid of jargon and intellectualisation), learned and profound. In particular, its author makes us face the reality that Christians, even born-again and charismatic Christians, function psychologically like other human beings. We deceive ourselves, do not always discern our true motives, try to hide from the unacceptable faces of the shadow sides of our personalities, all with damaging consequences. "...if we refuse to let life in by the front door by accepting and welcoming those tensions which are necessary and healthy, life will sneak in by all sorts of back ways, establish itself in dark holes and corners, and bang about noisily and destructively within us."(p23.)

What other writer would be wise enough to recognise, and brave enough to tell us, that when we pray, we sometimes talk to ourselves, and often can't know for sure which we're doing? Or that we Christians often seem to think and act as though perfect faith were identical with perfect knowledge; the deeper your faith, the more sure you become, whereas perfect faith remains *faith* with the scope and necessity for genuine agnosticism and doubt? Or that life and resurrection are a great joke – literally. "The resurrection is... the supreme, the final, the ultimate joke – that than which nothing could be funnier". (p126)

Read it!

**Michael Ball**

**The Psalms** by Harry Mowvley (Collins,1989, 335pp, 6.95)

Harry Mowvley's work on the Psalms arises out of his teaching experience at Bristol Baptist College and Bristol University, and out of his desire to make the Psalms alive and accessible to students and congregations. The book begins with an introduction, summarising some of the conclusions of modern scholarship regarding the origin of the Psalms and their use in Israelite worship. This is not material for those wanting to pursue the detailed arguments of scholars, but a useful setting of the scene. The author then deals briefly with his own approach to translation and ends by expressing his hope that these translations will bring a "freshness and vitality" to readings of the Psalms.

The main part of the book is given over to translations of the Psalms themselves. Each one is preceded by an introduction containing valuable information about the possible origin of the Psalm and its setting in Israelite worship, the shifts in interpretation occurring in the exilic and post-exilic periods, and its use in Christian worship and theology. The translations themselves are direct and vivid. There is the occasional lapse into prosaic wording, but for the most part the rhythm and vividness of the original Hebrew poetry is captured in the English, and – an important test – the translations lend themselves well to reading aloud. My only disappointment was that the author has not paid more careful attention to inclusive language, both in the translations and the introductions.

I feel this book will be an invaluable resource, both for those using the Psalms in worship and preaching, and for those drawing on them for their own private devotion. Harry Mowvley's sensitivity to the Hebrew language and his appreciation of the Psalms as the living material of worship shine throughout the book.

**Janet Berry**

**The Normal Christian Birth** by David Pawson. (Hodder & Stoughton, 1989, 336pp, 5.95)

This is the most helpful and challenging Christian book I have read for a long time. "The Normal Christian Birth" is really a *must* for anyone involved in evangelism, or in helping new converts or enquirers. It is a thorough study of the nature of conversion in the New Testament, and challenges many common assumptions about what "becoming a Christian" means. Essentially, Pawson's thesis is that conversion is a complex of four elements – repentance, faith, baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit- and that, whilst these are theologically interrelated, they do not normally occur simultaneously, but require explicit and separate counselling and ministry.

His book has three main parts: the first presents the four elements in conversion, and establishes his basic thesis, I believe convincingly. The second and longest part is a detailed analysis of a wide range of New Testament passages dealing with conversion; his exegesis is generally excellent, and though one may dispute the interpretation of this or that verse, the discussion is balanced, well presented, and full of the most interesting illustrative details which will not be found in the average commentary. In the third part, he discusses the practical application, in pastoral and evangelistic contexts, of his argument.

Pawson generally achieves a very readable style somewhere between "popular preaching" and serious discussion of the technicalities of biblical exegesis, though some of his regular use of alliteration is over-subtle rather than helpful. But such minor quibbles cannot detract from my profound gratitude to David Pawson for giving us such a superb study, and such a challenge to take a much-needed fresh look at the vital business of Christian initiation. Buy it!

**Michael Hooton**

**To Be A Pilgrim** by Basil Hume (SPCK, 1988, 240pp, 2.50)

It is interesting that when Cardinal Basil Hume brings together a variety of thoughts about the Christian life, he should use as its title, 'To Be A Pilgrim',

quoting John Bunyan's famous hymn. Perhaps it wasn't so strange seeing that his father, a distinguished physician, was a Scottish Presbyterian. It was his mother who was a Roman Catholic of French extraction. After being educated at Ampleforth College, Basil Hume joined the Benedictine Community there in 1941, rising to Abbot in 1963. In 1976 Pope Paul VI nominated him Archbishop of Westminster and he quickly became highly respected within and outside the Catholic Church.

'*To Be A Pilgrim*' is not a book to be read straight through, but to be dipped into. It is mainly composed of addresses given on a variety of occasions. The author apologises unnecessarily for its lack of polish. In fact the *shortage* of anecdotal material to me is a weakness. When he does relate what he is saying to actual events, or is practical, e.g. the excellent sections on prayer and holiness, it is more alive. Nevertheless, there are many beautiful passages where the Archbishop's deep spirituality come through powerfully – in terms with which no Nonconformist could quarrel.

The book is in five sections which have within them a number of short articles. The 'Pilgrim' theme develops as man seeking God, God's search for us, the secret of the pilgrim's strength and finally his goal. I did not find the arrangement particularly helpful. I think dated reading for a period in the Church Calendar might have been better.

Unconsciously I left reading the sections where the doctrinal differences between us were most apparent until last. But I have to say how strongly he put forward traditional Catholic beliefs, believing firmly that one day the rest of Christendom would be united under the Pope and that the place of Peter is a current topic of interest in all the churches!

To me the strength of '*To Be A Pilgrim*' was the very real hope and vision the author had of the future life which for him was the impetus for seeking God's help to transform our world today. To Basil Hume the only way that our world can be changed for the better is through Christ in the hearts of His children.

## **Maureen Robbins**

### **The Bible in Politics** by Richard Bauckham (SPCK 1989, 176pp, 6.95)

Richard Bauckham's book is essentially about Biblical hermeneutics: how we can apply the message of the Biblical text to our own culture. Chapter One deals with the general difficulty of scriptural interpretation, and the danger of reading the Bible with our own prejudices. The writer insists that a proper methodological approach to scripture must take account of the varying contextual levels with which we are always dealing. The subsequent chapters seek to work out this methodology with detailed exegetical work on a passage followed by an application of that specific principle to the contemporary scene.

Subjects covered within the book include: the law of gleaning (Lev.19); the responsibility of government (Prov.31); Jesus and taxation; political resistance (Rev.18); the book of Esther and anti-semitism. Perhaps, however, the most impressive chapter was an exegesis of Psalm 10 entitled "Songs for the Oppressed", in which Richard Bauckham examines evidence from those in re-

cent history and the Third World who have experienced the sense of God's abandonment in the midst of oppression.

The writer's avowed aim in this methodological approach is to show both the political nature of much Biblical material, and its abiding social, economic and political relevance today. In pursuit of this aim his exegetical work is rigorous, and his ability to pinpoint the main principle within a passage is incisive. Occasionally, however, some of the conclusions he reaches are a little tame and disappointing. He does not always seem to carry through the logic of his argument to its obvious conclusion.

In spite of that, this remains a worthwhile book, and its value will be assessed not least because it reveals the fallacy of those who argue that Christianity should have nothing to do with politics.

**Stephen Greasley**

### **Addendum**

The reviewer of "The Anointed Community" in the July edition was Larry Kreitzer. – Ed.

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