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'The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily
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Editorial

In earlier life, fêted as a novelist, but at the end, unread and virtually forgotten: Angus Wilson (1913-1991). Indeed, it is not easy now to get hold of the work of this solid craftsman of the story-teller's art. But then his novels are demanding, not merely entertaining, exploring as they do the complexities of human relationships and offering psychological insight into character and motive. About a year before he died a writer suggested that "mediocre novelists imitate life: better ones reveal new aspects of life in their fiction, enabling the reader to interpret and evaluate experience in a new way. They (with an eye to Wilson) may even be said to compel life to imitate fiction".

Here we encounter a moral view of art, rather than an imitative one: that which has something new to share, interpreting and envisioning the human condition. And although this corner of the market may attract only a relatively small clientele (and who has read any Golding since *Lord of the Flies*?) it succeeds, here and there, to do something with us, make something of us, rather than merely reminding us that this is how life is.

And as such it bears on the Christian ministry, particularly the Sunday-by-Sunday proclamation, especially when what is proclaimed appears more and more outlandish in the light of the prevailing ethos and atmosphere in which every congregation lives and moves and has its being these days. Unless the eternal verities are to be reinterpreted in terms of an enlightened humanism, we wrestle like mad to form the people of God, Bible in one hand, daily rag in the other. It appears all too like Kierkegaard's "madman" who raves in the market-place. Perhaps, as not for many a long day, we struggle for an hermeneutic which has integrity, faithful to the word and faithful equally to where people are. Unless, of course, we further abandon preaching in favour of other mediums, drama et al, which, we are assured, are certainly gospel-effective in a visual age. So, preaching as art that invites life to change. And talking of such 'moral art', Edvard Munch's Expressionism work *The Cry*, with its flight from the ultimate terror, appears to speak powerfully to this generation.

A number of the contributions to this edition touch upon this issue of communicating. The first, from the pen of Brian Stanley, is the penultimate in our series tackling specific aspects of world mission. Brian enters the contentious arena of 'culture': are all cultural expressions equally valid in their interpretation of Christ? Subsequently, Faith Bowers introduces the work of *BUILD*, inviting local churches to rise to the challenge of taking seriously those with learning difficulties, that the church may not be discriminatory by default in this area.

Our third article is the first in a two-part submission by Alastair Campbell: *Romans Through New Eyes*. He introduces us to the fresh thinking characterising current Pauline scholarship, dealing here with the purpose of the letter. Then, Peter Shepherd sounds a warning note in the light of the perceived influence of the enterprise culture upon our ministry, its style and goals: "He that has ears to hear...?" To conclude, Edwin Robertson, in an essay review, shares his enthusiasm for a collection of sermons from the acclaimed theologian, Gerd Theissen, characterised by their creativity.

Culture and Christian Mission: A Perspective from History

On 22 April 1888 William Holman Bentley, pioneer missionary in the BMS Congo mission, baptized two young women at Ngombe Lutete in what is now lower Zaire. Both of these early converts of the Baptist mission - Aku Toniangu Biseobodi and Kavazwila Kalombo - had been rescued from Arab slave-traders on the upper Congo river, and had found sanctuary with the Baptist missionaries. In his sermon preached at the baptism, Holman Bentley referred to the prevalent custom in the Congo that when a runaway slave seeks the protection of a new and more benevolent master:

“..he breaks a plate or pot before his new master, strikes him touches his foot, or goes through some such form according to the custom of the district. The new master if such he is willing to become gives the runaway a goat, and they make a feast, and after that will protect him at all costs, generally paying the current price of a slave to his old master. This is called ‘Dia e nkombo - to eat goat’. I referred to their custom, and told them that our Saviour had instituted the ordinance as the outward formality, and sign to be observed by those, who come ‘to eat goat’ with Him. Then continuing I explained who the old master was, and to whom they had come for salvation, and why; how He saves and keeps us. So using their own ideas, and customs the meaning and teaching of the ordinance was brought home to them, and readily understood.”¹

Holman Bentley’s baptismal sermon provides an illuminating example from the early history of Protestant missions in Africa of an attempt to translate the Christian message into cultural categories that would be familiar and intelligible to the hearers. Although obviously susceptible to a theological critique (is baptism *merely* an “outward formality and sign”), it should form a corrective to any conception of the missionary past which imagines that previous missionary generations were *uniformly* marked by Western cultural arrogance and insensitivity. Indeed, in the same letter to Alfred Baynes, the BMS General Secretary, in which he described the baptism of Aku and Kalombo, Holman Bentley defended the decision of his early convert and assistant, Nlemvo, when going out preaching, to wear native dress, rather than the trousers to which he had become accustomed when visiting Britain with the Bentleys in 1884-6, on the grounds that:

“If a native wears trousers he...is considered to be a black white man (*mundele andombe*) and loses at once any influence he may have as being one of the people...Personally I hope that our converts will be Christian Kongos, and not endeavour to efface their nationality, lest they thereby lose their influence.”²

Holman Bentley acknowledged that Nlemvo’s decision would disappoint “many of our friends” - meaning primarily those BMS supporters who had seen him in European dress in Britain, but probably including some missionary colleagues also. A few years later, in 1899, when on furlough, Holman Bentley was intensely annoyed to learn that younger colleagues at Ngombe Lutete had in his absence forced through a new church rule barring all polygamists and their wives from church membership.³

It would thus be easy, and not wholly unjustified, to portray Holman Bentley as a missionary whose enlightened attitudes to cultural questions set him apart from much

Western Christian thinking of his day. Yet there is another passage in this same letter of 1888 which sounds a markedly different note:

“We white folk are hopelessly above these people, we cannot possibly come down to their level: if we were to lay aside our coats and trousers and wear the native cloth we cannot divest ourselves of our gleaming white skins, and we must ever be white men”.⁴

For Holman Bentley, the gulf in what he would have called standards of “civilization” between white and black was so wide that it could not be bridged by any superficial attempts at cultural identification by the missionaries in one direction or by Nlemvo in the other: missionaries should not play at being Africans, and neither should Africans play at being European Christians. Whilst we may wish to endorse the wisdom of Holman Bentley’s conclusion, we find the racial and cultural arrogance of his premiss unacceptable. If missionaries believed deep down in the fundamental superiority of their own culture, did this not ultimately vitiate and invalidate all their attempts, however imaginative, to contextualize and indigenize the Christian message?

The Present Furious Debate

It is thus perfectly possible, by the selective citation of different passages from missionary writings (indeed in this case the same letter of a single missionary), to portray Christian missionaries either as the champions or as the enemies of non-Western indigenous cultures. The debate over these questions in the world of missiological and historical scholarship is now fast and furious. The majority of academic writing on this issue since the Second World War has been highly critical of the allegedly destructive impact of Christian missions on indigenous cultures. The same charges are endlessly repeated at the semi-popular level of television and radio documentaries - the 1990 BBC TV series on “Missionaries” by Julian Pettifer and Richard Bradley was a typical example.⁵

Yet the drift of recent academic scholarship is not all in one direction. An extremely important book by Lamin Sanneh, a converted West African Muslim who is Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale Divinity School, argues that Christianity has been a major influence in the preservation and enhancement of indigenous cultures in the Two-Thirds World.⁶ Sanneh maintains that the decision of the Church in the first century to cross the cultural divide separating Jerusalem from Athens and Jew from Gentile committed Christianity irrevocably to the principles of universality and translatability. If the gospel was for the Greek as much as for the Jew, then it was both necessary and legitimate to translate its message into terms which would be intelligible in the Hellenistic world. At the heart of the principle of translatability was the importance of making the scriptures available in vernacular languages. Where Christianity failed to implement this principle - as in North Africa, where ecclesiastical Latin won the day - the Church failed to put down indigenous roots, and then succumbed meekly to the inroads of Islam in the seventh century. Where, on the other hand, the Church placed its greatest emphasis on vernacular translation - as in the sixteenth century Jesuit mission to Japan or in the nineteenth and twentieth century Protestant advance into sub-Saharan Africa - Christianity rapidly became indigenized, and experienced remarkable growth as a result. Sanneh comments that “there is a radical pluralism implied in vernacular translation wherein all languages and cultures are, in principle, equal in expressing the word of God.”⁷

However, according to Sanneh, translatability is not the only route to numerical success in mission. Islam set its face against the principle of translatability by its insistence that Mecca remained the focus of religious devotion and that the Qu’ran was untranslatable: not only the content of their scriptures, but also their cultural and

linguistic form, were divine revelation: Arabic was the sacred language which must be taught to all converts and universally employed in Muslim worship. Paradoxically this inflexibility proved to be part of Islam's missionary appeal: converts became part of a universal and, to a large extent, uniform religious movement; the loss of particularity was more than compensated for by the sense of belonging to one faith, united by one holy tongue. In consequence, Islam has been a culturally homogenizing force, ultimately hostile to the preservation of indigenous cultures in their particularity.

Implicit, though not explicit, in Sanneh's book is his conviction that the Christian commitment to translatability is to be preferred to the Islamic path of uniformity. The price that has to be paid for the Christian way of cultural plurality is a much greater tendency to schism and disunity, as Christians repeatedly fail to agree on the point at which legitimate inculturation becomes illegitimate syncretism.⁸ Ultimately the justification for the Christian option for diversity in unity can only be theological: it stems from the trinitarian nature of God Himself, the Three in One, who seeks to reconcile the embittered dividedness of humanity into the harmonious diversity of a new humanity in Christ.

Sanneh's thesis is powerful and, to this writer, persuasive. If allowed to stand on its own, it appears to put Christian missionaries decidedly on the side of the angels in the ongoing debate about Christianity and culture. Yet perhaps it fails to take sufficiently seriously that dark underside of the missionary record whose shadow can be discerned in Holman Bentley's unquestioning assertion of European superiority. The argument of an even more recent book by an African Christian scholar is relevant here. Kwame Bediako, a Ghanaian Presbyterian, has contended in *Theology and Identity* that the fatal flaw of the historic missionary movement was its implicit equation between Europe and Christendom. In the medieval period, the expansion of Islam, the experience of the Crusades, and the weakening of the historic churches of the eastern Mediterranean, all contributed to a gradual merging of Christian and Western European identity whose consequences have been profound and enduring. Both Catholic and Protestant missionary expansion was informed by the premiss that European civilization represented the divinely-sanctioned summit of human social development. The task of Christian mission, therefore, was not merely to bring salvation to so-called "primitive" peoples, but also to introduce them to those temporal benefits which hundreds of years of Christian history had bestowed on the societies of the Western world. For Bediako, therefore, the Church has been insufficiently radical and consistent in its commitment to universality. Christian mission has too easily slipped into racially and culturally divisive categories which labelled non-Western people as "heathen" rather than simply as men and women who, no less but no more than Europeans, needed the redeeming grace of God in Christ.⁹ Bediako's implication that the Church has been insufficiently prepared to submit the values of Western civilization to the scrutiny of Scripture is of a piece with the call, originating from Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, and now embodied in Britain in the "Gospel and Our Culture" movement, to challenge in the name of Christ the "plausibility structures" of modern Western humanism and secularism.¹⁰

Particularity and Universality

The debate over the relationship between Christianity and culture began in the pages of the New Testament and will continue unabated until all human cultures are transcended in the kingdom of God in its fullness. All participants in Christian mission have to live with the tension between their own inescapable cultural identity and the universality of the gospel which addresses itself to, and embodies itself in, and yet deeply challenges, all human cultures. To attempt to escape from that tension by deculturizing ourselves would be, as Holman Bentley rightly perceived, a fruitless

enterprise. Worse than that, it would be untrue to the gospel of the Word of God who became flesh in a particular Jewish cultural form, yet who, in and through that very cultural particularity, opened the way for men and women of all nations to return to the Father.

Brian Stanley

1. Regent's Park College, BMS archives, A/31, W.H. Bentley to A.H. Baynes, 24 April 1988
2. Ibid
3. Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992* T and T Clark, Edinburgh, 1992, pp129-30
4. Regent's Park College, BMS Archives, A/31, W.H. Bentley to A.H. Baynes, 24 April 1988
5. See J. Pettifer and R. Bradley, *Missionaries* (BBC Books, London, 1990)
6. L. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1989)
7. Ibid., p 208
8. Ibid., p 234
9. K. Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (Regnum Books, Oxford, 1992), pp 228-52
10. Newbigin's ideas are most fully worked out in his *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (SPCK, London, 1989)

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The Story of BUild

Eight years ago I faced a room full of ministers from the south-east gathered on retreat at Arundel House, took a deep breath, offered another prayer for control of the tear ducts, and began to speak for the first time about issues raised for the Church by mental handicap. It was a strange experience for a lay woman, whose main qualification for standing there was motherhood. Drawing largely on personal experience of the past fifteen years, in a session perhaps mischievously entitled: "Where ministers fear to tread", I stirred up questions about the problem of suffering, about perceptions of 'subnormal' human beings, about cerebral expectations relating to believer's baptism and gathered church ecclesiology.

In a second session I looked at pastoral care, especially of parents; at the mishandling they too often suffer from medical and social workers, leaving a void which should challenge the church; I told of the horrors of sentimental kindness and spoke of more acceptable ways to help. The great need of parents, I said, was to have their child accepted, and made the uncomfortable suggestion that the criterion for acceptance at church might in practice be socially acceptable behaviour. And what about Christian outreach to those beyond the church family, especially as the big hospitals began to close and more people with severe learning disabilities would soon appear in local communities? I could already speak of a few enterprising initiatives taken by individual Baptist churches, and hoped that others would be moved to look at needs and opportunities in their own localities. Finally, but most importantly, I began to ask about special efforts in Christian nurture, and how people like my own son could be helped to know the love of Christ. Richard has been given a Christian upbringing, and was from the first wonderfully enfolded in the love of our church, but would he ever be capable of making our faith his own, in a mature personal response? He had a child's simple belief and trust in Jesus, but for full church membership Baptists look for more. How far would his belonging always depend on parental proxy?

Last year Richard and I together led the opening worship at a BUild conference in Cheltenham. Baptized at his own request shortly before his seventeenth birthday, he is a responsible, active member of the Bloomsbury Church, and exercises a priestly ministry within the family, for he spends many hours a week in devotional exercises, while the rest of us run round over-busy in our Christian service. Richard led that gathering in prayer and read some Bible verses (in 'special' translation, for we began with *Good News* and re-worded any phrase he could not get his tongue round clearly), while I found myself led to speak on a subject I could not begin to envisage in 1985: people with mental handicaps as evangelists.

BUild, (the Baptist Union initiative with people with learning disabilities), began out of concern that, faced with someone with mental handicap, all churches wanted to help but many had little idea how to go about it. Some churches, guided by people with professional experience or just with the right instinctive sensitivity, were doing good things. Some churches, sadly, were making rather a hash of it and alienating families who badly needed support. We wanted to alert church people to the particular needs in this area of mental handicap and to pool resources to help more churches do better.

Since 1984 the Working Group now called BUild has been active within the Baptist Union, drawing on experience around our churches, encouraging more to get involved, trying to help them minister more effectively to those with severe learning disabilities, to their families, and to those who work with them. We have tried to give a Cinderella subject a higher profile. We all readily believe such ministry must be dear to Jesus, even

if the gospel pages lack specific examples of mental handicap. We have tried to recognise honestly the difficulties that can arise. Being Baptists, we have not sought to tell churches what they ought to do, but rather tried to prompt a sharing of experiences, good and bad, between churches - that seems the right way for Baptist Christians to help one another grow in a delicate area of ministry.

Many churches have since found that these concerns, known to just a few of my hearers at Arundel House, have come home to them forcefully, as more and more have received people from new community homes. In 1985 one college principal, not unsympathetic, suggested we were working in a field that would only concern a tiny minority of churches and ministers. Even if true then, that is certainly no longer the case.

The initial contact that drew us together was made through the columns of the *Baptist Times* and that paper carried our first sally into print, with a series of articles in 1984. Books followed. *Let love Be Genuine* (BU 1985), and *Who's This Sitting in My Pew?* (Triangle, SPCK, 1988), both in my name, and Bryan George's *The Almond Tree* (Collins Liturgical, 1987) all drew widely on the working group's resources, and indeed on churches' experience at large. BUild publishes a newsletter three times a year, and holds day conferences, usually based on an interested church but intended to serve a wide area - invitations welcome! Last spring Richard Kidd arranged a BUild consultation at Northern College, to wrestle more deeply with some of the theological questions which arise. We anticipate more activity on that front in due course.

Some of us have always been especially concerned with Christian nurture. How do we communicate Christian hope to those who have difficulty with wordy presentations? I was excited when I began to hear of churches that not only made such people welcome at regular worship and other activities but also provided special groups for worship and teaching suited to these people's ability and understanding. Initially we located three such groups in Baptist churches, one in London and two in Scotland, and I took every opportunity to tell people about their work. We have rejoiced to hear of a number of new initiatives. One is near enough for Richard to attend, and it has become his midweek highlight. His joy in it is clearly shared by all those involved. The numbers needing such groups are not great, so they lend themselves to inter- church activity, whether denominationally or ecumenically. I thank God that churches are finding people with ideas and patience and the will to share the gospel in such groups, and I long for the day when one church in every district will offer such services to people who know so much about isolation, frustration and rejection, and need to hear that God loves them as they are. To help with this, BUild last year produced a set of discipleship booklets, *Knowing Jesus, The Church, Joining the Church and Following Jesus* (available from the Baptist Union, £3.00 per set, including 'teacher's notes'.)

Lives that Tell

What about those unlikely evangelists? Let me share some with you. Jason, terribly handicapped yet developing remarkably in the loving care of a Christian foster-mother, was less afraid in hospital than formerly, sustained by his picture Bible. His ability to follow the stories was minimal, but he could unerringly point out Jesus in each picture. The youth in the next bed was so struck by this he decided he had better buy a Bible to read when he got home.

An elderly man, long institutionalized but now in a small group home, came with others to a London church. After a time he sought baptism. The minister did what seemed possible by way of preparation, but set out for the service with grave doubts about the rightness of what he was about to do. How much could this candidate really grasp? Was there any understanding of the meaning of baptism and of being a Christian? A dozen strangers appeared early for the service. They were the caring

relatives of the baptismal candidate, come to learn more about the reason for the great change they had observed in him over the past three months. The minister entered the pool confident that the candidate had real experience of new life in Christ.

Other churches are moved to tell us of such baptisms. One lady, in her forties, delighted the congregation with her lively testimony - she used to have terrible temper outbursts, but no longer - and on being asked to confess Christ as Saviour and Lord, her 'YES' 'out-yessed anyone else!' Elsewhere again John 'seizes every opportunity, whether it be at the training centre or Sainsbury's, to tell everyone what a difference Jesus has made to his life. It's so good. His baptism was a real triumph and now, although he cannot read or write, people at the Centre where he trains are asking, "Why the change in him?"

In a new midweek worship group for those with learning disabilities, the least able member was so enthusiastic that he was the first to bring in an unchurched recruit, who has been thrilled to find people who welcome and like her as an individual and through them to learn about the love of Christ. Another church realizes that some members will need to learn Makaton if they are to communicate with some of their new worshippers; among the volunteers to learn this sign language is a young woman who has Down's Syndrome but is able to speak well. I find that profoundly moving.

A Church for All?

Is your church ministering to people with learning disabilities? If not, why not? Are you sure there are none needing friends in the local community? If you are offering a kind welcome and pastoral care, have you also thought about how to communicate the gospel to people with limited language skills? If you perceive possible opportunities but do not know how to go about it, have you sought help from BUild? Ministry with people who have serious learning disabilities is not all a bed of roses, but it can be deeply rewarding.

Twenty-three years ago I used to look at my floppy, snuffly baby, and think about the paediatrician's dismal prognosis for development, and hear the devil whispering that I was doomed to spend my life in futile care. Driving such thoughts away with the old hymn 'How firm a foundation', I prayed that God would 'sanctify to us our deepest distress' and somehow make Richard's life useful. Well, Richard has developed considerably further than expected, and this is especially apparent within the liberating life of the church. And in effect Richard has opened doors for me into wider Christian service. I hope both lives might be termed 'useful'.

When George Neal asked me to write about BUild for your Journal, he probably did not envisage a personal testimony, but I commend ministry with people with learning difficulties to you because I live with someone whose ability is restricted in so many other areas of life but not the spiritual. I continue to resist sentimental attitudes towards handicap, and I still grieve for any family having to face this kind of burden; I irk professional colleagues for preferring the clear term 'mental handicap' to the current approved euphemisms; but I care passionately about churches making the gospel known to these people. BUild exists to help with this.

Faith Bowers

BUild

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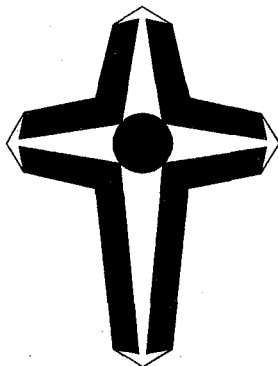
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Romans Through New Eyes: Part 1: Purpose

In 1983 James Dunn wrote an article which he entitled *The New perspective on Paul*.¹ He was referring to that challenge to the traditional Lutheran understanding of Paul that was launched by the publication in 1977 of E.P. Sanders' book: *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.² We have commonly believed that Paul is concerned with the question, "How can I gain acceptance with God?", and that whereas the Pharisees believed that salvation is earned by the merit of good works, Paul is demonstrating that a person is saved solely by faith in Jesus. Sanders showed that this is wrong on two counts. First, it is a gross caricature of first century Judaism which believed most firmly that salvation was by grace, God having freely entered into a covenant with his people not for any merit of theirs at all, but solely out of his own loving kindness. Obedience on that basis was not the way a person got saved, but the way in which they responded to God's grace and enjoyed the relationship thus freely provided. Second, Paul's letters are not primarily concerned with how a person can "get to heaven", but rather with how Gentiles can get into the Church.

Sanders' protest was by no means new. Some years before, K. Stendahl had published an article entitled *Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West* in which he argued that Luther's problem had never been Paul's.³ Neither before nor after his conversion was Paul greatly troubled by a sense of sin, such as had characterised Western spirituality since Augustine. However, Stendahl's protest was not widely heard in the way that Sanders' has been. Sanders' work has since been followed by a number of distinguished scholars in this country, among whom we might mention Francis Watson's iconoclastic book, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*,⁴ and the two most recent English commentaries on Romans, that by John Ziesler⁵, and the massive commentary by Dunn himself⁶. While differing in details among themselves, all of these writers are trying to read Romans and Paul without the Reformation spectacles which they believe have led to Paul's real concerns being missed. They would go further and say that the continual denigrating of the Jews in Protestant mythology as a people morbidly obsessed with earning their own salvation has contributed to the sorry story of the Church's antisemitism, while the transformation of Paul's target from "works of the Law" to "good works" in general has contributed to a tendency to quietism and lack of obedience among many Protestant Christians.

In the view of these scholars it is not that we have misunderstood justification by faith so much as that we have misunderstood what that doctrine was set in opposition to. Dunn, in particular, has advanced the thesis that "works of the Law" are not simply to be equated with obedience to God, but refer specifically to those distinctive practices, such as circumcision, sabbath-keeping and the distinction between clean and unclean foods which marked out the Jews from other nations and gave them their sense of national pride and identity. Paul's problem with them is not that they were supposed to earn salvation, but that they effectively restricted salvation to those who were Jews by birth and culture. As Dunn puts it: "What Paul is concerned to exclude is the [racial] not the [ritual] expression of faith; it is [nationalism] he denies, not [activism]".⁷ In the next part of this paper I propose to take up this insight and conduct a brief review of the letter to the Romans in the light of it.

Paul's Motive Impulse

It is commonplace to say that Paul is not a systematic theologian. His letters are

'occasional letters', written to deal with specific situations as they arose in the life of his churches, and not theoretical discussions of doctrine and ethics.

But is Romans an exception to this? This has often been said. Here we feel Paul stands back from the hurly-burly of local church crises to set out a considered statement of the Christian message. Within the Protestant tradition it has been normal to read Romans as a sort of Westminster Confession, a definitive account of the Christian gospel for whose understanding you need to know nothing of the circumstances of the writer or the readers, the Christian message *en clair*, so to speak, that needs no decoding from the world of the 1st century in order to speak to our world. This view of things goes back to Luther himself:

This epistle is really the chief part of the NT, and is truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of his soul.⁹

This was certainly not what Luther thought about the NT as a whole, within which he saw a clear hierarchy among the books according to whether they truly preached the gospel or not!

However, it is increasingly being recognised that this view of a 'timeless' Romans is quite wrong. Romans like every other Pauline letter is one side of an animated telephone conversation, and unless we know who Paul is addressing and what it is that they, in turn, were saying to him, we shall not really understand either what he said to his own time or what he now says to ours. Neglect of the historical context means that we increasingly find in Romans just what we ourselves already believe, with the result that we no longer hear anything that challenges our own situation. As Krister Stendahl said: "Our vision is more often obstructed by what we think we know than by our lack of knowledge".

Within the Reformation tradition we have tended to read Romans (and Galatians) as if it were written to answer Luther's famous question: How can I find a gracious God? On this understanding the letter first establishes the universal sinfulness and guilt of humankind before a holy God and then shows how God, nevertheless, finds a way to forgive us and forgive us justly through the death of his Son. This is then followed by chapters that deal with the way of Christian sanctification, and the letter rounds off with some practical teaching on the way to lead the Christian life. This is the gospel according to Romans and anything in the letter that doesn't fit is simply part of the historical husk from which the kernel of faith and truth can be extracted without loss.

The trouble is that there is rather a lot of husk! Why does Paul keep talking about "the Jew first and also the Greek"? Why does he devote a whole chapter to Abraham? What is the point of those three difficult chapters on the place of Israel, and why is the only ethical question to receive any extended treatment the seemingly remote and even trivial question of who eats what? In the light of this we should probably see Romans not as an answer to the question, "How can I find a gracious God?", but rather to the question, "Who are the people of God?" Romans, we shall see, is less about finding acceptance with God, and more about finding acceptance with his people (see 15:7).

We tend to think of Paul as the leading Christian of his generation, and so in the perspective of history he was. It would not have seemed that way to many of his contemporaries for whom the apostle to the Gentiles was rather a dangerous radical. That the Gentiles could and should belong to the people of God without circumcision; that they should do so without being required to observe the sabbath; that they should be allowed to sit loose to the laws of purity in matters of what was eaten and with whom

- all this was to Jewish-Christians a scandal that struck at the heart of everything they had been brought up to believe. It is important to be clear about this. Obedience to the law of Moses and the avoidance of defiling contact with Gentiles was not a burden from which most Jews longed to be free. Rather the law was seen as a great privilege, and keeping it a source of legitimate pride. The Maccabean martyrs had died to preserve such things, and many Gentiles were attracted to the way of life preached by the synagogues that were to be found all over the Mediterranean world.

Jewish [Christians] did not necessarily feel differently about these things. For them the Messiah promised in scripture had come to his people Israel. In accepting him they had not abandoned their ancestral faith, nor sundered their links with the religion of their fathers. Paul's insistence that Greeks did not need to become Jews in order to become Christians struck many of his fellow Christians as patently absurd and destructive of all true religion and morality. At the time he wrote Romans Paul was engaged in the delicate task of seeking to mean his fences with the mother-church in Jerusalem. For many of its members his name was synonymous with discord and irreligion, and now he was about to bring them the fruits of a collection designed to express, in its being offered and accepted, the loyalty and legitimacy of the law-free Gentile churches.

Such were the circumstances of the writer of this letter. The circumstances of the readers in Rome were no more tranquil. Such evidence as we have suggests that the Christian churches in Rome had had a turbulent history. Only a few years before Paul wrote Romans, Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome, apparently as a result of disturbances resulting from the arrival of the Christian faith among the scattered synagogues of the capital. Christian Jews would have been among those expelled, while Gentile Christians may well have been able to remain. With the death of Claudius just a year or two before this letter, Jewish Christians will have been free to return, but it needs little imagination to see how explosive the resulting situation would be between Jewish and Gentile Christians, or how mixed a reception Paul could expect among them. The list of greetings in chapter 16 shows that we should not think of one monolithic church at Rome, but that the churches were many in number, as the Jewish synagogues were, and the likelihood is that different house-congregations represented different ethnic and Christian traditions more or less divided from one another and in their attitude to Paul. Francis Watson is therefore probably right to see that Paul is writing not simply to enlist the church's support, but to bring about the churches' unity.

Principle and Compromise

That this is the case receives clearest support within the letter to Romans itself from chapters 14-15. It begins, you remember, "As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions". Is this just a piece of timelessly good advice on congregational relationships? There are such to be found in Romans 12, but this is clearly a major issue which Paul takes a chapter and a half to deal with - the final chapter and half, as it happens, before he returns to the matter of his own travelling plans. This is not an appendix to the main argument of Romans; it is where the complex theological arguments of the preceding chapters have all along been leading. It tackles at last that very practical issue that will have been in the minds of Paul's listeners all along as the letter was read to them, the issue of how in practice Jewish and Gentile Christians are to get along together in one church.

For who exactly is this person described unflatteringly as the "man who is weak in faith"? We learn that he eats only vegetables, as opposed to his brother who believes he may eat anything. He esteems one day better than another, while his brother esteems all days alike. It has been usual to link this chapter with what Paul says in 1 Corinthians about meat offered to idols and to suppose that weak man is a recent convert from

paganism. But the chapter says nothing about idols. The person who esteems one day better than another is much more likely to be a Jewish believer continuing to observe the sabbath, and his abstinence from meat is best explained by reference to the example of Daniel, that model of how a Jew should behave in a pagan society, who made a point of not eating the king's rich food and insisted on a diet of vegetables and water, no doubt mindful of the idolatrous practices associated with the slaughter of animals for food.⁹

In the Roman church then, there are Jewish Christians who observe the sabbath and are careful to avoid contamination through eating meat, and probably through social contact with Gentiles generally, and there are Gentile Christians who feel free to eat and drink without restriction or taboo and who do not observe the sabbath. Paul calls on the Gentile to welcome the Jew, and not argue with him, and he calls on the Jew not to pass judgement on his free-living gentile brother. Each is to welcome the other, and the strong in particular are not to put their own pleasure and principles ahead of their brother's scruples or the church's unity.

Yet Paul is hardly neutral in the matter. True, he allows each person to follow his conscience. But simply by the fact of labelling one group as strong and the other as weak, and aligning himself clearly with the strong ("we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak"), he makes plain that this is no case of "all have won and all must have prizes". In the interests of one church all must now make compromises, but there is no doubt to whom the future belongs, and no doubt which group will have to make the greater sacrifice. As Watson says:

By far the greater concession is demanded of the Jews. They are required to abandon the idea that the law is the authoritative, binding law of God, to which all must submit, and to regard it instead as purely optional, a matter of individual choice and private piety.¹⁰

In return for this gigantic concession they are to be treated with consideration and understanding, welcomed by their Gentile brothers and sisters into the people of God at Rome! The body of the letter concludes with a string of quotations from the OT showing that God's purpose all along had been to bring all men everywhere into one praising congregation. So Paul is seen to be passionately committed to the unity of the church. Such unity is worked out through compromise, but it is founded on principles that are unyielding, and while the compromises are temporary, the principles are of eternal validity.

In the second part of this article I shall take you back to the start of Romans and try to read it with new eyes, and then draw some wider conclusions.

Alastair Campbell

Notes

1. J.D.G. Dunn, *BJRL* 65 (1983), pp 95-122
2. E.P. Saunders *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* SCM, 1977
3. Republished in: *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* SCM, 1977, pp 78-96
4. F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, Cambridge, 1986
5. J. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, SCM 1989
6. J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans*, Word Biblical Commentaries, Dallas, 1988
7. Dunn, *New Perspective*, p 115
8. M. Luther, *Works*, vol 35, p 365
9. Watson, op. cit. p 95
10. Watson, op cit., p 97

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To the Readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal
Terrorism and Insurance

The business of insurance is concerned with the transfer and the sharing of risks. Clients pay premiums to insurers to carry the risk which they do not wish to bear and insurers pass the excess of risk which they do not wish to retain to reinsurers, who may themselves transfer some of that risk through retrocession.

We are now experiencing the effect of the international reinsurance market deciding no longer to accept the risk of damage caused by terrorism in the United Kingdom. This decision was made against the background of the St. Mary Axe bomb in April 1992 causing damage estimated at between £700 million and £800 million. This was considerably more than the total cost to the Government of terrorist damage in Northern Ireland over several years.

The withdrawal of reinsurance facilities has necessitated all insurers, including ourselves, limiting the cover we can provide for terrorist damage. With renewals an endorsement is being issued limiting cover for each separate premises to £100,000 damage to buildings and £100,000 other property or the sum insured, whichever is the less. Where appropriate, additional cover up to £100,000 is provided separately for computers, engineering insurance (e.g. boilers) and "Business interruption". These limitations apply to Church and other property including blocks of flats but not private house property.

Whereas the Government are not prepared to assume this risk as they have for some years in Northern Ireland, they are acting as reinsurer of last resort to a mutual reinsurance pool of which we are members. Cover based on full sums insured can be arranged with this pool and we will provide quotations on request.

Yours sincerely

M.E. Purver

Christian Ministry and Enterprise Culture

Constant change is the one thing we can be certain of as we look forward to the future. Today's engineers and managers have to be constantly and substantially re-trained if they are to remain at the top. School leavers can expect a working life that will involve several different careers, interspersed with periods of training. Our 'enterprise' business culture, with its emphasis on innovation, choice and risk taking, is the consequence of a society increasingly characterised by rapid and unpredictable change.

The thrills and rewards are enormous for those who can successfully meet the challenge of constantly developing technology and commercial practice. Those who aim to ride this powerful surge of change have to be adaptable, bold and highly motivated.

The stress involved, however, is correspondingly enormous. The stakes are high, and unremitting competition is the order of the day. In many areas of industry and commerce, success must be won in the global market-place. The choice of either adapting and winning, or sitting back and losing, is facing a wider range of people who never faced it before, in health care and education, for example. As the rewards of success increase, so the numbers of people who are able to achieve them decrease. This environment can breed an aggressive desperation that is ultimately destructive of people, their marriages, their families and their communities. The fear of failure or of being left behind may stimulate more energetic effort, but when no more energy can be found, the result is a frightening emptiness and confusion. Those who do not have the opportunity or desire even to try to master the forces involved feel sidelined and excluded.

No doubt life has always been like this to some extent, but the scope and speed of change today has increased the pressures immensely. Computers, fax machines, car phones, fibre optics, 'smart cards', satellites, word processors. They may make the laborious processes of yesterday easier and simpler to perform, or often redundant altogether, but they make it increasingly difficult to sit back, take stock and simply be ourselves. We are more and more the victims, rather than the masters, of the world we have made. In the mad and thrilling whirl of life around us, humanity is losing its dignity and self respect.

The crisis we face has global as well as personal and social dimensions, such as the pollution of the oceans and atmosphere, the destruction of nature, overpopulation and tension in international relations. These factors act as the backdrop for the personal crises of life and work, creating an over-riding sense of hopelessness for many people.

Ministry Inevitably Shaped?

We have to conduct our ministry in this setting. We are caught up in all these fearful developments in a whole range of ways. They determine the demands made on our time. We have to minister to people who face the opportunities, challenges and threats of our changing world in direct and personal ways. Some gain great rewards from it; many experience a great sense of lostness and confusion because of it. Some are excited by it and want the Church to embrace many of its ideals; others desperately want to escape from it and regain the security of tradition the Church (for them) represents. This is not the case only for those who are working as part of the 'system', but for all those who have children or grandchildren, who watch television, who live in the cities, who need medical

care, who have money to spend, who travel by car or by public transport - in fact all of us.

Not only do we as ministers minister to people who live in this world; we live and work in it too. We are personally involved in the enterprise culture. Rapid change and personal choice are features of Church life as much as anywhere else, and there are pressures on us to adopt the qualities of adaptability, innovation and risk taking. We need to learn the skills of strong, attractive leadership if we are to be masters of the surging currents that are shaping peoples' attitudes and feelings today. We too face the fear of failure, of being left behind, of being excluded from where it's all 'really happening'.

It is crucially important that we ministers see the spiritual significance of what is happening around us and to us, and are not simply drawn into the enterprise culture with our eyes closed. There are enormous rewards for ministers who succeed in mastering the cultural trends of contemporary society - admiration, prestige, fame, influence. Who among us can resist the appeal of an invitation to address thousands, or to have our name on the cover of a paper-back on the shelves of hundreds of Christian bookshops, or to be on the radio or television? The opportunities are vast. We dare not let these opportunities go begging - or be taken up by others who do not share our Gospel values, and we have to conduct our ministry in a way that is relevant and accessible to today's culture. But what of the cost? What is the enterprise culture doing to our perception of ministry, and in turn what is it doing to people's perception of Christian discipleship? I fear that the same dangers of weariness, confusion and lostness exist inside the Church as outside. There are an increasing number of dissatisfied Christians craving for a spiritual excitement. They find routine Church life boring and search with increasing desperation for experiences or personalities to meet their needs. Their faith has become fragile and they are facing the possibility of disillusionment and emptiness.

All this adds, of course, to the burden of ministry. Not only are we called to handle the victims of the enterprise culture in the world, but also the victims of the enterprise culture in the Church. And they are much more difficult to deal with, partly because we as ministers have contributed to the problem ourselves.

Let me give one example. I was recently lent a book which tells the story of the growth of a particular church. The title gave the impression that the story was basically a series of miraculous events in which God rewarded the simple faith of the Christians involved, and the content bore this out. No doubt the aim was to encourage the readers to expect similar interventions as a regular feature of their Church and personal life. The actual result of books like this, it seems to me, is to raise false hopes and unrealistic ideas about what Church life is really like. Some time after being given the book I met some of the leaders of the Church in question. They were gifted and committed Christians. 'You mustn't think it's really like that' they said, with some embarrassment as they noticed the book on my shelves, 'we're not so different from any other Church actually'. It was not that the book was untrue factually, it was simply that it gave a misleading impression, compressing a number of events that occurred over a period of many years into a short and punchy paperback.

I dare say most Churches see the hand of God at work as often as in that Church, but what, I wonder, is the impact of hundreds of books and testimonies of that kind on the attitudes and values of those who buy and read, or hear them? How many unrealistic hopes are raised, only to be dashed in due course?

Transfiguring of the Ordinary

As ministers we have a duty to convey in a more honest way the ordinariness of the ministry and of Church life. The Christian ministry has more to do with the eternal values

that meet people's deepest needs rather than spectacular interventions to solve problems. The new things which are so attractive and which command so much attention have not actually changed the way God works or people's experience of him in any profound way. If he is not real in the everyday routine of life, and he doesn't bring his peace and wholeness there, then we must question his presence in the extraordinary. He is just as real in the courage and endurance of the chronically ill or disabled as he is in the miracle of healing, and he is working just as effectively in the routine pastoral work of hospital visiting as he is in the thrill of leading an evening of celebration and testimony. The Spirit's gifts of encouragement and service, seen in the faithful work of Christians year in year out, are just as wonderful (and usually more valuable) as his gifts of tongues and prophecy. How we have succumbed to the fashion for attention-grabbing novelty which is so much a feature of our enterprise culture!

The more ordinary ministers, leading ordinary churches, made up of ordinary Christians, that we have, the better we will be able to serve the Lord in the changing and threatening world around us. Also, I believe, the less exhaustion among ministers and Christian workers we will see. We need balanced, faithful disciples of Jesus, not restless Christians hooked on spiritual excitement dashing around for a fix. As the world around us loses itself in the whirlpool of change, disintegrating, it seems, as it rushes around, what the Church has to offer is the ordinariness of Jesus - his presence and peace in the common things of life: childhood; parenthood; sleeping; working; conversation. We don't need to search for him in the unusual or spectacular, for he is with us all the time, closer even than breathing and thinking. The real miracle we need today is not the excitement of the extraordinary, but happiness and satisfaction in the ordinary. And we need it as ministers as much as anyone else.

Peter Shepherd

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The Changing Form of Preaching

Wheeler Robinson, in sermon class, listened with patience to many a feeble effort and almost always advised us to read the sermons of such as John Henry Newman or F.W. Robertson. We dutifully did so, although my fellow student, Ronald Bryant, always thought his range too narrow! Reading those sermons today and others that Ronald advised, I am impressed still by the beauty of style, the clarity of the message and the complete control of the English language. They are magnificent, but they will not do for our day. In radio and TV we have frequently reconstructed the sermons of the great - John Donne, Hugh Latimer, even John Clifford. They provide excellent scripts and I would like to hear more of them. Charles Kingsley, too, can be wonderful. But again, they will not do for our day.

Occasionally a theologian comes to our rescue. And I have learnt to ask of any theology or new theological movement, "Does it preach?" One was Rudolf Bultmann, who asked us searching questions about whether we really believed what we were saying and also pointed to the importance of finding out why the gospel writers wrote about what they did. He gave a new lift to preaching in Germany in the fifties and Britain in the sixties.

The SCM Press and its translator/director has introduced us to another theologian from Germany who could give new penetration to our preaching. He is Gerd Theissen. Not so very long ago, he gave us *The Shadow of the Galilean*. It told the story of the influence of Jesus almost like a novel. A spy tracked Jesus down, but never caught up with him until he was dead on a cross. The adventures of the spy describe the influence of Jesus upon the people he met - the beggars at Matthew's feast; the blind who received their sight; the people whose lives had been transformed by his teaching; and so on. Jesus does not appear - only the shadow of his influence. Theissen's imagination is creative and his scholarship impeccable. This kind of narrative exegesis is rare.

I enjoyed *The Shadow of the Galilean* so much that when another book by Gerd Theissen appeared, I read it at once. It was quite different: a collection of sermons and meditations, but the creative imagination was at work. This collection throws a whole new light on expository preaching. His brief introduction also gives us some gems of insight into the nature and role of preaching. He regards preaching as vital for the life of the Church, but warns of the dangers of interfering in the intimate life of the worshipper's dialogue with God:

"To be a preacher means to prompt, illuminate, change this dialogue by redefining it in terms of that dialogue which came to be recorded in the Bible. Preachers have achieved their aim where the biblical text makes it possible to engage in dialogue with God, so that men and women can understand their lives as an answer to God's call - in all spheres of life: in personal, political and universal contexts".

But while preachers have to bring historical traditions, personal experience and contemporary history into dialogue with an ultimate reality, they know that they cannot produce this dialogue. Theissen has a high view of preaching, but sees its dangers more than most. His Preface leads us to a due humility when he says: "Sermons touch a sphere which is vulnerable and should be protected from the attacks of other people. Preaching would be an intolerably indiscreet business did we not know that whether or not we reach this most intimate sphere is not up to us."

Against that big view of preaching, we can test his own sermons and there are twenty-five of them in this collection, ranging from Genesis to Revelation. They all have texts of the German type, a pericope with many verses, sometimes a whole narrative. I will sample a few, but may I say at once how well they are translated by John Bowden.

Cain and Abel

The text is whole story of Genesis 4;1-16. The preacher begins by declaring, "The criminal case of Cain and Abel is not yet over". We cannot leave it in the realm of legendary primeval time; it is still going on. Cain keeps killing Abel, and Cain must continually be brought to trial. Theissen then proceeds to put Cain on trial and calls his witnesses. He selects an historian, a sociologist, a biologist and a philosopher. Historians, of course, disagree over the case, but there is a widespread view that Cain is the victim of a bad obituary! The story was told to explain why the Kenites were so different - restless, nomadic. People in those days, and it passed from generation to generation, said: "They are not only different, they are bad". The reason why they left the cultivated land was obviously because they were under a curse. But they could not be killed because they believed in God. They were under his protection. Another historian might have said that the story was an expression of xenophobia - these people are dangerous, because they are different. Such an historian would conclude that this was a myth about all human beings. "So what once was attributed to strange neighbours out of prejudice came to be regarded as a possibility for oneself". Any one could be a Cain, everyone repeats the story of Cain and Abel.

Theissen then continues the image of the courtroom and becomes the advocate for the defence of Cain. Having called his historian, he pleads: "If the malice of neighbours towards the Kenites was involved when Cain was accused, must he not be rehabilitated? And if everyone is Cain, can one still condemn Cain without condemning oneself?"

He passes to the sociologist, who now takes the stand. He describes the unequal treatment of Cain, the farmer, compared with Abel, the shepherd, and as a sociologist, he points out that unequal opportunities involve structural violence which kills even when not a single murder takes place. At this point he gives a powerful contemporary example: "The fact that life expectation in the countries of the European Community is seventy years while in the developing countries it is only forty means that because of different conditions, death strikes there more frequently and earlier than it does among us. The imbalance in social development is a violence that kills". And then again the counsel for the defence on the basis of this evidence can plead: "Are these not mitigating circumstances for Cain? "What becomes clear in his murder is latent in the unjust distribution of opportunities. Who will cast the first stone?"

The third expert witness is the biologist, who puts Cain and Abel in a wider context. Homo Sapiens could establish itself only by outstripping other variants of human life, allowing them to die or exterminating them. We have all developed at the expense of other forms of life. Again the counsel for the defence asks, "Who can condemn Cain? Are we not getting close to Cain, so close that we must ask ourselves whether we do not have to identify ourselves with him, even if we repudiate his action?"

Our last expert witness is the philosopher. He daringly proposes that Cain is the first modern man. He rebels against the arbitrary distribution of opportunities: why should Abel be preferred to him? Although he condemns the murder, the philosopher can understand the intention: "The metaphysical rebellion against the inequality of human destiny". He also maintains that Cain is a rebel, whose destructiveness passes over into constructive action. He rebels because he no longer accepts a religious legitimization for the unjust distribution of fate.

The preacher now addresses the German people. The awful criminal energies released during the Nazi period were born of a simmering experience of injury (the Versailles Treaty) and 'the blood of our murdered brothers and sisters still cries out to heaven'. But a generation later those same people are building cities, achieving miracles in business and culture - yet they cannot square their consciences. Theissen concludes; "We are these people. Can we condemn Cain?"

And so the case of Cain is re-opened, the trial resumed. After the experts, the jury. But Cain's problem is seen to be their problem, our problem. We must return to the text and listen to how God judges Cain. He speaks four times: first; "Why are you angry? Why is your face cast down? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"

Second: "Where is your brother Abel?" The third time is a harsh punishment: "Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground...you will be a restless wanderer on the earth". And the fourth is the response to Cain's complaint that the judgment is too harsh: "Not so, if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over".

Those four statements in the context of our solidarity with Cain set our dialogue with God in motion.

"We are Cain. Cain is not just our neighbour, of whom all kinds of bad things are said. We are Cain. For as a result of social differentiation we are caught up in a deadly inequality of opportunities. We are Cain. For we spread ourselves over the earth at the expense of other life".

Theissen does not end on that note of guilt which may well lead us to hopeless remorse. He looks further into the story and concludes that because God had plans for Cain, he has plans for us. It is to set our conscience a great task. This is what God says to us through this ancient myth: "You must look up. You must walk upright. You must overcome sin. Even if you fail again and again. Even if hatred and envy keep poisoning your life and you find yourself yes in the vortex of a destructive tendency towards degeneration. Like Cain you are under God's protection, even when you feel banished from God's sight, when you wander around harassed and restless in your life. You are all indelibly marked with God's image. You are all branded with the sign of Cain. You are all inviolable. None may make you suffer! None may force you to the ground, for you are destined to look up and walk upright. That is what God has called you to."

Other Variations on Biblical Themes

After that opening sermon, there are subsequent sermons and meditations from the Old and New Testament: 'Jacob and Esau', sub-titled, 'The unpious presuppositions of peace'; 'The Obstinate Prophecy', sub-titled, 'A Christmas Sermon on Isaiah 7:10-16'; 'Variations on the letter of Jeremiah chapter 29'; 'Jesus as Exorcist: A Painful Story'; 'The Sign Language of Baptism'; and so it goes on through 25 stimulating sermons with creative ideas. The sermon of the title (*The Open Door*) is an exposition of Luke 13; 23-30. The final sermon is on the need for repentance and based upon the Letter to the Church in Laodicea in Revelation 3. There is also an unusual one on the credibility of the Easter message which repays more careful attention. It is called *Doubting Thomas*.

The Credibility of the Easter Message

The text is John 20:19-29 and the opening sentence, "Doubting Thomas is often more alive in us than the risen Jesus". Theissen begins with the assumption that all believers are also doubters. He then takes a modern Thomas and begins to deal with his doubts by giving him some lessons in doubt. This sermon began to remind me of a Boys' Brigade Bible Class in Yeovil many years ago. It was Easter and I wondered how I might attract the boys' attention with this familiar story. I began by saying that there really was no

evidence that the resurrection ever took place, it was just the imagination of the disciples. Within minutes they were hounding me like the Spanish Inquisition and were arguing for the credibility of the Resurrection. Theissen is more subtle than I was. He began by getting his modern Thomas to study theology. He reads 120 books. At first he concludes that the evidence for the resurrection is not at all bad, but before long he is confused and finds that different writers have quite different views. At last he asks himself, "How do we distinguish between fantasy and reality?" The modern Thomas then appeals to his everyday experience and soon discovers that reality is painful. He is introduced then to a group who laugh at his historical-critical phase and tell him that what the Bible says is part of a symbolic human language which discloses unconscious depths in us. At first our doubting Thomas is fascinated by this: if the death and resurrection of Jesus is an image of processes in us, then we can experience its truth directly. This lasts for a time, but he begins to dream and his dreams are not the nice dreams those people told him about. Theissen describes such a dream and analyses it. He concludes that "the pains which torment us in our dreams are not just pains of self-realisation". Thomas goes in search again of reality.

His third stage is contact with the occult, friends who promise him contact with reality outside human experience. He fled such friends eventually and found an African friend, who told him that back home they did not think it strange to have contact with the dead. In fact, his people had quite different problems about the Easter message. There is an excellent section in this sermon on the relevance of the African experience, seeking more than a Christ alive in dreams. But Thomas is not an African. He goes from radical free-thinkers to others and Theissen interrupts the story to give his own experience. He, too, was dissatisfied with most attempts to explain the resurrection which must be more than a mere survival, whether in the imagination of the disciples, or the dreams of believers, or even simple objective reality. The Easter message is of an overwhelming power. There is no parallel to it and only images will help to explain. He tries the electromagnetic field. The Easter experience is when such a field reaches break-through point and sparks. For he says, "It is not the appearances that are important, but the field of force from which they come and which surrounds us everywhere." Theissen's last words are, we can always trace this field of force, even when the Easter appearances fade into the past. None of us could be witness to them. But the spark of an unconditional courage to live and die can fly into each one of us. And then each of us may relate to himself or herself the beatitude, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed".

Edwin Robertson

Publication details:

Gerd Theissen, *The Open Door: Variations on Biblical Themes*, E.T. translated by John Bowden, SCM Press 1991, price 39.95. ISBN 0-334-02510-9

Book Reviews

***The Contemporary Christian* by John Stott (IVP, 1992, 432pp, £9.95)**

It was said of Nehemiah that he had a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other "and thus he filled his breaches". John Stott stands with the Bible and today's newspaper and calls us to "double listening" - to God and to the world.

A bridge, to carry traffic, must be firmly founded on both sides and Stott perceives too many of our people who cannot make the transition from Sunday to Monday without loss of relevance and authenticity.

The book is a companion volume to *Issues facing Christians Today* (exploring questions of social ethics), but broader in scope. It is easy to read, clearly printed, vintage John Stott and full of quotes and sermon offerings.

In 22 chapters Stott looks at Christian relevance, authentic freedom, the Cross, Resurrection and Lordship of Christ, discipleship in today's world, Bible exposition, the Church and its witness, pluralism and holistic mission (a lovely piece here comparing and contrasting the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan). Evangelism and social action, says Stott, are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird.

He ends with the Christology of mission and a salutary look at "the now and the not yet". (Why do psychiatrists rightly speak of the powerful influence of the past, but miss the importance of future goals? e.g. in the young athlete "going for gold"). As Stott says, "One of the tragedies of the contemporary church is that, just when the world seems ready to listen, the church often seems to have little or nothing to say... Indeed the major reason for its diminishing influence in the West is its diminishing faith".

Evangelicals will rejoice in this book but have much to ponder. Liberals may wish to argue with some parts but will be helped to see evangelicals seriously and not polarised or caricatured. All will be helped towards "double listening" and a balanced wholeness in mission.

A book to be warmly recommended. Its added study guide will help it to be used also in small groups.

Lewis Misselbrook

***Pastoral Care in Context* by Neville Clark**

(Kevin Mayhew, 1992, 110pp, £7.50)

This book is "an attempt to take seriously the theological rooting of pastoral care" and not a series of case studies or DIY guide to success in specific situations and common pastoral dilemmas. For this it should be welcomed and read, but most will have to chew hard to digest the nourishing meal it provides. The communication of abstracts demands incisive language. Immanuel Kant had a penetrating mind yet most read *about* him instead of reading *him*. The contemporary philosopher Sir Geoffrey Warnock thinks that Kant wrote so badly because of his love of heavy academic style and an obsessive taste for technical terminology and elaborate dichotomies. I encountered a similar problem with this book. It is sad when our theologians lag behind professors in other disciplines in learning modern communication skills. We don't have to read *The Sun*, even *The Times* will help!

Prospective readers should not be deterred by this warning. I will attempt to summarize the important and thoughtful teaching given here. The Christian God is

unique in possessing unity and community between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Humanity, created in the image of God, is not simply individual but communal. Relationship, fundamental in the Triune God, is fundamental in God's vision for his Church and therefore for pastoral care. For example when "pastoral theology faces the storm centres of sex and marriage" its overriding concern is not to satisfy laws of divorce, adultery, or premarital sex, but to assist those seeking help to continue as human beings capable of relating.

Similarly, the Church is not a gathering of individuals, but the one body of Christ. This one body has integral parts, not spare parts detachable and exchangeable at will. Pastoral care treats people as members of the body. The formation of the church through liturgy and pastoral care must be entirely trinitarian in scope, building a Church with authority (as of the Father), friendship (as of the Son) and power (as of the Spirit). Churches must not concentrate on one to the detriment of the other two. Pastoral care must not be allowed to become limited to crisis management, but should set its sights on the general good and growth of the Church. Limitations in pastoral care parallel the limitations of the Church on earth, which must learn how to settle in this life while pressing forward in vision towards the next. Pastoral care must not therefore be expected to solve every problem and heal every disease, or immediately remove feelings that God is absent or has withdrawn himself.

Evil is not as ultimate as good, nor the devil as ultimate as God, therefore the author does not seem to relish the concept of spiritual warfare. He believes it spawns a doctrine of pastoral care based on the suppression of those parts of our human nature that are thought to be the home of sin, vice and evil. Emphasis should be placed on the growth of love and goodness rather than casting out demons. Hate is love gone wrong, and the core of sin is misplaced trust. If relatedness is at the heart of the Triune God and of humanity created in his image, the essence of sin resides not in the individual or in society, but in our relationships. Mr Clark labels the mortal wound of humanity as estrangement, thus approaching Hegel who sees alienation at the root of our misery.

Finally, since humankind is created in relationship, Neville Clark does not see the Church's mission as a holy group divorced from an alien world, but as a Christian presence within it. Evangelism is not then a raucous assault on the ungodly, but a promise of communion with God given to our fellow human beings.

Clifford Fryer

***Baptists at the Table* by Michael Walker**

(Baptist Historical Society, 1992, 224pp, £6.00)

This book is the text of Michael Walker's Ph. D. dissertation, accepted by London University in 1986, together with an appreciation of Michael Walker by Dr. David Russell.

It is a most thorough review of the particular Baptist concerns over the Lord's Supper or Communion, and is presented in very great detail with copious documentation. Much of the work is concerned with the two big controversies among Baptists, namely the clash between Hall and Kinghorn over who could receive Communion, and the effect on Baptists of the Tractarian movement and the Catholic revival.

The open/closed Communion debate is dealt with well, and Michael Walker points out well the problems of the doctrine of the Church raised by both protagonists. And one winces to hear of the lawsuit at Norwich, where two equally sincere groups of Christians fought out in secular courts the minutiae of a trust-deed.

As one from the "sacramentalist" side of Baptist tradition, Michael Walker laments the fact that the resurgence of Roman Catholicism and Anglo-Catholicism drove Baptists into "Zwinglianism" over the Lord's Supper. But his revealing treatment of the

clash between Godwin (Minister of New Road Baptist, Oxford) and Pusey shows that there were Baptists who were ready to study the Church Fathers and still come down against the resurgent sacramentalist tide.

Almost as important as the two big controversies, there are various other points touched on more briefly. Who presides at the Lord's Table? How often should communion be celebrated? Communion and Church discipline. All get a smaller but useful treatment, and will give us plenty to study. He also poses the interesting question as to why there are so few Baptist Communion hymns. And (having heard how tea could be used for Communion in China) I suppose that the awful clashes over the use of fermented wine are a terrible warning of a Pharisaism that can so easily creep in.

Factually, this is a good book. But one could wish that Michael Walker did not use "Zwinglianism" as a pejorative term. It is perfectly possible to have a high regard for the Lord's Supper, without going down the track towards mediaeval or modern sacramentalism. And enthusiasts for a liturgy should perhaps remember that fixed liturgies only came slowly, and that composing, and even extemporizing of services went on as late as the 8th century AD (Sidonius Apollinaris extemporising late 5th, Gallican/Irish mass-books up to late 8th century, with no two books alike).

However, this is a book which will provide plenty of facts, from which hopefully constructive debate can continue, and it is to be welcomed as such.

There are very few misprints, although I defy anyone to find Mt 28: 31 (page 68)!

Mike Smith

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