

## THE BENJAMIN HENTON LECTURE 1998

### H. HOWARD WILLIAMS

#### Preacher, Pastor - Prophet without honour?

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

I take a risk in tackling as history my own times and a personal friend, with all the danger of hagiography, yet I cannot compile a history of the Bloomsbury church without addressing Dr Williams' ministry. So I declare an interest: I first went to Bloomsbury on a Friday evening in October 1958 and was there introduced both to Howard, about to become the minister, and to my future husband, Brian; Howard became our friend and pastor, with whom we shared our joys and concerns for many years. He has been dead seven years. The interval is too short for retrospective assessment. I have sought a wider perspective by gathering memories from many people,<sup>1</sup> hoping thus to lay down a contemporary record responsibly, while paying tribute to the minister who helped make me what I am today.

Howard could be controversial and many Baptists reacted strongly. He preached the apostolic faith, especially the essential unity of incarnation, cross and resurrection - yet critics branded him a heretic. Often he seemed in the wrong denomination - yet he was deeply Baptist. The key to this tension lies in his early years in Wales.

#### 2 EARLY INFLUENCES

Born on 30 April 1918 into a manse family<sup>2</sup> in the tiny, Welsh-speaking, Breconshire village of Soar, Howard was the fourth and youngest child of Henry Williams (1875-1945) and Edith Gwenllian Williams (1883-1972). He was 'nurtured in the faith in a tiny village chapel ... like a house but bigger' in days when 'to be a "member" of a dissenting church meant a good deal ... Their homes were sacred with the daily prayers offered in them ... and their knowledge of the Bible was marvellous. They read nothing else, of course, and they read it very closely for was not every word in it "the word of God"?'<sup>3</sup> Their stern Nonconformity needed no Lenten discipline, though Howard and his brothers indulged in a few 'wicked' juvenile pleasures - not too difficult when going for a walk was the only leisure activity of which their father really approved!

Howard was seven when his father moved to Moriah English Baptist Church in Abercynon, a small mining town in 'a part of Britain important for understanding ... the declining influence of church and chapel'.<sup>4</sup> Welsh chapels still looked back to the exciting Revival of 1904-5, with its persistent aftermath of disappointment which made Howard wary of revivalism. In South Wales, unlike Northern England, the owners of mines and industry did not live locally as paternal overlords, so the workforce organized the communities: 'in South Wales the chapel was their home.

They were deacons and teachers on Sundays.<sup>5</sup>

The Depression hit the mining community hard. The meagre manse income was stretched to help those in dire need. Howard never forgot the unemployed miners, let down by chapels nervous of controversial activity and relieved to see politically-minded members leave to battle elsewhere. They failed anxious men with starving families: 'It seemed ... that even the poor ministers belonged to "them" and not to "us". So they watched their women folk getting ready for chapel while they opted for the club or the Workman's Hall.'<sup>6</sup> Once Howard went, guiltily after chapel, to hear Aneurin Bevan in the Workmen's Hall: he could never be happy with 'a view of the Christian faith which was primarily concerned with the reality of heaven ... This is not to deny the value of a true eschatological hope but simply to assert that no view of "the end" can be granted validity by denying the proper claims of the earth.'<sup>7</sup>

In the preface to *Down to Earth*, he observed that 'Most of what was good in Welsh Nonconformity came to me because of my mother and father, but I also owe a debt to those who made it uneasy to rest too comfortably in tradition. From time to time we are all aware both of our need of roots and a desire to tear them up'. As a child, he found belief in God easy - though it was 'largely a sanctified superstition', most obvious when he had been naughty! Baptized at sixteen, he found his father's Calvinism comforting - 'election' seemed to relieve him of responsibility for unregenerate friends! Soon, however, arguing with them at Mountain Ash Grammar School about politics, psychology and religion, he 'felt the need for some apologetic'. The questions of atheist friends mattered, because 'If the Book proved vulnerable to the sharp darts of young, bright critics then the way of life which I had been taught to follow would become a dead-end ...'<sup>8</sup>

He read avidly: his father's theological library, garnered from secondhand stalls, was curiously wide-ranging. An older friend, Elwyn Broom, encouraged him 'to probe and question, to be more concerned with truth than with certainty'.<sup>9</sup> His adolescent mind needed the challenge. Struggling with creation and eschatology, Genesis and Revelation, he read the American paperbacks, *The Fundamentals* (from which the term 'fundamentalism' was coined; they were published from 1909 on). Their conservatism and their authors' academic distinction, reassured him: 'I felt that the trembling ground had become safe'. He read with joy A.T. Pierson's *Many Infallible Proofs*, reflecting later that 'Pierson garrisoned my life at this period because he was not only a scholar but also a saint who had brought some abiding virtue to Wales'.<sup>10</sup> His faith was further fortified by seeing how gospel hope transformed the hard lives of the chapel faithful. Familiar with declining churches and tough manse life, he contemplated a career in socialist politics as 'possibly more useful', but the call to ministry won - because the vision of the Kingdom went beyond politics in building a caring society.<sup>11</sup> His socialism was not uncritical.

At Rawdon College, he warmed to Principal Underwood's teaching: he 'took the nonsense out of religion and made us realize that a man of faith was not entirely an

idiot ... His passion was roused not so much by the struggles and tensions of life as by conservative castles built to protect the Gospel from the world.<sup>12</sup> Howard disapproved of Underwood reading 'other men's prayers' - and told him so - but gladly imbibed the Principal's dislike of denominational structures, not least Superintendents and committees. Harold Rowse and L.H. Marshall completed Rawdon's staff.<sup>13</sup> There Howard was introduced to the writings of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788-1870), and those of F.D. Maurice and other Christian Socialists. Marshall stressed the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the human soul - anyone who sat long under Howard's ministry will recognize the themes. Rawdon students also studied at Leeds University where J.N. Schofield proved an inspiring lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament Studies (his grandson is a Bloomsbury deacon today). A scholarship would have taken Howard to a German university<sup>14</sup> but war intervened, so he continued at Leeds, with a doctoral dissertation on 'The religious thought of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen: its origin, nature and influence' (1951). When Rawdon was short-staffed in 1952, Howard helped out, sharing the Sermon Class and Homiletics with the Area Superintendent, John Barrett.

Student preaching in Yorkshire was a culture shock: the chapels were much larger and the congregations even smaller than in Wales, but the generous hospitality was a delight to hungry students! Howard's early sermons, 'seasoned by a combination of Welsh *hwyl* and extreme criticism', were received with the kindly stolidity of Yorkshire: '[We] sallied forth ready to encounter the prophets of Baal only to meet a group of people who had a way of reducing the most splendid occasions into a meeting of friends... These were the people who, in a dry season, were preserving the faith for future generations while we worried about the problem of belief ...'<sup>15</sup>

The students debated Christian participation in war with academic detachment until September 1939, when many abandoned pacifism overnight. Entering a reserved occupation in 1943, Howard's conscience was haunted by contemporaries in the forces, including his brother David. No-one taxed him with it, but at times he 'was ashamed of being alive'.<sup>16</sup>

His first pastorate was at Blenheim, Leeds, a large church to take a young man fresh from college. Howard was told it was 'down-town in the tone of voice that suggested it should be in some other place', but city ministry appealed to him: 'the people were there with all their problems and all the wealth of community and city life'.<sup>17</sup> Founded with open membership and communion, Blenheim had a remarkably mixed membership - in income, education and culture. The variety of expressions of the common faith amazed Howard, but 'with all its perils' he liked the openness.<sup>18</sup>

After the war, with society to be renewed, it seemed that 'politics was the arena in which faith would fight and triumph'.<sup>19</sup> Fascinated by politics but less enchanted with politicians, he caused a stir with a 'wayside pulpit' after the General Election

in July 1945 when Clement Attlee had led the Labour Party to victory: 'CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT. One lot of sinners out! another lot of sinners in!'. It caused uproar in the City Council - and Howard lodged with Councillor Bretherick! With Howard away on holiday, embarrassed deacons covered the poster with plain paper. On his return, he substituted 'A change of government alone will not bring a new order' and wrote to the *Yorkshire Post* explaining he meant that *all* men were sinners and the current crisis was not just economic and political but also moral.<sup>20</sup> Many remember this as Howard being shocking, but for David Russell it 'sums up well the "down to earth" quality of his preaching and the "worldliness" of the Gospel he preached ... in the best sense of that word.'

Howard formed a close friendship with the Area Superintendent, John Barrett - in spite of his suspicion of the Superintendent's office. Barrett drew Ernest Payne's attention to this young minister 'of rare potential'.<sup>21</sup> Another stimulating friend was his church treasurer, Robert Gawler, Clerk to Convocation of Leeds University, who regularly gave Howard lunch, seasoned with academic discussion. This all helped to develop his taste for dialogue.

Blenheim folk still have vivid memories of the dynamic Welshman with his floppy auburn hair - and the shock to Blenheim girls when their 'heart-throb' imported a Welsh bride: always one for travel conversations, he met Athena Maurice on a train. She was not bred in Baptist ways but Howard valued her detachment, and the church soon took her to heart.<sup>22</sup>

Moving to Beechen Grove, Watford, in 1953 proved hard. Why did Howard, always suspicious of 'career moves', accept this long-established, wealthy church?<sup>23</sup> Probably it looked like a city centre church (before the ring road isolated it), but he found it more a commuter suburb and his politics were at odds with Beechen Grove's prosperous businessmen and succession of mayors. Nevertheless, his preaching drew five to six hundred hearers on Sunday evenings. The church's enduring, faithful witness won his affection, but he remained wary of confusing respectable, middle-class ways with the Kingdom of God: Christians busy providing nice activities could fail to expose the church to the world and the world to the church. 'The Church as a social structure has never ceased to scare me', he wrote - because it is so easy to shut people out.<sup>24</sup>

The call to Bloomsbury came in 1958 when he was forty. By then Howard and Athena had two children, Bronwen and Gareth; Huw and Gwilym were born in London. Contemplating the new task, Howard wrote:

I felt excited about the opportunity of working in a great city... The city has its own peculiar problems and the troubles seen in town or village are multiplied. There is a society rather than a community of people ... It is strange at first to step into the streets and find the world passing by as though one were invisible ... I shall not be satisfied with a life conditioned simply by the functions of people. Somewhere society and community must meet. (*Room to grow* p.186)

His induction struck the *Baptist Times* as 'like a Welsh eisteddfodd': London had so many Welsh preachers to welcome him.<sup>25</sup> He set about renewing premises and people for more effective ministry, with the pioneering Friendship Centre, copied and developed by many churches at home and overseas.

From Bloomsbury Howard served in wider spheres. He was always in demand as a preacher. Impatient with bureaucracy, he never relished committee work, but was drawn to the religious media. He was a director of the *Baptist Times* Ltd, and on the editorial board of *New Christian* 1965-70. He wrote for the *Baptist Times*, including a major series on twentieth-century theologians,<sup>26</sup> and for *New Christian*, the *Methodist Recorder* and other religious journals. He supplied a number of 'Face to Faith' columns for the *Guardian*; one sermon appeared in *The Times*, and another in the *Radio Times*.<sup>27</sup> He served on the Central Religious Advisory Committee of the British Broadcasting Corporation 1962-5, and the Religious Advisory Council of the Independent Television Authority 1965-70. An effective broadcaster, he is remembered especially for the TV epilogue on the night of the Aberfan disaster. Other interests were in education and ecumenism. He was for a time chaplain to Baptist students in London (as he had been in Leeds), a director of the Central Young Men's Christian Association, and a member of the Northern Baptist College Committee. He represented the Baptist Union on the British Council of Churches, and in 1984-5 was Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council. He also served as an Arbitrator for the Printers' Pension Association. While President of the Baptist Union in 1965 he went with Ernest Payne and Douglas Hicks to the Soviet Union - visits were not easy in those days of the cold war.

His publications, a few slender volumes, emerged during the Bloomsbury years. *Down to Earth: An Interpretation of Christ* (SCM 1964), *Noughts and Crosses* (CKP 1965), *Old Memories and New Ways* - his Presidential Address to the Baptist Union (CKP 1965), *Personal Religion* (BUGBI Christian Citizenship Department, n.d.), *Song of the Devil* - on the temptations of Christ (Epworth 1972), *My Word: Christian preaching today* (SCM 1973), 'An Apology for Dissent' - Moderator's Address (*Free Church Chronicle* XXXIX, Summer 1984), and *If words mean anything* - the C.R. Batten Lecture (London Baptist Preachers' Association, 1986).

Retiring to Cardiff in 1986 - since he remained, as he put it,<sup>28</sup> 'daft about Wales' - Howard continued to preach, appreciated not least because he had not become too grand to have time for the smallest churches. But his health was already failing; he died on 27 February 1991.

### 3 THE PREACHER

#### a) *The faith he proclaimed*

'Still held by a faith' that he 'could not have disowned at any period without enduring wounds', Howard was devoted to Jesus Christ. He marvelled at God choosing to dwell with men - which meant that Word and Sacraments 'must grapple with the places where men have chosen to live and work even while they complain

of city life'. He believed in those twin Baptist principles - evangelism and freedom - the Good News must be proclaimed and people must be *free* to respond, not coerced: the 'word of salvation' should not be rammed down people's throats! Nor did God want people to 'do violence to their reason': honest doubt was not helped by arrogant, over-confident Christians. Response to Christ must involve responsibility for others.<sup>29</sup>

The suggestion that he was strong on the incarnation but avoided the cross and resurrection is not borne out by his writings or our memories. Dafydd Davies, former Principal of South Wales Baptist College, suggests<sup>30</sup> that in the nature of Howard's itinerant preaching, mostly for special occasions, the great doctrines of the faith did not loom large, so 'it was wrongly ... assumed by his critics that he queried their validity', whereas from his own pulpit he provided a balanced diet. Davies judges that 'Howard's preaching was soundly Biblical. For his critics the doctrines were more important than the Biblical evidence on which they were based.' Consider some of Howard's own words:

I find this historical scepticism in relation to the passion and dying of Christ neither convincing nor attractive ... (*Down to Earth* p.59)

I was taught and now hold to the view that Jesus is a man who walked in Palestine ... I know that the Jesus of history is elusive ... is bound indissolubly with the Christ of experience ... This ... enables theology to move into realms which speak of glory and mystery far beyond the memory of recorded events or sayings. ('The real Jesus', *Baptist Times*, 19 May 1977)

The root of repentance is ... in a spontaneous response to the overwhelming grace and love of God... It is a gift before it is an obligation. ('Face to faith', *Guardian*, 20 March 1976)

The contents of early Christian preaching ... the fulfilment of prophecy, the early life of Jesus, the crucifixion and resurrection, the exaltation of the Lord, the gift of the Spirit and the universal judgment of Christ - there is enough there to believe or not believe. It is historical, redemptive and catholic ... If a man is a Christian preacher these themes will be an essential part of his message. (*My Word* pp.77-8)

There are Christians throughout the world who differ in their interpretation of what it means to say "Christ was raised from the dead", who unite in proclaiming "Christ is risen!" (*Down to Earth* p.78)

His writings pulsate with excitement at the risen Christ at large in his world - he often uses the present tense for Christ. He did not major on the penal aspect of atonement: 'If we have Good News to give, let's give it! Put Encouragement and Hope first, before Judgment - show the possibility of repentance'. It is hard to convey the impact this positive, challenging gospel had on young people coming from churches that majored on salvation from sin but did not seem to proclaim much beyond that. Howard believed in judgment too - and the media kept coming back for

### Advent sermons!

He was accused of 'universalism': he asserted that all people were created by God and so had something of Christ within them - whether they recognized it or not. Christ died for all and is open to all - though only a minority turn to him. Faith should produce a dynamic new attitude towards all people, not just the like-minded. Speaking on 'Evangelism Today' at St Paul's in January 1969, he expounded the Gospel as a three-way relationship: not just 'God and me' but 'God, me and my neighbour'. He explained how in the postwar years many Baptists revolted 'against an Evangelicalism which narrowed the Gospel to a message of individual salvation. We believed that the nature of the Church was of immense importance and that the Church should see its role as a community among communities.'<sup>31</sup> The church should make *all* who come welcome, whatever their beliefs or lifestyle. At the same time members must maintain the integrity of their own discipleship. It is no soft option.

Howard cared passionately about the local church, where people in Christ 'touch and talk to each other'.<sup>32</sup> He wrote:

I am grateful to the churches in which I have served ... for the encouragement of many friends and the precious gift of freedom to preach the gospel. The fellowship I have shared in these churches convinces me, more than anything else, that the Christian Way can create a community not limited to people of like mind. (*Noughts and Crosses* p.7)

He loved the Bible - both Testaments, at a time when many seemed to find the Old an 'embarrassment' - because 'old pictures need interpretation'.<sup>33</sup> Living among Jews in Golders Green, he was keenly aware of the relationship between these faiths, and particularly liked Judaism's 'moving sense of the sacredness of the life of the world'.<sup>34</sup> He was sure that 'there is no hope for any Church which will not face the future, welcome the advance of knowledge and be open to the complicated ways of truth', so he warmed to biblical scholarship, yet treasured the heritage of 'the little Meeting House where men of character and personal faith believed quite simply that the church must consist of Christians and where they heard the word and broke the bread knowing that Christ is the head ...'<sup>35</sup> Beginning with the Bible was always the most effective way to preach: 'The Bible view of life and of God's way with men has the capacity of going like an arrow straight to the heart'.<sup>36</sup>

Howard wrestled with the enigma of goodness in people unsupported by faith: 'each week', he wrote, 'I speak to people who reverence Christ but feel no experience of God'.<sup>37</sup> In wartime Leeds, he had found 'faith, superstition and tradition were all mixed up': 'It was annoying to find that the people could manage their lives so well. They faced misfortune and death with admirable courage, while it would have been more encouraging to me if they had cried out for the prepared props of faith which I was eager to offer them...'.<sup>38</sup> Not all managed so well - beyond or within the church:

there were simple Christians who lived in faith, while others used faith as a prop or a cudgel. I cannot pretend that simple Christians would have been better people without the Church and their belief in God. I always felt that those who remained aloof from a confessed faith would have enriched themselves and others if they had ... probed more deeply ... (*Room to grow* p.142)

Seeing 'no point in making a problem of the goodness and kindness in non-Church people', he welcomed it as of God, wherever it appeared, knowing that:

there are moments in the lives of people which transform a disparaging view of human nature ... Just when a preacher has pictured greed and inhumanity ... some little man squanders his life with incredible courage ... frequently if we searched for some avowed faith or church allegiance we should find none. Moreover, people who observe these acts in undistinguished lives feel themselves looking in respect and reverence ... feeling the grace and judgment of it ... (*My Word* p.79)

He delighted in saints so intimate with God that their prayers were the face-to-face conversation of friends, but could not claim that experience himself. Like his father, Howard approached God with a sense of awe, which came through in the reverence of worship he led. He trusted the context of worship with its inherited traditions to provide the counterbalance to adventurous sermons. Again, this would be easier 'at home' where he was in control of the whole service.

#### *b) His view of the preacher*

'No-one in his right mind would choose to be a Nonconformist minister', he declared, but he belonged 'to a tradition where all who respond to the call to the ministry are expected to preach'. 'Preaching is a work to be avoided if at all possible', yet 'the pressures brought by the Holy Spirit are so strong that a man can resist them only by being untrue to himself'.<sup>39</sup> He was inspired by great preachers 'who talked of the Gospel with enthusiasm', citing his own father, his tutor L.H. Marshall, Leslie Weatherhead, W.E. Sangster, George McLeod, and Martin Luther King.<sup>40</sup> He shared his father's sense of solemn responsibility when he 'entered the pulpit with Christ as God's representative before the people ... [for] the aim of the sermon is to bring people to Christ'.<sup>41</sup>

He was fascinated by the nature of the ordained ministry, a 'perplexing vocation' presenting the 'strange predicament' that it demands gifts and education but denies career ambition. The preacher must use his gifts yet not display them, for 'the people who come are to see Christ, not the preacher'. Once, ministers' learning had marked them out in society, but the modern preacher faced educated congregations asking questions formerly left to 'the obscurity of academic circles'.<sup>42</sup> Howard once explained the job thus:

I tell people how they may be saved. Saved from what? There's the rub. At one time it was clear. Saved from hell... or death ... Now, I'm not so sure,



for what point is there in saving people from a place in which they no longer believe or from a condition which is inevitable? ... No-one seems to want to be saved ... (*Room to grow* p.1)

On the other hand, 'nothing distresses some Christians more than to suspect that it may be God's will to save all. What about judgement? you ask. Don't worry - there is judgement for all.'<sup>43</sup> In more solemn vein he explained: 'Preaching means a declaration which speaks directly to the hearer and challenges him to a specific reaction. It is this personal encounter with the truth of the living Christ in which I am primarily concerned, where dead men may come alive in Christ.'<sup>44</sup>

The preacher's job was harder than a lecturer's, for the preacher had to make an historical faith 'come alive again to contemporary men and women':<sup>45</sup>

The preacher must bear in mind not only his own competence but the needs of a congregation who hear of scholarship only through occasional sensations in the daily press. If the preacher is blandly intellectual he will soon find himself delivering a monologue which he alone hears. If he is wilfully blind to scholarship he will in time become effective only to the dying and the dead. How is he to give a word to the living? (*My Word* p.55)

The preacher should 'take an interest in the life of the world' to 'go to the people making the Gospel relevant to their lives':<sup>46</sup> so Howard read the papers before going to church and brought current events into prayers and sermon. 'All this might sound so ordinary today but then it was a revelation', observes Seth Stephens. Some of his finest sermons dealt with matters on people's minds that week: a mining disaster, the Coal Strike, the deaths of Steve Biko and Martin Luther King, who had preached at Bloomsbury and enjoyed a family meal in the Williams' home.

He lamented that he could only preach in English - he loved to converse in his mother tongue but lacked the formal Welsh of platform and pulpit - but he had that Welsh gift, the *hwyl*, which he described thus: 'when speech poured out like a song and, in full sail, the words took wings as they were borne by the wind of the Spirit. The preacher no longer manipulated the text, the words controlled him.'<sup>47</sup> He recognized the power of this - and the dangers. 'I do not preach to try and please people', David Charley remembers him commenting quietly on his last visit to Blenheim (October 1990), 'I preach to try and please God.'

Legend has it that Howard did not prepare properly: that he would nip down to Blenheim Saturday night to discover the advertised theme. I can imagine him joking thus, but find it hard to reconcile with his high view of preaching - or with the stack of sermon notes his daughter showed us. Each is on a paper cut down to 9" x 8" and folded in half. The front gives text, readings, place and date; the middle spread has outline notes, with key words underlined in red; on the back are notes of subsequent re-use. Some have quotations or modified versions tucked inside.<sup>48</sup> Disliking a rigid scheme, he might modify up to the last minute, responding to inspiration or the day's events. This might well look like last-minute preparation. Seth Stephens, a Bloomsbury deacon and himself a preacher, remembers him

checking notes in the vestry: 'He was never completely sure of what he was going to say and suffered from pre-pulpit nerves. He was thinking on his feet. Once when I thanked him for an impressive sermon he replied "It is not easy".'

He would mull over a sermon through the week: I remember him discussing them when giving a student a lift - and the added interest of seeing the development by Sunday - perhaps even recognizing a contribution of one's own! Occasionally his light structuring let him down - but he was usually aware when he failed to get through. Sometimes his ability to speak spontaneously could rescue a meeting. He needed space for words to 'take off', and found irksome the need to keep to a full script when broadcasting.

He firmly distinguished between preaching a sermon and giving an address - and many talks probably were extempore. David Russell recalls how he often seemed unready for the minister's item at Bloomsbury Central Committee. Howard would appear to speak 'off the cuff', but 'could be quite prophetic. His manner was often flippant, but what he said was penetrating and even profound'. He had 'a well stocked mind', reflecting much serious thought, and was 'well versed in politics and economics as well as theology. To him these disciplines belonged together in the service of the Gospel'. John Hough remembers going for an overdue magazine piece to find Howard watching a billposter putting up 'Guinness is good for you'. Turning to the desk, he dashed off a splendid article on the Pauline distinction between rightness and goodness (Romans 5.7).

Constrained to preach, Howard kept on sowing the seed, knowing much would fail to mature and that, even among believers, few would achieve that 'consistent loyalty which marked them out from others, presenting the abiding mystery of election'.<sup>49</sup> It had puzzled theologians down the ages, but the preacher had to persist, trusting some would have ears to hear.

### c) *The impact of his preaching*

His sermons were eagerly anticipated. John Hough remembers equal appreciation from the scholar, William Barclay, and the Church House caretaker, Mr Bassett. Dafydd Davies ranks Howard in the top flight of preachers, along with Ingli James and Donald Soper: 'The spiritual heights were reached many times'. Ron Cowley remembers a university sermon in Bristol Cathedral at 8.30 pm, when Howard had already preached morning and evening at Tyndale, and been involved in a minor car crash midday: 'he talked to the vast congregation as if he was preaching to each one individually'.

Howard used everyday language, 'free of clap trap and religiosity', although he was occasionally 'carried into Celtic mists'.<sup>50</sup> For Daniel Jenkins, writing *The Guardian* obituary (5 March 1991): 'Bloomsbury ... could be depended on for sound biblical exegesis sharpened by theological insight and homely, often witty, illustration.' The Welsh voice caressed the English words, as Howard stretched our minds, entertained us with illustrative stories, took us back to scripture, made a

point with judicious humour (how daring it felt to laugh in the pew in 1958!), stirred us with perceptive social comment, and directed our eyes again and again to the cross he had had set above the pulpit. Always the sermon ended with a prayer.

Many appreciated worshipping *with their minds*. Going home, Douglas Stewart (Assistant Head of Religious Broadcasting, BBC) would say to his wife, 'What a remarkable thing to say ...!' and they would delight in discussing the sermon together. 'He was so varied and light-hearted', remembers Mary, 'yet he stood you up - you had to think for yourself. It was a profound help in facing everyday living.'<sup>51</sup> Rosemary Taylor found the Old Testament and Cross were 'given back afresh' as part of her religious framework, after she had been 'frustrated by the gap between scholarship (not "ivory towers" but questions buzzing in thoughtful minds) and the usual homiletical treatment of the Bible'. She found Howard's dedication services 'among his most eloquent sermons', with the sense of life as a gift and of mutual responsibility as 'a powerful social agent, not just a warm feeling.'<sup>52</sup> Ken Bennett remembers Howard's infectious enthusiasm, exposition that sent hearers off to read more, and evangelism - because he 'preached the gospel with certainty and fervour'. He did not strive for *instant* conversions, but his preaching brought people to Christ - like Joyce Wainwright, for many years a missionary in India, who remembers her decision following a Blenheim sermon on Revelation 3.20.

Perhaps even more had lost faith restored. At Bloomsbury we saw them come reluctantly, to be gently led back by Howard's respect for honest questions. In Bloomsbury today there are some who had apparently given up on the church years ago but now give devoted service - thanks to a 'flaming prophet for our day' who called them 'away from what he called dead orthodoxy to a lively encounter with the risen Christ'.<sup>53</sup>

Faithful Christians were given fresh insights: Bob Archer, a Spurgeon's man, saw Howard as a biblical preacher who made him grasp the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Cross (one arm reaching between God and man, the other extending over all people). 'Not', writes Bob, 'the old liberal "social gospel" but the gospel of Jesus Christ, both spiritual and social in its very nature'. After hearing Howard, Bob could never again preach personal salvation without calling for justice and freedom for all.

His sermons could be memorable even secondhand. John Barrett, by then strokebound in his wheelchair in the Bloomsbury aisle, relayed some to a young friend in Torquay. Raymond Brown, later Principal of Spurgeon's College, still remembers Howard's texts and exposition. There's a tribute from preachers to a preacher!

#### 4 THE PASTOR

Some question whether the great preacher was a pastor too. He was - even if Barbara Stanford bore the main pastoral responsibility at Bloomsbury. Howard enjoyed people. A warm friendly man, he had great personal charm and drew people

to him. Many cherish his letters, even if his writing took some deciphering! He could get alongside all manner of people, whatever their race, creed, or intellect, high in the land or living on the street. Raymond Brown writes: 'I often thought ... that if ever I was in any real trouble, I would have gone to Howard as someone I could trust completely ...'<sup>54</sup>

Howard had 'no time for pomp or cant', remembered Bernard Green in his Memorial Address, but he 'never knowingly hurt anyone'.<sup>55</sup> On a personal level he would gladly minister to or work with anyone, however different their theology or politics: he confessed he might make an exception of Ian Paisley but did not expect to be put to the test! He admitted to some surprise the day he found himself comforting a tearful party of conservative Southern Baptists, the week after division first rent their Convention.

Children were drawn to him. In his bachelor days, children would knock on the door to ask 'Can Mr Williams come out to play', knowing he might oblige. Elizabeth Settle recalls daily visits when she was in the Leeds fever hospital: isolated from her parents, the young minister saved the child from 'feeling totally abandoned'. My son Richard remembers that 'Howard liked to hug people'. Several of those consulted, of all ages, mention his hugs. Today, when ministers are warned to keep their distance, especially from children, because of the abuse of a few, we should not forget the precious impact of *good* physical contact. Howard could express more in a squeeze of the arm than even he could put into words.

Visiting the many elderly members of Beechen Grove, he reflected that he

had been flowing in the very life-blood of the Church... I shudder to think how easy it would have been to ... leave them to their own lonely ways. It seemed almost manly to reject their needs, claiming that I had not been schooled to spend so much of my time among the old. I was saved from this cruel neglect simply because I could not resist their love and charm. (*Room to grow*, p.173-4.)

At Beechen Grove too he learned to work with a variety of professionals - doctors, social workers, psychiatrists - and to see the minister's role as keeping the *whole* 'human person in view'.

When the first delivery of this lecture was reported in the *Baptist Times*, Norman Tate was moved to phone me. Now ninety-six, he used to run a garage in Golders Green and serviced the cars of twelve ministers. Eleven received normal customer treatment, but when Howard came in Tate enjoyed watching all his workmen down tools as they 'just dashed to talk to him!' The proprietor argued theology with Howard; the mechanics simply enjoyed his company.

Church members learned to cede priority to those 'from outside', but when with him one had his full attention. Dialogue appealed: 'If people wished to talk then I was content to let the conversation take its course whether it was deep or superficial'.<sup>56</sup> Often the conversations ran deep, prompted by his sermons. He liked to be available after worship, not just in vestibule or vestry but informally, sitting

on over coffee.

He remembered people - as Freda West puts it, 'not just names, but he would know the connections'.<sup>57</sup> His many contacts were often called on to help others. David Wilson of the BMS was still in junior school when Howard, a Rawdon student, took seriously a poor child's dream of becoming a missionary doctor and told his parents how it could be realized through scholarships before higher education was widely accessible. Brian and I remember a Harley Street consultation - free 'because you give time to the church'. Morris West recalls Howard's behind-the-scenes contacts helping secure a place in the Honours List for Dr Payne. Such ability to 'fix it', while welcome to those helped and done unobtrusively, may yet have irritated observers with less influence. He could, for example, be so grateful for the generosity to Bloomsbury of his far-flung, wealthy friends that it sometimes seemed to the treasurer that he did not appreciate how much the church depended on the more modest but regular giving of members.

It was a cardinal principle with him that *all* people, whatever their worldly state, were of equal value before God. Respectable middle-class members had to learn to welcome those whose lives were not so clean and tidy. At worship no disturbance would deflect Howard's concentration - so the congregation learned to take anything in its stride. Those who joined the church were expected to serve. Howard could be a hard taskmaster. Try the discipline that no member should make a suggestion unless prepared to be active in implementation: busy deacons with fertile minds think hard before promoting a new idea - but when people care enough things happen. In church and deacons' meetings Howard was concerned to 'seek the mind of Christ', wanting decision by consensus rather than vote. He was wary of giving too many jobs to women - partly for fear men would then opt out. This seems old-fashioned now, but I found him an encourager who often reminded us of Jesus' radical attitude to women.

## 5 PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR

Dr Payne in the Annual Report for 1965-6 described the President thus: 'Dr Williams ... always stimulating and not seldom controversial.' A voracious reader, Howard was aware of new thought and movements ahead of most people - drawing attention to issues like world development, multi-cultural society, and ecology before the terms became familiar. Indeed, he tended to move on, leaving earlier concerns to others once they came into fashion.

In the 1960s the Baptist Union had some churches like Bloomsbury, favouring scholarship, ecumenism and care for society, and others on the conservative wing focusing chiefly on evangelism, and these tended to polarize, although many churches steered a middle course. Internal struggles put conservative evangelicals on the defensive.<sup>58</sup> Today the balance has swung: conservative theology is dominant, but with a much broader understanding of mission which Howard rejoiced to see coming in. Much of his 'heresy' was the advocacy of an 'holistic' gospel and

'Kingdom theology' a generation early. He observed the tension, recurrent in church history, between 'modern and political or old-fashioned and fundamentalist' - 'Yet', he wrote, 'it is only when both are held together that we see Christ in his incarnation and cross coming alive again'.<sup>59</sup>

Conservative Baptists attacked him. David Russell 'got the impression that this did not disturb him unduly', but it hurt. Looking back in 1986, in his C.R. Batten Lecture, Howard wrote of the Welsh fundamentalists among whom he grew up as 'warm, friendly people, most of them quite unlike the nasty practitioners I have encountered throughout my ministry'. One could disagree to his face without damaging relationships (we did!), but 'stabbing in the back' was different. Perhaps his heavy smoking was part of his defensive system. 'At times', remembers Morris West, 'he seemed to give up on the denomination and isolated himself'. Ron Cowley suggests Howard simply enjoyed thought and discussion so much that he could not get on the same wavelength as his critics, who felt threatened by what others found stimulating. Bernard Green reckons that evangelicals 'could not hear the gospel in which Howard firmly believed because he did not use conventional terminology': although rooted in scripture, his message was 'couched in words and thought forms that spoke prophetically to contemporary men and women' - except those who only understood the language of Zion!

Unusually perhaps, Howard was honoured most 'in his own country' - where best known - in the churches he pastored, in Yorkshire and his native Wales, especially there among his own generation. He always retained some friends across the Baptist spectrum because, as Frank Goodwin told me at the funeral, 'to know Howard was to love him'. Where known, his gentle, humorous manner let him get away with much that might have given offence. Sometimes, exasperated with slow deliberations, he would just do things - like removing the names from Beechen Grove's 'family pews' one night. He writes of pushing tricky business through as 'AOB' since 'weary deacons are peculiarly susceptible to the guidance of the Holy Spirit at this late hour ... and ... remain under the impression that the decisions are their own. This providential method saves them from unnecessary humiliation'.<sup>60</sup> When the Blenheim Sunday School committee argued interminably over the cost of prizes, Howard closed the meeting abruptly: 'Damn you all, I'll pay for them myself!'<sup>61</sup> His letters to John Hough always included some attack on the corridors of power: the Baptist Union, Baptist Missionary Society, British Broadcasting Corporation, Superintendents, the Billy Graham organization, London Baptist Association, or even the management at Lords cricket ground who demanded that spectators wore ties on a hot day.

He could be provocative, saying startling things to get attention: Bloomsbury recognized the rhetorical device - elsewhere he could be misunderstood. He had a mischievous streak and enjoyed stirring up the complacent - to make them think. Bernard Green considers he was 'above controversy for the sake of it' but could not resist ridiculing cant. Such tactics can be effective, but demand a thicker skin than

Howard's. His gifts brought him a prominence he did not covet - some aspects he doubtless enjoyed, some irked him, and others hurt. Some people found him maddening.

They branded him a liberal, a social gospel-monger, a universalist ... failing to perceive how very Baptist he was underneath. Some criticisms bewildered him: Barbara Stanford remembers many times when he was very low. Colin Marchant has only seen three brother ministers weep, two at Bloomsbury: Townley Lord and Howard Williams were both vulnerable to attacks by fellow Baptists.

Raymond Brown, assessing the conservative evangelical reaction, observes: 'We may have misunderstood him', but he appeared 'almost deliberately confrontational if not adversarial - even relishing a provocative discussion ... evangelicals of my generation found him a rather threatening figure'. After *Honest to God*, it was tempting to see him as 'a Baptist John Robinson'. It did not help that Ernest Payne, deeply suspect for his ecumenism, clearly liked Howard. But, as ever, those who knew him warmed to him: Raymond chuckles about the time he spoke on Calvin at Bloomsbury and Howard told him he 'was less than fair' to the Reformer!

Howard addressed the Assembly in 1951 on 'The Lord of all life'. The *Baptist Times* report is bland: 'a well received address, delivered with freshness, force and fervour'. Ron Cowley remembers how he set up argument and counter-argument and then exclaimed, 'Damn it all, you can't have it both ways!' Swearing from the Assembly platform - horrors! Arnold Clark, the Vice President, was deeply offended - and his censorious letter did not prompt a duly contrite reply. Howard's next Assembly address in 1960, hailed by some as 'a breath of fresh air', prompted six months of scandalously irrelevant correspondence in the *Baptist Times* - a glaring example of how not to hear a prophetic voice!

In 1964 Howard was elected Vice-President of the Baptist Union - the first minister in pastorate since Dr Lord in 1947 and youngest President since 1912. He had served on the BU Council since 1954. Nominated by the smallest Association (Wiltshire and East Somerset), he was one of six candidates (the others were Mr W.J. Edgington JP of Doncaster nominated by four Associations, Revd H.W. Janisch of Worthing - four Associations, Revd A.J. Potts of Dorking - two Associations, Mr D.C. Shedden of Birmingham - one Association, and Revd S.A. Turl of West Ham - five Associations). With the conservative vote split, Howard was elected on the controversial alternate vote system. It was not a role he coveted, and meant facing, in Dr Payne's words, 'frequent carping criticism from certain conservative circles'.<sup>62</sup>

The *Baptist Times* serialised extracts from his book, *Down to Earth*. This drew complaints, mainly about an inadequate view of substitutionary atonement, but Walter Bottoms' review (13 August 1964) found it 'fundamentally evangelistic'. When entering inner city ministry, Colin Marchant, another Spurgeon's man, found *Down to Earth* singularly helpful. Overseas, antipodean Baptists were wary, but in Gore, in New Zealand's deep south, the ecumenical fraternal, dominated by

Presbyterians with multiple degrees in theology, chose this latest SCM book for their monthly discussions. The young Baptist minister enjoyed new-found respect for his communion's scholarship and wrote to thank Howard. Barrie Hibbert treasured the reply - never dreaming he would succeed Howard at Bloomsbury.

Of Howard's Presidential Address the *Baptist Times* (20 May 1965) reported: 'A Welshman breathing fire and fresh air came to an assembly a very few years ago ... and was practically howled down in the correspondence columns of this paper. This year, accepted as president, he said the same things, was heard with respect and acclaimed for his message!' Not everyone agreed. Dafydd Davies recalls the evening in Leeds: 'No one could have been unmoved on that occasion except, possibly, Howard's critics. Their discomfort was apparent to all. The truth sometimes hurts, and it undoubtedly did so then.' The *Baptist Times* published an abridged version, retitled 'The Church for others', and thereafter has only brief references to the President - but that was normal. Search in other contemporary journals<sup>63</sup> has drawn a blank. I began to think I had imagined the pain of that year, but for tangible evidence in Ian Paisley's diatribe, twenty-two pages of vitriol entitled *The depths of the Baptist Downgrade: C.H. Spurgeon's prophecy comes true: An exposure of the infidelity and unitarianism of the President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland* - with section headings like 'Dr Williams versus the truth of God'.<sup>64</sup> With a foreword by the Revd Brian Green of Hounslow Baptist church, it was sent to all Baptist ministers. Howard did not greatly mind offending Paisley, but some Baptist presidential visits were horrid.

The incident that rankled most came in 1969 and related to educational lectures on the Bible and Christian doctrine for which he thought he had London Baptist Association (LBA) backing. Barbara Stanford remembers how carefully he chose lecturers he believed would be acceptable: William Barclay, Rex Mason (then a Spurgeon's College tutor), Michael Walker, and Howard himself. Arrangements were well advanced when the LBA withdrew support, under pressure from conservative evangelicals. Howard wrote later of 'those LBA evangelical rotweilers appointed to guard the property of the faith'.<sup>65</sup>

The whole situation was more complicated than it sounded when Howard harked back to it later. It seems that Howard, typically dismissive of committees, had discussed the idea with the Superintendent and perhaps others but gone ahead with arrangements without waiting to work through the 'proper channels'. Bloomsbury, struggling to pay off the reconstruction debt, had not responded warmly to a request for £1 per member to finance the LBA's Shared Evangelism initiative, which Bloomsbury deacons judged poorly thought out. The promoters were the same men who blocked the lectures. Soon after, the LBA made a generous grant of £750 towards an assistant to work in the Friendship Centre - but a disastrous appointment effectively wasted the money. All this contributed to a period of soured relationships between church and association.<sup>66</sup>

Dafydd Davies observes that in Wales as in south-east England, there were two



distinct groups - traditional evangelicals, who loved to hear Howard, and those who prided themselves on being the 'real evangelicals'. When Howard addressed a gathering of two thousand at a college Valedictory in Cardiff in 1959, the 'real evangelicals' marched out when Howard declared that the judgment question at heaven's gate would be 'Where is your neighbour?'<sup>67</sup> Davies observes that 'the twinkle in his eyes was too much for them'.

Howard's inclusive love of people drew varied congregations. In the early days he would marvel from the pulpit to see Americans worshipping alongside Japanese. A Hindu and two Sikhs came regularly for a while before they had temples here. The chapel was let for an occasional inter-faith service - the Dalai Lama providing an excuse for at least one church to leave the London Association. Howard defended getting to know others, but was dismayed when Christians seemed to admire the sacred writings of other faiths more than their familiar Bible.

Baptist critics drove Howard back into Bloomsbury, or into appreciative ecumenical circles, lamenting that 'the only people who have tried to stop me preaching are some of my fellow Baptists'.<sup>68</sup> The prophetic voice, if not silenced, was muffled. He rarely appeared at BU Council or Assembly, but did intervene in Council when Michael Taylor was first being attacked. He teased me about joining the Council - but quizzed me on the business: he had not lost interest in wider Baptist life. He wrote kindly to every incoming Union Vice-President - only one failed to respond. Like an Old Testament prophet, Howard could speak sternly to Christians of his day. Some could not digest an uncomfortable word: it was easier to mishear and cry heresy. Howard never found the prophetic calling easy - but it was what the Lord required of him.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Prophet? Heretic? He knew God's truth could stand up to modern testing. He adopted - and insisted that his churches practised - an open, tolerant approach, and was constantly taken aback when Christians excluded people. Bernard Green sums him up as a 'remarkable mix of Welsh valley piety and enthusiasm ... plus a clear Christian socialism ... plus a love of people to whom he wanted to declare the good news of a God who loved them, whoever and whatever they were'.

An enigmatic man, pulled between head and heart, love of books and love of people, he was nurtured in fundamentalist respect for Scripture, and critical scholarship enhanced his love of the Bible. Burdened with the urgent need to make gospel proclamation relevant, he drew strength from those sustained by simple, traditional faith. He preached to all who 'had ears to hear', content to leave response to the Holy Spirit. The Arminian in him believed that 'all who will may come', while the old Calvinist sensed that there was a limit to how far the preacher could determine the outcome.

His disagreements with other Baptists stemmed as much from his very Baptistness as from 'liberal' theology. Kenneth Slack claimed that Howard identified

himself with the whole Christian church while remaining 'outrageously Baptist - almost irredeemably Baptist!'<sup>69</sup> Howard was an independent Baptist who ploughed his own furrow. He liked people and readily won love and respect in personal encounter, but not all found him easy to work with. He was a dynamic leader, but not a natural team worker, more effective as a student chaplain than as a Senior Friend. Relations with church officers and deacons were good, but he liked to generate the new ideas, or to mull over those of others until he was ready to own them. He had a long, fine partnership with the Bloomsbury deaconess/assistant minister, Barbara Stanford.

Howard did not like denominational structures and was severe on ministers who left the pastorate for any other service - yet his ministry drew several such ministers to Bloomsbury. Politics and academia had tempted him, but for him nothing could compare with the high calling to pastor a church and proclaim the Good News of the risen Christ - for behold, the dwelling of God is with men.

#### NOTES

*Many quotations are taken from Howard Williams's publications, see page 320 for details.*

- 1 The lecturer is grateful to many people who have provided material and whose memories she has ransacked. These include: Revd Robert Archer, Mrs Gladys Barrett, Mr Ken Bennett, Mr George Betts, Mrs Margaret Bevis, Miss Eileen Blackall, Dr Brian Bowers, Revd Dr Raymond Brown, Dr David Charley, Revd Ron Cowley, Revd Anthony Cross, Revd Dafydd G. Davies, Mr D. Sydney Dawson, Cllr Arthur Downes, Revd Thoraton Elwyn, Mrs Enid Elwyn, Revd Bernard Green, Revd Dr Roger Hayden, Revd Barrie Hibbert, Mr John Hough, Revd Roy Jenkins, Mrs Sylvia Latham, Revd Dr Colin Marchant, Revd George Neal, Mrs Agnes Peel, Mrs Barbara Perkins, Mrs Helen Read, Revd Dr David Russell, Mrs Elizabeth Settle, Mr David Shapton, Mrs Norah Shapton, Revd Alan Smith, Mr Alan G. Speed, Revd Barbara Stanford, Miss Edna Staple, Revd Seth Stephens, Miss Rosemary Taylor, Mrs Ruth Taylor, Revd J. Ancurin Thomas, Revd Trevor Thorn, Mrs Joyce Wainwright, Revd Dr Morris West, Mrs Freda West, Ms Bronwen Williams, Mr David Williams, Dr Gareth Williams, Mrs Mary Wilmshurst, and Dr David Wilson.
- 2 Howard's paternal grandfather had been a police sergeant in Llanelli. His father was an apprentice cabinet maker but members of Adulam Welsh Baptist Church sent him to train for ministry at the Old College, Carmarthen, and University College Cardiff. He was ordained June 1903 at Bethel, Lower Chapel, Brecon. From 1908 he served at Sardis Chapel, Soar, Brecon; from 1921 in the Rhymney Valley at Moriah, Aberbargoed, Pengam and Bargoed; 1926-42 at Moriah, Abercynon. Howard's mother was a farmer's daughter and one of only a few girls to attend Brecon County School for Girls in the 1890s. They married in 1905 and had four children: John Ionawr (b.1908), who moved to Birmingham in the 1930s to obtain work on the production line of the Birmingham Austin works; Corona (b.1911) became a Health Visitor in the Welsh Valleys and married the Revd Emlyn Evans, a Welsh Presbyterian minister; David (b.1915) worked locally for the Post Office all his life, apart from RAF service abroad, 1941-5; and Howard (b.1918). David's son, also David, observes that in a family that always shared experiences, these all informed Howard's thinking.
- 3 *Old Memories and New Ways*, p.9.
- 4 *Down to Earth*, p.9.
- 5 *Song of the Devil*, p.10.
- 6 *Song of the Devil*, pp.11-12.
- 7 *Down to Earth*, pp.11, 14-5.
- 8 *Room to grow* pp.24, 27. This is an unpublished 'autobiographical novel', which reflects Howard's childhood, college days, and first two pastorates. The typescript was kindly lent to the

- author by his son, Professor Gareth Williams of Salford University, along with a collection of broadcast sermons, newspaper articles etc. that Howard had kept.
- 9 Broom, trained at Rawdon and Oxford, eventually became Chief Probation Officer in Cardiff, yet also ministered to the church at Taffs Well. In old age he still delighted to read and explore everything he could on the text and scripture before preaching. Howard Williams, 'Portrait of a minister', *Baptist Times*, 5 January 1989. Also *Room to Grow*, p.24.
  - 10 *My Word* p.47-8.
  - 11 *Room to grow*, pp.53-5.
  - 12 *Room to grow*, p.76. Freda West, growing up in a Bradford church visited by Rawdon students, remembers Howard as a particular favourite of Dr Underwood's: telephone conversation with author, 26 January 1998.
  - 13 H.C. Rowse MA, b.1876, had one pastorate at Guiseley, 1918-21, and then became a Tutor at Rawdon. L.H. Marshall BA BD, b.1882, studied at the universities of London, Berlin and Marburg, as well as Rawdon College. After pastorates at Liverpool 1911-19, and Coventry 1920-25, he was a professor at McMaster University, Toronto, 1925-30, returned to the pastorate at Victoria Road, Leicester 1930-36, and was a Tutor at Rawdon from 1936. See also *Room to grow*, p.69.
  - 14 Memory of conversations with Howard; I think it was to have been Marburg. FB
  - 15 *Room to grow* pp.87, 90.
  - 16 *ibid.*, pp.122-3.
  - 17 *Old Memories and New Ways*, pp.19, 119.
  - 18 *Room to grow*, p.143.
  - 19 *Room to grow*, p.124.
  - 20 Howard kept the local press cuttings about this. The offending words were attributed to Studdert Kennedy, 'Woodbine Willie'.
  - 21 John Hough's memories: he was a student in Leeds and his sister and her husband were members of Blenheim and edited the church magazine.
  - 22 *Room to grow*, p.164.
  - 23 Membership in 1953 was 409, with 61 more in the daughter church, Kingswood. Many were, however, elderly or no longer resident locally, with some 250 attending regularly. I am grateful to Alan G. Speed, a deacon at the time, for this information. Eileen Blackall remembered the large evening congregations regularly filling the ground floor, but lamented the disappearance of these hearers once Howard left.
  - 24 *Room to grow*, pp.167-8, 176, 181.
  - 25 B. Grey Griffith took the chair; speakers included Walter John of Castle Street Welsh Baptist Church, Austen Williams of St Martin's in the Fields, and Daniel Jenkins.
  - 26 These studies, in 1975, introduced Karl Barth, Martin Buber, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Reinhold Niebuhr.
  - 27 'God with a face', *Radio Times*, 16 December 1965; 'Wisdom of the way of redemption', *The Times*, 4 January 1971.
  - 28 *Guardian*, 'Face to faith', 1 March 1980.
  - 29 The quotations come from *Room to grow*, pp.92 and 186f, and the last from Seth Stephens' memories written for the author in March 1998.
  - 30 Letter to author, March 1998.
  - 31 *Room to grow*, p.125.
  - 32 *ibid.* p.179.
  - 33 *Down to Earth* p.36; *Song of the Devil* p.6.
  - 34 *Down to Earth* p.30; *Personal Religion* p.8.
  - 35 *Old memories and new ways*, p.8. Howard often used 'male' language - in those days most of us used it inclusively. His later writing shows some attempt to be 'politically correct'.
  - 36 *My Word*, p.113.
  - 37 *Old Memories and New Ways* p.13.
  - 38 *Room to grow* pp.141-2, see also p.157.
  - 39 *My Word* p.30; 'Face to faith', *Guardian* 7 October 1978; *Room to grow* pp.102-3.
  - 40 *If words mean anything* p.7.
  - 41 *Room to grow* p.19.
  - 42 *My Word* p.20; *Down to Earth* preface.
  - 43 *Old Memories and New Ways*, p.18.
  - 44 *Down to Earth*, pp.76-7.
  - 45 *My Word* p.71.
  - 46 *Room to grow* p.150.
  - 47 *My Word* p.25.
  - 48 Bronwen Williams has some 365 such bundles - a pile 14 cms high. Of these 52 were delivered once only, 86 twice, 34 three times, many several times, 5 twenty or more times. These appear to be all that survive, apart from the full texts of broadcast and published sermons. There are enough to cover about fifteen years of Sundays. 'The Exodus of Christ' had 28 deliveries. Similar notes survive for some midweek Bible studies. Howard sometimes joked that he only had two sermons: there were more distinct themes than that, but he certainly used the same basic sermon on a number of occasions at Bloomsbury, as well as 'repeats' elsewhere.
  - 49 *Room to grow*, p.121.
  - 50 George Betts: letter to author, 12 May 1991.
  - 51 Mary Wilmshurst, formerly Stewart: telephone

- conversation with author, 8 December 1997.
- 52 Letter to author: February 1998.
- 53 Revd Robert [Bob] Archer: letter to author, 6 December 1997.
- 54 Letter to author, 8 December 1997.
- 55 Published in *Bloomsbury Magazine* 221, April 1991.
- 56 *Room to grow*, p.128.
- 57 Freda West: telephone conversation with author, February 1998. As a student preacher, Howard often visited her Bradford church and home.
- 58 Raymond Brown: letter to author, 8 December 1997, and subsequent telephone conversation. The *Honest to God* debate was traumatic, and conservative evangelicals were also divided over ecumenism, with Martyn Lloyd Jones urging them to leave mainstream denominations and John Stott wanting to work from within.
- 59 *Room to grow*, p.56.
- 60 *Room to grow* p.183.
- 61 John Hough: letter to author, 1991.
- 62 E.A. Payne's private journal, p.619. I am grateful to his executor, Dr West, for permission to consult this in the Angus Library.
- 63 I am indebted to Dr David Charley for checking the *Yorkshire Post* and the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, to the Revd Stephen Copson for checking the *Fraternal*, and to the Revd Dr Anthony Cross for checking there was nothing in a range of other possible Baptist sources.
- 64 Dr Williams showed the author his own copy of this many years ago.
- 65 *My Word*, p.49; letter from Dr Williams to John Hough.
- 66 The saga is recorded in the Bloomsbury Deacons' Minutes, and church members remember how the business rankled with Howard. When Geoffrey Haden was dying, Howard told John Hough, 'I liked him and his company when away from the LBA context. After retiring he became the attractive person he sometimes felt compelled to conceal'. He seemed to equate the Metropolitan Superintendent with the London Baptist Association and may not have grasped the delicate relationship of the Union employee whose area was coterminous with the Association.
- 67 Dr Davies notes that all but three of those who signed the subsequent protest letter to the college senate failed to become or remain Baptist ministers.
- 68 'This is what I would go to the stake for', *Baptist Times*, 16 October 1980.
- 69 *Baptist Times* 10 June 1965.

### FAITH BOWERS *Member, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church*

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*(Conclusion of review begun on page 364)*

None of this should deflect the reader from appreciating what is good in this work. Professor Underwood expertly maps the contours of the dispute with its salient features, drawing widely on printed tracts, and almost a third of the book comprises notes to the text. This is a significant contribution to understanding the genesis of seventeenth-century radical dissent.

### STEPHEN COPSON

*Skip One*, an anthology of the poetry of J.E.L. Logan (1884-1796), Baptist minister who trained at Regent's Park College and had pastorates in Bradford, Great Broughton, Sherborne, Southwell and Honiton, and of his grandson, John C. Logan, is available from Merian Derwent Publications, 1 Malvern Close, Winstanley, Wigan WN3 6DZ, £3-00 + 50p p&p.