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# ***Eternal Light, Adoption and Livingstone***

Congregational Studies  
Conference 1998





# **Eternal Light, Adoption and Livingstone**

**Gordon Booth, Gordon Cooke  
and Arthur Fraser**

**Congregational Studies Conference  
Papers 1998**

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

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# Foreword

Once again we assembled together at Westminster Chapel, London, for the Congregational Studies Conference held on 14 March 1998.

Sometimes we hear comments such as, “Fancy wasting time delving into the past; better to live in the present”. Winston Churchill once commented very aptly, “The further back you look, the further forward you are likely to see”. Someone else said, “Pondering the past is often the best way of providing for the future”. So we are happy to meet annually in this way.

When the name of Thomas Binney is mentioned, most people think of one thing, and one thing only, the great hymn that he wrote, *Eternal Light*. But there is much more to Binney than his hymn as the paper by Gordon Booth demonstrates.

Gordon Cooke opened up the subject of adoption with reference to Jeremiah Burroughs. Dr JI Packer once commented that “adoption ... is the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification”, though the former rests firmly on the latter. Much food for thought here.

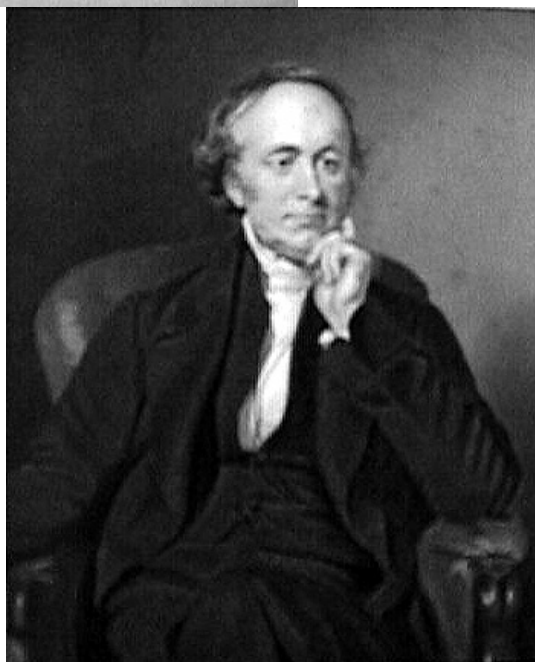
Arthur Fraser sketched for us the enigmatic life of David Livingstone. In the eyes of the world he was a great explorer, but he also had a wholehearted commitment to Christ and the Gospel. Any man who can say, “I need to be made more like my Saviour”, is worthy of study.

Next year’s Conference will be held, God willing, at Westminster Chapel on Saturday, 13 March 1999.

**Derek Swann**

**Cardiff**





# Thomas Binney (1798–1874)

by Gordon T. Booth, MM, BD

It may help if I commence by quoting, in full, the entry for Thomas Binney found in the most recent edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

English Congregational minister who actively sought reunion with the Church of England. He brought his chapel services closer to those of the established church by introducing the chanting of Psalms taken from the Authorised Version of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

I suspect that Binney is not much better known to many today than to the writer of that entry. Peel's *A Hundred Eminent Congregationalists*—very brief biographical sketches—includes these two sentences:

Binney did much to dignify Nonconformist worship, as also to improve the quality of its preaching. He was one of the first to introduce the chanting of the Psalms, though there will probably be divergent opinions about the praise-worthiness of this innovation!<sup>2</sup>

However little he may be regarded 200 years after his birth (the reason for this lecture this year), he was certainly thought a man of notable significance at the time of his death. *A Memorial of Thomas Binney*, edited by the distinguished historian John Stoughton,<sup>3</sup> appeared that year and also Paxton Hood's *Thomas Binney, His Mind Life and Opinions*, and it goes on—*Doctrinal, Denominational, Devotional and Practical interspersed with Anecdotes, Descriptions and Criticisms*.<sup>4</sup> The first has some two hundred pages, the second more than three hundred. As is common with such books, produced so quickly, neither is particularly good, but they underline the fact of his importance, as did, surely, the attendance of several thousand mourners at his funeral. I have read through the list of 51 names, members of deputations from societies and denominations, besides a multitude of other leaders, including Lord Shaftesbury.

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1 Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago, 15th edition), 2:219.

2 Albert Peel, *A Hundred Eminent Congregationalists* (London, Independent Press, 1927), p. 90.

3 John Stoughton, *A Memorial of Thomas Binney* (London, np, 1874).

4 E Paxton Hood, *Thomas Binney, His Mind, Life and Opinions* (London, np, 1874).

To attempt a little order I propose to look at his life in brief outline, and then to consider three major topics—1. Binney and the Church of England, 2. Worship and preaching with, finally, 3. An attempt to evaluate his contemporary significance and any lessons for our own times.

Binney came from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Hood described him:

He looked a 'hardy Norseman' every inch—his vast stalwart frame, blue, shrewd, tender eye and light brown hair, all announced the descendant from the ancient Danes.<sup>5</sup>

His parents were Presbyterian but he became a Congregationalist while still in Newcastle. He had little formal education but he made strenuous efforts at self-education during his teen years. Binney says of himself that he worked long hours in a bookseller's concern but

from my fourteenth to my twentieth year, I found opportunities for much reading and a great deal of composition.<sup>6</sup>

He says that he 'did not shirk my Latin and Greek', and he occupied himself in 'writing long poems in heroic verse'.<sup>7</sup> Hood suggests that he must have worked in the printing office as well as the bookseller's shop and comments on

the peculiar action of his fingers in the pulpit, especially in the more impassioned portions of a sermon, most graphically seemed to realise the distribution of type.<sup>8</sup>

What a pity it was not captured for display on a video!

In due time Binney entered for study for the ministry in Coward College, later a constituent part of New College, London, but then in Hertfordshire, under its Principal, Thomas Morell. For a year he was pastor of the New (Howard) Meeting in Bedford and then, from 1824–29, Minister at the St James Street Congregational Church, Newport, Isle of Wight. An early excursion into literature was the writing of a biography of Morell's son, who died at the age of 24.

Then in 1829 he succeeded John Clayton as Minister of the King's Weigh House where he remained for forty years. To quote the little biographical note in *A Hundred Eminent Congregationalists*,

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5 Ibid. p. 1.

6 Ibid. pp. 2f.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

he came to exercise a great influence on the religious life of the country—and not of this country only. ... He was a great preacher but a very uneven one—he is said to have remarked that he could preach a worse sermon than any preacher in London.<sup>9</sup>

Binney was Congregational Union chairman in 1848 and after retirement did some teaching at New College.

The first three pastors of the Weigh House had all been ejected ministers, for some time beneficed clergy of the Church of England. Under Thomas Reynolds the church had separated itself from the so-called Presbyterians, in fact the Arians of that day, and had united with the Congregational Board of London. In 1795, Hood reports, they:

erected a new, and for those times, a handsome and more respectable building over warehouses. As compared with the present structure, it was small and insignificant, capable of accommodating about one-third of the congregation of the present building.<sup>10</sup>

Times of meeting were 10.30 and 3.00. A change to 6.30

greatly increased the congregation—the place became utterly insufficient; the wealthy congregation worshipping within its walls, naturally, too, became ashamed of their old conventicle-like looking building.<sup>11</sup>

In 1833 the foundation-stone was laid of the King's Weigh House on Fish Street Hill. The cost to the congregation was £16,000 plus compensation for the Eastcheap ground. The old building was left on 24 May 1834.

Binney's life was not particularly eventful. He was busily occupied as preacher, writer and pamphleteer. He visited Australia in 1857 and was the inspiration of the Colonial Missionary Society, working in the British Commonwealth and Colonies.

Let us now turn to the major topic of Binney's relations with and view of the Church of England. Contrary to our opening quotation from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, we read in *A Hundred Eminent Congregationalists*,

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9 Peel, *A Hundred Eminent Congregationalists*, pp. 89ff.

10 Hood, *Thomas Binney, His Mind, Life and Opinions*, p. 9.

11 Ibid.

he was a strong Nonconformist, and one of the protagonists of Free Church principles, both by voice and pen, writing many able polemical works, some of which were widely read.<sup>12</sup>

It was at, or subsequent to, the laying of the foundation stone of the new building in 1833, that Binney became involved in controversy over the Church of England. Binney's biographers have been anxious, perhaps over-concerned, to insist that he was misrepresented in this dispute. I quote Hood again:

So heartily has Mr Binney been abused for his supposed vehemence against the Church of England, and the bitter virulence of his spirit, that it may surprise ... some to know that he was never at any moment of his life, even with reference to the Church of England itself, a man committed to extremes.<sup>13</sup>

Stoughton remarks that

one sentence much talked of at the time is surrounded with some mystery ... it formed no part of the original address, but was printed in notes accompanying its publication.<sup>14</sup>

Stoughton quotes from the address these words:

The civil magistrate is not appointed of God for the purpose of saving men's souls, but of protecting each equally in saving his own ... and that the Church of England is the most discordant and divided Christian denomination in the land.<sup>15</sup>

However it is the controversial sentence which must be quoted in full:

Truth cannot be impaired by fair and full discussion, and by open and uncompromising statements. I have no hesitation about saying that I am an enemy to the Establishment, and I do not see that a Churchman need hesitate to say that he is an enemy of Dissent; neither of us would mean *the persons* of Churchmen or Dissenters, nor the Episcopacy or other portions of the universal Church but the *principle* of the national religious establishment, which we would respectively regard as deserving, universally, opposition or support. It is with me, I confess, a matter of deep serious religious conviction, that *the Established Church is a great*

12 Peel, *A Hundred Eminent Congregationalists*, p. 89.

13 Hood, *Thomas Binney, His Mind, Life and Opinions*, p. 18.

14 John Stoughton, *History of Religion in England* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), 8:137.

15 *Ibid.* p. 136f.

*national evil*, that it is an obstacle to the progress of truth and godliness in the land; that it *destroys more souls than it saves*; and therefore its end is to be devoutly wished by every lover of God and man. Right or wrong, this is my belief.<sup>16</sup>

Hood argued that there had been a great improvement since Binney's statement of 1834 and quoted the Bishop of Chester's criticisms of his own church with 5,840 non-resident out of 10,261 incumbents, with many intoxicants, sportsmen, farmers, bon-viveurs, courtiers.<sup>17</sup> But this was not the ground for wholesale condemnation. There may well have been improvement from such a condition, but I find it difficult to accept the view that at the time of Binney's death he would not have been justified in pronouncing his sweeping judgement on the Established Church.

It is necessary to put Binney's activities in the context of this period in Anglican history. I quote first from *The Letters of LSE*, a virulent attack on the principles and practices of Nonconformists, supported by the Bishop of London:

Dissenters in dissenting and separating from the Church commit the heinous sin of schism which is in my opinion a greater sin than that of drunkenness, and therefore a great deal more frequently spoken of in the word of God ... I look upon schism as tantamount to a renunciation of Christianity. What is it but a renouncing of the Church of Christ, a renouncing of her ministers and through them of Christ himself ... they, by their schism, cut themselves off from the visible church and cannot therefore expect to be considered as Christians, but, according to the command of Christ, as heathens and publicans. In a Christian point of view, we have nothing to do with them, we must leave them entirely in the hands of God: they are without the pale of the visible Church of Christ—we are to act in the spirit of what the Apostle says. 'What have I to do to judge them that are without? Them that are without God judges.' The curse of God appears to me to rest heavily on them.<sup>18</sup>

I give these quotations to put an Anglican attitude to Nonconformity contemporary with Binney's notorious "sentence". Binney did, in fact, give a reply on 12 December 1834, in the Poultry Chapel. It was the sermon *Dissent Not Schism*.

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<sup>16</sup> Hood, *Thomas Binney, His Mind, Life and Opinions*, p. 18ff.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.

The Congregational Board of London had called on Mr Binney to be the vindicator of dissent from the insignificant charges of the anonymous letter-writer, accepted, endorsed and made dangerous by the Bishop.<sup>19</sup>

We must turn aside from Binney to make some reference to the story of the Church of England at this juncture. Newman used to date the commencement of the Oxford Movement to 14 July 1833 when Keble preached the assize sermon at Oxford on National Apostasy. In the same month, according to Wakeman's *History of the Church of England*, an address was presented to Archbishop Howley of Canterbury,

expressing a general adherence to the apostolical doctrine and polity of the Church, signed by 7,000 clergy and 230,000 heads of families.<sup>20</sup>

In September the first of the *Tracts for the Times* was produced, from which the alternative title of the Tractarian Movement derives. The first 46 of the tracts appeared in 1833 and 1834 and as Wakeman says,

from 1833 to 1840 the movement was in the full swing of eager and unhopd-for success ... For a time it carried all before it.<sup>21</sup>

Under Newman's leadership the Anglican Church was presented as the true Catholic Church against the errors of Romanism and Protestantism. His lectures on Romanism and Popular Protestantism made the Church of England out to be the *Via Media*; there was a theoretical unity—faith in the creeds, the Bible and tradition in liturgical worship and the use of the sacraments, of unity in the apostolic episcopate. The three great pieces looking to Rome, Constantinople and Canterbury, exhibited a broken surface but this disunity could be healed when, says Wakeman:

Rome shall have moderated her monopoly, when Constantinople shall have thrown off her unsympathetic impassiveness, when Canterbury shall have rid itself of its adventitious Protestantism.<sup>22</sup>

The seemingly invincible advance of Anglo-Catholicism was halted by the appearance of Tract 90 in 1840. Here Newman argued that there was no Catholic doctrine condemned by the *Thirty Nine Articles*, but only

19 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

20 Henry Wakeman, *An Introduction to the History of the Church of England* (London: Rivingtons, 1927), p. 458.

21 *Ibid.* p. 459f.

22 *Ibid.* p. 442.

popular exaggerations of Roman doctrine current at the time when the *Articles* were drawn up. The storm broke. The dishonesty of the Tractarian position was manifest. One of the younger leaders, WG Ward, claimed the right to hold all Roman doctrine and remain a member of the Church of England. ‘He defended his marriage’, wrote Balleine in his *History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, on the ground that, as English orders were involved, he was in God’s sight only a layman.<sup>23</sup> His son says ‘he believed he was bringing many of its members towards Rome ...’<sup>24</sup> Faber prepared for his work at Elton by a pilgrimage to Rome, where he ‘gained great comfort from the shrine of St Aloysius the Jesuit’.<sup>25</sup>

Binney was, of course, aware of the early days of Tractarianism when he pronounced his strictures on Anglicanism in 1833. His concern did not end there. He was responsible for a book or sermon or tract, as you will, entitled *Micah, the Priest-Maker*, the general content of which can be deduced from Judges 17 and 18.<sup>26</sup> His book *The Great Gorham Case* requires reference to that case, but first let me quote him from *Dissent Not Schism*:

I am a Dissenter; I am a Catholic; I am a separatist; I cannot be schismatical; I stand apart from some; I love all; I oppose Establishment. I am not a sectarian; I think little of uniformity ... I long for unions. I care not about subordinate differences ... with my brother, for Christ has received him and so will I.<sup>27</sup>

Binney says:

... to episcopacy, he has not much objection ... nor has he been a vehement Dissenter from liturgic services and forms, but he has maintained a decided hostility to the rubrics and to the prayer book; not to the greater portion of the spirit or the theology ... but to the slavery of its formulary, and to the too frequently Popish twang of its absolutions and communications—its confirmation and baptismal regenerations.<sup>28</sup>

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23 GR Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1933), p. 216.

24 Ibid. p. 217.

25 Ibid.

26 Thomas Binney, *Micah, The Priest-Maker* (London: Jackson, Walford and Hodder, 2nd edition 1867).

27 Thomas Binney, *Dissent Not Schism*, (London: Joseph Ogle Robinson Junior, 3rd edition 1835).

28 Ibid.



He commented on the Gorham case ... 'to listen for weeks and months to the jargon of the schools, to metaphysical distinctions and theological niceties'.

Ritual and vestments were not of significance to the early leaders of the Oxford Movement but it became a badge of a Tractarian to wear a surplice for preaching. The custom had been for the preacher to remove the surplice and don a black gown for the sermon. There was trouble, even congregational walk-outs, when the preacher adopted the novelty of surplice-wearing for the sermon. One or two High Church bishops attempted to impose it on their clergy. The Gorham case was of exceptional importance. He came into dispute with Bishop Philpotts of Exeter, described by Balleine as 'the most militant High Churchman on the Bench' though even he, Balleine asserts in a footnote, 'protested vigorously against Tract 90'. My quotations are all from Balleine. Gorham 'had already incurred the Bishop's wrath by advertising for a Curate "free from Tractarian error"'. In 1847 he accepted the vicarage of Brampford Speke near Exeter, but the Bishop 'declined to institute him ... until he had satisfied himself that he was sound in the faith. Gorham sat for eleven days under examination, and answered 149 questions on baptism, but at the end the Bishop refused him on the ground of heresy'.<sup>29</sup>

Relevant quotations from the Prayer Book are as follows: 'Seeing now ... that this child is now regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's Church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits ...'<sup>30</sup> 'We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this Infant with the Holy Spirit, to receive *him* for thine own *Child* by adoption, and incorporate *him* into thy holy Church'.<sup>31</sup> '... all clergy of every school believed in baptismal regeneration ... The Tractarians held the Roman view that regeneration is the new birth spoken of in Scripture, and that this is invariably and inevitably conferred by the act of Baptism. The Evangelicals believed that regeneration was a great spiritual change, a passing from darkness into light, from the power of Satan unto God, in which men receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among all that are sanctified ... How then could they honestly declare that a child is regenerate in Baptism? In the same way, they answered, that a child is possessor of an

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29 Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, p. 222ff.

30 *The Book of Common Prayer*, The Publick Baptism of Infants.

31 *Ibid.*

estate when we have seen the legal documents duly signed and sealed, although those documents may contain a clause naming two things that the child must do, when he comes of age, before he enters into possession. We charitably take it for granted that the child will not be so mad as to forfeit so fair a property by refusing to fulfil the reasonable conditions which his guardians have promised in his name'. So in Baptism 'the promises of the forgiveness of sins and of our adoption to be the sons of God are visibly signed and sealed, but there are two conditions, repentance whereby they forsake sin and faith whereby they steadfastly believe, which, when they come of age, themselves are bound to perform. That is to say, the baptismal blessing is *conditional* on the keeping of the promises, and our service is drawn up on the *charitable hypothesis* that this condition will be fulfilled'.<sup>32</sup>

The result of Gorham's examination was that Philpotts refused to induct him on the ground of heresy. Gorham then applied to the Court of Arches for the Bishop to show cause why he should not institute. The vital issue was 'the Bishop's view that no man can be considered unregenerate if he has been baptised in infancy'. So in 1849 we have the decision by Sir Herbert Fust in favour of Philpotts. Gorham appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council which eventually ruled, 'The doctrine held by Mr Gorham is not contrary or repugnant to the declared doctrine of the Church of England, and Mr Gorham ought not, by reason of the doctrine held by him to have been refused admission to the Vicarage of Brampford Speke'. The Bishop of Exeter applied to the Court of Queen's Bench, the Court of Common Pleas and then to the Court of Exchequer—in each case to be refused with costs. 'Nothing remained but for him to relieve his feelings by an excommunication of the Archbishop of Canterbury'.<sup>33</sup>

The effects of the Gorham case were significant. Balleine, for no reason that I find cogent, seems to find it a cause of thankfulness that only four Evangelicals left the Establishment, but that between 1840 and 1899, 446 Tractarians joined the Church of Rome.

I claim that the foregoing is no digression from a lecture on Thomas Binney, though it would have been, were the early history of Anglo-Catholicism and the case of Gorham more familiar to Christians, especially Congregationalists, today. No wonder Binney wrote his quite

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32 Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*, p. 223.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 226f.

lengthy book on *The Great Gorham Case*.<sup>34</sup> No wonder he devoted so much time and energy to the Established Church and no wonder he penned the controversial statement which, later, was treated with such an apologetic attitude. Would, I suggest, that more evangelical leaders today be prepared to state the undoubted truth that Binney stated, with trenchant and unapologetic vigour. Surely we have met with many whose hope of heaven is based on the sprinkling of a few drops of water on their infant heads.

When Binney preached his farewell sermon entitled *A Forty Years' Review* he remarked on the number of disagreements that had occurred during the period—the formation of various Methodist groups, the Brethren, the Free Church of Scotland, the Irvingites and many and various developments in evangelistic and social spheres. But his judgments on the state of Anglicanism are most significant and occupy most space. Of the Anglo-Catholics he says:

... with them the communion has become the mass—priesthood, sacrifice, the Real Presence, confession, penance, invocation of saints, prayers for the dead, are all advocated and practised ...<sup>35</sup>

There is much more that could be said, but it is, I think, plain that Binney remained a vigorous and effective opponent of the Establishment throughout his ministry. What would he have said, I wonder, of post-Keele evangelical Anglicanism!

It seems to be generally agreed that Binney had a profound effect on preaching and on the conduct of worship in Congregational churches. Dr Tudur Jones makes a number of references in his *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962*.<sup>36</sup> Stylistic eloquence and extreme verbosity had marked all too much before Binney 'adopted an unaffected style' and his abandonment of gown and bands when the church moved to the new King's Weigh House was a further indicator of a new spirit. Pulpit style does not readily translate to the language and thinking of a subsequent generation. It is unwise, surely, to quote the Puritans, however much a preacher may approve and applaud their theology or zeal. But to read some of Binney's sermons, and many are admirable, is not too much of a

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34 Thomas Binney, *The Great Gorham Case: A History in Five Books including Expositions of the Rival Baptismal Theories by a Looker-on* (London: Partridge & Oakey, 1850).

35 Thomas Binney, *Sermons Preached in the King's Weigh House Chapel 1829–1869* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), p. 371.

36 R Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662–1962* (London: Independent Press, 1962).

strain. Generally speaking they are straightforward enough, if longer in sentence construction than we would prefer today. Binney was not lengthy by the standards of the times. In the preface to the book of sermons from which I have already quoted he remarks that

the excessive length of some of the sermons may require ... explanation or apology ... They were not written out till after they had been delivered ... the hearer cannot ... escape ... but a reader can lay down a book when he likes, stop at any page, take it up again at a future time, or, if he has had enough, take leave of it for ever ... Archdeacon Denison says that he never preaches for more than ten minutes. That may do for a simple Christian exhortation, coming after protracted worship; but if a sermon ... is to have any power in it, either of instruction or impression, it must be something very different from what can be put into ten minutes.<sup>37</sup>

So Binney's printed sermons are often extended versions of the address as preached.

To continue with Tudur Jones 'Thomas Binney was also instrumental in bringing to an end the reign of pitch-pipe, fife and lute ... All the evidence goes to show that right down to the middle of the century, congregational singing in the churches was bad.' ... 'the improvement of singing was hindered, too, by the practice of lining hymns out, a practice that was still very much in use in 1848.'<sup>38</sup> It seems that Binney introduced more dignity into worship than had usually occurred, though I would be happy to attack the novelty of the chanting of Psalms. At a time when sermon-tasting was a popular entertainment and people would sometimes enter just in time for the sermon, there was obviously great need to restore, if possible, some sense of genuine worship.

It may surprise those who appreciate *Eternal Light*, and know Binney as the author of *The Service of Song*,<sup>39</sup> a major contribution to the subject of praise in worship, and even more to any who might recall the present lecturer's opinion on *The Rivulet*,<sup>40</sup> to learn that Binney was a supporter of Thomas Toke Lynch. I think explanation is not difficult. When Lynch published *The Rivulet* in 1855, it was subjected to a violent attack by

37 Binney, *Sermons*, p. viii.

38 R Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England*, p. 223f.

39 Thomas Binney, *The Service of Song in the House of the Lord* (London: Jackson Walford/Ward & Co., 1849).

40 Thomas Toke Lynch, *The Rivulet* (London: Straham & Co., 4th edition 1871).

James Grant, editor of the *Morning Advertiser* who, *Skeats & Miall* tell us, ‘denounced the book as containing “not one particle of vital religion or evangelical piety” nearly the whole of which “might have been written by a Deist, and a very large portion [of the hymns] might be sung by a congregation of Freethinkers”’.<sup>41</sup> One of the troubles was that Lynch was appreciated as a godly minister and Binney and other leading London Congregational ministers objected to the abuse which he had suffered, aggravated by Dr John Campbell’s espousal of Grant’s cause. Campbell maintained that ‘nothing like it had occurred within the memory of the present generation, or, perhaps, since the days of the Reformation’.<sup>42</sup> Dr Campbell seems to have been a vehement, natural controversialist and advertised a pamphlet attacking Lynch. At the Congregational Assembly of 1856, The Rev. J. Baldwin Brown protested at Dr Campbell’s ‘shameful and cruel treatment of Mr Lynch’. Binney sought the abandonment of the pamphlet in a private meeting. Campbell promised to suppress it, but it appeared within a fortnight. Binney produced a remonstrance on the subject, published as a Letter to the Union.<sup>43</sup>

Binney was not a great hymn writer, but he wrote a very great hymn. Julian in his *Dictionary of Hymnology*<sup>44</sup> mentions only one apart from *Eternal Light*, and it is the only one I have ever encountered—in the *Baptist Church Hymnal*.<sup>45</sup> If you listen carefully to these three verses I trust that you will agree that it is a good, useful, competently written, scriptural hymn, but not one that would force its way into every spiritual anthology.

7s., eight lines

*The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Psalm 141:2*

Holy father, whom we praise  
 With imperfect accents here,  
 Ancient of eternal days,  
 Lord of heaven and earth and air,  
 Stooping from amid the blaze  
 Of the flaming seraphim,

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41 HS Skeats and CS Miall, *History of the Free Churches of England* (London: James Clarke/Alexander and Sheppard, 1891), p. 547.

42 *Ibid.* p. 548.

43 Thomas Binney, *Letter to the Union* (London: Ward and Co., 1856).

44 John Julian (ed.), *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (London: John Murray, 1907), p. 143.

45 *Baptist Church Hymnal* (London: The Psalms & Hymns Trust, 1900).

Hear and help us while we raise  
This our Sabbath evening hymn.

We have trod Thy temple, Lord,  
We have joined the public praise,  
We have heard Thy holy word,  
We have sought Thy heavenly grace:  
All Thy goodness we record,  
All our powers to Thee we bring,  
Keep us in Thy watch and ward  
'Neath the night's o'ershadowing.

We have seen Thy dying love,  
Jesus, once for sinners slain;  
We would follow Thee above,  
We with Thee would rise and reign:  
May each passing Sabbath prove  
Sweet with new delight in Thee;  
Spirit, on our natures move,  
Fit us for eternity.

Grant's attack on *The Rivulet* asserted that it 'was pervaded throughout by the Rationalist Theology of Germany'.<sup>46</sup> That is certainly to stretch the facts. But it was an increasingly vital issue, and it may help to hear Binney again in his retirement sermon.

Forty years ago ... the authority of the Bible was generally maintained ... The miracles were believed to have occurred just as they are said to have done; the fourth Gospel was accepted, without question, as having been written by St John; the Epistles attributed to Paul were taken to be his; and, on the whole, what the book contained and declared was regarded as binding on all who professed to reverence it. Among large numbers, however, all that is changed; and 'breadth of view', 'superiority to the letter', 'the higher criticism', and what may be called the Modern Scientific Revelation, which rejects the supernatural and affirmed the reign of Law without a Lawgiver—these things have led many to disparage whatever is dogmatic in the Gospel, and to dispute or deny what they may admit that an apostle affirms. Some ... have a sort of mild

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46 R Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England*, p. 251.

47 Thomas Binney, *Sermons*, p. 373f.

Christianity without a Christ; bolder spirits can be very religious, or, at least, theological, without a God!<sup>47</sup>

Thomas Binney always had an evangelistic purpose in view as he preached and wrote. Many young men were attracted to the King's Weigh House and his most widely circulated book was addressed to young men, *Is it Possible to Make the Best of Both Worlds?*<sup>48</sup> We are not wrong to denounce the error and horror of the modern 'Health, Wealth and Prosperity' heresy, since it is forgetful of the universality, and sometimes, blessing of poverty, pain and suffering, but we are right to remind the young that the life with Christ is a blessed life and crowned with eternal felicity. Binney cared for young people and, I judge, for humanity in general.

Today we need Binney the preacher, the evangelist, the controversialist. We need men who will share in the life of the churches as a whole with sympathy and with understanding of the times. But I found by inquiry of a number of our ministers that all that remained, if even that, of the memory of Thomas Binney, two hundred years after his birth, was one hymn. We will sing it in a moment as a conclusion to this lecture, but I would like it to be sung with full appreciation, if that is ever possible, of what makes it, and any of comparable quality, into a great hymn. Please turn to number 5 in *Christian Hymns*.

1. It is addressed to God, as are a high proportion of the very greatest hymns.
2. It develops a theme—how a sinner can get to Heaven.
3. It expounds the nature of God, in contrast to human inadequacy.
4. It explains the grace of God.
5. It employs forms and images in unique and poetic language.
6. It is correct in poetic form—accurate in rhyme and scansion.
7. The choice of words enhances, if possible, the theme.

If it has a weakness, which I do not concede, it is that the vocabulary is a little rich for our generation—a criticism, I suggest, of our generation rather than of Binney.

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas Binney, *Is it Possible to Make the Best of Both Worlds?* (London: J Nisbet & Co., 1856).







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JEREMIAH BURROUGHES

Gospel Preacher

To two of the greatest Congregations in England, viz. St. Dunstons and Christ Church, London.

# The Doctrine of Adoption and the Preaching of Jeremiah Burroughs

**Gordon Cooke**

One of the first books I was given as a teenage Christian was Jim Packer's *Knowing God*. I clearly remember following the advice I had been given, and reading it avidly. The section of the book that had the most profound effect on me was the chapter *Sons of God*. I can still recall the impact that the following quote made:

You sum up the whole of the New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father ... our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption.<sup>1</sup>

In emphasising the importance of adoption, Packer was just reiterating what had been written three centuries earlier by John Owen:

The privileges we enjoy by Christ are great and innumerable. To insist on them in particular were work for a whole man's life ... I shall take a view of them only in the head, the spring and fountain whence they all arise and flow—this is our adoption.<sup>2</sup>

The quote in *Knowing God* fired my imagination and so it was disappointing to read a few pages later:

... apart from two last century books, now scarcely known, there is no evangelical writing on it, nor has there been at any time since the Reformation, any more than there was before ... the Puritan teaching on the Christian life, so strong in other ways, was notably deficient here.<sup>3</sup>

Although this has been rectified by more popular treatments such as *Children of the Living God* by Sinclair Ferguson<sup>4</sup> and, very recently, Mark

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1 JI Packer, *Knowing God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), p. 224.

2 John Owen, *Works* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust reprint, 1968) vol. 2, p. 207.

3 JI Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 255f.

4 Sinclair Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989).

Johnston's *Child of a King: The Biblical Doctrine of Sonship*,<sup>5</sup> it is still true that adoption is an undervalued truth, and consequently an underpreached one also. As pastors we do not declare it enough; as people we do not meditate on it enough. For, as John Owen defines it:

Now, adoption is the authoritative translation of a believer, by Jesus Christ, from the family of the world and Satan into the family of God, with his investiture in all the privileges and advantages of that family.<sup>6</sup>

To help us in our study of this great doctrine we are going to draw on the writings of Jeremiah Burroughs, the 400th Anniversary of whose birth will take place next year

His name has been brought to the attention of a new generation of Christians by the republishing, by the Banner of Truth Trust, of *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*,<sup>7</sup> first published 350 years ago this year. American publishers Soli Deo Gloria are now reprinting further volumes from his extensive works.

Burroughs graduated in 1624 from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, a veritable bee-hive of Puritanism at the time. He ministered at Bury St Edmunds, then at Tivetshall in East Anglia, before, like many Puritans, having to spend time on the Continent, due to the oppressive policies of Bishop Wren and Archbishop Laud.

On the constitution of the Long Parliament in 1641, Burroughs returned to England, preaching to two of London's largest congregations at Stepney and Cripplegate. He was nominated to the Westminster Assembly of Divines and was an eloquent, but conciliatory, representative of the Independent minority, along with such men as Thomas Goodwin and William Bridge.

His writings are undoubtedly one of the gentlest introductions to Puritan literature. Not only did he exemplify the clear grasp of doctrine, and profound knowledge of the Scriptures of that era, but he possessed a pastor's heart and a superb gift of illustration, which brings his teaching to colourful vibrancy.

On a personal note, I found recently that I had something in common with him. On the title page to his book *The Saints Treasury*,<sup>8</sup> he is

5 Mark Johnston, *Child of a King: The Biblical Doctrine of Sonship* (Fearn, Tain: Christian Focus Publications, 1997).

6 Owen, *Works* vol. 2, p. 207.

7 Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (London, The Banner of Truth Trust, reprint of 1648 edition, 1964).

8 Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints Treasury*, ed. Don Kistler (Ligonier, Pennsylvania, Soli Deo Gloria reprint, 1991).

described as “The late Reverend and Painful Minister of the Gospel”. As one who has been told that his preaching is painful, I take great comfort from Burroughs!

Though he did not write a treatise on adoption, deep within his 41 sermons on the Beatitudes are two marvellous sermons on the doctrine—flowing from Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God”,—perhaps not the first verse from which we would preach adoption, but the Puritans didn’t preach in the exegetical straitjackets we impose upon ourselves!

Burroughs begins by turning his hearers to a verse from which we would be more likely to preach adoption, Ephesians 1:5, describing adoption as the fruit of election:

To what? “Unto the adoption of children”. That is the special thing that God aims at in predestination; that is the blessing. When God was looking upon the lump of the children of men, Well, saith he, there are some that I mean to pass by and leave to the course of justice. Oh, but there are others that are good in mine eyes—that is, I make them so; and I will set them apart to the adoption of sons; they shall be my children; and I will be a Father to them for ever.<sup>9</sup>

Now that leads us into a very important question. Isn’t adoption the most glorious truth about being a Christian? Perhaps if we are asked such a question we are tempted to say that the most wonderful thing about the Christian life is justification—the thought that I, a vile sinner, born in sin, shapen in iniquity, one who daily transgresses God’s law could ever stand, right, justified, before a holy, holy, holy God. Of course that is amazing.

But God does more for us than that. For us to be right with God, to enjoy peace with God, to be able to stand before him, justification is sufficient. We do not “need” adoption to be able to do any of these things. This is extra. God doesn’t stop at justification—he then takes us into His family—that is not necessary to satisfy his righteous demands—this is extra. It is the fruit of predestination.

As Packer puts it, justification is the primary and fundamental blessing of the Gospel because it meets our primary spiritual need—forgiveness and a restored fellowship with God. Indeed, we could not be adopted without it. But adoption is a higher blessing. It involves a richer relationship with God. Whereas justification is a forensic idea, adoption is

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9 Jeremiah Burroughs, *Saints Happiness*, ed. Don Kistler (Ligonier, Pennsylvania, Soli Deo Gloria reprint, 1992) p. 191.

a family one. Justification is conceived of in terms of law, adoption in terms of love. Justification sees God as a judge, adoption as a father.

Burroughs' sermon on adoption then follows, and it is divided into three main sections, although, as was the wont of the Puritans, each of these headings has numerous subsections. His first heading deals with the question "What is the mystery of godliness in the subject of adoption?"

Here we immediately see a man who is using the word mystery in a biblical sense—describing something hidden beforetime but now revealed following the coming of Christ—but surely also in a very human way.

Burroughs is a man amazed by the greatness of the subject to which he has turned his attention, and to which he directs the minds of his hearers. It astounds him. At times in his sermon he seems almost lost for words—lost in wonder, love and praise—at the thought that he is a child of God.

This of course is the acid test of whether we have truly understood a particular truth. In our man-centred age we claim doctrines for ourselves and test our grasp of them by seeing whether we feel better as a result—more peace, more joy, etc.

Were not our forefathers different? Shouldn't we be? Their understanding of doctrine led them to praise God in a deeper way, and to exalt him higher. It is hard to believe that their peace and joy did not also increase as a heavenly by-product, but it was God they desired, and his praise and glory above all else.

Burroughs begins his description of this mystery of godliness by reminding his congregation of where they have come from:

There is no child of God that God hath, but only that only son Jesus Christ, but was a child of wrath before he was a child of God actually made. Every man or woman that is a child of God now, certainly was a child of wrath before. And for God to make of children of wrath to be his children, this is a mystery revealed in the Scripture only, that we would not have come to have known by the light of nature. And it shows the blessedness of man, too, to be the children of God, when we were the children of wrath and of disobedience, and enemies to God.<sup>10</sup>

As if being a child of God was not a high enough privilege in itself, when we consider where we have come from! That by nature we are children of wrath and disobedience. That we are enemies of God. Burroughs rightly sets this truth before his people at the start.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 192.

Burroughs goes on to deal with the link between regeneration and adoption, but only to the extent of reminding his hearers they are children of God by both:

The mystery of godliness consists in this, that though they be adopted children, yet they are by regeneration too; this is a mystery of the gospel. We are said to be adopted children in Scripture. Now, among men, the same man cannot be adopted and begotten both, a child by adoption and a child by generation, of the same man. But it is so here; all the children of God are the children of God by adoption, and yet the children of God by generation, not in that way of generation as the second person in Trinity is the Son of the Father, nor as he is God-man, conceived by the Holy Ghost; but by another work of the Holy Ghost, which is next unto that. The next most glorious work of the Holy Ghost is for to regenerate children unto God by an immortal seed of the word, to beget them unto God; and yet for all this they are children by adoption. Now adoption is that whereby a man, when he hath no child of his own, doth take up and own another to be his child or heir. So we, that were not children ourselves by nature, God now, by his unspeakable grace, doth adopt us. But in that he doth adopt us and regenerate us both, this is a great mystery of the gospel that is in this point.<sup>11</sup>

Others have sought to clarify the link between the two works of God, even to separate them in order to highlight their distinct properties. Lloyd-Jones, in a sermon on Ephesians 1:5, asked why Paul differentiated between regeneration and adoption, and answers the question by referring to the first five verses of Galatians 4. He describes adoption as being something similar to the child becoming of age. Although he was a true child before,

when he comes of age a declaration is made concerning his status and position as heir. He is no more a son than he was before, but there is a difference all the same.

His relationship to his parents in a fundamental sense has not changed ... yet from the standpoint of rank and legal position he is in a different position.<sup>12</sup>

Or to quote Ferguson:

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> DM Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978) p. 111.

We are born into God's family by the work of the Spirit. But we are also brought into that family by a decisive, legal act on God's part.<sup>13</sup>

Some have suggested that Romans 1:4 might help us here, where in verse 3 God's son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is then declared to be the Son of God in verse 4 by the resurrection from the dead.

Although adoption is a decisive act which can flow from nowhere but God the Father—"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the Children of God"—adoption is a work of God with clear Trinitarian aspects. It is to this truth that Burroughs next turns his attention, revealing again his grasp of the high calling of the believer:

The great mystery is in this, that they are the children of God by their union with Jesus Christ the only Son of God; they come to their sonship by their union with Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God; they come to be children of God in a higher way than could be by creation; in a higher way than the angels are children of God. The Scripture, indeed, calls the angels the sons of God. Ay, but the saints are sons of God in a higher way than the angels are. The angels are not the sons of God by their union with the eternal Son of God, and being made one with him; and from the rays, as I may say, and glorious beams of his sonship, they are not made so. So that every believer, every peacemaker that is godly, is a child of God by virtue of his union with the eternal Son of God, and he hath the rays and the glory of that sonship of his to shine upon him.<sup>14</sup>

We could never be adopted into God's family but through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as no-one comes to the Father but by Him—so no-one has God as Father but by Him. Paul says, "You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir of God through Christ", Galatians 4:7.

But our adoption is connected with our union with Christ in a further way. The spirit of adoption leads us to cry out "Abba Father", as we shall see in greater detail later—the prayer that came from the lips of our Lord here upon earth. We are brought into a Father-Son relationship with the living God.

This of course is another reason why adoption is a more glorious truth even than justification by faith—why we should never treat adoption as a bolt-on accessory or a subsection of justification. It is, as Packer says, "the

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<sup>13</sup> Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Burroughs, *Saints Happiness*, p. 192.

highest privilege the gospel affords”, “God intends the lives of believers to be a reflection and reproduction of Jesus’ own fellowship with Himself”.<sup>15</sup>

The thought that our adoption is in and through our union with Christ pervades his preaching to a wide degree. In a separate sermon Burroughs preached on Colossians 3:11, “But Christ is all in all” and published in *The Saints Treasury*, amongst the ways Christ is all in all to the believer, he brings in the doctrine of adoption.

Listen to him again:

He is all in all in point of adoption, Galatians 3:26, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus”, and chapter 4:4–5, “But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons”. And especially John 1:12, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name”.

If a stranger should say that he was the king’s son and heir to the crown, it would cost him his life because he is not the king’s son. But if one is declared by an act of Parliament to be the rightful heir to the crown, then he has authority to challenge it. It is so here. When once we come to be in Christ, then we have authority to claim this privilege, to be sons of God and heirs of heaven. This great privilege that is so mightily above us, we have in Christ, not only by way of the redundancy of His merits, but by our union with Him. We are married to Christ and, by union with His person, are made one with Him.<sup>16</sup>

Following Paul’s line of argument in Romans 8, Burroughs then begins to recount the mystery of being an heir of God, the natural follow-on from being declared legally God’s child:

There is this mystery in it, that all the children of God are heirs, every one of them. It is not so with men. Men that have many children yet but one is an heir. But all the children of God are heirs; every one, sons and daughters too, they are all heirs. This is the glory of the saints; for so the Scripture saith. If sons, then heirs. He doth not say, if we be eldest sons; but if we are sons, we are heirs. So in Romans 8:17.<sup>17</sup>

And of course being an heir of God is a far greater privilege than being heir here upon earth. We may be heir to a title, to a piece of land, a

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<sup>15</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 230, 228.

<sup>16</sup> Burroughs, *Saints Treasury*, p. 61f.

<sup>17</sup> Burroughs, *Saints Happiness*, p. 192.



treasured possession, etc. and we may look forward to the day when the promise to us is made good. But many things may come between us and the possession. We may die before the person we are heir to does. If that happens we will never come into its possession. But our death only increases our portion of joy when we are heirs to God.

Furthermore we may be heirs to the things of this world, and find that the donor changes their mind, writes us out of the will, and leaves them to somebody else. But God's promises to us are "Yes & Amen" in Christ Jesus. Earthly possessions fall in value, they fade and rust, thieves break in and steal, but our inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled and never fades away.

And of course not only heirs, but joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Listen to Burroughs again. One can almost hear his mounting excitement as he ponders this:

Not only every one of them heirs, but they are joined co-heirs with Jesus Christ. To be co-heirs one with another is a great blessedness; but for every one of them to be co-heirs with Jesus Christ, that is a high blessedness indeed.

Perhaps before they come to inherit, here among men they have not a foot of land; but they are the heirs of God. Though not heirs of a nobleman or prince, or have not, I say, a foot of land in the world, yet they are the heirs of God—yea, and they are joint heirs with Christ.

I say, whatsoever thou art in the world, Jesus Christ is not an heir to more than thou hast an interest in.

Thou art as certain of thy salvation and glory as it is certain that Jesus Christ shall be happy for ever; because Thou art a co-heir with Jesus Christ. You know, when men are co-heirs, the title of one is as certain as the other. If you be but a co-purchaser with another, then you have as true a right in such a land or house as they have ... ay, but it is more to be a co-heir than a co-purchaser: the right of inheritance is better and a more noble right than the right of purchase, and in some case it may be more certain ... Christ himself shall be disinherited as soon as a believer, because a believer is a co-heir with Jesus Christ.

Oh, who can utter the soul-satisfying, soul-ravishing consolation there is in this, that the same God that is the God of Jesus Christ is my God, and the same Father that is the Father of Jesus Christ is my Father!<sup>18</sup>

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18 Ibid. pp. 192f.

The last of the great mysteries of adoption to Burroughs is the greater privilege the New Testament child of God has in comparison with the believer in Old Testament times. Here Burroughs touches upon the extent to which the Old Testament believer, or rather Old Testament Israel, enjoyed adoptive sonship. Listen to him:

Another particular is this, that now in Christ there is a great deal more privilege than there was in former times to the child of God. That is one of the mysteries of the gospel. Oh, it is true; Is not Ephraim my dear son? The saints in former times were God's children, but in the times of the gospel they have far higher privilege and prerogative than before; ...

To explain, Burroughs turns us to Galatians 4:

Gal. iv.: "Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of this world: but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons". So that it seems, till Christ came, there was no receiving the adoption of sons. Why, were not the saints children before Christ came? Truly, in regard of God's usage of them, they were not as children, they were not sons—that is, they were not sons of age, to come to enjoy their inheritance, but they were sons; as kings' sons, when they are little children, have their tutors and governors, that use them as other children of meaner men,...But as noblemen and princes, they are fain to please their children with plums, and rattles, and baubles as other men please theirs—they cannot tell them of their inheritance and possession that they shall have while they are little children; but when a child comes of age, then he comes to understand his dignity, his possession, and it is that that pleases him then, and not those baubles that he had before. And the truth is, in comparison of the ordinances of the gospel and the privileges of the gospel, what the people had under the law were but rattles, and plums, and baubles that we please children withal; ... But now by Christ we are redeemed, that we might receive the adoption of sons, and come to enjoy a great part of our inheritance.<sup>19</sup>

Although this section, which relates the believer's experience of adoption with that of the Old Testament saints, is not as detailed as some of the present day academics who write on adoption would like, this section of Burroughs' sermon does point us in an interesting direction.

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19 Ibid. pp. 193f.

On the rare occasions on which we hear adoption preached, it is commonplace for *our* cultural understanding of adoption to be drawn on—or more likely, that of a previous generation. Illustrations of childless couples going to an orphanage and selecting a child which they then adopt are frequent.

There is currently a debate in academic circles as to whether Paul drew his doctrine of adoption from a Hebrew, Roman or Greek background. Whichever of the three is the truth, it was not a 20th Century British one.

Francis Lyall, in his book *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, opts for the Roman background, and Sinclair Ferguson seems to take this on board in *Children of the Living God*.<sup>20</sup> There is no doubt that the legalities of the Roman adoption system would provide Paul with a great basis to preach other truths too.

Listen to Lyall:

The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state and was placed in a new relationship of son to his new father ...All his old debts are cancelled, and in effect the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family. From that time on the *paterfamilias* had the same control over his new “child” as he had over his natural offspring. He owned all the property and acquisitions of the adoptee, controlled his personal relationships, and had rights of discipline. On the other hand the father was liable for the actions of the adoptee, and each owed the other reciprocal duties of support and maintenance.<sup>21</sup>

But in Romans 9:4, at the head of the list of privileges that his fellow countrymen according to the flesh, the Israelites, had spurned, we find “the adoption”. In a sense which perhaps Galatians 4:1–3 throws light upon, Israel in the Old Testament was adopted by God, and perhaps it is to this that Paul has turned for his doctrine rather than Roman social life. Surely one of the consequences of our belief in the unity of the Scripture—both Old Testament and New Testament—is that we look for the background to New Testament terminology in Old Testament theology? Is not that glorious passage in Ezekiel 16 a description of adoption? Indeed, maybe if we read Ezekiel more, we would understand more of the central section of Romans anyway.

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<sup>20</sup> Ferguson, *Children of the Living God*, *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons*, (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1984), p. 83.

For when we turn to Ezekiel 16 we find a picture of adoption far more suitable for Paul to use as his model, rather than the Roman social life about him:

And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity *is* of the land of Canaan; thy father *was* an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite. And *as for* thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple *thee*; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee *when thou wast* in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: *thy* breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou *wast* naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time *was* the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil.

Ezekiel begins his description of God's love for Jerusalem by reminding them of the parentage from which they were taken—"your father was an Amorite, your mother was a Hittite". In the Roman world it was most unlikely for a son of another nationality to be adopted. But the New Testament believer has been taken from one kingdom and one family into another.

Ezekiel 16:4,5 pictures the helplessness and unappealing prospect that Jerusalem was at the time of her "adoption" by God. There is nothing remotely attractive to God, no reason in the world why He should take pity on her, nothing at all that Israel could ever do to pay God back for the kindness or make herself valuable to Him.

Contrast that with the Roman system of adoption. It was often the son of a friend who would be taken in to the new family. Many Romans adopted purely so that somebody could inherit the family name and preserve the family line. The new Roman son, adopted perhaps in his late teens, was strong with earning potential, a valuable addition to any family.

So when we think of the doctrine of adoption, perhaps God's adoption of Israel in Old Testament times is where we should start. Maybe we should preach it from Ezekiel 16 as well as Romans 8.

It is hard to think that Paul did not realise that the readers of his epistles, falling as they did into two groups, Jews and Greeks, would not each think of adoption in terms related to their own background, but surely it is even harder to think that a man so steeped in the Old Testament did not have a ready-made illustration there.

Though the legal term may have come from Roman social life, the picture comes straight from the Old Testament.

Burroughs then moves on to his second question. “What are the great privileges that children of God enjoy?” Even here, Burroughs’ treatment is God-centred and God-glorifying rather than man-centred. By means of a simple illustration he brings the first truth home to us:

Now the first privilege of a child of God is this, great honour is put upon him. According to the dignity of the father, so is the honour and dignity of the child. If the father is a yeoman, so is the child looked upon, if the father is a gentleman, so is the child; or a duke, or a prince, or monarch, the child hath honour according to the honour of the father. Now, to be a child of God must needs be honourable. The children of great men of the earth are honourable; but the children of the infinite God must needs have honour above them by their birthright, the reflection of the honour of their Father is upon them.<sup>22</sup>

Does not Burroughs hit the nail on the head here?

We are children of a king, and not just any king—the King of heaven. Why are we not more like Billy Bray, a man who was for ever rejoicing that he was “the King’s son”. Surely it must be because we think little on it, and perhaps too little of it.

“High is the rank we now possess” reminds the hymnist, yet too often the hymn line which is more true of us would be:

Why should the children of a king  
Go mourning all their days?

With honour comes freedom—freedom from bondage. In Romans 8 Paul deliberately sets the Spirit of adoption over against the spirit of bondage, emphasising our freedom.

Again, perhaps, we see the comparison with Old Testament Israel. God’s calling of them to be his people involves freeing them from the bondage of Egypt. Burroughs picks up some aspects of this freedom—particularly the freedom from sin and the law:

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22 Burroughs, *Saints Happiness*, p. 194.

The second privilege of the children of God it is, that they are freed from all kind of bondage, from a spirit of bondage ...in Romans viii:14,15 "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." ...The people of the Jews, even the godly people,—the Holy Ghost saith in Heb. ii,—“were all their lifetime subject to bondage through the fear of death”. There was a spirit of bondage and fear upon the hearts of the people of God in former times. Now God expects his children should serve him out of another principle, out of the principle of love, as it beseems children; ... Yea, and likewise they were under the bondage of a more tedious way of worship—the bondage of the law. Now the children of God are freed from that; from the bondage of sin, and from the bondage of the law they are wholly free. That is the second privilege; free from bondage.<sup>23</sup>

But as Sinclair Ferguson points out, this freedom is a more substantial one than that—“If the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed”. We are free from guilt, from the reign of sin, the bondage of Satan, from anxiety and from the traditions of men. We are now free to serve Christ in peace, under His Lordship and dominion, having taken His yoke upon us.

Then, of course, as adopted children we know God’s love:

The third privilege, the entire fatherly love that they are embraced withal. God, who is the infinite glorious first-being, embraces them with an entire fatherly love. All the love that ever was in any parents towards children is but as one drop of the infinite ocean of fatherly love that there is in God unto his people. You that are fathers and mothers, you know what the love of a parent to children means. Now, when you find that natural affection of love to children, you should help your faith by this ... Why is it that God hath taken upon him this title of a Father, but to the end that it might be a ground of the faith of his people to look up unto him, and to see his love as entire as ever the love of a parent, the love of all parents in the world put together, is towards children. Put all the natural affections of all the most loving, tender-hearted parents that ever were in the world into one parent, you will say that father surely is a loving father, that hath all the love that all the fathers had in the world since the beginning, he hath it all in his heart; yet I say of this father, he were a hard-hearted, carnal father in comparison of God, of the love of God, that is a Father unto his saints. That is the third privilege.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. pp. 194f.

One of the saddest things about the godless age in which we live is that, if we are reaching out into the world at all, we will meet with people who have never experienced a father's love—maybe never known a father, and, even worse, may associate fathers with brutality, abuse or worse. How wonderful that we can tell people of one who will be a loving Father, the best Father, a Father who wants nothing but good for his children and who has moved heaven and earth to provide it.

What is more, He is a Father who allows instant access into his presence:

He hath free access to his Father's presence; he may come at any time into his Father's presence, and so long as he is owned to be a child, he may come with comfort into his Father's presence. God hath no children that he serves as David served Absalom, "Let him not see my face"; he acknowledged him to be his child, and yet he would not have him to see his face. No, but God loves to have his children be in his presence, and it is a part of the purchase of Jesus Christ that we should come into the presence of God by him. We have access by Jesus Christ, and we may always come and stand before our Father, which is a great privilege that those which are the children of God account of.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, as Burroughs describes in another sermon, published in *Gospel Worship*, the extent to which we have grasped this point is a good reflection of whether we really have understood our high calling in Christ Jesus:

Further, it is a special sign of our adoption to love to be near God. What should a child love most but to be in the presence of his father? Would you know whether you have received the spirit of adoption or not? I can hardly give you any one sign so clear as this, for to love to go into God's presence. As David said "I was glad when they said, Come let us go up unto the house of the Lord." You shall have many that love to be in God's presence so that they think on it overnight and long for the time when it comes. I am never better than when I am with God. I think when I get into God's presence, either in prayer or any duty of God's worship, I find my heart warmed and quickened.<sup>26</sup>

Does that not search our hearts? Why is our prayer life so tepid? Why are our devotional lives in general so mean? Burroughs says it is because of this—a failure to meditate on our status as sons of God.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 195.

<sup>26</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship*, ed. Don Kistler (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), p. 56.

This, of course, is linked with the work of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Adoption. In passing, is it not instructive to note that one of the titles given to the third person of the Trinity is that he is the Spirit of Adoption, as Paul refers to him in Romans 8?

That Spirit is sent forth into our very hearts:

A child of God hath the Spirit of God communicated to him. That you have in those former Scriptures, Romans 8:14–16, “We are led by the Spirit, being sons”; and therefore “we have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father”. And in that forenamed place, Galatians 4:6, “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, father”. It is the observation of a learned man upon this place; saith he, He doth not say God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your minds, to give you knowledge and understanding, but into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. The Spirit of his Son, that now rules in the heart, God hath sent that into it; and this is a great blessing of God, that he gives his Spirit. This Spirit is an enlightening Spirit in the mind, and it is a Spirit that doth sanctify the heart, a Spirit that makes known the great and deep counsels of God to the soul, and a Spirit that guides the soul in the way of eternal life. That is the privilege of all sons: they are partakers of the Holy Ghost.<sup>27</sup>

It is the ministry of this Spirit of adoption which brings us to the heartfelt persuasion that we really are God’s sons. The Spirit of God assures us of our new standing, and consequently by his witness with our spirit—the double witness required by Scripture—He enables us to enjoy the rich and spiritual blessings of our sonship.

And then with a Father’s love comes protection:

The privilege of God’s children is, that they have protection from God. God as their father doth provide for them, and protect them. If any of your children be in any danger, what do they do but run to their father or mother, and complain to their father? and the father, according to his power, he will protect his children; and so there is a natural instinct in the children of God to run to their Father for protection. Indeed, a carnal heart, if he be wronged, all the way he hath to help himself, it is to rage, and fret, and vex, and seek to revenge himself. But a child of God, the way that he hath, it is to go and make his moan to his Father, to make his moan to God, and to tell God of all the wrongs that he hath, of all the calumnies that are cast upon him, and of all his accusations.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Burroughs, *Saint’s Happiness*, p. 196.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*



Remember, that was written by a persecuted Puritan who had hardships to endure that you and I have known nothing of.

With a father's love also comes a willingness to restore, even when we have sinned:

“As a father pities his child, so the Lord pities them that fear him.” And that known place in Malachi 3, “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels, I will spare them; as a man spares his only son that serveth him”. If you have a servant that displeases you, you can turn him out of doors; but you will not so presently turn a child out of doors, or, at least, you will not be so ready to disinherit him. Nay, a man that hath a father's affections will never disinherit his child, if he return to him, whatsoever his fault be. Now this is the state of God's children.<sup>29</sup>

In the final section of his sermon, Burroughs turns his attention to the responsibilities of the child of God. For every one of the privileges he has already described, extensive as that list was, he has a responsibility.

How instructive that is to those of us who are preachers, and indeed, to us all. There are no privileges without responsibilities, in the Christian life or anywhere else for that matter. Burroughs' preaching is balanced in terms of doctrine and its application. Nobody left a sermon of his without being clear of the duties that the glorious truth imposed upon him.

Our first duty, he says, is to behave ourselves as it becomes the children of the Most High:

And so the children of the living God, they must carry themselves according to the estate of the children of God—that is, above the world—above these vanities of the world—look upon them as too mean and too low things for them. Oh, it is exceedingly unbecoming a child of God for to have his heart dejected for the want of the comforts of this world—because he hath not some few things that others have; for him to be dejected as if he were undone. Oh no. But see thou live according to this rate. Look upon your father as the Lord of heaven and earth, and know that all the power, and all the goodness and excellency, and treasures that he hath, thou hast some way or other right unto. And therefore when any affliction doth befall thee, do not thou presently let thy heart sink.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 197.

What would Burroughs say if he could preach in this materialistic age when even God's people fall prey to the seductive influence of the advertiser's charms? The fact that his most famous book, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* was so titled points to our constant failings as God's people.

Then, of course, there is the duty of reverence. Yes, the Spirit of adoption does enable us to pray "Abba, Father", to have that personal, family relationship with him, but we must still walk before our Father with filial obedience and reverence. Malachi 1:6, "If I be a father, where is my honour?" What a searching question in a day of trite choruses and over-familiarity in worship generally.

Then, if God is our Father, the only proper response is one of love—a love which constrains us to work for God:

...do all you do out of love, be not mercenary. A servant doth not care to do anything any further than he may be paid for it, but a child doth not so; he doth what he doth out of love. Oh that we could bring all our obedience to be out of love to God.<sup>31</sup>

and, continues Burroughs, that love will lead to obedience, and zeal for the Father's glory and honour.

A child would be zealous for the honour of his father, yea, a child would fight for his father though his father be angry with him; a servant will not do so for his master. ... though you never spake word in all your lives, yet when you see your Father dishonoured, oh cry out, Oh spare the honour of God, do nothing against the honour of God. You that are of the meekest, quietest spirits, that you can put up anything concerning yourselves, yet when you see your Father struck at, that should make your spirits boil within you.<sup>32</sup>

Then again, the sign of the child of God will be his trust in his heavenly Father. Do we trust in him as our Father?

If the father doth but promise anything, the child relies upon him. A child relies upon his father for provisions and all things needful. A child, when he comes to desire anything of his father, he doth not study arguments to persuade his father; it is enough to call him but father. The word father hath enough argument in it to persuade out all arguments whatsoever. If a stranger come to desire a thing, he must bring arguments to obtain it; but a child need not, because he is his father.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 198.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 199.

There is a great deal of difference between the confidence of a stranger and the confidence of a child; and a great deal of difference between the confidence of one that is begotten again by the Spirit of God—the confidence of a child and a stranger.

Oh this title of Father, it is a mighty rock of faith, a mighty foundation of faith unto all the saints, that God is their Father. Oh trust then in him, rely upon him for supply, for help! Were it not a great dishonour to any father that his children should go to all his neighbours to beg bread, and say, My father will not give it me, and I shall be starved for all my father. This would be accounted a great dishonour. Parents would have their children look to their duty, and let them alone for providing for them. So if thou callest God Father, let God alone for providing for thee, and rely upon him, as the heart of a child doth rely upon the parents for whatsoever it stands in need of.<sup>33</sup>

That truth must express itself primarily in prayer:

If you be children then delight in the presence of your Father. Make use of the Spirit of adoption; come often before your Father. When you go to prayer, do not go to prayer merely as a duty, but go to prayer as children use to go to their father.

Oh make use of the spirit of adoption! Oh love to be in the presence of Thy Father! Though God the Father may seem to be angry with thee, yet do not go out of his presence. A child, if he hath a childish disposition, and not a base, sordid disposition, he will not be cast out of the presence of the father. ...Oh prize duty as thy privilege, to be often in prayer to thy Father. You that pray merely as a task, and do not know what the meaning of adoption is, do not know what it is for your hearts to spring within you when you go to God in prayer, surely there is a great deal of cause that you should fear that you are not yet among the number of children.<sup>34</sup>

Then, of course, we are to imitate our heavenly Father—to be holy as He is holy. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:1 to be “imitators of God”—we are to bear the family likeness. Just as our children take after us we must be those who display the family likeness. This, of course, is hard for children who are adopted. By nature we are children of another family, and it is those family traits that more often come to the surface. Mortification of sin then is in keeping with our standing as children of God.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pp. 198f.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 199.

For his final duty of the adopted child of God, Burroughs says,

And let the children of God walk one towards another as children of the same Father. Though it is true the children of vile persons that have no education at all, but are rude, they will be fighting one for another, and their parents perhaps look on, because they are rude and have no breeding; but if men of any rank and quality in the world, that have breeding themselves, and bestow breeding upon their children, should see them wrangle and fight one with another before their face, oh how grievous would it be to them. It is enough that the children of the world wrangle one with another and fight; let not those that profess God to be their Father, oh let them not in the presence of their Father wrangle and fight one with another, for certainly the Spirit of God cannot bear it.<sup>35</sup>

It is, perhaps, peculiarly appropriate that Burroughs' list of the duties of the child of God should end with an appeal for Christians to live peaceably with one another. The quality of Burroughs which stood out, in comparison with many of his contemporaries, was his conciliatory spirit. Richard Baxter famously said:

If all the Episcopalians had been like Archbishop Ussher, all the Presbyterians like Mr Stephen Marshall, and all the Independents like Jeremiah Burroughs, the breaches of the church would soon have been healed.<sup>36</sup>

It was said of Burroughs that his heart was broken by the divisions among the Puritan reformers and that this contributed to his physical weakness and death from consumptive illness on 14 November 1646.

What else might we add to Burroughs' masterly summary of the mystery, rights and responsibilities of the adopted child of God? Well, no doubt, if he had been preaching from Romans 8 instead of Matthew 5 he would have brought to our attention the statement of Paul in verse 23—the idea that although he was an adopted child he was eagerly waiting for, indeed groaning for, the adoption, the redemption of the body.

Like many others of the great New Testament statements about the believer, adoption has an “already ...not yet” aspect to it. We are sanctified, yet go on being sanctified; we sit in the heavenly places with Christ, yet look forward to sitting in the heavenly places and seeing Him as He is. Likewise, although we are adopted children, we await our adoption—the public declaration of our sonship which will take place on the last day.

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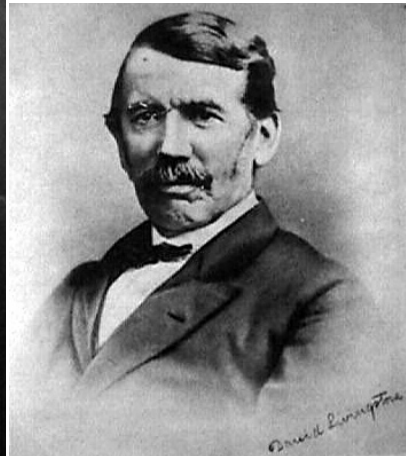
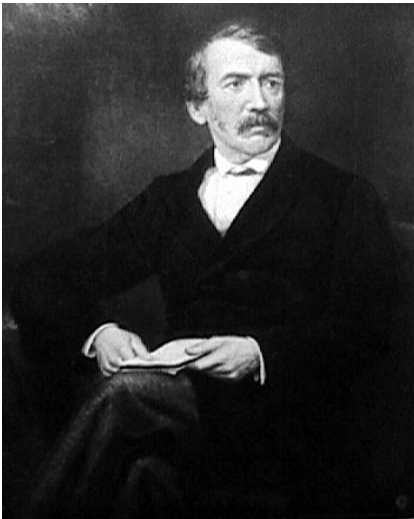
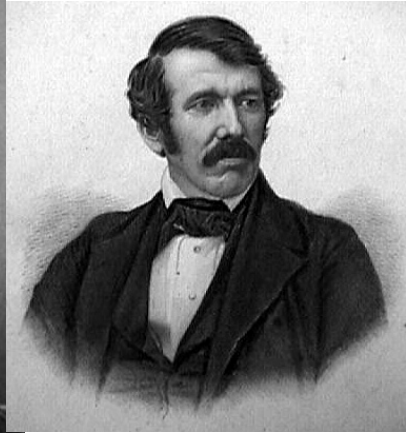
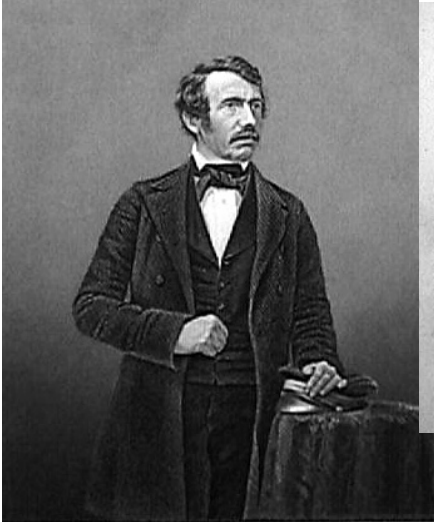
<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 200.

<sup>36</sup> James Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, two volumes in one reprint of 1811 edition, 1982), vol. 2, p. 81.

At the moment we are like the person who receives a letter from Buckingham Palace telling him that he is to receive an honour, an OBE, or a knighthood perhaps. Nobody else knows about that honour—only him and the Palace. But there comes a day when the news is released, everybody knows that the honour has been given. Until then the honoured man must be patient. John says,

Beloved, now we are children of God: and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2.





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Note on African place-names: The modern spelling of these has been adopted, as in the current edition of *The Times Atlas of the World*.

# David Livingstone

Arthur Fraser

I feel I must begin by issuing a disclaimer and say that, having made no prolonged or deep study of the life and character of this famous Scotsman (a shameful confession for a fellow-Scot!), I am no real expert on my subject. As some of you will know, my professional life has been largely taken up with other kinds of stones, which, I would claim, are not the lifeless objects they are assumed to be, since they do have a story of their own to tell! But David *Livingstone*. Here, surely, is a name to conjure with! Others have played on his name; allow me to do the same and observe that all believers are described in the Bible as living stones, belonging to the great and everlasting house promised by God to David, a house whose foundation is Jesus Christ, and in which we are blessed with the sure mercies of David.

David Livingstone. One is perhaps entitled to query if there is anything else still to learn about this great missionary explorer. There is a vast literature available to the researcher so that one has the very definite impression that no stone has been left unturned in examining every minute detail of the man. Yet, surprisingly, in the opinion of one of Livingstone's most recent biographers, "much about him remains obscure",<sup>1</sup> a verdict which explains the intriguing sub-title to his book: *The Dark Interior*.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, I for one cannot fathom out how he could ever come to tell his four children in a letter to them from Africa, "Don't speak Scotch. It is not so pretty as English." But more seriously, grave charges have been levelled against Livingstone. For example, that he abandoned true missionary work in order to become an explorer, that he was an almost impossible man with whom to work, and that he failed in almost everything he set out to do. In line with the brief given to me for today, one of the main objectives of this study paper is to attempt some re-assessment of the man and his spirituality, especially in the light of the more critical biographies and statements which have appeared over the past few decades.<sup>3</sup>

To do this, it is necessary first to give a brief summary of Livingstone's missionary work in Africa and in particular to trace the changes which

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1 Oliver Ransford, *David Livingstone* (London: John Murray, 1978), p. 1.

2 Ibid. title page.

3 See, for example, Tim Jeal, *Livingstone* (London: Pimlico, 1993), 425pp.



occurred in his thinking as time went on; changes in how he perceived his role in the strategic opening up of Africa to the gospel and the factors which lay behind them.

The details of his early life are well enough known not to be repeated in detail here. Following his conversion he soon became aware of the urgent need for qualified missionaries and, in response, he began to intersperse his work in the Blantyre cotton mill with early studies in medicine and theology. Encouraged in his training for missionary work by Rev. John Moir of the Congregational Chapel in Hamilton where he was a member, he was then persuaded by close friends to apply to the interdenominational London Missionary Society (hereinafter referred to as the LMS), which eventually accepted him, after extending his probationary period on the grounds of his dismal failure as a preacher, as well as his hesitant manner in leading worship.

Motivated by the feeling “that the salvation of men ought to be the chief desire and aim of every Christian”,<sup>4</sup> he offered himself for service in China, a country in which he always had a great interest. He was frustrated in this object by the Opium War then raging, but through Dr Robert Moffat, an LMS worker in Africa and his future father-in-law, Livingstone developed a deepening interest in Africa and, following ordination in Albion Street Chapel, Finsbury, sailed for the Cape at the end of 1840.

Livingstone’s first spell of 15 years in Africa began at Kuruman station, some 650 miles north-east of Cape Town, where he worked for two years. While there, he became convinced of two things. First, that native Christians should be trained to evangelise their own people, and secondly, that the Kuruman station was over-crowded with missionaries relative to the native population, to the extent that he confessed to the Directors of the Society that he was “grieved to hear of the arrival of new missionaries”.<sup>5</sup> An important clue regarding Livingstone’s outlook on missionary work generally is provided by his reaction. His burden was always for the unexplored areas, and the unreached peoples, so that he deplored

this huddling together of labourers in sparsely peopled districts, instead of sending them forth over the whole of Africa, India, and China, to preach the gospel to every creature.<sup>6</sup>

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4 William Garden Blaikie, *The Personal Life of David Livingstone* (London: John Murray, 1880), p. 15.

5 *Ibid.* p. 58.

6 *Ibid.* p. 57.

The LMS approved his request to move further into the interior. To the new station at Mabotsa, he brought his young bride, Mary, whose companionship and help were to give him his happiest years in Africa. Sadly, however, Livingstone's relationship with a fellow-missionary broke down completely, a circumstance which prompted another move, this time a little further north to Chonuane. Drought conditions soon necessitated yet another change of location. At the encouragement of Chief Sechele of the Bakwena people, his next destination was still further north in Kolobeng, just inside the south-east corner of present-day Botswana. With his wife and growing family, Livingstone laboured here for five years and had the satisfaction of seeing Sechele converted and baptised—apparently his one and only definite convert in Africa.

During this whole period, from 1841 to 1849, Livingstone's work followed the pattern of a conventional missionary. However, it is noteworthy that even at the outset of his time at Kuruman, he had thoughts of a journey overland to Abyssinia (present day Ethiopia). To a friend, he wrote what turned out to be an almost prophetic statement:

Whatever way my life may be spent so as but to promote the glory of our gracious God, I feel anxious to do it ...*My life may be spent as profitably as a pioneer as in any other way.*<sup>7</sup>

The pioneering spirit apparently grew while he was at Kolobeng. He made several long journeys to the north to visit the Makololo people whose chief, Sebituane, was very keen to have a resident missionary. These exploratory journeys proved to be hazardous; on one of them his wife almost died and the children suffered dreadfully from mosquito bites, but on the positive side they yielded the discoveries of Lake Ngami and the Zambesi river. At the same time, Livingstone's eyes were opened further to the evils of the slave trade and this was to have a profound influence on his thinking from now on. Let me quote here a key passage from Blaikie, his first and most sympathetic biographer.

The Makololo ...began to practise the slave trade. It arose simply from their desire to possess guns. This led to another master idea taking hold of Livingstone. The desire of the natives to possess European-made articles of manufacture compelled them to engage in the slave-trade; notably selling children that had fallen into their hands by war or otherwise. A legitimate trade, Livingstone surmised, would bring to an end this frightful practice. This idea naturally gave a great impulse to the purpose which had *already* struck its roots into his soul—to find a road to

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7 Ibid. p. 41f.

the sea either on the eastern or western coast. Interests wider and grander than *even the planting of mission stations* [emphasis mine] on the territories of Sebituane now rose to his view. The welfare of the whole continent, both spiritual and temporal, was concerned in the success of this plan of opening new channels to the enterprise of British and other merchants, always eager to hear of new markets for their goods. By driving away the slave trade, much would be done to prepare the way for Christian missions which could not thrive in an atmosphere of war and commotion. An idea involving issues so vast was fitted to take a right powerful hold on Livingstone's heart, and make him feel that no sacrifice could be too great to be encountered, cheerfully and patiently, for such an end.<sup>8</sup>

To fulfil this aim of finding a route to the coast, Livingstone would require the sanction of the LMS. At the same time he would also have to send his wife and family back to England. He was aware that his new plans might be misunderstood, as indeed they were by some of his colleagues who accused him of wordly ambition. He himself conceded that he might appear to the Directors of the LMS more as an explorer than a missionary. But he told them:

I am conscious that though there is much impurity in my motives, they are in the main for the glory of Him to whom I have devoted myself ...<sup>9</sup>

The LMS granted general acceptance of his plans.

That, very briefly, is the background to Livingstone's first great journey across Africa. Setting off from Linyanti in the upper Zambesi region in November 1853, he journeyed to Luanda on the west coast. Not having found a suitable site anywhere for a mission station, and concluding that the route was not convenient for traffic from the interior to the coast, he turned to investigate the possibility of a navigable highway to the east coast along the Zambesi. The resulting cross-continent trek took 20 months and included in it the discovery of the Victoria Falls. In all these travels, Livingstone earnestly shared the Gospel with his support team and with the local population whenever he could. One extract from his Journal at this time reads:

We had a good and very attentive audience yesterday, and I expatiated with great freedom on the love of Christ in dying ...It cannot be these precious truths will fall to the ground; but it is perplexing to observe no effects ...O that the Holy Ghost would enlighten them! To His soul-

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8 Ibid. p. 119.

9 Ibid. p. 122.

renewing influence my longing soul is directed ... It is His word, and cannot die.<sup>10</sup>

On arrival at Quelimane near the mouth of the Zambesi on May 1856, Livingstone received a letter from the LMS Directors in which they informed him that they were “restricted in their power of aiding plans connected only remotely with the spreading of the gospel”.<sup>11</sup> He interpreted this as a reluctance, if not a refusal, to accept his vision and new pattern of work. He himself felt led to work in what the Directors had referred to as “the untried, remote, and difficult fields”. In other words, he increasingly saw his role as a missionary pioneer rather than as a conventional missionary worker.

The ensuing correspondence proved to be the beginning of the end of Livingstone’s service with the LMS. During his first visit home, one of his closest friends and counsellors sought to dissuade him from severing his links with the Society, afraid that he would return to Africa with a lower aim than that of advancing Christ’s kingdom. Needless to say, Livingstone did not see the matter that way, although he was sensitive to the criticisms. Later, his mother-in-law was to write to him in these lines:

Now, my dear Livingstone, I must conclude by assuring you of the tender interest we shall ever feel in your operations ...as one who has laid himself out for the emancipation of this poor wretched continent, and for opening new doors of entrance for the heralds of salvation (*not that I would not have preferred your remaining in your former capacity*). I nevertheless rejoice in what you are allowed to accomplish ...[emphasis mine].<sup>12</sup>

Livingstone subsequently recorded the fact that he

never felt a single pang at having left the Missionary Society. I acted for my Master, and believe that all ought to devote their special faculties to Him.<sup>13</sup>

Livingstone’s second period in Africa covers his leadership of the government-sponsored Zambesi Expedition, together with the exploration of the Shire Highlands south of Lake Niassa. It so happened that during the expedition, Bishop Mackenzie and several fellow-churchmen arrived

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 175f.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 305.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 216.

to establish the Universities' Mission on the Shire, a project organised in direct response to Livingstone's appeal in a speech he made at Cambridge University. Livingstone assisted the Bishop in setting up the mission, though it was no part of the expedition itself. All in all, this six-year spell brought him to his lowest point in almost every sense, since the expedition, and the Universities' Mission, ended in almost complete failure. A whole succession of disasters occurred, and of the many factors contributing to this sorry outcome, Livingstone's own errors of judgment and the problems he experienced in handling his team have to be included. The expedition was exceedingly costly in human terms. Livingstone's wife, Mary, as well as five members of the Universities' Mission, all died of fever, several members of the party were dismissed, and interpersonal relationships were often under severe strain. There was even occasional tension and bitterness between Livingstone and his brother Charles who gave up his ministry in New England to become one of the expedition members. The failure of the Universities' Mission was a particular blow to Livingstone, and he was very critical of the decision made by the church authorities to withdraw it.

Following his second furlough in England, Livingstone returned to Africa for a third and final term, inspired on this occasion by his friend Sir Roderick Murchison of the Royal Geographical Society who encouraged him to return with the explicit purpose of discovering the source (or sources) of the Nile. Although Sir Roderick was keen that the exploration should be purely geographical,—“unshackled by other avocations”,<sup>14</sup> as he put it—Livingstone's response showed where his heart still lay. To his friend James Young, he wrote:

I would not consent to go simply as a geographer, but as a missionary, and do geography by the way, because I feel I am in the way of duty when trying either to enlighten these poor people, or open their land to lawful commerce.<sup>15</sup>

En route to Zanzibar from Bombay, he recorded his solemn intention in his Journal:

I mean to keep ...this a Christian expedition, telling a little about Christ wherever we go. His love in coming down to save men will be our theme.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 349.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 351.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 366.

On this final journey, Livingstone was to face many discouragements, frustrations and hardships, the nature, scale and intensity of which almost defy the imagination. And, more than ever before, he was confronted with the appalling atrocities associated with slavery, especially those perpetrated by the Arab traders. In his reports back home he continually highlighted these horrors so as to keep the public conscience fully informed. In one terrible massacre at Nyangwe, the westernmost point reached in his journey, some four hundred people, mostly women and children, were slaughtered, and Livingstone reported that the dreadful event gave him the impression of being in hell. The ending of these atrocities became an increasingly dominant passion in the closing stages of his life. To his brother in Canada, he wrote:

If the good Lord permits me to put a stop to the enormous evils of the inland slave-trade, I shall not grudge my hunger and toils. I shall bless His name with all my heart. The Nile sources are valuable to me only as a means of enabling me to open my mouth with power among men. It is this power I hope to apply to remedy an enormous evil, and join my poor little helping hand in the enormous revolution that in His all-embracing Providence He has been carrying on for ages, and is now actually helping forward. Men may think I covet fame, but I make it a rule never to read aught written in my praise.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of all the obstacles and severe setbacks, Livingstone persevered in his desire to share the Word of God with the people. For example, after the journalist Stanley found him in their famous meeting at Ujiji, he was to observe that,

Each Sunday morning he gathers his little flock around him, and reads prayers and a chapter from the Bible, in a natural, unaffected, and sincere tone; and afterwards delivers a short address ...<sup>18</sup>

But all the while, his health was declining, his strength was ebbing away, and eventually he became so weak that he had to be carried in a palanquin by his faithful, devoted attendants, Susi and Chuma. On or about 1 May 1873, Livingstone passed into his Saviour's presence in an attitude of prayer in a little hut in Chitambo's village, deep inside the Africa he loved. The immediate sequel is a deeply moving one. Susi and Chuma removed the internal organs and, after carefully treating the body with preserving materials, lovingly carried it the 1,500 miles to the coast for its safe return to England.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 444.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 424.

In attempting to make a fair assessment of Livingstone and his work, a number of influential factors have to be considered. Amongst the most important of these, I suggest, is that, like everyone else in greater or lesser degree, he was a child of his time. He is therefore not to be judged entirely from the standpoint of what we know today with all the benefits of hindsight. I believe we touch here on something crucial in helping us to understand Livingstone's motivation, and also those decisions he made which were so determinative in charting the course of his missionary life.

Consider first of all his much-criticised remark at the end of his famous speech in the Senate House at Cambridge delivered during his first visit to England. According to Professor Adam Sedgwick, Vice-Master of Trinity College and, incidentally, a fine Christian geologist, Livingstone's visit was an extraordinary occasion. We are told that neither the great military heroes of the Napoleonic wars nor even the Queen herself ever received quite the rapturous reception that was given to Livingstone. Sedgwick's account indicates the flavour of the man and the tremendous impact he made on others. Here is how Livingstone ended his address:

I beg to direct your attention to Africa: I know that in a few years I shall be cut off in that country, which is now open; do not let it be shut again! I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity; do you carry out the work which I have begun. I LEAVE IT WITH YOU!<sup>19</sup>

"Commerce and Christianity." Why in that order? Was Livingstone beginning to lose sight of his high calling as a missionary as some have claimed? No. Surely he was simply articulating a widely held conviction of that period, confirmed by his own first-hand experience. Nearly 50 years before Livingstone went to Africa, William Wilberforce had identified legitimate commerce as the most effective way of stopping the slave trade in Africa. The Sierra Leone Company sponsored by the Clapham Sect was specifically formed in 1790 for "the abolition of the slave trade, the civilisation of Africa and the introduction of the Gospel there".<sup>20</sup> Note the order. William Carey believed that "commerce shall subserve the spread of the gospel", and hoped that the new colony of Sierra Leone would not only "open a way for honourable commerce", but also "prove the happy mean" of introducing "the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" to

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19 Ibid. p. 226.

20 Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Apollos, 1990), p. 71.

the people.<sup>21</sup> Underlying this kind of thinking was a firm belief in Providence, whereby God was evidently opening up new countries for missionary endeavour through the expansion of British interests.

Of course there were clear dangers in this approach, and evangelicals came increasingly to recognise these. The natural sinfulness and greed of the human heart could soon turn legitimate trade into vicious exploitation, and Livingstone himself was fully aware of this problem. Quite early on in his missionary career, he said,

I am more and more convinced that in order to the permanent settlement of the gospel in any part, the natives must be taught to relinquish their reliance on Europe ...If natives are not elevated by contact with Europeans, they are sure to be deteriorated ...all the tribes I have lately seen are undergoing the latter process ...<sup>22</sup>

Livingstone's fears proved to be well founded as the subsequent history of Africa and elsewhere has shown all too clearly. Nevertheless, it was in the context of a partnership between missionary work and morally acceptable trading that Livingstone hoped to accomplish the opening up of central Africa to the Gospel. In that regard, he was unquestionably a man of his time. In the shorter term he was proved to be correct as we shall see later.

A similar kind of argument applies to his attitude to geographical exploration. His famous dictum that, "The end of the geographical feat is only the beginning of the enterprise"<sup>23</sup> voices his personal conviction about the vital role of discovery in evangelising the heathen. But it was also a simple matter of fact at the time. It was no accident that the LMS sent out its very first missionaries to the South Seas in 1796 in the wake of Captain Cook's published accounts of his voyages to that area. Carey himself testified that "reading Cook's voyages was the first thing that engaged my mind to that of mission".<sup>24</sup> This intimate connection between increased geographical knowledge and growing interest in missions was undoubtedly a potent factor in Livingstone's thinking, and enables us to have a better understanding of why his missionary career followed the course it did.

Then again, it is clear that Livingstone had thoroughly embraced the post-millennial views on prophecy which prevailed for much of the

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> Blaikie, *The Personal Life of David Livingstone*, p. 82.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 190.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, p. 58.



19th Century; what Iain Murray describes in the title of his book, *The Puritan Hope*.<sup>25</sup> Post-millennialism—the belief that the millennium precedes the Second Coming of Christ—bred an optimistic outlook on the evangelisation of the heathen. According to its tenets, missionary endeavour would eventually lead to the millennium, the final age in which the Gospel would rule the world. It was not until after Livingstone's death that the opposite, pre-millennial view, persuasively advanced by Edward Irving earlier that century, began to take over the philosophy of missions in the evangelical constituency. However we may regard the post-millennial position theologically, it undoubtedly generated a remarkable stamina in missionaries as they laboured in confidence and hope for the transformation of pagan countries and societies. Livingstone's commitment to it enabled him to persevere in the face of almost insurmountable obstacles and great discouragements. He took a long-term view of the task of mission, and looked forward to the time after his death when the Gospel would take root in Africa. Here are his thoughts after he had conducted a service:

A minister who had not seen so much pioneer service as I have done would have been shocked to see so little effect produced by an earnest discourse concerning the future judgment, ... (But) The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord—that is enough. We can afford to work in faith, for Omnipotence is pledged to fulfil the promise ... The poor Bushman, the most degraded of all Adam's family, shall see His glory, and the dwellers in the wilderness shall bow before Him ... The hard and cold unbelief which distinguished the last century ... would sneer at our faith, and call it superstition, enthusiasm etc. But were we believers in human progress and no more, there must be a glorious future for our world. Our dreams must come true ... The world is rolling on to the golden age ... Discoveries and inventions are cumulative. Another century must present a totally different aspect from the present. And when we view the state of the world and its advancing energies, ... we see the earth filling with the knowledge of the glory of God,—ay, all nations seeing His glory and bowing before Him whose right it is to reign. Our work and its fruits are cumulative. We work towards another state of things. Future missionaries will be rewarded by conversions for every sermon. We are their pioneers and helpers. Let them not forget the watchmen of the night—us, who worked when all was gloom, and no evidence of success in the way of conversion

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25 Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 299pp.

cheered our paths. They will doubtless have more light than we, but we served our Master earnestly, and proclaimed the same gospel as they will do.<sup>26</sup>

Once more, subsequent history has vindicated his hope in substantial measure.

In continuing our assessment of Livingstone and his work, we turn our attention to more personal factors. On this score, we are confronted with a man with a very unusual personality. In the first place, he was a strongly independent character. He would not have been ordained as a missionary had this step not been pressed upon him by others. Still less would he have personally chosen to work for a missionary society. As he himself said, "It was not agreeable to one accustomed to work *his own way* to become in a measure dependent on others" [emphasis mine].<sup>27</sup> This spirit was undoubtedly a major element in his parting with the LMS. In his book, *Missionary Travels*, he tells us that at that time, "his old feeling of independence had returned".<sup>28</sup>

But beyond his fierce independence and the stubbornness that goes with it, Livingstone appears to have been affected by a deeper psychological condition which proved to be a double-edged weapon throughout his life. Oliver Ransford, a medical practitioner with a non-conformist missionary background, makes a convincing case for his claim that Livingstone had moderately developed symptoms of manic depressive disorder, a genetic condition which was most strongly developed in his brother Charles, but was also traceable in his two sisters, Agnes and Janet. Charles, who studied theology at Oberlin College at the time of Charles Finney's Presidency and who went on to be an ordained minister in New England, wrote in letters to his wife of his fear of ending up "in the madhouse", and of having "a narrow escape from insanity".<sup>29</sup>

In David's case, the alternating highs and lows of his emotional state usually followed a regular time pattern and were by no means always the result of his outward circumstances. In fact he was sometimes at his most optimistic, creative and determined when the going was at its toughest. This probably goes a long way in explaining his extraordinary, almost superhuman achievements in the face of the severest trials which he bore with such amazing patience.

26 Blaikie, *The Personal Life of David Livingstone*, p. 142f.

27 Mrs JH Worcester, Jr, *The Life of David Livingstone* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 12.

28 Blaikie, *The Personal Life of David Livingstone*, p. 196.

29 Ransford, *David Livingstone*, p. 2.

By the same token of course, his fluctuating emotional states must have played a major role in the fraught relationships he evidently had with many of his white colleagues while in Africa. In his more exalted moods belonging to the manic phase of his condition, more ordinary mortals were out of their depth and he in turn had little patience with those who did not share his vision and optimism. Dr Kirk, the botanist on the Zambesi Expedition, wrote at one point: "I can come to no other conclusion than that Dr Livingstone is out of his mind".<sup>30</sup>

In reading the lives of other great Christian leaders of exceptional vision and achievement, one almost invariably finds that they too had serious flaws in their make-up. I am sure we all know of some outstanding Christian leaders who were notoriously difficult individuals to live with. The plain truth is that they would never have done what they did unless they were unusual. But their defects should not be made to reflect on their genuine spirituality and godliness. Take Samuel Rutherford as a good instance of this, a man whose intense love for Christ is renowned and yet who had certain traits not altogether unlike those possessed by Livingstone. Listen to what Alexander Smellie has to say about him in his book, *Men of the Covenant*:

Rutherford was not himself a perfect man. There were defects both in his creed and in his character. His temper was fiery, and too frequently he made no effort to moderate its energy; "I am made of extremes", he wrote to his friend, David Dickson. Dialectician and polemic all his days, he had scant mercy for those who saw the truth from other angles than his own ...he showed, on many occasions, an acrimoniousness which was far from admirable.<sup>31</sup>

Some of these sentiments could be applied to Livingstone, and indeed have been, yet as with Rutherford, they cannot take away from the reality of his love for Christ and his whole-hearted commitment to the Gospel.

These considerations lead us to examine more specifically those qualities which reveal Livingstone's spirituality. We begin with his conversion experience, the manner of which is both significant and highly instructive. From his earliest years, he was nurtured in an atmosphere of vital godliness and careful instruction in the Word of God. When only 9 years old, he was given a New Testament from his Sunday School teacher for repeating the 119th Psalm on two successive evenings with only five

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander Smellie, *Men of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975 reprint of 1924 edition), p. 70.

errors. Speak of perseverance! He became deeply concerned about the state of his soul when about 12. He said,

Great pains, had been taken by my parents to instil the doctrines of Christianity into my mind, and I had no difficulty in understanding the theory of a free salvation by the atonement of our Saviour ...<sup>32</sup>

However, a sense of his own unworthiness kept him from accepting the free offer of mercy and forgiveness through Christ, and he believed that he must wait until an inward spiritual change had taken place by the Holy Spirit *before* he could come to Christ for salvation [emphasis mine].

This deeply mistaken belief—that an inner change of heart was essential before he could receive Christ—thrust Livingstone into a spiritual wilderness for nearly eight years during which his conviction of sin and his sense of need of the Saviour were progressively blunted. Perhaps something of the Highland temperament passed on to him from his father's side of the family, whose ancestral home was on the west coast of Mull, had something to do with this holding back from Christ.

Mercifully, in the good providence of God, Livingstone was put in the right way by reading Dr Thomas Dick's simple philosophy books. On reading them,

I saw the duty and the inestimable privilege *immediately* [emphasis his] to accept salvation by Christ. Humbly believing that through sovereign mercy and grace I have been called to do so, and having felt in some measure its effects on my *still depraved and deceitful heart* [emphasis mine], it is my desire to show my attachment to the cause of Him who died for me by devoting my life to his service.<sup>33</sup>

Livingstone's experience touches on a vitally important doctrine of salvation. As Paul puts it in Romans 4:5, "It is the man who does *not* work but trusts God who justifies the *wicked* whose faith is counted for righteousness".

The thoroughness of Livingstone's conversion is well attested by his life of dedication to Christ and to the cause of the gospel. Right to the end of his days the underlying deep current of his evangelical faith kept surfacing. He never lost sight of his missionary calling nor his goal; he was steadfast to the end. I can do no better than quote from the

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<sup>32</sup> Blaikie, *The Personal Life of David Livingstone*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

Livingstone Memorial Lecture delivered by Bishop Stephen Neill on 30 April 1973:

He had come to Africa to make Christ known. All his travels, all his scientific work, all his plans for opening up Africa to what he called “civilizing influences”, were subordinate to his one great aim; he scoffed at the idea that his work as a missionary could be distinguished from the other enterprises which he undertook. [This] ... can be demonstrated ... by the whole tenor of his journals and letters ... He records that, during one of his long delays ... he had read the whole Bible through 4 times ... All through his life, he had spent long hours in quiet meditation on the meaning of what to him was the book of books. He had spent long hours of intercession for Africa, and especially for the elimination of his great and lifelong enemy the slave trade ... Jesus Christ was for him ... the living friend and companion of each day’s life ... [He] believed that the African needed Christ, not because he was black or because he was a “heathen”, but because Livingstone himself had needed Christ in far away Blantyre ... From this point of view he never diverged one inch in the 30 years during which his life was given to Africa.<sup>34</sup>

In the remainder of this study, I want to amplify a little the theme of Livingstone’s spiritual fruitfulness. This is the supreme test of the quality of any Christian, and the ultimate standard by which he or she is to be judged. “By their fruit you will recognise them”, said Jesus. “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit” (Matthew 7:16,18). True spiritual fruit is first and foremost that of character and then of service. On both counts we will examine the evidence from Livingstone’s life.

As to his Christian character, there is an abundance of proof, both from his own writings and from the testimony of others. Throughout his Journals, there are numerous passages from which his self-effacement, his desire for God, and his longing to be profitable for the honour of Jesus Christ shine forth. He ever regarded himself as a poor sinner saved by grace and in constant need of the cleansing of Christ’s blood and the sanctifying work of the Spirit. We can savour something of the spirit of the man from the following extracts from his Journals. Immediately prior to his first great journey, he pleaded with his Lord,

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34 Stephen Charles Neill, *Livingstone Reconsidered*, The Livingstone Memorial Lecture, delivered at Blantyre, Malawi, 30 April 1973 (ZOMBA, Malawi: Printed by the Government printer, 1973), 28pp.

O Jesus, fill me with Thy love now, and I beseech Thee, accept me, and use me a little for Thy glory. I have done nothing for Thee yet, and I would like to do something. O do, do, I beseech Thee, accept me and my service, and take Thou all the glory ...<sup>35</sup>

Then during that same journey, he confessed to

a feeling of want in the soul,—... I need to be purified—fitted for the eternal, to which my soul stretches away, in ever returning longings. I need to be made more like my blessed Saviour, to serve my God with all my powers. Look upon me, Spirit of the living God, and supply all thou seest lacking.<sup>36</sup>

When facing the very real possibility of death from hostile tribes in the Zambesi, he wrote:

Thank God for His great mercies thus far. How soon I may be called to stand before Him, my righteous judge, I know not. All hearts are in His hands, and merciful and gracious is the Lord our God. O Jesus, grant me resignation to Thy will, and entire reliance on Thy powerful hand. On Thy word alone I lean. But wilt Thou permit me to plead for Africa? The cause is Thine. What an impulse will be given to the idea that Africa is not open if I perish now! See, O Lord, how the heathen rise up against me, as they did to Thy Son. I commit my way unto Thee. I trust also in Thee that Thou wilt direct my steps. Thou givest wisdom liberally to all who ask Thee—give it to me, my Father. My family is Thine. They are in the best hands. Oh! be gracious, and all our sins do Thou blot out. “A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, On Thy kind arms I fall.” Leave me not, forsake me not. I cast myself and all my cares down at Thy feet. Thou knowest all I need, for time and for eternity.<sup>37</sup>

At a particularly frustrating time on the Zambesi expedition, he felt assured that:

If we dedicate ourselves to God unreservedly He will make use of whatever peculiarities of constitution He has imparted for His own glory, and He will in answer to prayer give wisdom to guide ...O how far am I from that hearty devotion to God I read of in others! The Lord have mercy on me a sinner!<sup>38</sup>

A few days later, he made this entry:

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35 Blaikie, *The Personal Life of David Livingstone*, p. 139.

36 *Ibid.* p. 159.

37 *Ibid.* p. 181.

38 *Ibid.* p. 253f.

I want my whole life to be out and out for the Divine glory, and my earnest prayer is that God may accept what His own Spirit must have implanted—the desire to glorify Him. I have been more than usually drawn out in earnest prayer of late ...that I may be permitted to open this dark land to the blessed gospel. I have cast all before my God. Good Lord, have mercy upon me. Leave me not nor forsake me ...<sup>39</sup>

A little further on in the same entry, we read:

There is a great deal of trifling and frivolousness in not trusting in God. Not trusting in Him who is truth itself, faithfulness, the same yesterday, today and forever! It is presumption not to trust in Him implicitly, and yet this heart is fearfully guilty of distrust. I am ashamed to think of it. Ay; but He must put the trusting, loving, childlike spirit in by His grace. O Lord, I am Thine, truly I am Thine—take me—do what seemeth good in Thy sight with me, and give me complete resignation to do Thy will in all things.<sup>40</sup>

The testimony of those who knew him best confirms the reality of his godly life and character. Sir James Young, the discoverer of paraffin, claimed that,

Livingstone was the best man he ever knew, had more than any other man of true filial trust in God, more of the spirit of Christ, more of integrity, purity, and simplicity of character, and of self-denying love for his fellow-men.<sup>41</sup>

In a lengthy tribute, Florence Nightingale included this passage:

Learned philologists from Germany, not at all orthodox in their opinions, have yet told me that Dr Livingstone was the only man who understood races, and how to deal with them for good; that he was the one true missionary. We cannot console ourselves for our loss. He is irreplaceable.<sup>42</sup>

Many more such tributes could be cited. Perhaps the most eloquent of them all come from the African natives themselves. Sensitive as they are likely to have been to the slightest hint of any patronising attitude, they recognised in Livingstone a man who genuinely loved them and cared for their welfare. Blaikie's account tells of a man who lived in the Makonde country east of Lake Niassa and who had met Livingstone

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39 Ibid. p. 254.

40 Ibid. p. 254.

41 Ibid. p. 22.

42 Ibid. p. 458.

... whom to have once seen and talked with was to remember for life; a white man who treated black men as brothers, and whose memory would be cherished ... after they were all dead and gone; a man ... whose words were always gentle, and whose manners were always kind; whom, as a leader, it was a privilege to follow, and who knew the way to the hearts of all men.<sup>43</sup>

Then what does the amazing feat of Susi and Chuma in carrying his body for some 1,500 miles tell us of the esteem in which they held their master? In their long journey, they faced great perils, and even risked death, to fulfil what they believed would have been his wish. Their dedication is shown to be all the more remarkable when they strenuously resisted the efforts of the leader of a British search mission to have the body buried in Africa. Significantly, the two faithful servants handed over the body at a place called Bagamoyo, which means, “lay down the burden of your heart”.

What of the fruit of Livingstone’s service, the legacy of his life and work? As we have already seen, he saw very little fruit for his many labours and deep travail during his life-time. For this reason, he has been harshly judged a failure in certain quarters. But a fundamental principle operates in the spiritual realm which the natural man fails to grasp, but which was stated by our Lord Himself:

I tell you the truth, unless an ear of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Many seeds; that is, much fruit. A rich harvest.

In one of his very last letters to an old friend, Livingstone wrote of feeling “forgotten and lonely”.<sup>44</sup> He certainly died a lonely death in the heart of Africa. But although his body was buried in Westminster Abbey with pomp and ceremony, it is surely profoundly symbolic that his heart, by which I mean his literal, physical, throbbing heart, was buried deep within the continent for which he gave his life in self-sacrifice. That burial is the symbol of the single seed and the double death it represented which was to prove astonishingly fruitful. New life, a kind of spiritual resurrection, was to flow from Livingstone’s death, not just his physical death but above all that inner death to self through union with Christ. As Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 4: “Death is at work in us, but life is at work in you”.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 472.

<sup>44</sup> Ransford, *David Livingstone*, p. 300.



That ear of wheat planted in Africa did not remain alone. On the contrary, it produced a truly abundant harvest which continues to the present day. Livingstone's hope expressed in his valedictory message that "on the African continent our deeds may in our children's days bear fruit worthy to be held in everlasting remembrance",<sup>45</sup> has been fully realised, far more indeed than he could ever have imagined. One direct and far-reaching achievement was the stamping out of the African slave-trade. In all his travels, he saw the terrible evils of this traffic in human flesh, whose awful cost in Africa alone was reckoned to be of the order of 100 million lives in all. In his despatches to England, he always gave the subject a high profile, and it was his graphic report of the fearful massacre at Nyangwe which he witnessed during his last great journey which finally moved opinion in this country to take immediate and effective action.

As to more specifically missionary objectives, the fruitfulness of Livingstone's service is again apparent. Within a decade of his death, a mission station was established by the Free Church of Scotland at Livingstonia on Lake Niassa, and another by the Church of Scotland at Blantyre in the Shire Highlands. In addition, a Scottish company, the African Lakes Company, was established on Lake Niassa, a fulfilment of Livingstone's aim to combine mission with colonisation and acceptable trading. It was not to be long either before the ill-fated Universities' Mission to Central Africa was revived and had a flourishing station established in the very area where there was previous defeat. What to everyone else were foolish pipe-dreams became a reality. Following this initial missionary surge after Livingstone's death, more widespread evangelistic projects developed. The opening up of Christian work in Uganda, the Congo and elsewhere, plus the planting of medical missions, can all be directly traced to Livingstone's inspiration and influence. In a fairly recent article in *Evangelicals Now*, Dr Delaney describes how Peter Scott had a remarkable supernatural experience at Livingstone's tomb, after reading the inscribed words, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring". This experience proved to be the seed germ of the Africa Inland Mission, which presently has hundreds of missionaries on the continent, a number of them in areas opened up by Livingstone's travels.

All these facts illustrate the practical outworking of our Lord's words that if the ear of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it bears much fruit. If the servant follows his Master, a harvest is sure.

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45 Ibid. p. 311.

Lord Polwarth's message to Livingstone's daughter expresses this truth beautifully:

His memory will never perish,...his prayers will be had in everlasting remembrance, and unspeakable blessings will yet flow to that vast continent he opened up at the expense of his life. God called and qualified him for a noble work, which, by grace, he nobly fulfilled, and we can love the honoured servant, and adore the gracious Master.<sup>46</sup>

In conclusion, what, very briefly, are the practical lessons of Livingstone's life and work for ourselves? One obvious lesson is that, as workers in God's field in whatever capacity, we may not always see the fruit of our labours in our own lifetime. The harvest of all our toil may be largely hidden from our view as far as this life is concerned. Our task may be to sow Gospel seed in the desert and its watering by the life-giving streams of God's Spirit may only come after we have gone. "One sows and another reaps" as Jesus said (John 4:37). This should not discourage us; rather it should spur us on, knowing that our labour is *never* in vain in the Lord. Livingstone ultimately never lost confidence in God that his work would be rewarded, and that a future generation would reap its benefits. The test of time has proved him absolutely right.

I believe that the other main message from Livingstone is a very reassuring one. Here was a man who was quite extraordinary, almost unique, in his personality and achievements. But, as we have seen, he was not without deep flaws in his character and temperament. He was certainly no plaster saint as some have portrayed him to be. But just as earlier biographers made the mistake of glossing over or ignoring his faults, so later critics have erred in making too much of them. True, the secular historian can hold Livingstone up and point to his many inconsistencies, his turbulent relationships with colleagues, his lack of success in attaining his own goals, and many other negative factors. But the Bible-believing Christian says rather: Look at what the grace of God did in and through this man's life *in spite of* all his failings and shortcomings. Our God is the God of Jacob! Is there not great encouragement for us all here? What is God not able to do when even unpromising material is dedicated to Him and to His service?

Ultimately it is not the greatness of David Livingstone that impresses us so much, as the greatness of His God and Saviour. And He is the same God today!

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46 Blaikie, *The Personal Life of David Livingstone*, p. 457.



## Past Conference Papers

### 1981

Rev. A Tovey MA BD: Robert Browne: The Morning Star of Congregationalism

Rev. DO Swann BA BD: The Church Meeting

Rev. P Seccombe BD: John Angell James

### 1982

Rev. J Legg BA BD: Children of the Covenant (available as a booklet)

Rev. A Clifford BA MLitt PhD: The Christian Mind of Philip Doddridge

Mr D Boorman BA MLitt: The Origins of the London Missionary Society

### 1983

Rev. H Elias BA BD: PT Forsyth—Prophet of the 20th Century

Mr M Boland: Oliver Cromwell

Rev. N Rees BD: Prayer Life of the Local Church

### 1984

Rev. GT Booth BD: The Hymn Writers of English Congregationalism

Rev. ES Guest: John Robinson (1575–1625)

Rev. G Fielder MA BD: RW Dale and the Non-Conformist Conscience.

### 1985

Rev. Prof. T Jones DPhil DD: Walter Craddock (1606–1659)

Rev. Prof. T Jones DPhil DD: John Penry (1563–1593)

Rev. P Golding BTh MTh: Owen on the Mortification of Sin

### 1986

Rev. PJ Beale MA: Jonathan Edwards and the Phenomena of Revival

1986 Rev. DO Swann BA BD: An Earnest Ministry

1986 Mr P Collins: Thomas Wilson

### 1987

Rev. DL James MSc ARCS: John Cotton's Doctrine of the Church

Rev. M Plant BA: Richard Davis and God's Day of Grace

Rev. B Jones: Lionel Fletcher—Evangelist

### 1988

Rev. G Evans: Richard Mather—The True Use of Synods

Rev. A Tovey MA BD: That Proud Independency

Rev. G Kirby MA: The Countess of Huntingdon

### 1989

Rev. GT Booth BD: Josiah Conder—Hymn-writer and Compiler

Rev. J Legg BA BD: The Use and Abuse of Church History

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