

well in the past, as a result of the experience of someone not even known to us, come to be effective for every new congregation of believers. In our use of the Psalms together we do not insist that every member of the congregation should be able to say beforehand that the sentiments about to be expressed in the Psalms are exactly his or hers at that very moment. Indeed there are such violent emotional lurches in some Psalms that it would be impossible to conspire to 'feel' all the things that are said in the reading of them. That is not how the Psalms work. We are not obliged to try to re-live the 'original' experience. Nevertheless, in a remarkable way, the person who goes in in distress, may yet go out in joy, led along by the train of thought in the Psalm, affirmed by the agreement of the congregation to utter it as a testimony to the God they know.

The second point concerns genuineness. One of the besetting temptations of the ancient Israelites was to believe that religion consisted in maintaining the worship *system*. The Psalms are themselves products,

in a sense, of that system. However, the Psalmists are not willing to become its tools. It is clear from the Psalms that what counts before God is the worship of the heart. For this reason there are certain emphatic rejections of the idea that it is enough to go through the motions. The hardest-hitting are 40:6–8 and 50:7–15. Here the Psalmists are very close to the prophets (cf. Isaiah 1:10–17; Micah 6:6–8). The message in these places is not that all organised religion should be abolished. God's message has come to a *people*, and there will consequently always be some need to make an 'organised' response to him. The Psalms do require, however, a careful self-examination in matters of worship. The worshipper is in an assembly, but not just of the crowd. 'For God alone' says the Psalmist 'my soul waits in silence' (62:1, 5). This above all is the attitude that the Psalms both facilitate and require.

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## POWER: PLAYING ACCORDING TO SATAN'S RULES?

Stephen Timmis

### Some reflections on 2 Corinthians 10–13

'There's glory for you!' said Humpty Dumpty. 'I don't know what you mean by "glory"', Alice said. 'I meant, "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!"' 'But "glory" doesn't mean "a nice knock-down argument"', Alice objected. 'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more or less.'

It is clear from the chapters before us that the Apostle Paul suffered from his fair share of Humpty-Dumptyacs. Interlopers whose approach to, and understanding of, both the Gospel and Christian discipleship were not merely different from that of Paul, but in fact contradictory, the two being mutually exclusive. However, although it is only these chapters that reflect the head-on confrontation, the intruders

were in one sense only exploiting existing prejudices that are both implicit and explicit in the previous correspondence. For it seems to me that the tensions evident throughout the two epistles, and that climax in these chapters, are in fact primarily the repercussions of an on-going debate over the nature of true spirituality. Nowhere is this conflict of ideologies and world-views so evident as in their understanding of those significant and emotive words 'knowledge, wisdom and power'.

Let us begin by attempting to identify the nature of the problem that Paul faced within Corinth, and then to see the implications of the various influences that were at work for church life, concluding with an analysis of Paul's response.

### 1. The nature of the opposition

Assumptions and generalisations abound with regard to Corinth, and many of them have little basis in fact. We need to tread carefully therefore in any attempted reconstruction of the city, and although graphic accounts of their moral degeneracy may be the stuff of gripping sermons we must not allow our speculations to exert a controlling influence on our exegesis. The same cautionary note needs to be sounded in relation to any attempt to identify the nature of the opposition Paul faced, either from within the church itself or from the manipulative interlopers. However, given that caution, certain deductions can be made from the correspondence which will prove helpful in establishing a framework for our study.

Certainly Corinth could hardly be considered an island of chastity in a sea of promiscuity. Vice and depravity were no strangers to the inhabitants who practised their religion with a certain indulgent flair. It was religiously diverse and economically prosperous. As Fee points out, the church was in many ways a mirror of the city, as seen by Paul's reminder to some of the Corinthians of their former 'past-times' (cf. ch. 6:9-11), and also the way in which he emphasises the diversity of those who comprise the church of God in Corinth—Jews, Greeks, slave, free (1 Cor. 12:13). Given the context out of which these individuals were plucked it should not surprise us that they brought with them considerable excess baggage. Baggage which tended to weigh them down, and distort their perception of the Gospel and its consequences. We have no reason to doubt that Paul was as clear in his preaching in Corinth as he was in say Pisidian Antioch or Athens (where we have an abbreviated account of his message). But because of the presuppositions and prejudices of his hearers, Paul would have said one thing and they would have understood it with a slightly different nuance, or as F. F. Bruce expressed it 'concepts and terms which originally had one meaning tended to take on another meaning from their new surrounding'.

Clearly, Paul did not doubt that God had done something dramatic and decisive in the hearts and minds of those who 'sat under' his ministry. Their response to the apostolic message enabled him to declare without fear of contradiction that although he arrived in Corinth 'in fear and in much trembling', his preaching was 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (1 Cor. 2:4, 5). But that divine irruption of grace was but the beginning. Many of them failed to comprehend the significance of what had happened, and therefore to appreciate the consequences. It can not be put better than it has already by Fee: 'Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was yet in them'. This fact is essentially what the Corinthian correspondence is all about, for although the vast majority of the issues addressed by Paul are ethical or behavioural, Paul is always concerned about the thinking that lay at the back of their actions. What was going on amongst these Christians was not simply overt and conscious disobedience to the claims of Christ upon their lives. They had at worst justified their behaviour by adapting their theology,

or more likely, they had simply acted in a way that was consistent with their distorted perception of the Gospel and Christian discipleship.

This is an important point (not least because it gives us an insight into the apostolic methodology when dealing with either confused saints or manipulative heretics). It is unlikely that the interlopers had arrived when 1 Corinthians and indeed 2 Corinthians 1-9 was written. Paul was dealing with an inadequate understanding of the Gospel that was indigenous to the Corinthian congregation. The individuals that came from Jerusalem and whose arrival and activity so disturbed the apostle, exploited an existing tension, and capitalised upon a number of theological aberrations that were not only present within the church but rampant. Aberrations that were the result of simply absorbing the Pauline message into an existing Hellenistic and dualistic mind-set.

It will perhaps be helpful if at this stage we can identify some of the underlying theological assumptions by the manner in which they expressed themselves in the behaviour of these Christians.

For some of the Corinthians, the crucifixion of Jesus was significant only in as much as it was the means by which they were enabled to partake of the heavenly essence or Holy Spirit. Because of their experience of him, they now knew heavenly reality. They had not only tasted of the age to come, they had digested it. They had arrived, and the coming kingdom of which Paul spoke was already theirs. This seems clear from the biting irony of 4:8.

'You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us.'

As Bruce observes 'what could the hope of bodily resurrection add in the way of bliss to those who knew themselves to be here and now "men of the Spirit"?' This over-realised eschatology, or 'spiritualised eschatology' as Fee prefers to identify it, is the rational behind their arrogant indulgence of the heinous sin referred to in ch. 5. As a consequence of the amalgamation of their spiritual conceit with their hellenistic thought-patterns, they were above such trivia (Ch. 8:12). 'All things are lawful' they argued therefore it was of little consequence how people behaved because such activity was external, and therefore irrelevant in terms of their spiritual attainments (cf. 6:12-20).

The problem addressed in ch. 7, in which Paul addresses a question posed by the Corinthians themselves (cf. v. 1), reflects the same dualistic base from which the Corinthians were operating, only with the particular group coming to apparently quite different conclusions. However, if you believe that the 'spiritual' is everything and the 'physical' is nothing, then you can basically take your pick whether you indulge your desires or ignore them.

The same tension comes out starkly in chapters 12-14, where Paul addresses the 'spirituality' issue head on. Fee may be right (although I think not) in his observation that there is no real evidence of rivalry in Corinth, nor in their use of gifts, but there is every reason to suppose that there was a basic indifference towards one another, as we shall develop in the next section. If the usage of angelic tongues (13:1) was part

of the evidence of their highly developed spiritualised state, it typified their attitude and approach. Put at its simplest, the only thing that mattered was their own spiritual ecstasy.

The same issues are discernible in 2 Corinthians. If we consider the thrust of Paul's teaching in chapters 3 and 4 where he is speaking at length about the nature of the new covenant, his emphasis is upon 'the glory'. Because the gospel is what it is, and because it does what it does it is something for the world to see and hear. Paul revelled in the fact that he was called to be a minister of the new covenant, with its glorious message of life. This would have contrasted with the underlying Corinthian view that seemed to understand the gospel in somewhat esoteric terms. For Paul it was something to declare to the world with great boldness of speech (3:12), and one of the genuine marks of the Spirit's activity in the life of his people is liberty in the sense of enabling and encouraging them to make an open declaration of their faith (v. 17: cf. 4:13). Paul clearly sees a connection between the spiritualised eschatology of the Corinthians and their incipient gnosticism (I'm aware such a term is anachronistic but it is a convenient term that usefully communicates something to this particular audience). Hence his assertion in 3:12, 'having therefore such a hope . . .', dwelling, which comes as a precursor to further encouragement and exhortation about the ambassadorial function of the people of God (ch. 5).

## 2. The implications for church-life

It is worth spending a little time trying to assess what the implications of this faulty theology were for church life. We have already touched upon various issues which should give a pointer to the direction to be taken.

One of the major consequences of their Hellenised understanding of the gospel was, as I have already stated, a basic indifference to others due to an inordinate preoccupation with themselves. Consequently, recourse to the law was the natural response to a wrong suffered (ch. 6:1-7), regardless of the consequences for the reputation of the gospel.

The question of tender consciences was immaterial to the specially endowed Corinthians. Because of their superior understanding they 'knew' (a significant and key word) that eating meat couldn't affect their exalted spiritual existence. Therefore they could eat and drink to their hearts content and remain blissfully indifferent to the struggles and turmoil of their brethren (ch.8).

This indifference manifested itself with alarming consequences within the context of the Lord's supper (ch. 11:17-34) when the disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' comes into sharp focus.

[Without getting embroiled in discussion over two very difficult passages it is at least interesting to note that in ch. 11:2-16 where Paul deals with the question of 'head-covering' and authority, he concludes by saying:

'But if one is inclined to be contentious we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.' (v. 16)

Likewise, in the concluding section of ch. 14 (vv. 34-40) when addressing the issue of women keeping silent, it is possible that the prohibition originated as a 'prophetic word' within Corinth itself, and Paul was actually refuting it by reference to the other churches. Cf. v. 36:

'Was it from you that the word of God went forth? Or has it come to you only?'

Which ties in with his reference to 'all the churches of the saints' in v. 33.

In other words, the independent and arrogant attitude of individuals reflected itself in the independent and arrogant (notice the scope of the prohibition—'churches' v. 34) spirit of the church as a whole.]

Paul deals explicitly with the whole question of spirituality in chs. 12-14 and defines it in altogether different terms from the Corinthian *pneumatikio*. For them it was a matter of individual experience and ecstatic utterances. The corporate gathering of the church was simply an arena for their own 'communion with God', and to display their own spirituality. Ch. 14:26 is not a mandate for church meetings (charismatic or otherwise) it is simply a description of what was going on, and clearly Paul is none too happy because it is yet another expression of their strident individualism.

## 3. The manner of Paul's response

We now come to examine Paul's response, and focus primarily upon 2 Corinthians 10-13. The assumption underlying this approach is that these chapters form a distinct section in which Paul is responding to bad news. Chs. 1-9 reveal Paul in an almost euphoric mood. News from Titus (ch. 7:6, 7) tells him that the church have responded well to his stern letter (Corinthians C, of which we have no knowledge) and relationships between Paul and this troublesome church have been restored. Not that Paul is naive enough to think that all of his problems are over. Chs. 1-9 find him re-iterating a number of the themes we have identified in 1 Corinthians, but he feels confident enough in the relationship to speak openly and frankly with them. He is in the 'teaching mode', and is not engaging in open censure in these chapters. He knows that the Corinthians have a number of areas of theological weakness which manifest themselves in inadequate Christian living (cf. the corporate individualism already made reference to, and the extended teaching given by Paul in chs. 8 & 9 on giving and the responsibility of the Corinthians to the Jerusalem church). The restored relationship gives him the opportunity to address some of these pastorally.

But things are very different now. Interlopers have arrived and exploited the situation. All the negative feelings towards Paul have been re-kindled. All of the suspicions of him have been aroused. All of the criticism of his ministry, both in terms of his method and his message, has re-surfaced.

However, there is nothing new in the issues that Paul addresses so passionately. That is why we have taken so long to try and establish the nature of the opposition that Paul faced. Although chs. 10-13 are

distinct, they cannot be treated separately. In many ways the situation that provoked Paul's response was a logical, albeit tragic, conclusion. All the raw material was present within the Corinthian church, making it easy for these false teachers to capture the hearts and minds of the immature and undiscerning Corinthians.

Yet despite the pain suffered by Paul upon hearing of the news from Corinth, there is still remarkably an underlying note of confidence. If we may borrow Paul's own language when writing to another church, he is certain that God has begun a good work within Corinth, and therefore equally certain that the good work will be brought to completion (cf. Phil. 1:6), and that God will vindicate Paul's ministry amongst these people.

Let us look at two passages within this section, observing how Paul deals with them, because thus we will have an insight into his view of Christian ministry and his understanding of power. An understanding that not only stands in stark contrast to that of the interlopers, but also calls into question many of the prevailing attitudes within the contemporary church.

### Chapter 10:1-6

Paul begins his counter-attack in a surprising but highly significant manner. The situation is such that not only is his apostolic credibility being called into question, but so too is his whole ministry, and his integrity as a person. It would have been easy for Paul to have summoned all of his Christ-given authority as the apostle to the Gentiles and 'father' of the Corinthian church. But he resolutely rejects any identification with the style of leadership being modelled by the Judaising 'Johnny-come-lately's'; a rejection he maintains throughout the section, because he prefers to model himself upon the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason is that, in essence, HE is the issue for Paul. It is not a personality conflict that is going on here, but perspectives that affect the very gospel itself.

Part of the complaint against Paul was his unimpressive manner. He seemed to lack that personal charisma that is supposed to set leaders apart. He had a meekness about him that his opponents confused for weakness. Paul was unapologetic. The earthly ministry of Christ was characterised by meekness and gentleness. He was the one who claimed to be 'meek and lowly', the one of whom it was said 'a bruised reed he would not break and a smoking flax he would not quench'. Paul lines himself up with such a model of ministry, even in the face of such vindictive opposition and even when the stakes are so high!

'So' says the apostle 'I am timid when I am with you, but bold in your absence, am I? Well I ask you not to make it necessary for me to be bold and stern when I come to visit you. Because, make no mistake, I will be very bold when I come face-to-face with those interlopers!'

We then see the nub of the problem. Paul was despised because it was said that he operated 'according to the flesh', or, in other words, on a

purely human level. He lacked that supernatural spark so necessary for true leadership. Listen to how Don Carson describes it:

'They are accusing him of being an ineffective leader, given to excessive timidity, capable of not more than third-rate preaching, and having too little background in spiritual and visionary experiences to claim the allegiance of the Corinthians'.

'You deserve someone better than Paul' they said. It should not surprise us that the puffed-up Corinthians believed them.

However, Paul exposes the method of evaluation employed by the false teachers as being fundamentally flawed. 'They're using the wrong criteria altogether' says the apostle. The phrase 'we walk in the flesh' means something more than simply 'we live in this world'. Paul is in fact saying that this world is the sphere of his activity. Or perhaps we could phrase it a little more colloquially: 'we live in the real world, whereas these interlopers, with their lofty eloquence and their sublime experiences know nothing about that!' They know nothing about helping the people of God to live out their faith in the day-to-day. Nor of applying their faith in the nitty-gritty business of human affairs and relationships.

But even so, although he operated in the real world, the weapons that Paul employed and the arsenal at his disposal was anything but worldly.

Obviously such a statement begs, however, a critical question: what weapons are being referred to?

In terms of the construction of vv. 3-5, v. 4a reiterates v. 3 and prepares for Paul's positive claim that the weapons are in fact 'powerful in God's warfare for the destruction of the enemy's stronghold'. Thus Paul informs his readers of the nature of the weapons and the purpose for which they are employed.

#### a) *The nature of the weapons*

Paul is contrasting the weapons at his disposal with those considered so indispensable by his opponents, 'human ingenuity, rhetoric, showmanship, a certain splashiness and forwardness in spiritual pretensions, charm and powerful personal charisma' (Carson). It was Paul's refusal to use such gimmickry that made him so despicable in the eyes of the sophists. But Paul is adamant: such techniques were 'worldly', 'fleshly', and hold no attraction for Paul. He relied on prayer, holiness and the Word of God (cf. Eph. 6:13-18). All of which were incomprehensible to the Judaisers, with their pre-occupation with the outward and the immediate. 'But these weapons' says Paul, 'my weapons, whilst being nonsense to the unregenerate are in fact divinely powerful'. That is, their effectiveness depends upon God, and these are the weapons that he uses to achieve his ends and fulfil his purposes.

#### b) *The purpose for which they are employed*

The 'destruction of fortresses' or 'demolition of strongholds' in v. 4b is expanded and explained in v. 5. 'Our battle is to break down every deceptive argument and every imposing defence that men erect against the true knowledge of God. We fight, through

our spiritual weapons of prayer, holiness and the gospel, to capture every thought until it acknowledges the authority of Christ'. These weapons destroy the way people think, demolish their sinful thought patterns, the mental structures by which they live their lives in rebellion against God. What Paul wanted the Corinthians to know was that he saw the issues for what they truly were. The false teachers, with their rhetoric and charm could gain a following. Their claim to divine encounters would quickly draw a crowd. But there was no substance to their claims, and their impact was superficial at the very best. To be sure, they had power to influence and impress people, but they were powerless to fundamentally change people!

'Not so with us' says Paul, and he proceeds to speak about his own ministry, and in fact the very existence of the church at Corinth, as proof-positive of his claims (vv. 13–18).

It is on the basis of such claims, and such a presentation of truth that Paul makes an initial appeal to his readers. He is willing to deal with the trouble-makers once the church as a whole returns to their initial obedience to Christ. And this is an important qualification. Paul will act independently, even when the situation would seem to warrant him acting as a benign dictator. If these heretics are to be dealt with, then the gathered church is the context for their discipline. This is an issue to which we shall return.

### Chapter 13:1–4

Paul is now coming to the end of his appeal. It has been a very difficult letter to write. There have been times during it when he has felt embarrassed and intensely uncomfortable (cf. ch. 12). He has been pushed into a corner, and it is only his commitment to the gospel and the Corinthians themselves that have made it necessary for him to respond thus.

But now he must finally 'lay it on the line'. 'I'm coming to visit' warns Paul somewhat ominously, 'and then I will face the issues, confront the detractors and deal with the sin. You doubt that Christ is speaking through me (v. 3). You sit in judgement on me and my ministry and cast aspersions upon my integrity. Well, if proof is what you want!'

We need to tread a little carefully at this juncture, because it is easy to attribute to Paul sentiments that may well be contrary to what he actually intended.

Carson understands it in this way: 'Paul responds by saying that if it is power they want to see as the absolute criterion of genuine apostolicity, they may get more than they bargained for: he may be forced to display the power of the resurrected Christ, speaking through him in thunderous tones of punishment . . .'

Paul may very well be saying that, and Carson has a number of worthies to support this view. But I must confess to being a little uneasy about it. Certainly Paul has seemed to threaten the rod in a previous letter (as indeed he does in ch. 10, with the important qualification of v. 6), or at least the prospect of it in 1 Cor. 4:21:

'What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?'

However, it is possible to interpret that verse a little differently. He was in fact saying to the Corinthians that they would seem to prefer him to come with the rod, in a show of strength and forcefulness. Whereas, Paul would only come with love and a spirit of gentleness, to the immature and easily-led Corinthians, because that was the manner in which he conducted his ministry. (This does not mean that Paul was 'soft on sin' as 1 Cor. 5 demonstrates, but even that was restorative, and, once again, the onus was upon the church.) Paul speaks in v. 19 about finding out the power of some in Corinth, because that is what the kingdom of God is all about. They may use fine-sounding words, but can they actually achieve anything in terms of changed lives. For that assumption under girds everything Paul says about power in the Corinthian correspondence.

In 1 Cor. 1:13–2:5, he uses the term four times.

1) In v. 18 it is in relation to the 'word of the cross', which for those who are being saved is the 'power of God'. That is, it is the means that God uses to rescue people.

2) In v. 24, the message of a crucified Christ may be a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks but 'to the called it is the power of God' because it is the means of their salvation.

3) In ch. 2:4–5 Paul declares that his preaching was in 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power' so that the faith of the Corinthians should rest unequivocally on the power of God. It is unlikely, given the context, that the demonstration of the Spirit and of power is a reference to 'signs and wonders'. Paul is simply saying that despite his human infirmity, God had used the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified to transform sinners to saints. Their repentance and faith was the demonstration of the Spirit and power (a hendiadys).

If we bear this in mind therefore when we come to 13:1–4, it may prove helpful. If Paul is simply saying that the Corinthians may get more than they had bargained for, then he would seem to be indiscriminating in his threat, but more significantly descending to their level, and playing them at their own game. But too much is at stake for that!

What Paul is depending upon is the *sanctifying* power of Christ at work within the Corinthians themselves, bringing them to the point where they will see the issues and they will contend for the truth. After all, Paul's apostolic authority was an authority to edify (v. 10).

Paul once again draws attention to his Saviour. The same Christ that subjected himself to the ultimate ignominy and shame of crucifixion, yet through which he achieved the salvation of sinners, and their transformation to glory. Thus Paul ends 2 Cor. where he began 1 Cor. The cross may appear foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is in fact God's ultimate victory and the basis for all that follows.

As he did in the opening verse of ch. 10, Paul says that 'Christ crucified' is his model. As Barrett points out 'the kind of vulnerability that Christ himself chose to adopt' will be the vulnerability that typifies the ministry of the apostle even in such dire circumstances, and the power of God will be manifest

through Paul's sacrificial service on behalf of the Corinthians.

Consistently then, we find Paul using different criteria from the interlopers. They placed great stress upon the outward. They were the triumphalists who claimed to live in possession of all the promises of the Gospel. They were not mere mortals, but sophisticated and eloquent 'experts' who knew nothing of defeat. Nothing of weakness. Nothing of suffering, neither would they tolerate it in others (in contrast to Paul, cf. 11:28-29 whose ultimate mark of apostolic authority was his concern and empathy).

Paul, on the other hand, glories in his weakness. The things that he will boast in are not his achievements, but those very things that make him so despicable to the sophists and their supporters. Power for Paul was something that belonged to God and which he exercised through human weakness. True power could not be measured by visions, nor ecstasy, nor any other human criteria. It could only be measured by transformed human lives. By sinners growing in grace. By the existence of a true church (however immature) in the midst of corruption and decay.

Power for Paul was something available for the individual to enable him/her to suffer (cf. Phil. 3:10. NB. the order!) and to serve for the sake of the gospel, the good of the church, and the glory of God. The Christian life, in the here-and-now, was to be modelled not upon the glorified Christ, but the crucified Christ. (cf. 12:1; 14:1; 14:12, true spirituality is experienced in commitment to the good of others). Hence Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 2:2. Paul was not simply referring to the gospel message, but rather that all of his ministry concerned a crucified Christ, who is not only the means of salvation but the means of sanctification also. God achieves his purposes through human infirmity and even failure (cf. 11:32, 33) so that only God should receive the glory.

### Relections

I want to just refer in passing to a number of areas where I think what Paul says about power and Christian ministry is very pertinent to the contemporary church; areas in which we could unwittingly be playing according to Satan's rules. For it is pertinent to note that there is no evidence to suggest that the interlopers were anything but 'orthodox' in their essential doctrine. The area of weakness and the point at which they were deviant was their style and emphasis.

#### a) *Christian activity in the former eastern bloc*

Much of the 'ministry' of missions seems to be concerned with high profile ventures. There seems to be great delight in the fact that we now have access to high-ranking politicians, and we are being asked to become involved in some of the former republics of the USSR by Ministers of State. I would not want to decry this, nor debunk it entirely. But we must not make the mistake of thinking that this is of the essence of Christian ministry. The early church was hardly in a position to tread the corridors of power.

Yet through the power of God lives were changed and insignificant and inconsequential individuals were used to create a new community that through manifest weakness challenged the Greek and Roman world of philosophical genius and political might, and brought it to its knees.

Thus, in these emerging democracies(?), we need to invest time and resources in the lives of the national Christians and indigenous churches, to help them (in the midst of evident weakness) challenge their own culture, and through the power of God, to change sinners into saints.

It is also worth asking whether or not we are in danger of alienating ourselves from 'ordinary' Christians by identifying ourselves with those within the power structures because of the cynicism and mistrust that abounds.

#### b) *The application of management techniques to church leadership*

I'm not convinced that the goals of efficiency and profitability are vital to the Christian community. Yet modern management is understandably pre-occupied with these issues. Therefore the nature of management is shaped by the achievement of those ends. It's about viewing people as resources, and helping people to realise their potential so that they can help the company. When managers talk about service, it is invariably utilistic. You can serve people as long as in so doing they are better equipped to help your department to achieve.

Christian leaders (perhaps the time has arrived when we need to adopt a different term) are called to be servants, not as a means to an end but as an end in itself. For even when people do not respond, and when they fail to realise their potential, the responsibility is still to serve. Service within the Kingdom of God is not a rung on the way to the top of the ladder of success. It is the top. The power of God is something available for 'leaders' to help them serve and to help them be at the disposal of others. We need to ask searching questions about the extent to which we have been influenced by the 'achievement sin-drome'.

#### c) *The pre-occupation with 'liberty' in preaching*

Modern concepts of preaching have more to do with oratory than they do with biblical exposition. When preachers speak about 'liberty' they frequently mean that they are looking for fluency, passion and erudition (not to mention a good feeling), the ability to influence people, to sway opinion and to make an impression upon those listening to them.

Such a model (because it is essentially a power model) begs many questions, and I am not sure that we should be so ready to dismiss or qualify Paul's claim of 'fear and trembling', nor his less than favourable reputation amongst the Corinthians as a public speaker. Perhaps he would never have been invited to Keswick?

The primary 'target' for a biblical ministry is surely the mind, because it is only as the mind is informed that the heart can be stirred and lives changed. True

preaching then should be creating a congregation of Bereans, yet eloquence primarily affects the emotions and often 'persuades' people to believe or do things that they may want to reconsider in the cold light of day. And that is possibly the essence of power. Perhaps we should be examining ways in which we can develop alternatives (or at least additions) to the monologue.

*d) The personality cult*

This manifests itself in two particular ways.

Firstly, in the desire many evangelicals have in seeing famous people 'enlisted', and then paraded before a wide-eyed public, thinking that it somehow gives credibility to the Gospel.

Secondly, in the tendency to create Christian personalities. To elevate certain people, by virtue of their personality or flair or ability to a position of influence within the Christian community. One such 'personality' wrote recently in an article about some young people who asked him 'how he got where he was today'. The comment was then made by the person concerned 'I know what they mean'. Somehow, it all seems to be a little out of step with Paul's qualifications for apostleship listed in 2 Cor. 11:23-29.

There is also a need amongst many Christians to create personalities. Many Christians suffer from a low self-image, because of which they feel a need to identify with successful Christians, and to 'bask in the reflected glory'. This is a problem that may have been an issue in Corinth, hence Paul's assertion in 1 Cor. 1:30 of what the believers have in Christ.

*e) The prominence of visions and 'words from God'*

Within the contemporary Christian culture, much is heard about these particular phenomena. Without wanting to dismiss them. I have a sneaking suspicion that there is a 'power element' involved. Being able to claim either indicates a certain intimacy with 'the divine', and often gives the exponent of the gift a place of influence and status within the fellowship. This is seen at its most blatant when a 'word from God' is couched in the first person singular, and is given as a word of direction to an individual or a group.

*f) The contemporary understanding of revival and the March for Jesus*

'It is a good thing to desire that God would revive His church' wrote David Morgan in 1859, and yet there are understandings of revival that once again seem to have been infected with the power virus. The picture is drawn of a Church mighty and militant, enjoying the acclaim of the world and even having its prophets consulted by world leaders. This contrasts starkly with the reality of the early church, whom God blessed mightily and yet who soon knew the pain of persecution. I have no problem with the view that God is going to do something marvellous in terms of the expansion of the Gospel, but I become very concerned when our understanding is of a tri-

umphalistic church, rather than a suffering church. That is a church whose experience follows that of a glorified Christ rather than a suffering Messiah.

This leads on to my concern about the theology that undergirds the 'March for Jesus'. The concept of 'claiming the ground' struggles to find New Testament support, and also fails to appreciate the flow of redemptive history. But the idea of making a statement by virtue of a self-conscious show of strength on the streets of our towns and cities, once again comes close to undermining the idea of a suffering church, impacting a society by their sacrificial commitment to service. Perhaps it would be more appropriate for the resources expended in this venture, both at a local and a national level, to be used to support people in acts of costly compassion within the community. And, at the very least, if all the Christians who give their time marching were to give that day in hospitals, or with ageing neighbours, or with the destitute and drop-outs of our society, then perhaps the world might take notice of this powerful gospel that can change lives and create within people a willingness and eagerness to serve.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I have tried to address certain areas where I think, at one point or another, every evangelical constituency needs to be challenged. I have tried to be a little provocative. Yet it is my hope that we can not only agree on the areas where we are all (to a greater or lesser extent) playing according to Satan's rules, but to deal with the practical ways we can all be encouraged to adopt a different, and more apostolic model of ministry.

## References

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**Stephen Timmis is the Director of Radstock Ministries. He provides the following description of the work of his agency.**

Radstock Ministries exists to serve the local church, both in the UK and in the former Soviet Union. Our goal is to mobilise local churches for mission, because of a conviction that, in the words of Emil Brunner, 'the church exists by mission as fire exists by burning'. Mission should be the heart-beat of each congregation, principally because it is the heart beat of God. In line with this goal we:

- a) teach on mission through meetings, seminars and publications;
- b) give opportunity for churches to get involved directly in mission.

Undergirding everything is a commitment to see Christians grow in their knowledge of the Bible. There is a dual-rational behind this, because a developing understanding of the Bible will:

- 1) convince people of the importance of mission, for that is its unifying theme;
- 2) equip people to communicate the gospel, both by their lives and their words.

The style of our ministry is long-term, low-key and relational and the focus of our current activity is Latvia. 1993 should see us move into Estonia, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine as we press on with our goal of seeing teams made

up of Christians from the former republics, alongside Christians from the West, planting churches amongst the unreached peoples of the world.

# 'TERRITORIAL SPIRITS': THE NEW MYTHOLOGY

Mike R. Taylor

John Dawson, Director of Youth With A Mission (YWAM) in Los Angeles, California, has stated:

Satan has assigned a hierarchy of principalities, powers and rulers of darkness to specific territories on the earth.<sup>1</sup>

The demonic spirits to whom this role is said to have been assigned are now commonly known as 'territorial spirits'. And the acceptance of the notion of 'territorial spirits' by a number of so-called 'Christian leaders' of today has resulted in the generation of an entire mythology. This mythology purports to give an account of both the supposed origin of 'territorial spirits' and also their destiny at the end of this age.

## Misunderstanding the principalities

In his article *Understanding Principalities and Powers*, Thomas White has attempted to explain the origin of 'territorial spirits'. He commenced with these words:

'The study of both Old and New Testaments, with additional evidence from Apocryphal texts reveals three categories of fallen angels.'<sup>2</sup>

This should immediately sound a few alarm bells! Since the Bible itself intentionally withholds information from us concerning the world of angels and demons, advocates of 'territorial spirits' are obliged to supplement the revelation of God from uninspired sources. However, the fact that they are willing to do this shows that, for practical purposes, they are willing to place alternative authorities on the same level as the very Word of God.

It should, therefore, not surprise us to find that this theory of the origin of 'territorial spirits' contains many elements incompatible with the Biblical revelation. At the outset, White claimed that there are three categories of angels:

1. 'those angels who fell originally with Lucifer at the time of his rebellion and who are still active in the deception and affliction of people'.<sup>2</sup>

2. 'the "sons of God" (angelic beings) of Genesis 6:2 who committed such abominable acts of immorality with the "daughters of men" (women), they were "bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day" (Jude 6)'.<sup>2</sup>
3. 'angelic beings who were given charge to watch and rule over certain groupings of mankind'.<sup>2</sup>

This idea that there are three categories of fallen angels has no Scriptural warrant at all. It is clear from the Biblical data that the angelic fall occurred before Eve's temptation. This fall encompassed all angels now fallen and not merely a subcategory of such angels.

The first category is, therefore, accepted, but not merely as one of three categories. on the contrary, it would appear that this first 'category' is actually a description of all fallen angels.

## 'Immoral angels'

As for the second category, although the phrase 'sons of God' (as used in Job 38:7) can refer to angels, it is unlikely that this phrase refers to angels in Genesis 6. The main reason for this is that the Bible was written by God in the form of a continuously expanding revelation in its progress from Genesis to Revelation. As the phrase 'sons of God' was not used of angels before the reference in the *Book of Job*, it is unlikely that it would have such a meaning in a book placed earlier in the Canon of Scripture.

The most likely meaning of the phrase in that context is of human beings of the godly line of Seth. It would then refer to a mixing of the lineage of Seth with the lineage of Cain, and bringing about a diminishing of the testimony through Seth which God had established in the earth.<sup>3</sup>

Some have used the reference to giants here to suggest that these were the offspring of sexual relationships between fallen angels and women, but the passage does not say this. It merely states that: