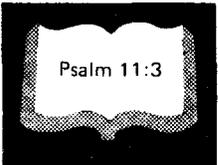


Foundations

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Council

If the foundations
be destroyed, what
can the righteous do?



Psalm 11:3

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THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE
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BLASPHEMY AND THE LAW

A theological response to the Law Commission's invitation for views on offences against religion and public worship.

Professor Donald MacLeod
Edinburgh

In June 1981 the British Evangelical Council was informed that the Law Commission was asking for comments on their Working Paper concerning possible changes to the law of blasphemy.

Amongst others from whom the BEC sought advice was Professor Donald MacLeod of the Free Church College, Edinburgh. Because we think his subsequent Paper on the basic theological issue raised, 'Does the first table of the Law merit civil legislation?', worthy of a wider readership, we are grateful to the writer for permission to publish it here.

Definition of blasphemy

The Law Commission, quoting Stephen's Digest of the Criminal Law lay it down that in any legal definition of blasphemy the emphasis must fall on the mode and manner of expression rather than on the content: "The test to be applied is as to the manner in which the doctrines are advocated and not as to the substance of the doctrines themselves."

The theologians' approach has been the exact opposite. They have focussed primarily on content. James Durham, for example, defines blasphemy as "a wronging of God's holy majesty by some reproachful speeches or expressions, uttered to His disgrace" and then analyses his definition as including the following elements:

1. Ascribing to God something unbecoming to His glory.
2. Denying to God something which is essential to His glory.
3. Ascribing to a creature what is proper (unique) to God.

He then gives as examples:

1. Denying the Trinity.

2. Denying the deity of Christ (or indeed, any of the affirmations of Chalcedon).
3. Denying the personality of the Spirit.
4. "Blasphemy against the Spirit".
5. To hear blasphemy uttered and feel no suitable revulsion.
6. Lots, omens, superstitions (astrology).

There can be no doubt but that Durham's is the definition which accords most closely with Scripture. For example, when Isaiah (65:7) speaks of Israel blaspheming God upon the hills he is referring not to a manner of speaking which is scurrilous or contemptuous or ludicrous but to idolatrous worship in which, probably, the name of Jehovah was not even mentioned. Similarly, when Jesus and Stephen were convicted of blasphemy the charge proceeded not on the basis of their language being intemperate or indecent but of their claims being theologically subversive. The same truth emerges from the reference to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The sin consists not in the tone adopted but in the sentiments expressed.

The practical consequence of these facts is that no biblically motivated plea for legislation against blasphemy can be content to concentrate on the manner of utterance and ignore the actual content of the opinions expressed.

The teaching of the Old Testament

The most relevant passage here is Leviticus 24:16: "And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death; and all the congregation shall certainly stone him."

1. The provision clearly indicates that it is inherently competent for the legislature to take cognisance of blasphemy.

2. The question as to which punishment is appropriate must be answered in the light of the difference between the Old and New dispensations. The discontinuance of the death penalty for desecration of the Sabbath and disobedience to parents, along with our Lord's specific abrogation of the death penalty for adultery, indicates that we cannot simply transfer the penal code of the Old Testament into the age of the church. Ecclesiologically, the Leviticus enactment means that the blasphemer must be cut off (by

excommunication) from the people of God. Typologically, it finds its fulfilment in God's final condemnation and wrath.

The teaching of the New Testament

There are three points to be noted:

1. While in no way mitigating the OT condemnation of blasphemy, the NT habitually lists it with sins which we easily tolerate and which no one would ever think of defining as crimes: cf. Colossians 3:8, 2 Timothy 3:2. Collating these, we find blasphemy ranked with anger, pride, malice, foul language, self-love, covetousness, boasting, ingratitude and false accusations.

2. The NT nowhere suggests that blasphemy should be proceeded against by the civil power. Instead, it suggests two courses of action:

a. corrective teaching: "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:25)

b. church discipline: In 1 Timothy 1:20 Paul speaks of having delivered certain apostates over to Satan "that they may learn not to blaspheme".

3. Virtually all the references to blasphemy in the Pastoral Epistles contemplate it as a phenomenon occurring within the church itself. This means that any biblically controlled legislation would have to discriminate not only between truth and error in terms of natural religion but in terms of Christian orthodoxy.

The theological development

1. The mediaeval church condemned blasphemy as a capital offence at the Council of Aachen in 818, defining the offence as vilifying Christ, the church, the Virgin, the saints or the sacraments.

2. The unanimous view of the Reformed creeds is expressed in the Westminster Confession (XXIII:III): "the civil magistrate hath authority and it is his duty to take order that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed." The same position is taken up by the

First and Second Helvetic Confessions, the Belgic Confession, the Gallican Confession, the Scots Confession and the Second Book of Discipline.

We should note:

1. The breadth of responsibility herein defined: not only blasphemy, but heresy, schism, atheism and corruptions in worship and discipline.

2. The basis of the magistrate's interest in such religious offences is that they have civil and social consequences. Walker (Scottish Theology and Theologians, p.138) quotes one unidentified authority to the following effect: "The magistrate punisheth heresies and false doctrines as they disturb the peace of the civil state." Walker himself holds that in suppressing heresy or schism the magistrate as such has only civil ends in view: "The state has to do with distinctly religious offences not as they are religious but only as they may be breaches of civil order." This is also the view endorsed by Cunningham in his Discussions on Church Principles "The magistrate restrains and punishes atheists, blasphemers, heretics and schismatics as the violaters of justice and public peace.

3. According to Cunningham, the Westminster Confession leaves untouched the whole question of the means the magistrate is to employ. In making this claim, his concern is to vindicate the Confession from the charge of advocating persecution. There is a better defence, however, indicated by MacPherson: "The deliverance of the Confession must be understood of moral support and encouragement to ecclesiastical officers in the administration of doctrine and discipline." The statement re: suppression of blasphemy is set in the context of the broader principle that it is the magistrate's duty to ensure "unity and peace be preserved in the church"; and the Confession is not, pace Cunningham, silent as to the means to be employed because it goes on to say: "For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods". Bearing in mind that the Church of Scotland in adopting the Confession expressed certain reservations as to the wording of this sentence it does indicate, nevertheless, that what is in view is blasphemy that is internal to the church (ie. it threatens the peace and unity of the church); that the primary responsibility for dealing with it lies with synods (using not the magisterial sword but ecclesiastical

4.

censures); and that the duty of the magistrate is to give moral support and encouragement to the synods as they carry out their remit.

4. It would be an anachronism to credit the Westminster divines with a developed doctrine of toleration. Such a doctrine was, however, implicit in their views on liberty of conscience and it became an explicit part of the constitution of the Free Church in 1846 when the General Assembly (Act XII) declared that the Church disclaimed intolerant or persecuting principles and did not regard her Confession of Faith as favouring intolerance and persecution or any principles inconsistent with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment.

Conclusions

1. Any biblical definition of blasphemy must reckon not only with the mode of expression of obnoxious sentiments but also with the matter and content of these sentiments. It is with blasphemy as thus defined that church discipline has to deal. And the moment we admit that any opinion may be expressed, however theologically deviant, provided it is not expressed scurrilously, contemptuously or indecently, we have abandoned theological for political ground and replaced an absolutist ethic with a relativistic (situational) one. Those who seek a simplistic transference of biblical teaching to the statute-book must outlaw blasphemy as such, not blasphemy expressed in a particular way.

2. To base a law against blasphemy on the principle of protecting individual feelings would be highly dangerous. For example, many of the expressions used by the Reformers and their successors would "wound and outrage" the feelings of Roman Catholics. Similarly, evangelical theologians today might hurt the feelings of modernists; of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists; and of Moonies, Scientologists, Diabolists and Necromancers. The nett result might be the affording of protection to "religions" which merit investigation, criticism and condemnation.

3. It is unrealistic to base a law against blasphemy on the principle of protecting public order. This argument, as we saw, figured prominently in the reasonings of theologians of the past. In today's world, however, the de facto situation is that blasphemy

is not a threat to public peace. Furthermore, if it did become a threat it could be proceeded against under other legislation (eg. breach of the peace). And still further the argument is double-edged. Truth itself is sometimes a threat to public order, as witness the Christians who turned the world upside down.

4. To invoke the principle that blasphemy is an insult to God is to raise at once the question, "Which God?" and, by implication, the question of toleration. Jehovah, our God, is the only Lord. But to invoke penal sanctions against all that insults Him would mean proceeding against all idolatry and every major theological distortion. We should be acting against our own principles of toleration, liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement and assuming the role of persecutors, protecting our faith by the sword.

5. In conclusion it may be said that it is highly doubtful if the state is competent to define blasphemy. We should be expecting of judges a degree of theological competence they do not possess; or, alternatively, exposing ourselves to the subjective judgements of juries as to what is scurrilous, indecent or contemptuous.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Readers might also like to see what was the response of the BEC to the Law Commission - copies are available from their office at 21 Woodstock Road North, St Albans, Herts AL1 4QB price 15p post free if pre-paid.

THE PURITANS AND COUNSELLING TROUBLED SOULS

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In dealing with this subject my object is to consider the history of counselling with special attention to the Puritan approach, then to focus in detail on the Puritan method, and that in

specially selected areas which are most relevant and helpful for

us today.

Indeed the relevance of these considerations throughout is not to be lost sight of. It is precisely because of present-day problems that we are devoting our attention to this subject. Our Western culture is characterised by an abundance of affluence which tends to camouflage chronic widespread spiritual bankruptcy. One of the manifestations of this generation's spiritual poverty is the alarming increase of neuroses and mental disease. The people are resolute in their pursuit of worldly pleasure. Long ago Jeremiah likened man-made, godless pursuits to broken cisterns that could hold no water (Jer.2:13). It should not surprise us, therefore, to find that depression, frustration, loneliness and despair are commonplace and the consulting rooms of psychiatrists and psychotherapists are overcrowded. The pressures, complexities, malaise and ignorance which prevail point to the need for instruction and guidance as well as a revival of interest in basic spiritual realities and how to deal with them, not from a clinical but from a biblical point of view. Not only do non-church-goers consult psychiatrists; believers do it as well. It is sad to note that often there are as many boxes of pills to deal with tension, neuroses, strain and insomnia in believers' homes as in unbelievers'. Not only are sermons lacking in practical application and pastoral counsel but too often the personal relationship and trust necessary for counselling is lacking between church members and their elders or ministers.

The need for personal counsel has always been fundamental to man. Among pagans it is seen in recourse to witchdoctors who, despite their crack-brained deceptive arts, continue in business still. In some parts of the West it is seen in a revival of sorcery and spiritualism, the medium providing directions from the diabolical counsels of evil spirits.

1. COUNSELLING IN HISTORICAL SETTING

In Old Testament times we see implicit provision made for man to man counsel in the system of leadership instituted following the advice of Jethro (Ex.18:13-27). Advice could be sought from leaders of tens or leaders of fifties. That spiritual counsel and care was expected of the elders is clear from Ezekiel's complaints about failure in this respect: "neither have ye bound up that which was

broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away - but with force, and with cruelty, have ye ruled" (Ez.34:4).

Because the shepherds were unfaithful the flock was scattered. But through Ezekiel God promised to set up one shepherd over the flock who would feed them (Ez.34:23). This found its fulfilment in the good shepherd (John 10:11). He is the soul-counsellor par excellence who has a perfect knowledge of spiritual disease and of the remedies. His masterliness is illustrated by the way in which he spoke to the woman at the well. With directness and discretion he exposed the sin that entangled her. In the restoration of Peter after his fall we see a perfect example of thoughtfulness, gentleness and provision. Pastors look to the Lord to give them wisdom, insight, guidance, courage and strength to counsel and care for the flock of his purchase. The under shepherds will have to give account to him, the Chief Shepherd, at his judgment seat (Heb. 13:17; 2 Cor.5:10).

The apostles sought to warn every man, and teach every man in all wisdom that every man might be presented perfect in Christ Jesus (Col.1:28). The word translated warn (noutheteo) means admonish or put in mind. The idea of confrontation or counselling is included, that is counselling with all teaching and wisdom, with the sublime end in view that each one might be prepared for that great day. Jay Adams in his books ¹ has emphasised that counselling was not confined to the apostles. They encouraged believers to follow their example. Paul, writing to the Roman disciples, expressed his confidence in their ability to admonish (noutheteo) one another. Various scripture passages would seem to bear this out. Heb.10:24 says "and let us consider one another" and Gal.6:2 "bear one another's burdens" and Rom.15:7 "receive ye one another".

ROMAN CATHOLIC COUNSELLING

Augustine showed an acute interest in spiritual care, conceiving of the Church as the mother of believers. His emphasis on the subject influenced the Roman Catholic Church to a considerable degree. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers, especially that of the Pastor of Hermas, indicate concern with pastoral care.² The Franciscans, founded by Francis of Assisi in 1210, were pre-eminently pastors of the soul, but they, like those of other orders, came to subserve all things to the Church as an institution with the pope as head. Gradually in the Roman Church as a whole an

innumerable number of legalistic requirements were enforced. The auricular confession of sins to a priest became the main means of ensuring universal obedience. Jesuitism specialised in the study of questions of the conscience - casuistry, but generally the whole idea of pastoral care according to the scriptures degenerated into tyranny and legalism akin to that of the Pharisees, which our Lord detested and denounced (Matt.23). Where law-keeping is advocated for salvation there man-made rules multiply and bondage and darkness ensue. Where justification by faith is proclaimed, with love and compassion, there we will see mercy and forgiveness followed by joy and freedom, in stark contrast to the thralldom of self-righteousness and self-justification.

THE REFORMATION

It was precisely the sinners' justification by God's grace and by faith alone which Luther preached. This proclamation ushered in (as one might expect) a new age as far as personal care for souls is concerned. Through the ministry of John Calvin pastoral care made massive strides. The establishment of family visitation by the elders was one significant advance. His emphasis on Christ shepherding his people through the office-bearers was another. Both Luther and Calvin demonstrated their pastoral concern and ability to counsel souls in distress by their correspondence. The colossal correspondence maintained by these reformers who were already extremely burdened with work is a rebuke to some who, with one quarter their work-load, neglect their duty in replying to letters. Tenderness, wisdom, comfort and insight characterised the pastoral letters of the Reformers.

Calvin in particular was crystal clear in maintaining a correct relationship between the law and the gospel. He hated the Roman legalistic system with a mortal hatred. In his lucidity of thought and application of the Gospel to pastoral counselling he was followed by the English Puritans who for detail, quality and richness both of biblical exposition and application in this area are superior to any other generation of Christians. By way of contrast modern evangelicalism is in the wilderness. From the external point of view this is due to the predominance of liberalism and subservience to the authority of secular and humanistic thinking such as Freudianism and Rogerianism.³ From an internal point of view it is due to shallowness, lack of teaching and particularly the

prevalence of Arminianism in which there is confusion about the basic issue of regeneration.

2. PURITAN COUNSELLING AND THE QUESTION OF REGENERATION

Fundamental to the counselling of the Puritans was the necessity of determining the spiritual condition of the person in question. They viewed this as foundational and imperative. What is the use of counselling a person as a Christian if he is not saved? It is true that it is not possible to determine in an infallible way whether a person is regenerate but nevertheless Puritan writings demonstrate the importance of using the biblical data to ascertain this question as carefully as is humanly possible. That the question of regeneration is axiomatic is illustrated by the fact that much counselling is concerned with either the problem of assurance or desertion. ⁴

Marvellously does Robert Bolton illustrate the centrality of regeneration and justification on the one hand and the fleshly state and legalism on the other. He achieves this by exposition of the text, "The Spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" (Prov.18:14).

A man standing upon the solid ground of justification, furnished with grace and fortified with the sense of God's favour is, says Bolton, "able to pass through the pikes and conquer all comers". In other words once it is established that a man is truly reconciled to God and that God is for him, then he can be greatly strengthened through counsel and, by application of the means of grace, he will be able to defy all his enemies.

In contrast with the spirit of a justified man, which can be mightily strengthened in the day of trouble, there is the spirit of a man who has no comfort because he is at odds with God. The torture of a troubled conscience is intolerable. In all other afflictions, says Bolton, "we have to do but with man, or at worst with devils; but in this transcendent misery we are in conflict with God himself: frail man with almighty God, sinful man with that most holy God - who can abide the fierceness of his anger?" ⁵ If God's wrath is against a man all comforts fail; wife, friends, honours or pleasures!

The Scriptures lead us to compare David with Saul, Job with

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Ahithophel and Peter with Judas. History furnishes us with contrasts such as Martin Luther and Francesco Spira.⁶

These examples illustrate the importance of discerning between foundations, true or erroneous; experience, real or spurious; assurance, genuine or false. A grasp of biblical doctrine together with one's own vital experience of salvation is essential. How will we be able to discern the deception and strategies of Satan in regard to others unless we have conquered in the field of battle ourselves? If we certainly detect a false assurance in those who seek our counsel then we ought to know how to stir the conscience; how to remove ignorance of the certain wrath of God; how to depict the calamitous consequences of sin; in short, how to awaken souls to the reality of eternal damnation. Did not Felix tremble when he heard Paul reason concerning righteousness, temperance and judgment to come? (Acts 24:24,25). The less discerning today tend to be deceived when public figures speak piously about God. Felix probably did, but Paul knew him to be an adulterer and a ruthless man. Like Felix, Herod was a public figure. Herod "did many things, and heard him (John the Baptist) gladly", but soon he showed his real state by consenting to the unjust execution of the prophet.

Bolton, besides laying much stress on the necessity of discernment as to the condition of the soul, insists that no comfort is to be applied where there is no conviction of sin. "The conscience is not to be healed, if it be not wounded". John the Baptist, declared Bolton, "thoroughly frightened the minds of his hearers, with the terror of judgment, and expectation of torment - and when he had stirred them up to a desire of deliverance; then at length he made mention of Christ".⁷

That Bolton was an avid reader of earlier and contemporary writers is evident from the generous way in which he quoted them - and no more so in his book than at this point of pressing home the importance of rightly discerning the state of troubled souls. Calvin, Paul Bayne, Perkins, Hieron, Davenant, Greenham, Gouge, Rolloc, Forbes, Throgmorton and Culverwell are quoted.

Let Gouge sum up the point made by the others when he says, "God healeth none but such as are first wounded".⁸ Throgmorton is as pointed and as clear when he asserts, "The law first breaks us, and kills us with the sight and guilt of sin, before Christ cures

us, and binds us up".⁹

If, in counselling, it was found that inquirers were not Christians what procedure was followed? We are familiar with widespread present day approval of simply counselling a soul to give his heart to the Lord. To the Puritans it was necessary for a knowledge of the truth to be made effectual to salvation by the Holy Spirit. They sought to apply the Scriptures with the following ends in view. 1. Conviction of sin. 2. Humiliation before God. 3. A spirit of seeking the Lord. 4. A desire for forgiveness. 5. A confession of sin and asking for pardon. 6. Repentance. 7. Faith.¹⁰

Bolton illustrates the importance of discerning true from false repentance citing two cases from his own experience. A man in prison evidenced great broken-heartedness and penitence but as soon as the threat of execution was removed, he became, said Bolton, as bad as he was before. The second, expecting to die through an illness, professed repentance with all his heart and soul and declared that if he did recover all the world would see what a changed man he would be. As soon as he recovered, however, he became as bad, if not worse than he had ever been. Natural fear, human grief and selfish sorrow are very different in character from the "godly sorrow (sorrow toward God) that leads to repentance".

The balm of mercy and the oil of comfort must be applied at the right time. Just as the surgeon cuts out the cancer first before he sews up the wounds so spiritual physicians must deal faithfully with this corruption of the soul.

The most eloquent section of Bolton's classic on counselling afflicted consciences is that which expounds the daubers of Ezek. 13:10-16. The daubers of course are false ministers who gloss over the real issue, promote false assurance and comfort people with salvation when really they are in the grip and service of sin. Un-tempered mortar is shallow, erroneous teaching. The work of daubers will be destroyed in the judgment. Bolton describes both daubers or false ministers and those whom they have deceived as burning in hell together with the deceived crying out with hideous yells at them, "O thou bloody butcher of our souls, hadst thou been faithful, we had escaped these eternal flames".¹¹

Finally, before we leave the question of discerning the main issue

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of whether the person counselled is a Christian or not it ought to be stressed that the Puritans in no wise neglected the importance of urgency.

Thoroughness did not negate the pressing nature of the subject of salvation. "To refuse Christ freely and fairly offered," declared Bolton, "is to receive God's curse under seal, and to make "Thy covenant with hell".¹² "A ruinous house, the longer thou lettest it run, the more labour and change will it require in repairing. If thou drive a nail with a hammer, the more blows thou givest to it, the more hard it will be to pluck it out again. It is just so in the case of continuing in sin; and every new sin is a stroke with the hammer."¹³

3. DIFFERENT CASES FOR COUNSELLING CONSIDERED

Richard Sibbes in his 'Souls Conflict', John Durant¹⁴ in his 'Comfort and Counsel for Dejected Souls' and William Bridge¹⁵ in his 'Lifting up for the Downcast' all used Psalm 42:11, "Why art thou cast down O my soul," as a springboard for a series of sermons on counsel for troubled souls.

Causes of spiritual trouble according to Durant and Bridge read as follows:

John Durant: causes of trouble: William Bridge: causes of trouble:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Remainders of Corruption | 1. Great Sins |
| 2. Falls into Sin | 2. Weak grace |
| 3. Ignorance of the Covenant of Grace | 3. Miscarriage of duties |
| 4. Spiritual indisposition to duties | 4. Lack of assurance |
| 5. Want of former incomes (spiritual decline) | 5. Temptation |
| 6. Insulting of Satan, and Enemies | 6. Desertion |
| 7. Some corporal affliction | 7. Affliction |
| 8. Appearance of Divine wrath | 8. Unserviceableness |

It is worthy of note that all these troubles are with us today. They are all relevant. Each particular area deserves thorough

treatment. If we are to be the physicians of the soul then we must not gloss over the problems but analyse them with prayerfulness and sympathy.

Much though I would like to deal with all the subjects outlined above, bringing each into its equivalent contemporary setting, it is possible to handle five only. These are the ones most frequently before us as pastors. They are Assurance, Desertion, Falling into Sin, Afflictions and Temptations.

1 ASSURANCE

This subject is highly relevant today and the problem widespread largely because of decisionism. Large numbers are assured that they are Christians because they have registered a decision. When complaint is made that no change has been felt or experienced the troubled soul is counselled to ignore his feelings and just believe. In many, perhaps most instances, disillusionment follows and the person simply falls away from any profession of faith. Sometimes their condition then is worse than before as scepticism sets in, followed by hardness of heart. On the other hand, there are those who, despite difficulties, persevere in the means of grace and come to experience the new birth as they continue under the ministry of the Word, obtaining a well grounded assurance of salvation.

Apart from assurance problems arising out of contemporary evangelistic methods, it is hard to find any church where there are not some who struggle through lack of assurance and who struggle on this account, some more so than others. The Puritans were experts on the subject, two treatises are fairly well known today, both established by the Banner of Truth, namely, 'The Christian's Great Interest' by William Guthrie, and 'Heaven on Earth' by Thomas Brooks.

Brooks' counsel to believers as to ways and means of gaining a well-grounded assurance is as follows: 1. Be active in exercising grace. 2. Follow the path of obedience. 3. Follow diligently the instructions of the Holy Spirit. 4. Be diligent in attendance upon ordinances. 5. Pay particular attention to the scope of God's promises of mercy. 6. Distinguish those matters in which believers are different from all others. 7. Seek to grow in grace. 8. Seek

assurance when the soul is in its best frames. 9. Ascertain whether you have the things which accompany salvation: knowledge, faith, repentance, obedience, love, prayer, perseverance and hope. Each one of the latter: knowledge, faith, etc., is then made the subject of a detailed chapter.

It is possible to lose assurance and suffer much conflict of soul as a result. Brooks suggests six methods whereby souls which have lost assurance may be kept from fainting, and offers five suggestions whereby they may recover it. One support of the person exercised by lost assurance is to remember that eternal happiness does not depend upon assurance and another is that though assurance may be lost "blessed breathings and sweet influences of the spirit upon them" are not lost. "Witness", he says, "their love to Christ, their longing after Christ, their fear of offending Christ, their care to please Christ".¹⁶ While I agree with Brooks in most of his exposition I do not follow him in the idea that God removes assurance. We should always think in terms of God giving assurance and not confuse loss of assurance with desertion to which we now give our attention.

2. DESERTION

We know from Heb.13:5 that God will never forsake his people but this is not to be confused with the hiding of his face. There can be very gloomy days when the sun is hidden, but we do not thereby conclude that it has ceased to exist. The child cries as if her mother was gone, when she is but hidden, or attending to duties. "Zion said, the Lord has forsaken me, and my God has forgotten me" (Is.49:14,15).

Manton distinguishes between temporary or partial desertion and eternal or total desertion of reprobates such as Saul and Esau. Concerning temporary desertion he makes further distinctions between internal and external desertion and, also, desertion in regard to comfort or grace.¹⁷ When David says, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me" he is referring to the withdrawing of the Spirit, that is to internal desertion. External desertion is when God leaves us under heavy crosses.

In counselling deserted souls comfort can be administered by explaining the wisdom of God's purpose in such situations. While we

cannot know the mind of God in each case we do know examples from Scripture to show that he has wise reasons for dealing in this particular way with his people. "Wherefore hidest thou thy face", cried Job, "and holdest me for thine enemy?" "Thou makest me possess the iniquities of my youth" (Job 13:24,26).

What are the reasons for desertion? Manton summarizes as follows:

1. To correct us for our wantonness, and our unkind dealing with Christ.
2. To acquaint us with our weakness.
3. To subdue our carnal confidence.
4. To heighten our esteem of Christ, that love may be sharpened by absence.
5. That by our own bitter experience we may learn how to value the suffering of Christ.
6. To prevent evil to come, especially pride, that we might not be lifted up; and to entender our hearts to others (2 Cor.1:4).¹⁸

Pastors ought to be equipped to deal with cases of desertion. This affliction is a reality. It is, says Bridge, as "the darkening of the sun, which brings a universal darkness upon the soul"¹⁹ and Sibbes quoting Luther declares: "If all the temptations of the whole world and hell itself were mustered together, they were nothing to this, whereby the great God sets himself contrary to his poor creature".²⁰

3. FALLS INTO SIN - THE FEAR OF THE UNPARDONABLE SIN, OF BEING AN ESAU.

Having considered the questions of assurance and desertion as causes of spiritual conflict let us look more closely at other sources of trouble pinpointed by Puritan writers. Those who fall into sin after conversion, once brought to repentance, are prone to the temptation to believe that they have committed the unpardonable sin. Deep sorrow for sin and self abhorrence are quite consistent with Gospel justification (Zech.12:10; Ez.36:31; Is.57:15), but if grief only prevails a soul may dishonour the Gospel. Constant depression and gloom will not only harm the one concerned but hinder and distract his family and the Church. Not only those like King David who have committed great sins, but some who have very tender consciences and who lack assurance are prone to

affliction on account of shadows cast upon their standing before God because of sin.

John Owen, in expounding Ps.130:4 "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared", proposes some valuable advice to those afflicted with falls into sin and the problem of forgiveness.²¹ "Mix not foundation and building work together" he counsels. Justification by faith is the foundation and all else proceeds from this foundation. Great entanglements ensue if there is not clarity on this matter. Owen further advises against useless complainings and bemoaning of the soul's condition. "Get you up," said God to Joshua and the elders, "why lie you thus upon your faces?" (Joshua 7:10). "If you would come to stability" continues Owen "Improve the least appearances of God unto your soul, and the least imitations of his love in pardon". Even when the spouse can only enjoy a glimpse of her husband at the lattice she rejoices in him (Song.2:9).

The Puritans linked Heb.6:4-6 and 10:25-29 with our Lord's teaching on the unpardonable sin. This is germane at this point because pastors frequently find souls afflicted with the torment of seeing themselves beyond redemption on account of sin against the Holy Spirit. William Guthrie disposes of the difficulty by providing a very clear exposition of what this sin is and what it is not.²² For comfort one of his conclusions reads as follows, "Whatsoever thou hast done against God, if thou dost repent of it, and wish it were undone, thou canst not be guilty of this sin." He then points out that heart malice against God and spite against God prevail as part of the unpardonable state.

Common in pastoral experience are cases where troubled souls are tempted to think that their position approximates to that of Saul, Balaam, Judas or Esau. Did not Esau seek repentance carefully with tears? (Heb.12:17) But he was rejected! One of the most passionate reasonings to counsel and comfort afflicted souls in doubt about their standing is found in Bridge's works. "Did you ever know a man finally forsaken of Christ, who longed after the presence of Christ as the greatest good, and looked upon his absence as the greatest evil and affliction in all the world, being willing to kiss the feet of Jesus Christ, and to serve him in the lowest and meanest condition, so he might but enjoy him? Did you ever read in all the Word of God, that ever a man was finally forsaken who

was tender in the point of sin, who sat mourning after God?"²³

To this challenge the simple reply might be given, Esau! What about Esau? Probably John Owen's greatest work is his massive exposition on the Hebrew epistle and certainly we have not discovered any other commentary on that epistle as thorough or as satisfying as the one by the prince of the Puritans. In his exposition he draws attention to the following important facts concerning Esau: 1. He afterward sought. This afterward was about 40 or 50 years. 2. The blessing sought was the birthright not salvation. 3. In his attempt he was rejected. Eternal reprobation is not hereby intended. For that we turn to Rom.9:11,12. The refusal of his father to give him the patriarchal blessing is intended. 4. "He sought it diligently with tears" but there is nothing in the words which should in the least intimate that he sought of God the grace of repentance. 5. Gen.27:38 refers to Esau's weeping and due consideration must be given to the conflict connected with the peculiar relationship between Isaac and Esau.²⁴ Painstaking exposition of the Word may be necessary in order to remove false fears in afflicted souls and we ought not to shun the labour required in order to bring troubled spirits to peace in Christ.

4. AFFLICTIONS OR TRIBULATIONS

Hezekiah was cast into the depths of depression through physical sickness (Is.38:3), and David through bereavement (2 Sam.18:33). Spiritual drought cast down Habakkuk although he learned to sing the songs of Zion in his affliction (Hab.3:17). Lamentable failure in denying his Lord caused Peter to weep bitterly (Matt.26:75).

In analysing and giving counsel to souls in distress great wisdom, insight, discretion and tenderness are needed. Richard Sibbes who was known in London during the early seventeenth century as 'The Heavenly Doctor Sibbes' can afford elders more help than most others in advising them as to what should be remembered when counselling those in tribulation.

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes a time in his life when he was badly overtired and subject in an unusual way to the onslaughts of the devil. At that time when he needed gentle tender treatment for his soul he found soothing, quietness, comfort, encouragement and healing through Sibbes' works, particularly 'The Bruised Reed'

and 'The Soul's Conflict'.²⁵ The minister who cannot help others is ill-suited to his vocation and the elder who does not know the appropriate remedy to apply to himself in the various spiritual perplexities and conflicts through which he must inevitably pass is to be pitied.

Some leading principles summarised from Sibbes' writings will be of help to us in our study. Christ will not break the bruised reed and will not quench the smoking flax (Matt.12:20). There must ever be an eye to preserve the flame of faith. In times of anguish Satan will attempt to extinguish it. "For the great consolation of poor and weak Christians," says Sibbes, "let them know, that a spark from heaven, though kindled under greenwood that is soggy, yet it will consume all at last"²⁶ The counsellor comforting those in tribulation ought to discern the relationship of the affliction to the work of sanctification. In a sermon, 'The Discreet Ploughman', Sibbes expounds Is.28:23-29. That portion of Scripture draws attention to the fact that in the threshing of wheat, barley or rye, different instruments and methods are used and various pressures applied to separate the kernals from the chaff. Likewise God's dealings with his people are precisely and exactly determined by the wise end in view.

Much comfort is afforded in stressing that nothing occurs which is not designed for the good of God's children. All things work together for their good (Rom.8:28).

Thomas Watson in his matchless book on Rom.8:28 shows that the worst things work for good to the godly including the evils of affliction, temptation, desertion and sin.

It is of comfort to the saints to think that there is a divine purpose in their afflictions. One main reason for affliction is the furtherance of sanctification. "Water in the glass looks clear, but set it on the fire", says Watson, "and the scum boils up - much impatience and unbelief appear". "Oh", says the Christian, "I never thought my corruptions had been so strong, and my graces so weak."²⁷

Stephen Charnock in his exposition on Providence explains that "it is not bad with the righteous however afflicted. No righteous man would, in his right mind, be willing to make an exchange of his smartest affliction", asserts Charnock, "for a wicked man's pros-

perity. Is it not more desirable to be upon a dunghill with an intimate converse with God, than upon a throne without it?" ²⁸

In exposition of Psalm 119:25, "my soul cleaveth to the dust", Thomas Manton specifies reasons for the saint's affliction as follows. 1. To correct them for their past sins. 2. To humble them, and bring them low down even to the dust (2 Cor.1:7-9) that they build not too securely on their own sufficiencies. 3. To try their graces. 4. To awaken the spirit of prayer (Ps.130:1). 5. To show the more of his glory, and the riches of his goodness in their recovery (Ps.71:20,21). ²⁹

Tribulation is not easy to bear and much counsel is often needed to comfort the afflicted. Some afflictions are of a temporary nature in which case it is permissible to provide comfort with truth expressed in Psalm 34:19. "Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all". Henry Smith in a sermon on this text points out that "the lawyer can deliver his client from strife; the physician can deliver his patient from sickness; the master his servant from bondage; but the Lord delivereth out of all." God does provide means of deliverance and it is right that we should pray for these to be effective but it depends entirely upon the Lord. ³⁰

Several portions of Scripture can be consulted to remind the afflicted soul that there is an end of trial. "After two days he will revive us, and the third day he will raise us up" (Hos.6:2). "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy will come in the morning" (Ps.30:5).

Yet for some there may be no deliverance. Their sickness may be terminal in which case we are required to prepare them for the final deliverance. Again I quote words of comfort for those in this state from Smith: "Seeing then your kingdom is not here, look not for a golden life in an iron world; but remember that Lazarus doth not mourn in heaven, though he suffered pains on earth (Luke 16), but the glutton mourneth in hell, that stayed not for the pleasures of heaven. To which pleasures the Lord Jesus brings us, when this cloud of trouble is blown over us!" ³¹

Probably the sweetest of all comfort for souls in affliction is the certain knowledge that their trials are designed by a Father's

love. "The greatest and bitterest sufferings", declares Thomas Goodwin, "be sweetened to us, looked upon as coming from a father. It was so with Christ; when he looks upon this as a cup given him by his Father, and it is a pleasure to him to drink it off (John 4:34). Whatsoever cup it be that God in thy life affords thee, take it, and go drink it off heartily; for whether thou wilt or no, if it be a cup he hath given thee, thou shalt drink it."³²

Our Lord sweated as it were great drops of blood in Gethsemane in anticipation of his sufferings which were substitutionary and propitiatory. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." (Phil.1:29) Human nature shrinks as did Christ's human nature from that which has only come into the world because of sin. Some who may have suffered already cannot endure the thought of more. It is right to pray for relief as did David (Ps.39:10) "Remove thy stroke away from me." When more sorrow comes then the added burden of temptation comes too, the temptation to censure God.

Several reasons are proposed by John Flavel to counter this temptation and crush it. He shows the foolishness of exalting our own reason and understanding above the infinite wisdom of God as well as the folly of spurning God's sovereignty. Furthermore to fret and to quarrel is not only like clay chiding the potter but is destructive to our inward peace and tranquility of mind. Our murmuring reveals odious ingratitude toward God.³³

5. TEMPTATION

As we have just noted, affliction can bring temptation with it. This subject brings us to consider the whole world of spiritual warfare in which all God's people are involved.

Let John Gibbon speak for the others when he declares, "be well skilled in the wiles of temptation - I mean, in unmasking sophistry and mystery of iniquity, in detecting and frustrating the cheats and finesses of the flesh with its deceitful lusts - if ever thou wouldest prove famous and victorious, and worthy of honour and reverence in thy spiritual warfare, be well seen in the skill of fencing, know all thy wards for every attack".³⁴

Not only the world and the flesh but Satan, who is able to

manipulate both in temptation, has to be dealt with in all his wiles and strategies. According to William Bridge, "the evil one, for his devouring nature is called a lion, for his cruelty is called a dragon, and for his subtlety an old serpent: and in every temptation a poor soul goes into the field with Satan, and fights a duel with him".³⁵

Thomas Brooks', 'Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices', is rightly regarded as the classic work on the subject and not surprisingly occupies premier position in the first volume of a six volume set of his works.³⁶ Innumerable devices are exposed and remedies suggested as well as wise counsel given. One example must suffice.

There are those who become extremely depressed because of relapses into sin. Satan endeavours to bring them to despair on this account. Brooks cites several characters from Scripture to show that even the choicest saints have struggled to overcome besetting sins but, lest any think that excuses can be made on this account, he brings his readers to consider that relapses into enormities are different from relapses into infirmities.

Richard Gilpin's treatise on this subject is much more detailed than that of Brooks and is a great help in that he handles matters of the utmost relevance today.³⁷ We hear, for instance, of those who have forsaken the evangelical faith. Having been captivated by liberal theological concepts they have ultimately come to oppose all that they previously advocated as essential for salvation. Gilpin shows how Satan can divert a man's thoughts and pervert his reason illustrating too, that corrupt principles invariably lead to corrupt practices.

William Gurnall's massive one thousand one hundred and fifty page, double-column exposition of Ephesians 6:10-18 provides all necessary directions for a right use of our spiritual weapons as well as counsel for those tempted or assailed by the devil.³⁸ Note a little of Gurnall's advice on "fiery darts of the wicked" as he counsels those tempted with the sin of despair. "The soul should view the great God - the infinitude of all his attributes, particularly his justice which Christ has satisfied. The scarlet thread on Rahab's window kept the destroying sword out of her house; and the blood of Christ, pleaded by faith, will keep the soul from

receiving any hurt at the hands of divine justice. The soul should draw encouragement from the cloud of witnesses. O who can read of a Manasseh, a Magdalene, a Paul - in the roll of pardoned sinners, and yet turn away from the promises?" He concludes by showing that despair opposes God in the greatest of his commands, which is to believe, and at the same time it strengthens and enrages all other sins in the soul.

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that the Puritans were always mindful of a person's standing before God. This to them was fundamental. As Thomas Goodwin shows, there is the case to be considered of a child of light walking in darkness but also the case of a child of darkness walking in light.³⁹

The two must never be confused. Likewise Thomas Brooks demonstrates that it is the chief wile of the devil to persuade people that repentance is easy.⁴⁰ Particularly in our day when superficial views of repentance are rampant we ought to be discerning as to whether the one afflicted has both faith and repentance. Both are essential.

We have also observed that a wide variety of causes lead to distress. Some of the main causes of soul trouble have received the briefest attention but sources of detailed exposition have been referred to with comments in the appendices. An important conclusion from this study is the fact that republication of Puritan works is by no means complete. Valuable treasures await the publisher's attention. New editions of rare works such as Brooks' 'Heaven on Earth' are urgently needed. Once Christians realise the expository value of these treatises they will turn from facile books with repugnance. A man having drunk old wine will not desire for new for, says he, "the old is better".

Several examples could be quoted of Puritan books on counselling that urgently require republication. Joseph Symonds' 'The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul' 1641 (558 small pages) is an example of the purest gold for expository value. A last quotation from the Puritans in this paper is from Symonds and is designed to be of help to all Christians whatever their condition. Affirms Symonds of the things to be done by the regenerate: 1. Stir up yourselves

and work upon your hearts by your understanding. 2. Attend the ordinances. 3. Take the help of saints. 4. Do your first works.
⁴¹ How do we stir up our hearts by our understanding? Symonds gives seven most helpful practical suggestions but we may not have them now.

Only one important matter remains and that is the necessity to discern carefully between those who are severely cast down yet able still to care for themselves and those who for any reason whatever have lost possession or control of their actions and who need continual care or oversight. Prompt responsible provision has to be sought in such instances.

Acute abnormal depression or melancholia can be a reason why distressed souls attempt in some cases to take their own lives.

A.A.Alexander in his 'Thoughts on Religious Experience' gives advice which is as helpful today as it was when he wrote it during the last century. Among his counsels he advises that tender compassion is needed and that harsh language should never be used in the case of the disease of melancholy.⁴² Counsel which it is beyond the power of such people to receive and apply should not be given and nor does it help to say to them that their woes are imagined, not real. Nor does it help them to assert that their disease is to be attributed to the devil. Accounts of disaster or calamities should be avoided as those in this condition only tend to apply everything to themselves in the most adverse way. The prayers of God's people for deliverance are to be sought and encouragement drawn from passages of Scripture showing the mercy and power of God.

In addition to those we already have who require biblical counsel we need to be prepared for spiritual awakening. Were our prayers for revival to be answered we would surely find many who have presumed themselves to be safe, awakened to their lost state. The need for discerning counsel would be much increased.

NOTES

1. 'Competent to Counsel' (1970) and 'The Big Umbrella' (1972) (see p.132ff) Both are published by Pres.& Ref. Both books are reviewed and discussed in detail in 'Reformation Today' issue 15.
2. See 'Christian Counselling' G.Brillenbug Wurth. Pres.& Ref. 1962.
3. Freud pre-supposed sex and conscience as the basic issues. His approach was contrary to the biblical one at almost every point. Carl Rogers is responsible for a system of counselling, very widespread in which man is regarded as autonomous.
4. 'Instructions for a right comforting of Afflicted Consciences with special antidotes against some grievous temptation' (1631) Robert Bolton. This is an exceedingly valuable and rare book. Robert Bolton 1572-1631 was before his conversion a Roman Catholic lecturer in logic, moral and natural philosophy. He was the minister at Broughton in Northamptonshire.
5. *ibid.* p.58
6. Francesco Spira born in Italy about 1498 denied his Protestant profession and died in a state of intense despair and remorse in 1548. The details of his life were widely known and made a profound impression. Calvin and the other reformers took a deep interest in his case and did not regard him as having experienced true repentance even though he preached justification by faith to others before he denied the truth by going back within the Roman fold.
7. 'Comforting of Afflicted Consciences' Robert Bolton p.136 Bolton acknowledges that he is following Augustine and Chrysostom in their expositions at this point.
8. 'The Whole Armour of God' p.237,238
9. 'Treatise of Faith' p.149
10. c.f. 'Becoming a Christian' Westminster Conference Papers 1972 p.61 following.

11. *ibid.* Bolton p.250 ff
12. *ibid.* p.151 ff
13. *ibid.* p.246
14. Published in 1651 but to the best of my knowledge never reprinted. John Durant (a.1660) was a lesser known Puritan. He ministered at Canterbury. To one of his books he gave the quaint title 'A cluster of grapes taken out of the basket of the woman at Canaan'.
15. Thirteen sermons preached at Stepney, London, in the year 1648 Bridge's works were reprinted in five volumes in the last century. The Banner of Truth reprinted 'A lifting up for the Downcast' in 1961. It is now out of print. Bridge (b⁺1600 d⁺1670) of Norwich who was one of the Westminster divines fled to Holland in 1636 where he associated with Jeremiah Burroughs. He returned to England in 1642.
16. 'Heaven on Earth' Thomas Brooks. Banner of Truth edition p.313 ff
17. 'Manton's Complete Works' Vol.6 p.77 ff
18. *ibid.* p.80
19. 'A Lifting up for the Downcast' William Bridge. Banner of Truth p.173
20. 'Sibbes Works' Vol.1 p.227
21. 'The Works of John Owen' Vol.6 p.564 ff
22. 'The Christian's Great Interest' William Guthrie. Banner of Truth p.154 ff. A present day author who follows the same argument with the greatest clarity and helpfulness is Edwin H.Palmer. 'The Holy Spirit' Pres.& Ref. p.165 ff
23. *op cit* 'A Lifting up' p.184 ff
24. 'An Exposition of Hebrews' John Owen Vol.4 p.302-3
- 26.

25. 'Preaching and Preachers' D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Hodder and Stoughton 1971.
26. 'Sibbes' Works' Vol.1 p.86
27. This volume of about 94 pages has been reprinted several times with the title 'A Divine Cordial' Evangelical Press. Thomas Watson was one of the most popular preachers of his time. Persecuted after his ejection in 1662 he nevertheless continued to preach, at one time pastoring a flock together with Stephen Charnock. He died in 1686. His famous 'Body of Divinity' being an exposition of the Shorter Catechism is one of the Banner of Truth's best sellers and is an ideal introduction to both Puritan theology and Puritan writings as a whole. In the writer's view Watson and Brooks are the most scintillating to read, Manton (22 volumes in all) the most useful. Sibbes the best for themes of comfort and tenderness and Owen the most penetrating; these comments not in any way to disparage a host of others.
28. 'Charnock's Works' (1815 edition) Vol.3 p.549
29. 'Manton's Works' Vol.6 p.236
30. 'The Works of Henry Smith' Vol.1 p.245. Henry Smith (1560-1591) was commonly called the silver-tongued preacher that was but one metal below St.Chrysostom himself. Both high and low flocked to hear him, the aisles being filled with standing hearers.
31. ibid. p.247
32. 'Works of Thomas Goodwin' Vol.5 p.223
33. 'Works of John Flavel' Vol.6 p.133 ff
34. 'Morning Exercises. Cripplegate' Sermon on Gal.5:16 with title "How may we be so spiritual, as to check sin in the risings of it?"
35. 'A Lifting up for the Downcast' p.152

36. 'Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices' Banner of Truth paper-back edition. Pastors should encourage the publishers to keep these Puritan troubled souls, they are of immense value.
37. 'A Treatise of Satan's Temptations' Richard Gilpin. The third and final section is an exposition of Christ's temptation and runs to 160 pages. Revival of interest in witchcraft today makes Gilpin's section on this subject in his book apposite.
38. 'The Christian in Complete Armour' William Gurnall. Banner of Truth. This book is a photo reproduction of a former edition published in two volumes in 1864.
39. 'Works of Thomas Goodwin' Vol.3 p.236 ff
40. 'Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices' p.55 ff
41. 'The Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul' Joseph Symonds p.379 ff
42. 'Thoughts on Religious Experience' A.A.Alexander p.36 ff Banner of Truth.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE GOSPEL AMONGST 'HYPER-CALVINISTS'

Rev R.J.Sheehan BD

There is as much variation in the understanding of the Gospel and its presentation among hyper-calvinists as among any other comparable theological tradition. Some preachers do not address the unconverted at all.¹ Others address them but in a particular way that guards the preacher from implying natural, creature ability to do spiritual acts.

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It must be observed (and the observation is probably universally true in theological traditions) that the statements of hyper-calvinists in polemical writings, fuelled by the fires of controversy, tend to be more rigid and extreme than the sermons they preach, or their more relaxed writings.²

It must also be recognised that hyper-calvinism has suffered from misrepresentation even at scholarly level.³ The continuation of its traditions in respect to addressing the unbeliever owes more to a tradition of preaching than a tradition of writing.⁴ However, for the purposes of this paper the writings of W.J.Styles,⁵ a man who had considerable influence on many Strict Baptist hyper-calvinists, and, the more widely known, John Gill⁶ will be the main sources of reference.

(i) What does the hyper-calvinist understand the sinner's duties towards God to be?

The hyper-calvinist sees the sinner's duty towards God as an unchanging, unalterable duty. It is the moral law or the ten commandments. This was the law required by God of Adam and all his progeny, and that our Lord summarised in his two commandments. This is the total natural duty of man, his complete legal requirement. No other duty is required of man by Divine law other than these laws, whether man is unfallen or fallen.⁷

As it is the moral law that defines legal duty the hyper-calvinist rejects the notion that the sinner per se is required by law, as a duty, to repent or believe the Gospel. Those who require faith and repentance as the duties of the sinner are seen as attempting to redefine the moral law. The hyper-calvinist rejects such 'duty faith' and 'duty repentance' and negatively states in his doctrinal statements that 'saving faith is not a legal duty'.⁸

It is argued that if faith is a duty then it is a work. Whereas the Scripture emphasises 'the promise comes by faith so that it may be by grace' (Rom.4:16 NIV) the duty faith idea turns faith into what a man does and it becomes a work.⁹

With this foundation the hyper-calvinist can express his conviction in the terms of the 26th Article of the Gospel Standard Societies, 'we reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be

exhorted to believe in, or turn to God'.¹⁰

Those who do not accept hyper-calvinism usually challenge this position with five lines of questioning: Do not the Scriptures teach that sinners should repent? Do not the Scriptures teach that sinners should believe? Are not the invitations of the Gospel universal? How can sinners be condemned for unbelief if unbelief is not a sin? Why does the Holy Spirit strive with sinners if repentance and faith are not their duties?

(ii) How does the hyper-calvinist answer objections to his position?

We shall consider the five objections and the answers that are given to them by various types of hyper-calvinist.

Q1. Do not the Scriptures teach that sinners should repent?

The hyper-calvinist refers to the repentance that is connected with salvation as 'spiritual repentance'. As this repentance is the result of the regenerating work of the Spirit he sees it as absurd to suggest that sinners are bound to exercise it. What the Spirit must do cannot be the natural, legal duty of unregenerate man.¹¹

In the exegesis of Scripture, therefore, a careful enquiry must be made into the nature of the repentance that is required and of who it is required. It is contended that only in those places where the regenerate are addressed is spiritual repentance required. Where the Spirit's work is revealed in soul concern encouragements to repentance are legitimate (eg. Acts 2:37-38).¹² Otherwise, they are not.

While Styles and Gill do not always agree on the exact interpretation of every passage of Scripture they have a generally similar approach to passages dealing with repentance.

Many passages which others use to command or invite sinners to repentance in relation to salvation they see as commands to a purely natural repentance - calls to leave off particular sins to avoid temporal disasters (eg. Luke 13:3; Acts 8:22; 17:30). This repentance is not Gospel related and so is not spiritual but a response to God as Creator and Law Giver rather than as Saviour.¹³

Other Scriptures are also rejected as having to do with spiritual or Gospel repentance because they are addressed to the Jews. As the Jews were a people in covenant with God, and had special responsibilities towards the Messiah, calls to them to repent were calls to the national repentance of a people in covenant with God. By no fair exegetical principle can they be viewed as unregenerate Gentiles, so verses relating to covenant Jews may not be preached and applied to unregenerate, ungodly men not in covenant. This applies to New Testament verses (eg. Matt.3:2; Acts 3:19) as well as those in the Old Testament.¹⁴

This principle has been formalised in the 34th article of the Gospel Standard churches, 'We believe that we have no Scripture warrant to take the exhortations in the Old Testament intended for the Jews in national covenant with God, and apply them in a spiritual and saving sense to unregenerate men'.¹⁰

In this way all verses relating to repentance are classified and the hyper-calvinist believes that the duty to tell the unregenerate to repent is not proven.

Q2. Do not the Scriptures teach that sinners should believe?

The hyper-calvinist follows a similar procedure with the passages relating to faith. Spiritual faith, faith connected to the Gospel, is the result of the regenerating work of the Spirit and cannot therefore be a work of unregenerate man or his duty. The 33rd article of the Gospel Standard churches states, 'For ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependant upon the new creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power and on the other hand, to deny the doctrine of special redemption'.¹⁰

In dealing with those passages that relate to faith some are dismissed because of their Jewish connection. It is one thing for Jews to be called to accept their Messiah, quite another for unregenerate Gentiles to be called to receive Christ as Saviour on the basis of the same verses. Texts much loved by A.Fuller to prove duty faith (eg. John 12:36) are thus ruled out of court.¹⁵

Other Scriptures are rejected as non-salvational in content. The use of Eccles.12:1 is rejected as an abuse of a verse calling creatures to recognise creaturely responsibilities by those who use it to encourage the young to believe in the Saviour.¹⁶

Some Scriptures which are popularly used in Gospel preaching are rejected by hyper-calvinists for this purpose not because they are addressed to Jews but because they are in letters to Christian churches. Those who are exhorted to be reconciled to God (2 Cor.5:20) are not unregenerate sinners but regenerate Christians. The reconciliation called for is the acceptance by the Christian of his Gospel privileges. It has nothing to do with the unregenerate.¹⁷

Styles (but not Gill) goes to great lengths to make verses which appear to suggest a command or invitation to the unregenerate in fact commands to the regenerate. Many hyper-calvinists would no doubt reject his embarrassing use of Isa.45:22. He begins by stating that the speaker must always be God and not the preacher, so that effectual calling is in view rather than general invitation, and then interprets 'the ends of the earth' according to its 'spiritual signification' ie. those sinners who are at a conscious distance from God! The word 'conscious' is the key as that suggests the Spirit has been at work and so the invitation can stand.¹⁸

By this procedure the verses which are left are those which show 'sensible sinners', ie. sinners who have experienced the working of the Spirit, and them alone, being encouraged to believe. A sinner conscious of his need (Acts 16:30) is thus exhorted to believe (Acts 16:31).¹⁹

The hyper-calvinist believes that by his careful exegesis of Scripture in its context he has shown that duty faith is an unscriptural idea.

Q3. Are not the invitations of the Gospel universal?

Much energy has been expended by hyper-calvinists in opposing the term 'offer' in respect to Gospel invitations. Such a word is seen as implying the ability of the creature to take the Gospel or leave it, and it is seen as contrary to both the concept of limited atonement and the idea of predestination. If the elect are irreversibly chosen and Christ died only for them then to offer the non-

elect salvation through Christ is a nonsense. Joseph Hussey spends much of his tedious book repeating in one hundred and one ways the same basic objection to the word 'offer'. He argues that as Christ is to be preached he may not be offered. The idea of offering is antithetical to the idea of proclaiming.²⁰

Other hyper-calvinists are more interested in the invitations themselves and their exact wording. They reject the idea that these invitations are universal or indiscriminate. Rather, each invitation has within it the spiritual characteristics to which it is addressed. These characteristics are the marks of the regenerate. Not all men, but the thirsty, the weary and heavy laden etc. are exhorted to come.²¹ There are no invitations of the more general nature to all men to come in spiritual faith and spiritual repentance.

The Gospel Standard churches have an additional way of undercutting the passages which might present a universal Gospel offer. It must be remembered that verses to the Jewish nation are cut out under article 34 as we have seen, verses in the epistles are addressed to the regenerate in the churches, so we are only really left with verses in Acts. Article 32 reads, 'We believe that it would be unsafe, from the brief records we have of the way in which the apostles, under the immediate direction of the Lord, addressed their hearers in certain special cases and circumstances, to derive absolute and universal rules for ministerial addresses in the present day under widely different circumstances'.¹⁰ By this method the testimony of Acts to the manner of inviting sinners is removed.

The hyper-calvinist again believes that he has no solid grounds on which to invite the unregenerate to do anything. Many feel that in a mixed congregation the mixture prevents much exhortation being given at all.

Q4. How can sinners be condemned for unbelief if unbelief is not a sin?

The hyper-calvinist could not agree more! He argues that sin has to do with duty, that faith is not a duty, so unbelief is not culpable.²² As unbelief is not a sin the sinner in no way adds to his sufferings in hell by rejecting faith in Christ. He cannot be punished if faith is not his duty. He will suffer for his own

sins - the breaking of the moral law.²³

The hyper-calvinist finds the idea of condemning a man to greater punishment for failing to believe in Christ for salvation an absurdity because the unregenerate have nothing to do with the death of Christ. Christ died only for the elect - effectively and sufficiently.

He rejects the idea that there is an infinite value or sufficiency in the blood of Christ. He holds to the commercial theory of the atonement. Christ's sufferings were exactly proportionate to the number of the elect. If God had elected more sinners Christ's sufferings would have increased. If he had elected less Christ's sufferings would have decreased. The idea of telling sinners that there is a sufficiency in the blood of Christ to cover their sins if they will but believe is rejected as unscriptural in all its parts, and as useless rhetoric that will accomplish nothing for the non-elect.²⁴

Scriptures that are said to teach that unbelief earns wrath (eg. Ps.2:12; John 3:18) are dismissed as teaching no such thing. The homage required of kings (Ps.2:12) is not spiritual faith but a recognition of the supremacy of Christ over human rulers.²⁵ In John 3:18 the word 'because' is seen as not giving the reason for condemnation, but simply as a way of stating an inevitable logical conclusion. Facts are stated but no reasons are given in this verse.²⁶

The hyper-calvinist is again satisfied that his position faces no real scriptural challenge.

Q5. Why does the Holy Spirit strive with sinners if repentance and faith are not their duties?

In looking at the scriptural passages which relate to the strivings of the Spirit or our Lord, the hyper-calvinist finds no evidence of internal striving to bring the unregenerate to spiritual repentance and faith.

The strivings of the Spirit or of our Lord are related to the avoidance of physical or national disasters. The Jewish motif is very evident in the reasoning again. Jews are striven with

externally through the ministry of the Word to receive their national Messiah or face national disaster.²⁷ Our Lord's dissatisfaction in Matt.23:37 was because though he had often sought to teach them publicly (ie. gather them) they were unwilling to come.²⁸ No higher spiritual matter is involved.

Even Gentiles could be striven with through preaching to avoid physical disasters such as the Flood (Gen.6:3),²⁹ and sometimes moral repentance in the community resulted, as at Ninevah,³⁰ but striving to produce spiritual repentance which fails is inconsistent with the invincibility of the Spirit.³¹

Hyper-calvinist concern to be rid of the idea of the Spirit's striving to bring about spiritual repentance and faith is necessary because such strivings in the spiritual realm are seen as the evidence of regeneration.³² Only the regenerate elect must be allowed to have them, therefore. Wherever the Spirit is savingly at work (however feebly his work may manifest itself) there is the ground for confidence that sovereign love and redeeming grace are present.³³ If the non-elect could experience similar strivings what ground would the elect have for believing themselves regenerate?

We have seen how representative hyper-calvinists answer the objections raised against their refusal to call sinners to repentance and faith.

(iii) What are the consequences of hyper-calvinism for evangelism?

In preaching there must be a proclamation of the moral law so that sin can be clearly defined. The duties of the sinner as a creature subject to his Creator and Law-giver must be pressed home. This will create a natural piety.³⁴ This piety must be clearly distinguished from supernatural religion that is established and maintained by the Holy Spirit. It does have, however, the advantage of making the sinner religious and moral. It is in this context that, listening to the Word of God, he might find himself the subject of regeneration. Natural religious duties are not to be despised as totally valueless, even though they cannot save or induce God to give salvation.

John Gill comments on Peter's statement to Simon Magus (Acts 8:22), 'though he were in a state of nature, the Apostle exhorts him to

the duty of prayer; for prayer is a natural duty, and binding upon all men, though none but a spiritual man can perform it in a spiritual way'.³⁵

But none of this is Gospel work. It is law work. What Gospel work may be done? Gill again gives the answer, 'We are ambassadors for him; we come with full powers from him, not to propose terms of peace, to treat with men about it, to offer it to them, but to publish and proclaim it as made by him'.³⁶ He repudiates offers and terms (ie. statements such as 'if you believe then ...') and emphasises proclamation.

What God has done in Christ for his people is to be proclaimed. Regeneration and its marks are to be explained so that the 'emotions, desires and actions which reveal his gracious presence in the heart'³⁷ may be known, for from these a personal experience of regeneration has to be 'inferred'.³⁷

The preacher proclaims and explains but he does not command, exhort or invite with respect to faith or repentance or seeking the aid of God's Spirit.³⁸ Thus the first part of the 34th article of the Gospel Standard churches reads, 'We believe that any such expressions as convey to the hearers the belief that they possess a certain power to flee to the Saviour, to close in with Christ, to receive Christ, etc., while in an unregenerate state, so that unless they do thus close with Christ etc., they shall perish are untrue, and must therefore, be rejected'.¹⁰

The preacher proclaims and explains, but only God regenerates. When God does this the regenerate person becomes conscious of it by inference from the tell-tale signs,³⁷ and from the fact that the Spirit of God applies the word he hears to him in such a way that repentance and faith result.³⁹ Preachers can induce a mere human credence. Only God can produce a heaven-born faith.⁴⁰

What of the sinner? He can practice his natural duties and perform his natural religion, but for supernatural religion he must wait until the Holy Spirit is ready. He must not bemoan his long period of being unconverted for this is to question the wise timing of God.⁴¹ When the Spirit applies the word to his heart and he infers his regeneration he may proceed as God directs.⁴²

How are Christians to view their own failure as witnesses, the attitude of Christ to the progress of the Gospel, and to the prolonged refusal of sinners to come to him? Let Styles answer, 'Much that is preached for gospel in the present day asserts or implies that the Lord Jesus is continually disappointed, embarrassed and distressed at the failings of professing Christians, the slow progress His cause is making, and the prolonged refusal of sinners to give him their hearts ... These misrepresentations of the character and conduct of the enthroned Saviour are made to incite the church to earnestness and liberality, and to induce sinners to become pious. On the contrary, we believe that the existence of our Lord is one of unbroken joy and unruffled confidence, as He beholds the eternal Spirit, glorify His name by bringing all to His feet, for whom He died, in response to His intercessory prayers. Unremitting success attends His cause'.⁴³

References

1. This is not slander but a statement in a private letter from a prominent hyper-calvinist.
2. A comparison of Gill J (1971) Sovereign Grace Publishers (USA) 'The Cause of God and Truth' with Gill J (1980) Baker Book House 'Gill's Commentary' bears this out.
3. Peter Toon gives Joseph Hussey a large place in his book 'Hyper-Calvinism' (1967) The Olive Tree. His actual influence among modern hyper-calvinists is negligible and his views are rejected by prominent modern hyper-calvinists.
4. This information supplied in letter by a prominent hyper-calvinist.
5. W.J.Styles had influence among hyper-calvinists outside of the Gospel Standard churches through his book 'Manual of Faith and Practice' (1897) in which he quotes numerous hyper-calvinist authors and preachers.
6. John Gill was a prominent hyper-calvinist whose books have been mentioned and whose scholarship was revered among hyper-calvinists.
7. Styles op.cit. p.16-23

8. Styles op.cit. p.20,186,205. Most Strict Baptist Associations had these statements in their articles until very recently.
9. Styles op.cit. p.209
10. The Gospel Standard churches are a group of Strict Baptist churches who adopted developed hyper-calvinist articles nos. 32-34 in 1878. They still retain these to this day.
11. Styles op.cit. p.186
12. Styles op.cit. p.239
13. Styles op.cit. p.238-240; Gill 'Cause' p.35; Gill 'Commentary' Vol.V. p.498,939
14. Styles op.cit. p.238,239,241-247; Gill 'Cause' p.34-35
15. Styles op.cit. p.211,212,213,215,216,221,222,223,228,232,241-247
16. Styles op.cit. p.213
17. Styles op.cit. p.228-231,233; Gill 'Cause' p.44; Gill 'Commentary' Vol.VI p.310
18. Styles op.cit. p.214
19. Styles op.cit. p.225
20. Joseph Hussey's book is called 'Operations of Grace but no Offers'
21. Gill 'Cause' p.19; Gill 'Commentary' Vol V p.101, Vol VI p.1084
22. Styles op.cit. p.20,23,233-237
23. Styles op.cit. p.56
24. Styles op.cit. p.43,47-49
25. Styles op.cit. p.234
26. Styles op.cit. p.235
27. Styles op.cit. p.114-116; Gill 'Cause' p.36
28. Styles op.cit. p.113-114; Gill 'Cause' p.28-29
29. Styles op.cit. p.111-112; Gill 'Cause' p.3-4
30. Styles op.cit. p.177
- 38.

31. Styles op.cit. p.99,100,104,111-120
32. Styles op.cit. p.108-109
33. Styles op.cit. p.105
34. Styles op.cit. p.124-125
35. Gill 'Commentary' Vol V p.861 cf. Styles comment on why children should be taught to pray p.125
36. Gill 'Commentary' Vol VI p.310
37. Styles op.cit. p.167
38. Styles op.cit. p.101
39. Styles op.cit. p.131-133,195
40. Styles op.cit. p.186-208
41. Styles op.cit. p.168
42. Styles op.cit. p.167,132,133
43. Styles op.cit. p.86

Editor's Note. The writer has agreed to write a critical assessment of the 'Hyper' position in our next issue.

INTERPRETING AND APPLYING SCRIPTURE

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From the 9th to 11th March, thirty-five representatives from the constituent member churches of the BEC met in NORTHAMPTON to consider five papers dealing with issues related to the interpretation and application of scripture. The papers were distributed to conference members in advance, with a view to the maximum benefit being obtained from these days of corporate study.

Most of those attending were pastors of local churches. It may well

be asked what benefit to the churches could result from a group of pastors spending hours of their limited time considering such reputedly abstruse subjects as 'the New Hermeneutic'. The writer would respond in Pauline fashion, "Much in every way!" In summarising the content of the papers, the outcome of the discussions, and my impressions of this, the first such study-conference I have attended, I hope to show why this is so.

In the first paper, Rev Dr Eryl Davies dealt with FEATURES OF CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION against the background of the New Hermeneutic. Traditionally, hermeneutics has to do with the application of proper principles in order to interpret a passage of scripture and with a view to properly applying the message of that passage in the present - the very theme of this study-conference. In the context of the New Hermeneutic however, the term has acquired the sense of an account of the way in which the Word of God moves from the ancient text to a meaningful proclamation in the present. Central to this is the so-called language-event or word-event through which God's Word becomes an event time and time again in the realm of our human language.

Dr Davies first gave reasons why the study of this subject is so important. These included the fact that a "lively debate" on hermeneutics is taking place in contemporary theology, centering around this approach, highlighting the fact that hermeneutics has been much neglected in English Theology. Evangelicals must be concerned with how the Bible's message 'speaks' to modern man.

The leading exponents of the New Hermeneutics are Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling. Dr Davies described the influences which form the background to their thought. These include fundamentally, the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and, more directly, the theory of language advocated by Hans-Georg Gadamer and the historical-critical approach to the interpretation of the New Testament of Rudolph Bultmann, who were themselves greatly influenced by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. In line with Kant, Heidegger taught that it is impossible to go outside the area of our own 'historic' existence, and "Heidegger's category of 'world-hood' is basic to Fuch's description of hermeneutics."

The paper then highlighted features of the New Hermeneutic. Basic to it is the concept that the problem of hermeneutics extends

beyond the text to the interpreter because of the temporal and cultural distance between them. Perhaps of special value was the way in which the paper isolated four stages in the approach of theologians of this school to the New Testament in order to ascertain the present challenge of a text.

First of all, historical-critical analysis of the text is necessary. This performs a basically negative function, ie. the removal of all the conceivable possibilities of the interpreter deceiving himself as to the aim of the Biblical text. Secondly, 'common ground' is to be obtained between the interpreter and the text. According to Fuchs, the success of our Lord's parables related to the fact that he created and entered a world which he shared with his hearers. In this respect, we were introduced to the hermeneutical circle in the sense of a continuous interaction between the interpreter and the text involving movement and progress in understanding. The interpreter puts questions to the text which reflect his own pre-conditioning. He is changed by the text's answers, leading to him asking a new set of questions and receiving different answers etc.etc. Consequently, amongst other things, interpretation is an on-going open-ended process, existentially oriented. Thirdly, the interpreter is to exhibit openness to the text, waiting in receptive silence for Being to come to speech. Finally, a 'merging of horizons' occurs between the text and the interpreter, otherwise known as a 'language event' or 'word event'. A deep interaction occurs affecting the interpreter in a challenging manner.

Dr Davies then highlighted some of the weaknesses inherent in this approach. It undermines the objective authority of the Bible as divinely inspired and inerrant. Having done this, it is guilty of a subjectivism which disparages the role of the mind, denies that the significance of a text flows out of its meaning, and reduces the meaning and challenge of a text to that which comes through to the particular interpreter. Furthermore, the New Hermeneutic manifests an almost magical view of the nature of language, failing to do justice to the range of functions it has within revelation, and identifying language with 'Being'. Lastly this approach exaggerates the difference between the original writers and the interpreter.

In the final section of this paper, the challenge of the New

Hermeneutic was faced. This includes the pastoral concern which underlies and motivates it. In interpreting God's Word we need to be mindful of the complex contemporary problems which our people face, for example, in the realm of social and medical ethics. Other aspects of this challenge include the importance of applying the text and the necessity to be mindful that there are 'existential' factors which affect our interpretation of scripture. However, the main contribution of the New Hermeneutic concerns their approach to our Lord's parables, which highlights, for example, our tendency to identify with the publican in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector, whereas Jesus' original hearers would have identified with the Pharisee and would hence have been deeply disturbed and shocked by his climactical utterance (Luke 18:14).

The present writer heartily concurred with Dr Davies' statement that "our own hermeneutics have been atrocious at times", and his final comment, "The greatest challenge, possibly, from the New Hermeneutic is that we should improve our own hermeneutics".

The conference now moved from the general to the particular and from how hermeneutics should not be done to how it should. An Old Testament example of this was given in the second paper, AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF LEVITICUS 17, by Rev Principal John Waite.

After stressing the importance of this chapter as it bears upon the doctrine of the atonement, Rev Waite first of all considered its place in the overall structure of Leviticus. He suggested that chapter 17 is a transitional chapter, though belonging to the second part of the book (chs.17-27). However, having as its main theme "the sanctity of blood", it is also complementary to the preceding chapter on the Day of Atonement, which pre-eminently indicates the significance of sacrifice in the life of Israel and, consequently, the unique sacredness of the blood.

He then analysed the chapter into its constituent points, noting that, after a significant introduction, it clearly falls into four well-defined sections which all reflect the close-knit unity of the chapter. Each section was then carefully exegeted.

Vv 3-7 deal with the prohibition of slaughtering domestic animals away from the Tabernacle. (N.B. The Hebrew verb *sha'chat*, translated

'sacrifices' in the NIV, actually has the more general sense of 'to kill' or 'to slaughter'). Any Israelite who killed an animal which belonged to the sacrificial category either outside the camp, or within the camp but not at the Tabernacle was held to have 'shed blood'. He was thus exposed to the ultimate penalty, "that man shall be cut off from among his people" (AV).

Whereas these verses were concerned with 'peace' or 'fellowship' offerings, with which sacrificial meals were associated, vv 8,9 deal with the burnt offering (ʕlah), which belonged to God in its entirety. Rev Waite indicated that "the thrust of this section is to make illegal the offering of sacrifices to God in any other place whatsoever save at the sanctuary which had been set up at God's command and according to Divine specifications". Animal sacrifice must not be misused, and thus the peculiar significance of sacrificial blood, and its unique sanctity, must not be denied.

The key section of this chapter is vv 10-12 which deal with the prohibition of the eating of blood. Of central importance is verse 11. In this verse, the two-fold ground upon which the eating of "any manner of blood" is forbidden, is given. The first aspect is expressed thus: "The life of the flesh is in the blood". The meaning of this may be clarified by comparison with verse 14, Genesis 9:4 and Deuteronomy 12:23. It should be translated "the life of the flesh is the blood". Blood is the visible symbol of the life (nepheg) which is itself invisible. The second aspect, resting upon the first, is expressed in the rest of the verse. Mr Waite preferred the last statement of the verse to be rendered "for the blood makes atonement by the life".

In this connection, he carefully examined the meaning of the Hebrew verb 'kipper' translated "to make atonement", together with the cognate noun 'kopher'. Avoiding uncertain etymological considerations, he concentrated on the non-cultic use of this verb. The passage in Exodus 30:11-16, concerning atonement money, is especially relevant. Mr Waite also considered other passages, such as Numbers 35:30-34. From these passages, he concluded: "It would appear then that kipper involves the idea of the payment of a ransom - a kopher ... To make atonement thus means to pay a ransom for one's life".

It was now possible to argue that sacrificial blood was the

evidence of a life that had been taken. This was the ransom-price that enabled the person on whose behalf the sacrifice was offered to escape the death that his sin deserved. Animal blood had a unique sanctity "because God had appointed it to make propitiation for the sins of His Covenant people upon the altar".

Finally, by way of exegesis, vv 13-16 (closely related to vv 10-12) deal with the prohibition of the eating of the blood of animals caught in hunting, and the eating of clean animals found dead.

The paper now dealt with reasons for maintaining that the prohibition concerning the eating of animal blood is not binding upon Christians. Although Jesus Christ fulfilled and abolished the types and shadows of the Mosaic law, this prohibition antedated the Law (Genesis 9:4) and was enjoined on Gentile believers (Acts 15:20,29) Dealing first with the latter factor, Mr Waite argued that this decree of the Jerusalem Council was a temporary expedient in view of the continued horror of Jewish Christians concerning eating blood. Its non-permanency is clear from 1 Cor.10:25 and Romans 14:14. Secondly, having argued for the Divine institution of sacrifice from the beginning, and that the Noahic prohibition was because of the sanctity of blood through God's appointment of it in sacrifice, Mr Waite reasoned that this prohibition too had been abrogated by the great anti-typical sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the last part of the paper Mr Waite dealt with the abiding significance of sacrificial blood. He was particularly concerned with the view that the blood represents life released as an offering to God - life which has become available for another end. In line with his exegesis, he argued cogently that the significance of blood in sacrifice is that of a life forfeited in place of the life of the sinner who offers the sacrifice. It speaks of the death of a substitute under the judgement of God. It symbolises life violently ended, being given or taken in death. All this is indicative of the true nature of the death of Jesus Christ.

This helpful paper was followed by a thorough treatment of 1 Corinthians 7, as a New Testament example of how to interpret and apply Scriptures. This paper was prepared and presented by Rev Professor A.C.Boyd. The concern, as with the Leviticus paper, was the permanent-passing 'complex'.

Mr Boyd pointed out that the chapter is almost exclusively

concerned with marriage. However, Paul is not writing a treatise on marriage, but answering questions put to him. Again, Paul is dealing specifically with the Corinthian situation, but this must not be so stressed as to obscure the abiding and universal significance of his message. After answering those who pit Paul's (apparent) imminent expectation of the Parousia against the contemporary relevance of much that he wrote in this chapter, Rev Boyd referred to the phrase "dia tēn enestōsan anankēn" (because of the present necessity) in verse 26. Some take it to refer to a temporary crisis affecting Corinth, some as a reference to "the great tribulation", and others as a reference to the affliction that characterises the whole of the time between the two advents of Jesus Christ. He considered that the best approach "is the one that accepts that when Paul came to address those in mind in v26 (or 25 and 26) he saw that it was particularly relevant in their case to make mention of the 'present necessity'".

Mr Boyd then looked at the text of the chapter in some detail. He considered it in terms of four main sections.

In vv 1-17, Paul answers questions concerning marriage, raised by the Corinthians in a letter, in a straightforward but non-simplistic way. Paul does not contradict those at Corinth who were saying "It is good for a man not to touch (marry) a woman" But he cannot share their philosophies or preconceived ideas. Paul seems to regard marriage as the normal, regular, perfectly proper, practice, and the directions of vv 3-5 make it plain that it is to be a real marriage. However, for those who, like Paul, have the gift, to whom immorality is not a significant danger, "there is a life ... to live that Paul wished them to have".

In vv 10-11, Paul addresses the married in the light of what has been said in vv 1-7, especially vv 2-5. Paul is here giving a commandment in a matter on which the Lord Himself had clearly spoken. They were not to separate. Adultery is not under consideration here but rather, whether or not it was a "good" thing per se for Christian couples to separate. In vv 12-16 Paul addresses the partners in mixed marriages who were in a situation not under consideration in the commands of the Lord. There were those in Corinth, converted after they were married, who felt that they should put away or leave their pagan partners. However we translate 'aphiēmi' (divorce NIV), Paul is envisaging the breaking up of the

marriage and he categorically forbids the Christian partner to take the initiative in this. Concerning the encouragement Paul gives to obey this command in verse 14, Mr Boyd noted that the sanctification of the unbelieving partner is spoken about as an accomplished reality, already true while he or she is still an unbeliever (apistos). "He cannot therefore, be speaking about any regenerating or renewing work of the Holy Spirit". Mr Boyd also stressed that the "desertion" envisaged in verse 15 is not on the basis of such grounds as incompatibility. "It is the clash of unbelief with faith that is in view here". The statement "is not bound" is interpreted in various ways and may provide grounds for a believer to be free to remarry in such circumstances. However, the emphasis is that the believing party is not at liberty to divorce or depart. In conclusion, verse 17 states the general principle that the circumstances in which a Christian finds himself are those in which he is to live out his Christian life.

In the second section, vv 18-24, Paul applies what he has said in verse 17 to the realm of religious and social distinctions. The paper indicated however, that these verses must be understood in their relationship to the whole chapter, with its theme of marriage. Paul is emphasising a particular point in this connection.

Mr Boyd took vv 25-38 as a unit, containing advice concerning 'parthenoi' (virgins). On the basis of grammatical and exegetical considerations he also took the view that the 'parthenoi' are unmarried girls, perhaps betrothed, whom Paul does not address directly because they were not in a position to take the initiative in the matter of marriage. He further regarded those addressed in the whole passage as the fiances, rather than the fathers (or guardians), of betrothed maidens. In any case, the burden of Paul's advice is in line with what he said in verse 8 concerning other unmarrieds. The distinction Paul makes between 'gnōmē' (v25 advice) and 'epitagē' (command) is to be noted. In this section Paul is giving advice concerning the betrothed, whether it is wise to continue an engagement, or whether sin is involved in breaking it. Mr Boyd argued that in the first part of verse 27, Paul is not addressing a married man but an engaged man. The word 'gunē' (translated 'wife' in AV and NIV) can be used of a betrothed girl. Paul's advice is that, in certain circumstances ("the present necessity" v26) it is good for a man to remain engaged rather than

get married, or to remain unengaged if an engagement has been broken. However, because he is giving 'gnōmē' and not 'epitagē', failure to conform to it is not sin.

In verse 36, Paul qualifies his advice for those who feel they have good reason not to accept it. But in vv 37 and 38 he makes it clear that the man who has reasoned things out and, not being pressurised by the will of others, follows Paul's advice, takes the preferable course. The observations of vv 29-35 are very germane to all this. Whether we take vv 29b-31 as imperatival or a statement of what will be, it indicates that the attitude of the Christian towards the things of the world is to be one of "engagement yet disengagement". It is essential to get priorities right. In this respect, there are some circumstances in which it is easier than others for the believer to live out what these verses command or imply. This is the tone of vv 32-35. Paul is not suggesting that the striving of the married Christian to serve the interests of his or her partner is wrong. But Paul's point is that there are legitimate claims on the married man or woman that come in the way of undivided service to the Lord. This is intensified in a time of affliction ("the present necessity" v26).

The final section, vv 39-40, deals of course with the remarriage of widows.

In conclusion, some considerations of permanent relevance and contemporary application were highlighted. In particular the place of celibacy and the single life were stressed. The single life holds out countless opportunities for service and, "there can be a form of exaltation of marriage that is as much a perversion of Scripture teaching as is the Roman Catholic exaltation of celibacy"

The conference no moved specifically into the realm of the practical. The final two papers considered how Scripture's permanent authority and relevance may be applied to actual situations in a multi-faith environment. In this connection, the paper by Rev Maurice Wheatley dealt with CHURCH PLANTING AND GROWTH. In introducing this subject, he highlighted the nature and importance of church planting and indicated that such missionary activity always takes place in a given "culture". This raises such issues as how absolute and relative are to be distinguished and on what basis aspects of cultural practice should be excluded. The paper then

followed this matter through in four sections.

In the first section, Mr Wheatley considered the significance and power of culture as illustrated by the overall church situation in Africa. The vast complex of culturally orientated religious forms and structures that have arisen in the African churches was seen as a reaction to Western missionary activities of the past. Western missionaries saw little of value in African tribal customs and, frequently, Western values were assumed to be above question. For example, polygamy was often integral to tribal coherency and security. Western eyes saw a plurality of wives as reprehensible although not explicitly forbidden in the Bible. Demands made of newly converted men to conform to a monogamous pattern undermined the security of women and led to various evils. The paper made reference to other actions which "struck at the roots of traditional well-being., identity and security". The translation of the Scriptures into the vernacular provided an independent standard of reference and was "a major causative factor" of the spread of churches independent of those founded through missionary activity. In the long run cultural factors will not be ignored.

In the second section, the Church Growth Movement was considered. The father of this movement is Donald Anderson McGavran (born 1897) and the basic text book is his 'Understanding Church Growth' (published 1970). The home of the movement is North America (inevitably!). The theology of the movement is basically evangelical and the motivating desire is to mobilise the church to reach the vast numbers of people who have never heard the gospel.

Mr Wheatley then considered the major emphases of the Church Growth Movement. Numerical growth should be a primary concern of the church. The church should be making disciples. The church should concentrate on the responsive areas and segments of society. The church should use every possible aid to understanding its situation and fulfilling its task. The church must plan adequately and mobilise its whole membership. In enlarging on these emphases, reference was made to several key aspects of McGavran's thought. To give examples: his D1 category of "discipleship", in which a non-christian society turns to Christ for the first time evidencing this say by a sociological change; his concept of "winnable people", as those who for circumstantial reasons are more open to the gospel; his highlighting of non-theological factors which

prevent people becoming Christians, such as the fear of Hindus of being separated from their people.

In a brief assessment of the movement, Mr Wheatley referred to its success-orientated outlook, its pragmatism, and the tendency of its literature to suggest that growth is "achievable if only we master the technique". He then indicated the challenge to us of this movement, for example, in the matter of the non-theological factors related to the success of the gospel. Must we always expect God to overcome cultural barriers in bringing people to himself? "The theological ones are big enough".

The third section of the paper dealt specifically with McGavran's concept of People Movements and Homogenous Church Units. Western Christianity has an individualistic character incongruous to many areas of the world where the individual sees himself as part of a corporate entity such as a tribe, in which social practice, common religious belief, and power structures, are closely intertwined. This suggests the need for a change in a number of people together to enable them to alter their life out of allegiance to Jesus Christ and at the same time to retain the identity of their tribe or clan. These are known as "people movements". The people of such a group move forward together, the group taking its decisive step in its own time. McGavran regards such movements as the only way to plant churches in any significant number. In close connection with this, McGavran uses the term "homogenous unit" to describe the various sociological groups which have an identity of their own, sharing a lifestyle, language and assumptions. McGavran urges that there should be a deliberate strategy of church-planting amongst such groups as groups, allowing them, for example, to create their own indigenous music for worship. A broader manifestation of brotherhood is seen as a pattern for long-term existence, not a strategy for planting churches. In these ways "bridge-building" takes place using "the natural web of kinship and friendship in families, tribes, clans and castes".

In the last section, a few guidelines were suggested for the use of Scripture in a church-planting situation. The legitimacy of culture was stressed, indicating that there should be as little cultural separation as possible. In this respect a true "crux decision" must be looked for in a convert. This might be baptism, or a cultural factor which is truly significant such as the

abandoning of the turban. We were exhorted to exercise caution in applying deducted principles. Our opposition to polygamy is not based on express biblical statements but on deduction from scriptural principles. In such cases, there would appear to be a place for an "interim adjustment" taking a long-term view of the effect of the gospel on practices of this nature. We were also exhorted to distinguish between form and function. The example was given of the observation of the Lord's Supper by the Uhunduni tribe, using sweet potatoes and red juice from wild raspberries!

In similar vein, Rev George Hemming presented his paper on EVANGELISM AND MISSION. This took the form of a case study. It was based on the experience of a group of missionaries working amongst Muslims in Bangladesh, and had relevance to the whole subject of our evangelistic approach to Muslims.

The paper first pointed up the problems. Muslims in the Indian sub-continent associate the gospel with Hinduism, firmly believing that Christians worship three gods. The Muslim is convinced that the Christian Bible is a corrupt version of the Koran and finds the personal habits of Christians, who he sees as consuming both pork and wine, strongly offensive. He also has the impression that many people become Christians for the financial well-being associated with Western culture. Above all there is the problem of the converted Muslim, turning to the Western missionary for help in a time of persecution, henceforth being removed from his own environment with the consequent loss of his witness to his own people.

In view of all this, the missionary team have adopted a new strategy. This includes: the avoidance of the westernisation of the gospel; the ordering of their approach so that no financial dependence of converts upon missionaries is ever encouraged; the aim of obtaining group, rather than isolated, conversions. However, total loyalty to the Scripture is emphasised above all.

Mr Hemming next dealt with the need to avoid unnecessary offences. The missionaries adopt as simple a lifestyle as possible so that Muslims invited into their homes do not feel out of place. They normally adopt the dress of a Muslim teacher in order to be accepted as a religious teacher. The term 'Christian' is avoided, as this "conjures up a picture of a pig-eating, liquor-drinking, three-god worshipper". Other examples, for discussion, were given.

Furthermore, operations are based in a central town from where people in surrounding villages are reached. Those interested come to the central teaching location. Thus, when a group of men in a particular village become seriously interested, there is no western presence in their midst to confirm the view of their peers that Christianity is a Western religion.

The paper then turned to the complex matter of attitude to customs. We must remember that matters which seem trivial to us can give agony to missionaries in the real situation. First, customs which are unprofitable but nonetheless harmless were considered. These can be submitted to. However, Rev Hemming found problems in the matter of the wearing of prayer hats by men, since he regards it as obligatory for women to have their heads covered during times of public worship. Secondly, customs which are profitable in essence but questionable in form were dealt with. These include, praying five times a day towards Mecca and the observation of Ramazan. It was noted that the devout Muslim neither eats, nor drinks, nor even swallows his saliva, during the daylight hours of Ramazan. Fasting is an excellent practice for Christians. Should they thus outwardly conform to this Muslim feast, or demonstrate their new-found liberty in Christ? Is it, in any case, as simple as that?

In the final part of the paper, Rev Hemming turned his attention to baptism. He was concerned with "the fierce practical problems of establishing the Christian church in a Muslim community". He saw baptism as presenting insuperable problems since it leads to the rejection of a Muslim from his society, giving no hope of establishing true churches in Muslim cultural situations. This is because religion, culture and nationhood are bound together in the Muslim mind, in a way that is "impossible for any Westerner to grasp". He thus sought a reappraisal of the whole question of baptism. Making reference to Paul's apparent undervaluation of baptism in 1 Cor.1, and our Lord's command to "wash one another's feet" which we interpret spiritually, he asked whether we could emphasise the spiritual meaning of baptism" which need not necessarily be represented by a public application of water".

Lively discussion followed the presentation of this case study. Much of the discussion focussed on whether or not the Christian in a Muslim culture should outwardly conform to the requirements

of Ramazan. (Interestingly, the previous paper regarded this matter as involving a "crux decision"). By such means, the chairman skillfully avoided the subject of baptism! Avoiding the temptation to comment on this last matter myself, I can state that these final two papers challenged several of my presuppositions about missionary strategy.

The final morning was devoted to discussion and several observations were made by way of summation. These included reference to the need for a truly Biblical theology, the importance of taking account of the mode of the passage of scripture we are studying (whether it is narrative, poetry, etc.), the equal importance of an awareness of twentieth century man, and the need for a continual reexamination of our doctrines in the light of scripture. Ultimately, as the New Hermeneutic reminds us, we must realise that the purpose of scripture is to speak to people in order to renew a people for God.

There is space only to comment on two outstanding features of the conference, as far as I was concerned. First, the mutual acceptance of, and fellowship between, brethren from various evangelical 'traditions'. Secondly, the excellent chairmanship of Rev Hywel Jones.

BOOK REVIEWS

MAN AND WOMAN IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE James B. Hurley
Published by IVP 288pp. £5.50

Dr Hurley is to be most warmly thanked for this work of worthy evangelical scholarship and the IVP is to be loudly praised for its courage in publishing it. The relationship between and the respective roles of the sexes is a most vexatious issue at the present time. It not only divides the Christian from the non-Christian world but it also is a cause of disagreement between Christians and within Churches.

In all this the teaching of the Bible is given less than its proper place. Dr Hurley's aim is to determine what Scripture in its various parts has to say on this subject. He thinks in terms of

the Old Testament and the New, and within the latter of the ministry of Jesus and the life of the Apostolic Church. Each of these phases is related to the varied background cultures, eg. Babylonian, Assyrian and Israelite; Jewish and Graeco-Roman (There is a mine of information here and some interesting correspondences and stirring contrasts).

The main burden of his book, however, is the study of Old Testament and New Testament texts such as Genesis 1 & 2, Deut.24, Matt.19, 1 Cor.7:11 & 14, Eph.5 and 1 Tim.2 & 3. Here is the real meat of this book. It is tempting to say that every Scriptural reference on this matter is related somehow, somewhere in this book! In the course of dealing with this range of material, Hurley treats the family, society and the Church as man-woman relations bear on these spheres.

Here then is a book of major importance. It is a fine example of classic exegetical and theological method and also a demonstration of the relevance of theology to life.

Rev Hywel R.Jones MA Wrexham

PREACHING WITH CONFIDENCE - A Theological Essay on the Power of the Pulpit. Dr James Daane.

Wm.B.Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1980
80pp £2.40

A veritable plethora of writers, many within the reformed tradition, have expressed themselves on the importance of preaching - Bridges, Spurgeon, Dabney and more recently J.S.Stewart, D.M.Lloyd-Jones, C.H.Dodd, J.Stott, R.H.Mounce and E.P.Clowney, to name but a few. Dr James Daane comes at the end of this list chronologically, with a forceful modern word on the subject in 'Preaching with Confidence'. Dr Daane addresses himself to a modern evangelical world, whom he regards as having largely lost the biblical vision of the importance of preaching. He is concerned particularly about those, who hold doctrinally a very high view of the Bible as the Word of God and yet inconsistently attach a low importance to the preaching of that Word.

Perhaps his most significant contribution to this line of study is the masterful way in which he asserts that the Word of God preached is in reality the Word of God. Luther and Calvin were

quite explicit about this, and Dr Daane examines the concept of the Word of God in the Bible to substantiate this claim. The Hebrew 'dabar' meaning 'event' as well as 'word' sets the tone for the active and energetic nature of the Word of God within scripture. Both in creation and in prophecy the Old Testament asserts this. The New Testament 'Logos' (Word), while in classical Greek more of a static concept, becomes living and active with overtones of the Hebrew 'dabar'. Usage of "the word of the Lord" in Gospels and Epistles demonstrates this vital quality, so that, when the church preached, it was indeed the Word of God in that very act. The examination of this concept of the Word of God is a necessary prerequisite to a study dealing with preaching, and this key theme of the book is of basic importance.

Although the Bible expresses its true nature as the Word of God in preaching, Dr Daane is quite clear that the Bible is the Word of God itself, independent of the act of preaching, for expository preaching is regarded as the norm, and all preaching must truly expose or expound the given word, whether that word be Christ or scripture. This does not exclude so-called topical sermons, but simply brings them to the touchstone of scripture. Dr Daane quotes Peter Berger earlier in his book to make a similar point. "Put simply: Ages of faith are not marked by 'dialogue' but by proclamation". (p.16 Daane). His chapter, 'The Inescapable Offense' is a healthy counterbalance to much of the weak presentation of modern evangelistic preaching, while that on 'Constructing a Sermon' advocates the sermon making but one point and forms a helpful practical conclusion to the book.

For those who think the day of preaching is over and that we must give way to group Bible-study and discussion in its place, in which ministers act as 'enablers' or 'coaches', Dr Daane's book comes as an incisive, stimulating, biblical challenge. It is well worth examining, and should help do what it proposes - instill confidence in preaching within a somewhat confused and disillusioned evangelical world.

Rev Dr. Harry Uprichard BA BD MTh Co. Antrim

NUMBERS - AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY G.J.Wenham

Published by IVP. 240pp Paperback £4.95

It would, perhaps, not be difficult to write the best available commentary on Numbers - the competitors are scarcely legion! How-

ever, Wenham has, with this volume, completed a study fully up to the standard of his earlier work on Leviticus (see Foundations No.6 p53ff).

The usual introductory essays on Title, Contents, Sources, Date and Authorship pursue a balanced conservative line and are accompanied by some excellent original work on the Structure, Theology and Christian significance of the Book. Wenham argues that the Structure of Numbers is best seen in the wider context of Exodus 1 to Numbers 33. In these chapters four sections of Divine revelation (Egypt, Sinai, Kadesh and the Plains of Moab) are linked by three short bridging passages of narrative. These three journey 'cycles' are set out in explicit parallel so that the reader is intended to compare and contrast the nation's behaviour on the different occasions. In his discussion of Israelite ritual, Wenham immediately places his commentary in a different class from its competitors since he makes considerable use of modern anthropological studies in religion. He appeals, for example, to Victor Turner, Monica Wilson and Mary Douglas while Norman Snaith's New Century Bible still appeals, as does most liberal O.T. study, to the discredited theories of Tylor, Frazer etc. (on this see further J.W. Rogerson: Anthropology and the O.T., reviewed in Foundations 2). This emphasis gives considerable insight into the understanding and interpretation of Biblical ritual. On the Theology of the book Wenham observes that it is founded in its revelation of the character of God, on the focus upon the land as the destiny of His people and its emphasis on the fact that the People of God are to be imitators of Him. Christian interpretation of Numbers is essentially by means of Typology "a natural, if not inevitable, technique of historical writing once the constancy of God's character and human nature are understood. Though the light of revelation grows even brighter with the passing of time, man's ability to respond to truth is little altered. Thus against the changing background of historical development there will be repeated cycles of sin, grace and judgement. God's ideals of holiness for Israel, the priests or Moses will prefigure the only one who ever embodied those ideals perfectly, while the actual performance of Israel or her leaders will anticipate the real experience of the church and the ministers of the gospel in every age" (p51-52). He adds, significantly, in view of his approach to biblical laws (see, again, Foundations 6) "The principle of typology may be invoked to explain the relationship of the laws in Numbers to the Christian" (p52) since the

principles of O.T. legal material remain valid and applicable in the Christian era.

The text itself is thoroughly and helpfully exegeted and each section concludes with suggested typological links. These seem at times to be somewhat facile but at least an attempt is made to meet what is surely an essential (though often neglected) requirement for such commentaries. Several Additional Notes are included within the text. They include discussion on the Route of the Exodus, several able and detailed exposés of the falsity of liberal methodological approaches to Pentateuchal criticism (eg. the detailed analyses of chapters 13-14 and 16-17 and his comments on the history of the priests and Levites) and a discussion of the large numbers in this fourth book of Moses. Reviewing the various explanations offered for these numbers, including that of his father, J.W. Wenham in 'Large Numbers in the O.T.', he suggests that they may be symbolical. His argument requires consideration.

Once again an excellent commentary from Wenham's pen. Its purchase might even inspire the preacher to tackle material in this most difficult book (apart from the story of Balaam!) and will certainly provide a reliable and, often, inspiring guide. A consideration of Wenham's methodology might also inspire a more truly biblical expository ministry among those of us who tackle Old Testament narrative and laws in our preaching.

REVIEW OF THEOLOGICAL JOURNALS 1981: Part One.

Eryl Davies

While no single, major issue stood out in the theological journals I read in 1981, nevertheless there are clear trends discernible and several important subjects continue to be discussed and, happily, in greater depth.

In suggesting areas, for example, where new evangelical writing is required, Carl Henry specifies "a comprehensive text on Christian theism vis-à-vis the modern philosophies and living world religions; a contemporary systematic theology: perspective on concerns of Christianity and science with one eye on the debate over evolution; a thorough work on the biblical canon and its

significance; a fresh text on the person and work of Christ and a careful study of the problem of revelation and culture" (C.T. p23 6 Feb). In theology generally a reevaluation of systematics continues but without any significant evangelical contribution and the doctrine of Scripture is still rightly receiving special attention both in America and in Europe.

One useful editorial attempts to remove the confusion from the inerrancy debate and warns that "we must beware of red herrings that, whether so intended or not, divert us from the real issue" (C.T. p12 29 May). Emphasising the fact that the focus of evangelical teaching about biblical inspiration has been on the result rather than on the method of inspiration, the writer shows how misleading it is to charge evangelicals with believing that the whole Bible is LITERALLY true. "The Bible may speak in figures or literal language; but rightly interpreted, it is true in all that it says". Inerrancy does not require that the Bible employ contemporary scientific terminology. Another confusion is the identification of inerrancy with 'rationalism' as if we accept inerrancy on the basis of archaeological, empirical or rational proofs. While there is adequate evidence for the doctrine we "come to it primarily because of the teaching of Christ" and, may we add, the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. A later editorial reports on the Toronto Conference held last August where 'evangelicals' with differing interpretations of the terms 'infallible' and 'inerrancy' met to share their opinions and pinpoint their differences (pp16ff 4 Sep). Jack Rogers of Fuller Theological Seminary acknowledged that he had radically misunderstood what inerrantists were saying and confessed his own "blind spots" and "lack of clear vision". His first misconceptions, he explained, related to the nature of biblical inspiration as defended by inerrantists. He felt that they were speculating as to how a perfect God must reveal himself and consequently viewed the Bible as a book of exact and precise language. In the opinion of Rogers, this overlooked the human and culturally conditioned form of the Bible. He went on to argue that the basis for this false hermeneutic "lay in the slavish dependance by inerrantists upon the common sense philosophy of Thomas Reid, the eighteenth-century Scottish realist." Inerrantists also discovered that, to some extent, they had misjudged Rogers' views. "He was objecting not to their cherished doctrine of the truth of the Bible but to the miscellaneous truths many of them were deriving from the Bible." When questioned further, Rogers stated clearly that

he did not believe that scripture ever states what is false in science or history. "Scripture could be interpreted that way if we insisted on reading back into Scripture our own contemporary ways of saying things, but that would be to misinterpret Scripture. We must constantly remember the religious purpose of the biblical writers and always allow them to speak in the language and cultural medium of their own day. But when we interpret Scripture fairly to mean what it really means to say in its own way, it tells only the truth and never in any part of it errs or guides us away from the truth." The main lesson drawn from this Toronto Conference is "that the first rule in theological controversy is to make sure you understand what the other fellow is really saying. Controversy carried on in low visibility rarely engenders anything more than heat." A challenge is then given to Rogers "to focus his attack not against inerrancy but against encrustations that have grown around it" and also to "put into writing his views on the complete truth and divine authority of Holy Scripture without surrounding his affirmations with so many qualifications that his affirmations are lost in the maze of qualifications".

"How is it", asks Professor Norman L. Geisler, "that evangelicals on both sides of the inerrancy debate can claim the Bible is wholly true and yet one side believes that there can be minor mistakes of history or science affirmed by the biblical authors, while the other side denies that there are any mistakes whatever? One errantist put it bluntly when he wrote, 'We can speak of the Bible as being inspired from cover to cover, human mistakes and all'" (p185 ERT Oct). Geisler's answer is that errantists do not hold a double standard but rather a different theory of truth. "Different theories of truth", warns Geisler, "will make a significant difference in what one considers to be an 'error' or deviation from the truth. In fact, what counts as an error on one definition of truth is not an error on another definition of truth" (p186). Distinguishing between a NONCORRESPONDENCE and CORRESPONDENCE theory of truth, Professor Geisler offers two lines of argument for a correspondence view of truth - one biblical and the other philosophical. The biblical evidence includes the ninth commandment, for example, which depends for its very meaning and effectiveness on the correspondence view of truth. "This command implies that a statement is false if it does not correspond to reality. Indeed this is precisely how the term LIE is used in Scripture. Satan is called a liar (John 8:44) because his statement to Eve, 'You will

not surely die' (Gen.3:4) did not correspond to what God REALLY said, namely, 'You will surely die' (Gen.2:17). Ananias and Sapphira 'lied' to the Apostle by misrepresenting the factual state of affairs about their finances (Acts 5:1-4)" In addition, the Bible gives numerous examples of the correspondence view of truth: for example, Genesis 42:16, Deuteronomy 18:22, 1 Kings 8:26, 22:16-22, Daniel 2:9, John 5:33, Acts 24:8,11. One further consideration is that the biblical use of the word err does not support the intentional theory of truth since it is used of unintentional 'errors' (cf Lev.4:2,27 etc). "Certain acts were wrong, whether the trespassers intended to commit them or not, and hence a guilt offering was called for to atone for their 'errors' (p195). But if this is so, why do many Christians - even some who believe in inerrancy - claim to hold a noncorrespondence (intentionality) view of truth? The reason, in Geisler's opinion, is "often quite simple: There is a confusion between THEORY of truth and TEST of truth. That is, often both parties hold the correspondence theory of truth but differ in their claims that truth is tested by correspondence, by results, or by some other method. In short, truth should be DEFINED as correspondence but DEFENDED in some other way."

Another important and interesting slant on the subject is provided by Dr John Warwick Montgomery when he asks: "What does the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture have to do with revival?" (C.T. 8 May). He establishes a close relationship between the two and illustrates it convincingly by reference to the great French revival of the nineteenth century, a story which begins in Scotland with David Bogue (1750-1825) and who had a profound influence on the spiritual development of Robert Haldane (1764-1842). Both men attached great importance to an orthodox doctrine of Scripture and wrote helpfully on the subject. A number of theological students like D'Aubigne, Monod and Gausson were converted through Haldane in Geneva and they were greatly used of God in the French revival. "The time has surely come to recognise an even greater interrelation between revival and the doctrine of biblical inerrancy", concludes Montgomery. "It is no accident that the great revivalists have been unqualified Bible believers."

Hermeneutics still continues to be a major area of study for theologians and there are welcome signs that evangelicals are entering the field which is still dominated by liberal thinkers. The EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY (ERT) reprinted in D.A.Carson's

excellent article from THEMELIOS entitled, 'Hermeneutics: A Brief Assessment of Some Recent Trends' and this is indispensable reading for those who want a reliable introduction to the contemporary discussion. The same issue (April) includes a stimulating article by Samuel P.Schlorff on "The Hermeneutical Crisis in Muslim Evangelisation". While there exists today a unique potential for significant advance in Muslim evangelisation yet, adds Schlorff, "the mission to Islam is faced with a hermeneutical crisis which risks hampering its advance. A part of the problem lies in the fact that the hermeneutical issues have been clouded by other issues" (p26). One central problem is that of using the Qur'an as a 'bridge' in Muslim evangelisation, that is, giving the Qur'an a Christian interpretation. As Schlorff rightly argues, the validity of this approach must be established on theological rather than on pragmatic grounds. For example, "it is very doubtful that an historical-grammatical exegesis of the Qur'an will support a Christian hermeneutic" (p28). A second problem is that it introduces an authority conflict into the church. Thirdly, this approach approximates dangerously to that used by the World Council of Churches in its syncretistic approach to world-religions and the Christian-Muslim dialogues established by the Vatican since 1964. For example, the Muslim and Catholic scholars in France, Algeria and Tunisia who form a Muslim-Christian Research Group adopted a set of guidelines for dialogue, one of which was that "with regard to the historical facts which found our faith, and with regard to our Scriptures, we accept 'readings' other than our own" (p33). The conclusion seems inevitable that the Christian Qur'anic hermeneutic "favours the creation of the new type of spirituality envisaged by the ecumenical movement, but is not favourable to the planting of the church in Islamic lands." Schlorff then challenges those engaged in Muslim evangelisation to heed Walter Kaiser's call to join evangelical theologians in a "hermeneutical reformation" so as to "avoid getting bogged down in the morass of relativity" (p34)

To be continued

C.T. - Christianity Today

E.R.T. - Evangelical Review of Theology