

# Foundations

**Issue No.23    Autumn 1989**

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The authors' personal views are not necessarily endorsed by all the churches of the BEC.

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# Foundations

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**A Theological Journal  
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British Evangelical Council**

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Charismatic Co-operation

Altar Calls

Contemporary Moral Issues

Applied Theology

Reformation and Renewal

Theology in Italy

New Age Trends

Book Reviews

# foundations

**Foundations** is published by the **British Evangelical Council** in May and November; its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, biblical theology, church history and apologetics – and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry; its policy gives particular attention to the theology of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.

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# Editorial

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We are focusing in this issue of FOUNDATIONS on a number of pastoral concerns which are of immediate relevance to our churches in Britain and overseas.

Alan Gibson, the BEC General Secretary, provides the opening article relating to the **Lausanne II Congress** on World Evangelisation in Manila which he attended last July. Mr Gibson here reviews Dr Jim Packer's contribution to a Congress seminar on 'The Kingdom of God and Evangelisation'.

The relevance of the next article, **To Call or Not to Call?** will be immediately apparent to readers. Keith Walker here tackles the subject of evangelistic methods and, in particular, Altar Calls. In the wake of the recent missions held in Britain by Billy Graham and Luis Palau this article makes compelling reading.

Denis Pells Cocks contributes a useful article entitled **Moral Issues in Bio-Technology**. Here is a pressing subject which is responsible for some complex pastoral questions in our churches.

Salman Rushdie's now notorious novel **The Satanic Verses** is reviewed by Merle Inniger of SIM International who then sets it in the context of the contemporary discussion about the blasphemy law in Britain.

Our Study Conference Chairman, Hywel Jones, shares with us some of his reflections on the relevance of the BEC Study Conference in the next article, **Applied Theology**.

The **Exegesis** item this time is provided by Stephen Dray and is on **Reformation and Renewal**, a study of Zephaniah 1:1-6.

A quite different article is written by the Editor in response to requests by readers for information on two radically different movements, the '**Campbellite**' Churches of Christ and the New Age Movement.

Paul Finch then contributes **An Indigenous Initiative** focusing on the need for biblical, theological reflection on the part of evangelicals in Italy.

**New Conceptions of God?** is a review article by Alan Tovey of the authorised biography of the late John A T Robinson. This will be of particular help to those interested in contemporary theology.

Stephen Dray has written another **OT Literature Update** which concentrates on recently published commentaries. We conclude with another selection of **Book Reviews** and trust this more varied issue of the journal will be of significant help to all our readers and their churches.

**The Rev Ronald C Christie MA BD MTh** is minister of Govanhill Free Church of Scotland in Glasgow and we are pleased to announce his appointment as an Assistant Editor for FOUNDATIONS.

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**GOSPEL AND CHURCH** is the title of a new book by Hywel R Jones, another of our Assistant editors. A 176 page paperback, it is an evangelical evaluation of ecumenical documents. Orders placed before the publication date in January 1990 will qualify for a £1 discount at the price of £8.95.

Write to: Evangelical Press of Wales, Bryntirion, BRIDGEND CF31 4DX.

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# A Platform for Charismatic Co-operation?

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*Alan Gibson*

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*At the Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelisation in Manila in July 1989 charismatics and non-charismatics tried to find a formula for co-operation in the task of evangelising the world. Dr J I Packer's contribution was his seminar on 'The Kingdom of God and Evangelisation' which is reviewed here.*

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Dr Packer began by distancing himself from the view of the Kingdom currently espoused by the World Council of Churches. This he identified as God by-passing the church in his dealings with mankind, re-defining evangelism in this-worldly terms, marginalising church-planting as an optional extra and denying that neighbour-love requires us to seek reconciliation with God as man's primary need.

His brief section on the **Nature of the Kingdom** traced some inadequate views previously popular before indicating that contemporary scholarship accepts that the Kingdom has both a present and a future dimension, seeing it as God's gracious action and man's response in accepting his rule. He used the term *inaugurated eschatology* to indicate that the first instalment of the Kingdom is here already. In the light of some equivocal statements on the subject, it was encouraging to hear him insisting that those who refuse the rule of Christ will not only be banished from the future re-integration of heaven and earth under his Kingship but will suffer *eternal* misery.

I will pass over his sections on the **Signs of the Kingdom** and the **Task of Evangelisation** not because they were unhelpful but because they contained little distinctively important for this present enquiry. One note of interest was his reminder that Matthew 5:16 calls for a testimony of both works and words so that relieving the aching physical needs of the world is often necessary as 'pre-evangelism' to overcome some of the prejudices men have against the church.

The seminar consisted of a consideration of **Four Theses**.

1. *Evangelism under the Kingdom must call for the universal acknowledgement of God as Saviour and King by all human beings.*

This thesis was used to answer those who deny the need to evangelise people of other religions because they are *Anonymous Christians* or Jews because of the so-called *Two-covenant Theology*.

2. *Evangelism under the Kingdom must exhibit the signs of the Kingdom which it announces.*

It was here that Dr Packer outlined the *five planks in his platform* from which a bridge might be built towards co-operation in evangelisation with charismatics. As a corrective to assumptions commonly held they are all expressed negatively.

a) It is not necessary for anyone to deny the reality of 'signs and wonders'.

There is no *dogmatic* necessity. The reports should be listened to and then tested by Scripture, looking for maturing in faith and love in those on whom the signs took place. Because Satan tries to spoil reality by imitation we should reject as spurious anything which leads to pride or error. He observed that such 'tests' could not, by definition, be applied merely on the occasion of the evangelism as they call for the consideration of long-term effects.

- b) It is not necessary to reject either of the views of 'signs and wonders' current among evangelicals today.

The difference is over hermeneutics. One sees the 'signs' as authenticating the ministry of Christ and the Apostles, so there is no warrant for us to expect them after the era of NT revelation. Others expect all the phenomena of the NT to be experienced today. As all agree that God grants his gifts in answer to believing prayer, it is not surprising that God gives no 'signs' to those who do not ask for them. I understand Packer to be saying that whatever hermeneutic we adopt we are under obligation to *review* any 'signs' which may appear as Satan is also able to work supernaturally.

- c) It is not necessary to view 'signs' as the primary source of gospel credibility. The *primary* source is the transformed life of the evangelist. Every genuine conversion is a *power encounter*. Historically this is why *testimonies* have been used during evangelistic meetings. It also shows the harm done to our credibility by the much-publicised scandals of the tele-evangelists. Other 'signs' will have some credibility but we must notice that not all those who saw the abundance of NT miracles came to faith as a result.

- d) It is not necessary to accept all the claims made for miracles and the renewing of sign gifts of the NT to acknowledge that what is happening in charismatic circles may be of God.

It is Packer's view that *none* of the alleged instances of restored gifts is equal to those seen in NT times. He speaks of similarity without identity. All NT healings were direct and infallible. Modern 'tongues' do not have the structure of languages which he believes to have been the case in Acts and I Corinthians. He believes, however, that much that is happening is real and that we should not be found dowsing any fire God is giving.

- e) It is not necessary to affirm the superiority of evangelism accompanied by 'signs and wonders' over evangelism without them.

The well-known instances of Whitefield, Wesley, Billy Graham and Leighton Ford were given. (Leighton Ford is the Chairman of the Lausanne Committee!) This crucial point went without comment during the discussion as no one insisting on such superiority had chosen to attend Dr Packer's seminar.

3. *Evangelism under the Kingdom must not secularise the Kingdom it announces.* This was used to discredit Liberation Theology which appears to suggest that the Kingdom is no more than a change in external circumstances.

4. *Evangelism under the Kingdom must retain the perspective of the Kingdom it announces.*

The doctrine of the Kingdom requires that we define the church from the centre out, ie in terms of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Roman Catholic

theology *cannot* do this as it defines the church from the circumference in, ie a person is a Christian if they are in an outward relationship with the church, being in communion with the Bishop of Rome. Packer would not reject an individual RC who wishes to join him in evangelism, suggesting that 'your church is your problem, not mine'. *Prior agreement on the doctrine we preach* is necessary for joint evangelism, he said, but formalised church structures are not. He suggested that we should be praying for the break-up of the Roman church into national churches and that the grotesque papacy should be abandoned.

My general observation of the Lausanne Congress was that the sincere attempt made by Dr Packer to treat this issue *theologically* was not matched by a similar approach from the other side of the chasm. It was more than disappointing that the leading charismatic advocate, Jack Hayford, did not grapple with the hermeneutical issues but suggested that those differing from him were suffering from an emotional problem, ie fear of what might happen to them if they 'open themselves up to God'. Is it really adequate to insist, as Hayford did, that, '*A man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument.*'?

A bridge cannot be built with a platform only on one side.

*Rev Alan Gibson BD is General Secretary of the BEC*

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## God the Evangelist

The Scriptures declare that God himself is the chief evangelist. For the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth, love, holiness and power and evangelism is impossible without him. It is he who anoints the messenger, confirms the word, prepares the hearer, convicts the sinful, enlightens the blind, gives life to the dead, enables us to repent and believe, unites us to the body of Christ, assures us that we are God's children, leads us into Christlike character and service and sends us out in our turn to be Christ's witnesses. In all this the Holy Spirit's main preoccupation is to glorify Jesus Christ by showing him to us and forming him in us.

All evangelism involves spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil, in which only spiritual weapons can prevail, especially the Word and Spirit, with prayer. We therefore call on all Christian people to be diligent in their prayers both for the renewal of the church and for the evangelization of the world.

Every true conversion involves a power encounter, in which the superior authority of Jesus Christ is demonstrated. There is no greater miracle than this, in which the believer is set free from the bondage of Satan and sin, fear and futility, darkness and death.

Although the miracles of Jesus were special, being signs of his Messiahship and anticipations of his perfect kingdom when all nature will be subject to him, we have no liberty to place limits on the power of the living Creator today. We reject both the scepticism which denies miracles and the presumption which demands them, both the timidity which shrinks from the fulness of the Spirit and the triumphalism which shrinks from the weakness in which Christ's power is made perfect.

We repent of all self-confident attempts either to evangelize in our own strength or to dictate to the Holy Spirit. We determine in future not to 'grieve' or 'quench' the Spirit, but rather to seek to spread the good news 'with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction' (1 Thess 1:5).

*Section B, THE WHOLE CHURCH, Para (5) of The Manila Manifesto, an affirmation received by a majority at the Congress for study and response.*

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# To Call or Not to Call?

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*Keith Walker*

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The subject of evangelistic methods and in particular Altar Calls is once again to the forefront of evangelical debate. The purpose of this article is not to chronicle that debate. Suffice it to say that any understanding of the background to the contemporary discussion needs to take into account the theology and practice of Charles Grandison Finney and his counterpart, Asahel Nettleton.<sup>1</sup> In relation to the contemporary history we need to bear in mind the influence of the national missions of recent years for which Dr Billy Graham and Luis Palau have been the main preachers. Staunch criticism of the evangelistic methods of these and other similar campaigns has come from more Reformed circles. The re-issuing of Iain Murray's 'THE INVITATION SYSTEM' and the publication of R T Kendall's 'STAND UP AND BE COUNTED', which defends a particular kind of Altar Call, indicate the back-cloth against which we must address this subject.

Another factor needs to be borne in mind. There are not a few of those who would wish to express criticism of the use of Altar Calls who were themselves converted under ministries which made regular use of them. This writer is one such. Some readers may suspect that this explains but does not excuse his rather conciliatory line. Others will accuse him of ingratitude for daring to criticise at all. Many in our churches find criticism of the use of Altar Calls almost impossible to cope with because at the time of their conversion they 'went forward'. When they hear intemperate criticisms of Altar Calls there can be a feeling that their own conversion is being called into question. It is as well to recognise that our spiritual history shapes what we are; and that our criticisms may have an effect on others that we never intended, but that is quite understandable given their background. In other words the subject must not be tackled simply polemically but also pastorally, lest we cause a brother to stumble.

The subject also deserves to be addressed discerningly. Later we shall describe a variety of evangelistic approaches in terms of what preachers of differing hues ask of people at the end of their sermons. Our purpose in doing so is simply to alert us to the fact that there is a whole spectrum of approaches. Unless we have a view of the Regulative Principle which rules them all out of court without further discussion, we cannot lump them all together. We may conclude by rejecting them all, but if we do so we will have had to employ a variety of theological arguments in the process. *Evangelistic practices must be assessed theologically.*

## **Preaching for decisions**

Yet before we come to the matter of Altar Calls we would wish to make this assertion. There is a difference between preaching for decisions and 'decisionism'. We would want to argue that the word 'decision' is a good and helpful word with regard to the matter of response to the gospel. The reaction against it which is



evident in certain Reformed writers is quite understandable given its abuse. Yet if the Word of God can rightly be described as an ultimatum, an invitation, a command, it demands response. It demands decision, and there are a number of aspects to the kind of decision for which we must preach.

First there is the question of truth. Is the gospel true? Is Christ who he claims to be and whom we preach him to be? Did he die and rise again for the salvation of sinners? The Bereans are implicitly commended by Luke for their earnest approach to this question, 'Was Paul's message true?' (Acts 17:11). But then the question of obedience must be pressed. The question of truth is not academic. Will the sinner obey the truth? A decision must be made. This is the import of John 3:36. The language is clear and strong. The Christian is defined as one who has eternal life. The unbeliever remains under God's wrath and will never see life. The issue is resolved in terms of regeneration by the Spirit to new life, and reconciliation with God, but also in terms of decided attitudes towards the Son. It is this distinction between the actions of the believer and the unbeliever which is relevant here. The former believes, the latter disobeys or rejects.<sup>2</sup> The verse cries out for a decision. Will we believe the Son or will we reject and disobey him?

Gospel preaching is not lecturing. It is not the imparting of facts impartially — if that is ever possible. Preaching is to drive men and women to the point of decision. Yet this crisis, for such it is, is produced not by emotion, nor by psychological pressure, but by force of the truth proclaimed and by the enlightening of the Spirit.

Secondly, we ought not to be over cautious about calling for immediate decisions. We do not find the preachers of the NT encouraging people to go away and think about what they have heard. The call to leave all and follow Christ is a call to immediate action (Mt 4:18-22). This is explicitly the case in the dealings of Jesus with those who made excuses with regard to his call (Lk 9:59-62). It is true that these incidents relate to a particular kind of service in a particular context, but the Gospel-writers surely intend them to be paradigmatic of the general call to discipleship. It is a positive response to that call which constitutes conversion. A new Christian is a new disciple or nothing. The language of Paul in Athens illustrates this NT emphasis upon the call to an immediate decision to obey God. Even without the 'now' (which doubtless contrasts with the past times in which God overlooked man's ignorance) the last half of Acts 17:30, 'God commands all people everywhere to repent', demands an immediate response.

Thirdly, we need to note that the preaching of Jesus and his disciples demanded a concrete response. We shall need to comment on the matter of water baptism a little later on. At this point, however, it is necessary to notice the variety of ways in which response to the gospel was 'concretised'. In the cases of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:8) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33) there are examples of conversion being demonstrated in very concrete ways. Matthew 10 is most instructive at this point. In vv 11-15 it is the giving or withholding of a welcome into the home of one hearing the gospel which 'concretises' his response. Vv 32-42 take up the theme again. Here it is confession before men and identification with the people of God in practical ways which display outwardly the inner response.

Now we need to hold a balance here. Plainly the inward comes before the outward, but the outward is important. Evangelistic preaching and counselling need to take that into account. It is possible so to react against Altar Calls and the like that we fail our hearers by 'over-internalising' the gospel call, omitting to put before them the need to take practical, visible and open steps as part of their converting to Christ.

## Avoiding 'decisionism'

Yet there is a major difference between this concern for immediate, 'concretised' decisions and 'decisionism'. 'Decisionism' is one of those rather ill-defined 'boo' words which gain currency in Evangelical circles from time to time. We need to be careful how we use such expressions. *Perhaps we can define 'decisionism' in terms of an error regarding the nature and purpose of faith.*

The crucial thing about saving faith is not the faith itself, but its object — Christ and him crucified. Dr J I Packer has written that 'one of the unhealthiest features of Protestant theology today is its preoccupation with faith: faith that is, viewed man-centredly as a state of existential commitment'.<sup>3</sup> This view he contrasts with that of the Reformers. For them faith was 'not subject-centred but object-centred, not psychological but theological, not anthropocentric but Christocentric'. Packer goes on to quote from the late A M Stibbs who tells us:

'The faith of the individual must be seen as having no value in itself, but as discovering value wholly and solely through movement towards and committal to Christ. It must be seen simply as a means of finding all one's hope outside of oneself in the person and work of another; and not in any sense an originating cause or objective ground of justification. For true faith is active only in the man who is wholly preoccupied with Christ.'<sup>4</sup>

This point is well born out in Scripture, and in a number of ways. The range of use of *pistis* is evidence: our 'faith' rests upon the 'faith' (ie faithfulness) of God; and the gospel of God is the 'faith'. We debate which meaning is in view in relation to various texts, but that such a breadth of meaning exists is undeniable (eg 1 Cor 2:5; Rom 3:3; 1 Tim 1:2). But our point here is simply that this pattern of use suggests an object-centred conception of faith. The point is nailed home in Galatians 3. The chapter is full of 'faith' as the means of justification, but equally well it might be said that it is full of the object of that faith: Christ and him crucified (vv 1,10); receiving the promise in Christ through faith (v 14); until the seed should come...before faith came...now faith has come (vv 19,23,26); 'in faith in Christ' (vv 22,26).

'Decisionism' errs in relation to this biblical view of faith. Stibbs final words indicate the motive power towards faith. It must be the presentation of Christ. 'Decisionism' sits loose to that. The crucial thing is the 'decision'. So long as they give the appearance of being successful the means to promote that decision are, comparatively, a matter of indifference whether they be intellectual argument, emotional hype, peer-group pressure or whatever. Common to all 'decisionisms' is the conviction that it is man's act of faith, the decision to believe, which saves him. Moreover, when that act of faith is perceived to be inextricably bound up

with a physical act, then the action of the body becomes at least confusable with the action of the will. So the raising of a hand, walking out the front, etc, become something akin to Catholic sacraments. But more of that later.

The crucial difference between the 'decisionist' response and faith then is that the former places confidence in 'my faith in Christ', the latter in 'Christ for me'. In the former case, the decision is 'Yes, I will believe in Christ and so he will have to be for me'; in the latter case the decision is 'Yes, Christ is for me, and so I will have to be for him'. The former makes Christ the servant of 'my faith'; the latter makes me the servant of Christ. Therein lies all the difference in the world!

## **Contemporary evangelistic practices**

With regard to evangelistic practices we need to ask two questions: do they necessarily portray faith in a 'decisionist' way; and, if not, do they tend to promote such a view of faith? First we need to describe a number of current practices. In the case of some they should not in any way be described as 'Altar Calls', but it is worth noting their use for evaluation. Some we would not wish to criticise in any way at all.

It is possible to categorise contemporary evangelistic practices in relation to the conclusion of the evangelist's address in terms of the variety and significance of acts which the hearer is invited to perform. It is relevant to do so in two ways here. In the first place we need to note that some call for acts on behalf of the hearer which are private and some for acts which are public. Secondly and more importantly it is helpful to categorise 'calls' in terms of the significance of the act called for.

Some evangelists avoid suggesting any act which is public. They may suggest no outward act at all. Perhaps more in the context of evangelistic literature, the private act of reading a printed prayer, and then signing it to say you have prayed it, is recommended. Or it may be suggested that the hearers perform an act which is known only to the preacher. For instance some invite their audience to bow their heads for prayer at the end of the sermon. The prayer will perhaps be one of commitment to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Having explained the content of what he is going to pray, the preacher asks those who intend to pray that prayer to lift their heads and catch his eye. Some evangelists provide opportunity for those who have heard the message to indicate privately their desire to hear more or to begin to meet with Christians by, say, handing in a card which they have filled in appropriately.

Others call for an act which is public. In some cases the act is that of going out to the front of the meeting. In other cases people are invited to stand up in the seats.

Perhaps a 'semi-public' call is that which invites the hearer, as an aspect of his response, to approach the preacher for literature or to talk more about what they have heard. Depending on the physical geography of the building and where the preacher is standing that may or may not be a request to do something which is open to general public observation.

The more crucial matter is what any act is said to signify. In some calls the act

signifies becoming a Christian. So one evangelist uses words like this, "If you want to say 'Yes' to Jesus Christ, come forward." Another may put it like this, "If you want to come to Jesus, come to the front." It is true that the call could mean that coming forward indicates simply a desire to come to Christ, but the intention is to convey that in moving physically in a certain way the hearer is actually saying 'Yes' to Jesus Christ.

Others invite those who have already become Christians to make that public by going forward. This is what Dr R T Kendall describes as 'public pledge'. It is a public affirmation of faith.

In other cases the act called for is to indicate a desire to become a Christian. Those who would like to become Christians are invited to go forward in order to be counselled in that direction.

Then again there is the suggestion that those who wish to know more about the Christian faith they have just heard expounded should express that desire in some way in order that that wish might be fulfilled.

Lastly, going forward may be urged quite explicitly in relation to any one of a whole variety of desires at one and the same time. Philip Back's report on Mission England (1984), makes plain that Dr Billy Graham's appeal is of a multiple nature.<sup>5</sup> 'The counsellor forms included provision for recording the type of response an individual was making, in four broad categories:

Accepting Jesus Christ as personal Saviour...

To receive assurance of salvation...

To rededicate their lives to Christ...

For other reasons, which included providing moral support to a friend, going forward for prayer or other help, requests for further information and literature, and so on.'

Where the evangelist sees 'signs and wonders' as a necessary part of evangelism then those wanting healing or deliverance will be invited to go out along with those wishing to come to faith, etc.

Plainly, this brief description is not exhaustive, but perhaps it will suffice to alert us to the need to distinguish between things that differ.

## **Theologising calls**

In response to all of this, we need some theological structure to enable the evaluation of these practices. Plainly not all of them fall into the trap of outright 'decisionism'. Altar Calls *per se* are not 'decisionist'. To invite enquirers to gather at the front of the hall either to speak personally with the preacher or to be addressed further by him, or to practice what Dr Kendall calls 'public pledge' is not decisionist.

Dr Kendall has suggested, and most helpfully, that the Altar Call, which for him is best described in terms of the response as 'public pledge', may be considered in the light of two Biblical and theological categories. The basic theological category into which he places the act of coming forward is that of confession. 'My conception of the public pledge is essentially this, confessing what is already

true.<sup>6</sup> 'It is simply an invitation to come out of hiding, to 'go public' with your faith in Jesus.'<sup>7</sup> But there is another category which impinges here. 'Public pledge' is linked with the confessional aspect of baptism and thus 'temporarily takes the place of baptism'.<sup>8</sup> We are told that 'Charles Finney emphasised the anxious seat in America because baptism had lost its stigma'.<sup>8</sup>

## **Altar Calls and pastoral/situational considerations**

Altar Calls can then be weighed in the light of the biblical categories of sacrament and confession, but first it is well to note some pastoral and situational considerations. It may be that situational factors make the use of particular practices advisable. The use of enquirers' meetings may become an organisational necessity where the numbers concerned for counsel are large or where there is a particular urgency for matters to be dealt with. But on the other hand, no matter what the audience it needs to be recalled that works-salvation is the natural man's heresy, whether those works be good deeds or good decisions. Evangelistic methods need to be calculated to counteract that. There are also situational factors which may weigh against certain practices. For example, where a population has been fed a 'decisionist gospel' it may be almost impossible to use any Altar Call method without being misunderstood. Or in a situation in which the people are prone to mass expressions of emotion the effect of an Altar Call may be unhelpful.

We can see something of this in the story of Simon Magus (Acts 8:9-24). Simon's response to Philip's preaching was plainly spurious, but why? Surely it is evident that he had a mechanical view of religious merit and power. He was totally taken up with the natural man's heresy, that by doing certain things, believing, being baptised, paying for a rite, he could obtain divine power. Those who take Donald Macleod's view that Luke is indicating in v 12 that the response of the generality of the people was deficient,<sup>9</sup> will recognise yet another situational factor which caused difficulty. There was doubtless great religious excitement abroad; witness their allegiance to and naming of Simon. In all probability this excitement was a Samaritan counterpart to Jewish apocalyptic expectation.<sup>10</sup> Having already come into a popular religious mass-movement it would have been very easy for them to switch allegiance from Simon to Philip, accepting Philip's message and baptism for the same kind of reasons as they had responded to Simon.

Whether such an exegesis is correct or not, it is in no way to criticise Philip. It makes the point however that even with preaching which eschews the use of 'altar-calls' things can go wrong. Both the natural tendency of man and particular situational facts can militate against real faith. It is common experience that some professions prove to have lacked depth. The parable of the sower teaches us to expect that. However, it is right to deduce this. The preacher is wise who seeks to counter both pandemic and endemic anti-gospel effects.

Any call to an action which is supposed to signify coming to Christ (raising a hand, walking out the front, signing a card) fails completely at this point. Indeed it would seem to promote 'decisionism' suggesting that the act accomplishes and merits something of spiritual gain. An invitation to an after meeting or to individual counselling for serious enquirers may on occasions be valuable, even vital. But

it will be crucial that what happens then does not put pressure on the enquirer. Moreover if the response to that invitation is inevitably public, then great harm can be done by the unwarranted assumptions of over-enthused and excited Christians about the nature of the enquirer's response.

An invitation to make public one's conversion by some physical action does not seem on face value to be open to the charge of leading to 'decisionism'. Even here, however, there are risks. Where members of the congregation have been exposed to preaching which is blatantly 'decisionist' they may mistake the nature of the appeal being made. In the same way that people fail to read the small print in contracts, they will miss our careful explanations of what 'going out to the front' *does not mean*.

For these reasons it is necessary to reject totally the kind of Altar Call which makes a physical act synonymous with receiving Christ, and one would need to find fairly solid grounds for pursuing Dr Kendall's practice of 'public pledge'.

### **Altar Calls as quasi-sacraments**

It is an intriguing fact that Finney saw the anxious seat as fulfilling the place which the Bible gives to baptism. It would be interesting to know more of his theology of the sacraments not least in the light of some current evangelistic practices. There are without doubt quasi-sacramental elements in some kinds of Altar Calls. Moreover, where a physical response is seen to be synonymous with coming to Christ, the underlying thinking seems to be very close to that of sacramentalist theologies. The *ex opera operato* effectiveness of the sacraments seems to have been transferred to the Altar Call, so that an individual can know that they are born again not because of baptism but because of this other objective, outward act performed in response to preaching.

### **Altar Calls and confession**

Dr Kendall's point in relating 'public pledge' to baptism is quite different however. There is no sacramentalism there, because he specifically restricts 'public pledge' to those who have already come to faith. As we have seen, Dr Kendall places 'public pledge' more firmly in the category of confession.

But does 'public pledge' actually fit that category? Indeed what is confession? Confession, like faith, needs to be understood Christocentrically. Romans 10:9 ff is the passage in the Epistles which sets out the requirement of confession most forcibly. Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8 provide our Lord's equally potent demand that public acknowledgement of him must be made by his disciples. The Romans passage differs from the Gospels passages in terms of context. Romans 10:9ff points to the soteric benefits accruing to the one who believes and confesses. The Gospel passages are set in the context of persecution. Will the disciples submit to the fear of man or the fear of God?

Having noticed that difference, however, the similarities are very striking. Firstly, the subject of the confession is Christ. The believer is not being called to profess his faith: 'I believe'. He is being called to make a statement about Christ. *Confession is Christocentric*. Secondly, the teaching in both Romans and the

Gospels about confession contains a high Christology. R T France points out the 'egocentricity' of our Lord's demand.<sup>11</sup> It parallels a statement of Jehovah's in 1 Samuel 2:30 and is thus pregnant with Christological implications. Even to accept that Jesus had the right to make such a statement is to acknowledge his Lordship. Again in Romans the context of the confession is not to be seen in minimalist terms. To affirm that 'Jesus is Lord' in the context of Judaism — and that is the context of Romans 10 — would have been to have made remarkable statements about his person, his death, his resurrection, and his present reign.

As with faith, confession has Christ in view rather than self. It is for this reason that it is so vital. It expresses faith in terms of its object. It makes faith audible. It provides a means of response to the gospel which confirms that the gospel has been heard and understood. Stibbs wrote that 'true faith is active only in the man who is wholly preoccupied with Christ'. To express that faith it is natural not to speak so much of 'my faith', 'how happy I am', as of Christ.

Secondly, confession of this kind was evidence of true faith because of the context in which it was made. Where to confess Christ is to risk opposition from man it makes an unselfconscious statement about oneself. To affirm 'Jesus is Lord' in that context is to affirm his personal Lordship and implicitly a dependence upon his strength in the face of the consequences.

Confession then is not a statement about 'what has happened in my heart' nor 'a going public with my faith in Christ'. That which is confessed is an affirmation about Christ.<sup>12</sup> The content of that affirmation is both intelligible and unmistakable. This is not so with 'public pledge'.

Dr Kendall's public pledge has the primary purpose of confession, but remarkably he proposes a second purpose.

I now refer to what I would call the instrumental purpose of the public pledge: it allows people to seek the Lord in a public manner, although they may not be sure they are saved. The call to confess Christ publically allows many people to go forward who aren't sure why they are doing it but somehow feel it is the right thing for them to do. Sometimes a person who has walked to the front does not know why he is there. It is not unusual if, when I ask a person who has just moved out to the front, 'Why have you come?' that he answers, 'I don't know'.<sup>13</sup>

Dr Kendall is not alone in this experience. Evangelists who practise any form of Altar Call can give examples of the same phenomenon. Whether or not they ask people to come out for a variety of reasons they find that those who come do so for all sorts of reasons, some conscious, some subconscious. But that collapses the confessional value of 'public pledge'! How does the public know whether any particular person walking to the front is confessing Christ? What is being confessed? In the case of some, at least, it sounds like a confession of disorientation, bewilderment and confusion. *'Public pledge' does not have the coherent content of confession.*

Neither does it satisfy the Gospel passages in terms of context. Dr Kendall tells us that 'Finney emphasised the anxious seat in America because baptism had lost its

stigma. He therefore felt there was a need to bring back a stigma so that a certain amount of courage was required. I suggest that we are much like that in Britain.’<sup>8</sup> I suggest not. It is true that to go out to the front on one’s own may be embarrassing to some. But in a church full of Christian family and friends, to respond to the gospel in an open way will not bring a stigma. Some of our young people may even feel a stigma when in church because they are the last of their peer-group to remain unconverted. Where masses of people are moving forward some feel a psychological difficulty about staying seated. The stigma of conversion is not so often felt in the church or the mission-stadium, as in the world, at work, in the non-Christian home, etc. That is where confession ‘allows people to prove to themselves that they are not ashamed of Jesus Christ’.<sup>13</sup>

The making of physical actions significant of coming to faith can find no firm biblical or theological warrant. At the very least, it risks obscuring the nature of real faith. Though Dr Kendall’s exposition of ‘public pledge’ seeks to find biblical and theological support, we cannot find it convincing. Yet we must preach for decisions, urge people to close with Christ immediately, and to express that conversion in concrete terms. And surely it is not to be sneered at if preachers organise ways to help the serious enquirer to come to faith, and the convert in his first steps in the faith.

Altar Calls? No, thanks! Preaching for decisions? Yes, please!

*Rev Keith Walker MA is pastor of Borrass Park Evangelical Church, Wrexham.*

## References

1. See John Carrick, FOUNDATIONS, No 19 Autumn 1987
2. There is some debate as to how ‘apeithon’ should be translated here. Regularly it means ‘disobeys’, but it is possible to translate it as ‘disbelieves’ or ‘rejects’. In the context there is little effective difference between these.
3. HERE WE STAND, Hodder, p 95
4. Justification by Faith, EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY, July 1952, p 166
5. MISSION ENGLAND: WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?, Marc Europe, p 33
6. STAND UP AND BE COUNTED, Hodder, p 75
7. *ibid*, p 76
8. *ibid*, p 67
9. THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT, CFP, p 14f
10. cf J D G Dunn, BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, SCM, p 63f
11. MATTHEW, TNTC, IVP, ad loc
12. That is true also of baptism. It is not primarily a means of professing one’s faith. Baptism, by visibly preaching Christ and him crucified, is a means of grace.
13. *ibid*, p 24



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# Moral Issues in Bio-Technology

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## *Denis Pells Cocks*

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The rapid advances in Bio-Technology during the past three decades have opened up new and complex methods of investigation and treatment in medicine that have outstripped their ethical consideration. This is especially seen in the field of human infertility, where the moral questions demand urgent and thoughtful answers.

Christian leaders may be called upon to counsel in these relatively new areas and need to be well briefed if their advice is to be wise and helpful. Until recently newly-married couples may have sought their pastor's advice over family planning and the ethics of abortion. Infertility, with the failure to produce children, however, can now produce more complex moral problems. It can indeed result in a deep feeling of failure and guilt and may even result in marriage breakdown.

The new methods involving biology and genetics can now offer new hope of success in a certain group of infertile couples and also in the early diagnosis of foetal abnormalities with the identification of the defective gene responsible.

In 1953, Watson and Crick discovered the intricate construction of the DNA life system in the cells of the body. Today some 50,000 genes present in each human cell have been identified. In veterinary surgery defective genes are being replaced by healthy ones by means of genetic engineering and already such replacements are being considered in man.

In 1978, Steptoe and Edwards were successful in fertilising the egg cells (ova) of a woman with the husband's semen in a dish containing a nutrient and implanting the early embryo into the woman's womb with the resulting birth of the first 'test-tube' baby. This method is better known as In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).

In 1985, an embryo was successfully implanted after being frozen for several months in Australia.

### **Problems of the Infertile Marriage**

Difficulty in conceiving affects one marriage in ten and until recently the cause was presumed to be mainly in the wife. It is now recognised that she may be responsible in 30% of cases, the husband in 30% of cases and some cause in both in another 30% of cases, with no cause being found in 10%. An initial visit to the family doctor will probably have led to a referral for a specialist opinion. A Christian couple may now be faced with the dilemma caused by their intense desire for a child and the moral issues posed by the procedures for further investigation. In a number of cases it may be possible to treat successfully by means of drugs or by some surgical procedure. Occlusion of the wife's fallopian tubes may be relieved by microsurgery. In these cases normal co-habitation can continue between husband and wife and there seems to be no ethical problem.

Problems arise from the view of Christian ethics when the husband is sterile or

subfertile and the suggestion is made for the wife to be inseminated with the semen of another man by means of Artificial Insemination (AID). However carefully and anonymously chosen the donor may be, this method clearly raises moral questions as normal intercourse between husband and wife is by-passed and the child subsequently delivered has no blood relationship with the adopting father.

Where surgery or drugs are not able to achieve success In Vitro Fertilisation may be suggested. This involves the obtaining of a number of ova from the wife's ovary by means of a small telescopic instrument which is passed, under anaesthesia, into the abdomen. The ova so obtained are increased above the normal number by the administration of a super-ovulatory drug. Four or five of these ova are chosen under a microscope and after insemination with the husband's semen are inserted into the wife's womb. It has been shown that when four or five of these early embryos, rather than a single one, are inserted, the success rate is three-fold.

This fact raises the ethical question regarding the subsequent disposal of the 'spare' embryos depending upon the value that is given to their status. Many research workers do not consider that they have the value of adult life and see a wonderful opportunity for research into the causes of foetal abnormalities in the hope that by genetic engineering such conditions can be relieved in the future. Various conditions such as Down's Syndrome, Spina Bifida, Huntington's Chorea, Cystic Fibrosis and Haemophilia are such and can clearly cause great distress. Such workers will also carry out research only up till fourteen days of development as this is the time when evidence of the primitive nervous system appears.

Pro-life supporters, however, look upon life as a gift from God and ascribe such sanctity to it that they cannot accept that it can be experimented upon or produced to be discarded as if it were just a collection of cells. They recognise this early embryo as being genetically human, containing characteristics of both the mother and father and being a form of life through which we have all passed in our development and whose very vulnerability requires our protection. They concur with the Minority Group on the Warnock Committee who dissented from research on the embryo on the grounds that:

the embryo has a special status because of its potential for development to a stage at which everyone would accord it the status of a human person. It is in our view wrong to create something with the potential for becoming a human person and then deliberately to destroy it.

Gamete Intra Fallopian Tube Transfer (GIFT) is a modification of IVF in which only one of the wife's ova is obtained, fertilised with the husband's semen and then transferred into her fallopian tube in the patent portion past the blockage and thus allowing the early embryo to pass naturally into her womb for implantation. This avoids the production and disposal of any 'spare' embryos although the success rate is not so high as in IVF where a number of embryos is used.

Whichever method is used to overcome the problem of infertility by embryo replacement it may not be successful and may lead to many months of frustration and stress. This aspect should always be explained before a couple embark upon what is both a complex as well as an artificial method to conceive.

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Whichever method is used to overcome the problem of infertility by embryo replacement it may not be successful and may lead to many months of frustration and stress. This aspect should always be explained before a couple embark upon what is both a complex as well as an artificial method to conceive.

## **Surrogate Motherhood**

This is the highly debatable way in which another woman conceives a child after artificial insemination of the husband's semen in order to carry a child later to be handed over to the infertile couple. Problems have arisen when the natural mother eventually refuses to give up the child. There is also the problem of the child's identity and possible adverse effects on the marriage. The later effects upon the child, once the facts of his conception are known, have probably never been considered seriously enough. This goes against the basic unity of family life (Gen 2:24, Mt 19:5) as do all methods involving the sex cells of a third or even fourth person.

## **Problems Encountered in Ante-natal Care**

When an expectant mother attends for ante-natal care a number of tests are on offer including those that will demonstrate the presence of a foetal abnormality, such as spina bifida. These tests are arranged with the supposition that an abortion will be considered in certain cases. Such tests should be explained and only performed with the woman's consent. Should she not agree to a termination then she would be advised to withhold her consent from the tests in the first place. They include a blood test for an alpha-foeto protein and an ultrasound examination outline of the child's structure. The latter can also be helpful in estimating the foetal maturity in weeks and in the diagnosis of a twin pregnancy. It must also be understood that some abnormalities may show up by these tests which are incompatible with life, such as anencephaly. It must also be admitted that severe foetal abnormalities, if found early, can legally be aborted. It is important that the couple should be conversant with these facts and so be able to approach the visit with a clear understanding of the possibilities and with their minds made up regarding the moral aspects involved. This also allows them time to consult their pastor or other respected Christian counsellor for advice.

## **Summary**

The FIEC submission to the DHSS Consultative Document on Human Infertility Services and Embryo Research concludes that:

As Christians our premisses must be the dignity of all human beings as made in the image of God and the sanctity of marriage as ordained by God. We have deep sympathy with the longing of many married couples for children of their own, but we consider that any method of treatment involving the introduction of another party's gametes (sex cells) in the production of a child undermines the sanctity of marriage.

Many Christians hold that human life at any stage of development has a God-given intrinsic status which demands special evaluation and protection. The family is God's basic unit for society and man does not possess merely biological life but also spiritual life. All our decisions in this difficult sphere should be based upon these Scriptural principles.

*Denis Pells Cocks is a retired consultant gynaecologist and a member of the FIEC Christian Citizenship Committee, for whose Bulletin this article was first prepared.*

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# The Satanic Verses

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## Merle Inniger

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Salman Rushdie's novel, which has demonstrated the power to arouse the wrath of millions of Muslims, is a book alternately obscene and attractive, ridiculous and serious, and above all offensive to those who hold cherished beliefs. I wish here to outline the book's contents before commenting on its implications for the Law of Blasphemy in Britain.

Two men from Bombay, Gibreel Farishta<sup>1</sup> the movie idol and Saladin Chamcha, the wealthy play-boy, fall out of a bombed jumbo jet approaching London, and as they come to earth they are metamorphosed into the angel and the devil. Their involvements in London, "Ellowen Deewen", the "city visible but unseen" revolve around the love affairs, rejections, and all the love/hate syndrome of the immigrant psyche. It is the experience of the Indian Muslim immigrant finding it impossible ever to remove India or a rejected religion completely from his life. In the end, it is the angel who proves to be evil, and vice-versa.

From the depths of his subconscious and the culture of which he is a part, Rushdie, via the dreams of Gibreel, concocts some weird and wonderful stories. In some of these there is just enough truth or factual basis to provide the 'sting' which has fevered so many minds in 1989. One of these stories concerns Ayesha, a girl in an Indian village who has seen a vision of the angel, Gabriel! The butterflies which surround her, cover her and provide food for her, seem to confirm her prophecies. She leads a number of the villagers on a pilgrimage to the Arabian Sea, which they expect will part and make way for them to get to Mecca. Rushdie must have taken a cue from an incident in Pakistan in the early 80s.

But it is the chapters, "Mahound" and "Return to Jahilia", which have given the book its notoriety. Here Gibreel dreams of Jahilia,<sup>2</sup> the city of sand, and its prophet Mahound.<sup>3</sup> In the earlier chapter, the prophet, plagued by his failure to win converts, seeks the angel's advice about retaining three goddesses, part of the ancient pantheon, sought after by Jahilia's residents for their intercession. He receives the 'revelation' from Gibreel, and recites the verses to the congregation, "Have you thought upon Lat and Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other?... They are the exalted birds, and their intercession is desired indeed."<sup>4</sup>

But subsequent events and conversations with Hind, the wife of the Grandee of Jahilia, drive Mahound back to the mountain, back to Gibreel for a fresh revelation. They strive, they wrestle. Mahound returns. "He stands in front of the statues of the Three and announces the abrogation of the verses which Shaitan whispered in his ear. These verses are banished from the true recitation, *al-qur'an*. New verses are thundered in their place."

" 'Shall He have daughters and you sons?' Mahound recites. 'That would be a fine division! These are but names you have dreamed of, you and your fathers. Allah vests no authority in them.' "

So the first verses are abrogated. In exchange, Mahound receives new ones.

Surely Rushdie is here using his prolific imagination to search out the meaning of verses which now appear in the Qur-an. Three relevant passages are,

Sura 53 (The Star), verses 19-23, "Have ye thought upon Al-Lat and Al-Uzza and Manat the third the other? Are yours the males and His the females? That indeed were an unfair division! They are but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers, for which Allah hath revealed no warrani. They follow but a guess and that which (they) themselves desire. And now the guidance from their Lord hath come unto them."

Sura 16 (The Bee), verse 101, "And when we put a *revelation (verse) in place of another revelation (verse)* — and Allah knoweth best what He revealeth — they say, Lo! Thou art but inventing. Most of them know not."

Sura 22 (The Pilgrimage), verse 52, "Never sent we a messenger or a Prophet before thee but when he recited (the message) Satan proposed (opposition) in respect of that which he recited thereof. But Allah establisheth that which Satan proposeth. Then Allah establisheth His revelations. Allah is Knower, Wise."

Hence the book's title, **The Satanic Verses!** In the later chapter, "Return to Jahilia", Rushdie's imagination runs riot, and he sees a city overwhelmed by "laws" and yet plenty of opportunity to indulge in forbidden practices, for "no imperium is absolute, no victory complete".

Gibreel dreams of a brothel in Jahilia, named *Hijab* (The Curtain, or The Veil). The brothel-keeper and the poet, Baal, devise a scheme with the twelve prostitutes that each of them will assume the name and identity of one of Mahound's wives, from Ayesha on up. "It is dangerous, but it could be good for business." This mixing up, this mirroring, of Islam's first family with a popular brothel in "Jahilia", and giving the name *Hijab* (Veil, *Purdah*) to the brothel, is surely the "unforgivable sin" to Muslims and earned Rushdie — Muslim turned writer, slanderer and apostate — the sentence of death.

Anyone who reads Rushdie's novel can quite easily understand why the religious sensibilities of Muslims in the United Kingdom, and in fact world-wide, have been grievously wounded by its publication.

What is not so clear is what relevance this has to the United Kingdom **Law of Blasphemy**, and whether Muslims are right in demanding that the Law should be changed to become all-inclusive, or whether there should be a new crime to deal with deliberate insults to religious beliefs.

If our Muslim friends look around, they will find in modern society abundant material offensive to their beliefs and to their veneration (which in some cases borders on deification) of the Prophet. It so happens that they fixed their attention on *The Satanic Verses*, giving the book the notoriety it scarcely deserves.

In the profane climate of today, it is questionable whether any legislation can adequately deal with offences to religious beliefs. It is hard for Muslims to accept this, for in the founding principle and practice of Islam the State has always been the Protector and Promoter of Religion; it is unthinkable that insults to the "true and final Religion"

should not be summarily punished by the State. We can only urge our Muslim friends to be patient, to hold their faith in their hearts, and to seek to present their faith in a positive manner to a doubting, pluralistic society.

As for Christians, the case has been well stated by Professor Donald MacLeod:

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.<sup>5</sup>

He notes 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 judgments of juries as to what is scurrilous, indecent, or contemptuous."

I believe that the British Evangelical Council's response to the Law Commission's 1981 Questionnaire is on the right track when it suggests that the most important reason for any possible change in the *Law of Blasphemy* would be simply "harm to our society".

As an evangelical Christian, I often hear and read things which offend my beliefs. How do I deal with this? Was this not precisely the problem the Apostle was dealing with as he wrote to Christians living among those who heaped abuse on them? (1 Peter 4:4). The Christians were exhorted to "set apart Christ as Lord". They were to be prepared to answer, but "with gentleness and respect" and to keep a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously...may be ashamed of their slander.

Can we do any more — or less — than those early believers?

*Rev Merle Inniger MA is Area Director of SIM International*

## References

1. *Gibreel Farisha* is Urdu/Persian for "Angel Gabriel", and *Chamcha* is a Hindustani word meaning "spoon" and is a term used for one who is servile or a puppet. Saladin was a great Anglophile.
2. *Jahilia* means "place of ignorance". The word is used by Muslims to refer to Arabia as it was before the Prophet's era.
3. The name Mahound was used in medieval mystery plays, in which the author of the Qur'an was given satanic proportions.
4. This verse, quoted by Rushdie, is thought by some (eg the biographer Waqidi) to have been recited by Mohammed to his fellow-tribesmen, and were originally part of Sura 53 of the Qur'an. They were later replaced by the present verses, 19-23, of that Sura. (cf Stanton, *THE TEACHING OF THE QUR'AN*, London, SPCK, 1969, p 21.
5. *Blasphemy and the Law*, FOUNDATIONS, No 8, May 1982, pp 1-6.



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# Applied Theology

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## Hywel Jones

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### *Some reflections on the relevance of the BEC Study Conference*

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In the previous issue of this journal the papers given at the Theological Study Conference in March of this year were summarised (The Gospel and the World, FOUNDATIONS Issue 22, pp 12-23). This article aims to highlight the importance of the general theme we examined and the effect of doing so — in so far as that was registered during the conference itself.

Since the early seventies the BEC has held a Study Conference, usually every two years. Originally, these were devoted to subjects on which there was some disagreement among the various traditions represented within the Council. The aim of doing this was twofold. First, it was hoped that a clearer understanding of each other's positions could be gained so as to avoid misrepresenting each other. Secondly, it was hoped that we could obtain a better understanding of Scripture itself on some matters and that our divisions might be narrowed. Whether this latter goal has been realised is a moot point but there has been a real measure of success with regard to the former as published comments on these conferences have indicated. **A deepening of fellowship has resulted** which one hopes will have contributed to the strengthening of the life and work of the BEC.

Without losing sight of the need to work for greater church unity, a change occurred with regard to the subjects considered at these conferences. In a word, **we began to look outwards**. What happens in the theological world outside evangelicalism and the BEC (they are not identical in the UK, though one wishes they were) affects the whole evangelical world, broader and narrower. We became aware of this and that not all our problems were inherited from the past, some were being added to in the present. Therefore, the conferences, which began by considering 'Church and State' took up the larger subject of 'Social Ethics'. There was a similar progression from 'Charismatic Issues' to the matter of 'Hermeneutics'. Without a deliberate decision to alter course being made we found ourselves being led on from one subject to an associated one. In this way we proceeded to inter-act with this wider theological scene, not only to respond to it individually but to help each other respond to it *together*. In this way, unity has been furthered and perhaps more usefully than by our confronting a subject head on, eg 'Unity and Separation'. That, however, remains to be seen.

In my opinion, the last two conferences have been of particular help in this regard. As we have looked outwards together **we have found ourselves being drawn closer together**. In both we have had the gospel as our main theme and if that does not bring us closer together then nothing can or will. In the first of these we were concentrating on the content of the gospel and its proclamation (see

FOUNDATIONS 18 for a summary of those papers. In this year's conference we focussed on the universal bearing of the gospel.

Some have felt that the BEC Study Conference has been intellectually highbrow and detached from the real problems of daily ministering and witnessing. It cannot be denied that it has made strenuous demands on those who have prepared papers and attended over the years. But if it did not do this then all justification for its existence would be lost. At the risk of claiming too much I genuinely wonder whether there is any other *theological* conference in the UK which sets itself the aim as here outlined and brings together men from such a wide background of traditions to pursue it. Whether that is so or not, what must be refuted is the charge that the Study Conference has been unrelated to the problems and pressures of being an evangelical minister/church/churches in today's world at home and overseas.

Our last conference proves this point admirably. Its connection with the realities of our contemporary environment was stated in its publicised aim. This was: "To establish the parameters of an authentic biblical universalism for the gospel which will exclude pluralism **and stimulate evangelism.**"

In the church at large pluralism is rampant; evangelism by contrast is rare. While the former is not to be entirely blamed for the latter, there is no doubt that pluralism hastens evangelism's decline and would cheerfully conduct its funeral service. Pluralism and (biblical) evangelism are like oil and water. We believe that the gospel in its universal dimensions does have the double-edged effect of rejecting pluralism and resurrecting evangelism. We therefore saw authentic, evangelistic Christianity threatened by denial on the one hand and demise on the other, and both from within the professing church. Could any subject be more relevant?

Pluralism does not have the same meaning as plurality. *Plurality* means the existence of more than one — it refers to a few or to many. It reckons not only with singleness but also with variety and variety to the point of differences even disagreement. We can think of the plurality of races, cultures, languages, ideologies etc etc. Plurality corresponds to the realities of the human situation. By contrast, *Pluralism* is a notion (not to say a fiction and a delusive one as well) which says that the many, even the all are but part of the one and the same greater whole. It begins by blurring or ignoring distinctions, continues by minimising or relativising difficulties and disagreements and ends up proclaiming a mysterious (not to say mystifying) oneness in which everything merges. It is not borne out by the facts. It therefore does not correspond to reality. It is not scientific but pantheistic. Pluralism says that black and white are not mutual opposites; they are shades of grey. Who could call a true blue Tory a red Socialist? Only someone who would call a Hindu a Christian. Such thinking amounts to the same kind of non-sense, even though it claims to be theology.

This year's Study Conference sought to understand and respond to this kind of philosophising because it perceived it to be a threat not only against evangelising but also against authentic Christianity. This can be easily shown by extending the analogy of the close of the previous paragraph. If a Hindu is really a Christian, where does that leave God? If a Muslim or Jew is a Christian where does that

leave Jesus the Christ? And what do we as Christians have to say to Hindus, Muslims and Jews? Where does that leave not only the Christian church but Christianity itself? The distance between the ivory tower of academic theology and the door knocker of an inner city flat is dissolved at a stroke by such questions.

Most of the papers given at the Conference focussed on particular aspects of this thinking (cf the article by Mr Walker in FOUNDATIONS 22). All I will do is to underline the relevance of the issues dealt with in each paper. Put in popular form, the questions we grappled with were — ‘How many gods are there — really? Are all right-minded, socially active people in the Kingdom? Does the greatness of Christ mean that he is personally present in all other religions? Is any and every sincere devotee of another religion the equivalent of a Christian already?’ All of these questions call for an exclusive/negative reply from Bible believing people and churches but all of them are receiving positive, open-ended replies in today’s church with some Bible texts being used in support of the argument. The papers given therefore dealt with those actual passages of the Old and New Testaments as well as providing a rejection of pluralism in general.

The aim of the Conference, however, was not just to provide a rejoinder to religious pluralism. That was done and we believe our rebuttal will on inspection be found to understand the grounds on which pluralism rests and to provide a credible response to it. **The aim was also to stimulate evangelism.**

What stands in opposition to religious pluralism is really the Christian gospel. It is because there is only one God, and only one Saviour and Lord, and only one way to him for anyone and for everyone that Evangelicalism and Religious Pluralism have locked horns. Sad to say, some pluralists recognise this more clearly than some evangelicals do.

To be an evangelical therefore is to be anti-pluralist. But it is not to be anti-world. The gospel defined in the Bible is connected with the world in all its variety, complexity and need — nationally, culturally and religiously. Therefore evangelism is universal. Not *universalist*, claiming that all the world will be saved but *universal*, insisting that the gospel is urgently relevant to the whole world.

Without God’s love there would be no gospel and God does love the world. Without Christ’s death there would be no gospel and Christ died for the world. Without the Spirit’s work no one would know God’s love or benefit from Christ’s death and the world is the field in which the Spirit works. The church is gathered from all over the world and is told to go all over the world with the gospel. **To be an evangelical is to be for the whole wide world** — election and particular redemption notwithstanding. Our ‘small corner’ and ‘faithful few’ exclusivism is a denial of this universal dimension.

We were therefore constrained by the Bible and the gospel to say ‘No’ to pluralism. But we were also constrained to hear the Bible and the gospel say an equally authoritative ‘No’ to any world-ignoring mentality.

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# Exegesis 9: Reformation and Renewal

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*Stephen Dray*

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*The evangelical church today echoes with calls to **reformation and renewal**. This article considers how **Zephaniah 1:1-6** provides perspectives for our response to these clamant voices.*

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There is, of course, 'nothing that is new under the sun'. The issues are as old as God's people and others, with more authoritative voices, have addressed such matters in the past. This is singularly true of the Book of Zephaniah which, though over two and a half millenia old, speaks with a contemporary relevance so characteristic of the word of God.

## Exegesis

The title ascription to Zephaniah (1:1) is basically similar to that in Hosea, Joel, Micah, Haggai and Zechariah. It is unique, however, in tracing back the prophet's ancestry for four generations. The most reasonable explanation is that attention is being drawn to the fact that he was of royal lineage, notably that of Hezekiah the great and godly king of Judah. There are three objections to this:

- a) the king is not identified as such;
  - b) Hezekiah was a popular name;
  - c) there are only three generations from Hezekiah to Josiah and Josiah was young when he came to the throne. Can an extra generation be found for a collateral line?
- None of these difficulties is, however, insuperable:
- a) the omission of mentioning the title 'king' when speaking of Hezekiah may be to avoid syntactical clumsiness (since Josiah is also addressed as 'king') and in view of the ease of identification;
  - b) there is only one Hezekiah in the Bible;
  - c) the addition of another generation is not impossible, especially if Zephaniah's ministry was later in the reign. This point is hotly debated and most modern commentators assume that Zephaniah prophesied early in the reign of Josiah and acted as a catalyst for the Josianic reformation. However, the chronological difficulties this creates and references such as that to the 'remnant of Baal' (1:4) suggest that it is more probable that Zephaniah spoke in response to the reformation and as its critic.

The probability, then, is that *king* Hezekiah is being referred to and that Zephaniah was a member of the royal family who lived in Jerusalem (certainly he was very familiar with its geography, see 1:10ff) and that he prophesied when it was clear that the reform had only achieved a superficial success.

Zephaniah's inaugural oracle (1:2,3) was such that, 'most of his listeners would have branded him a religious crackpot' (Craigie, p 112). He launched immediately

into a speech of comprehensive destruction in judgement. While he adopted a familiar prophetic pattern of denouncing judgement before offering hope (compare 1:2-3:8 with 3:9-20, see Walker p 544) it is true that 'No hotter book lies in all the Old Testament' (Adam Smith, p 48). Of particular significance for the purposes of this study is the fact that though these two verses are something of a heading (Powis Smith, p 185) it does not appear that they stand alone. Thus Ralph Smith notes (p 126) the repetition of certain key words and phrases throughout 2-6: 'sweep away' occurs three times, 'cut off', 'one's bowing down' and 'swearing' and 'oracle of Yahweh' twice. He also suggests that this language, drawn from the cultic vocabulary of Yahwism, indicates that the setting itself is cultic. This view, endorsed by Craigie, seems highly likely and suggests that Zephaniah probably spoke at the time of (or even during) one of the great annual religious feasts of God's people.

Drawing his language from that which applies to the deluge in Genesis (eg 6:7; 7:4; 8:8) Zephaniah described a total destruction of all things and people (the *COL* as Pusey notes, p 235, is without limitation). Interestingly, the fish who escaped the deluge (Gen 7:21-23) do not escape now (Powis Smith, p 186) as all the subordinate creatures share the fate of their ruler, man. Keil (p 127) suggests that the language is intended to draw attention to the last phrase, 'I will cut off man' and that it emphasises sinful mankind as the objects of God's wrath.

There is also a play on words (characteristic of Zephaniah and Hebrew literature generally) in verse 3. 'I will cut off *ADAM* from *ADAMAH*' This recalls the creation story (Gen 2:7). Sinful man is cut off from the environment in which he was created to give glory to God.

'Heaps of rubble' (NIV) translates an obscure Hebrew phrase. It is not in the LXX. Various explanations are offered by the commentators. Perhaps Laetsch (p 355) is nearest the mark when he says it depicts the ruins of every social and political organisation whether of divine or human origin.

It is important also to note two other features in these verses which emphasise the seriousness and the certainty of the judgement. Twice 'declares the LORD' (a particularly solemn formula) is uttered and the whole oracle begins with an infinitive absolute construction best rendered: 'I will certainly sweep away...'

Zephaniah seems to have in mind the final eschatological judgement which he depicts in graphic and universal terms. However, the distinctive purpose for such a mention here becomes apparent in the subsequent verses.

The central section of the prophecy (1:4-3:8) is basically structured around a series of oracles against the nations all around Judah: Philistia (to the west), Moab/Ammon (to the east), Cush (to the south) and Assyria (to the north). These oracles are bracketed by two oracles against Judah (1:4-2:3 and 3:1-8). This structure, together with the significant placement of verses 2,3, indicates that Zephaniah is using a technique which emphasises that though Judah had been the recipients of the special revelation of God they would also be the recipients of his special judgement (Walker, p 546) for their contempt for him was the greater in view of the honour which had been bestowed on them (Laetsch, p 356). His

message would have been shocking indeed to his first hearers for 'The Jews thought themselves safe for ever, because they had escaped that (the judgement of the northern kingdom) calamity' (Calvin, p 740).

However, Judah, and especially Jerusalem, is singled out as the object of God's judgement (4a). This judgement is not, however, irrational. Through Zephaniah a succession of offenders are listed. First *Baal* is identified (4b). If the prophecy dates from late in the reign of Josiah the 'remnant' presumably refers to the vestiges of Baalism still found in Judah, almost certainly not publicly displayed but privately entertained.

The remainder of verse 4 may be variously understood as amplifying this phrase or as identifying some other group. In the Hebrew text two different words for priests are used: *CHEMARIM* and *COHENIM*. Pusey regards the words as synonyms and argues that words for priests other than those of Yahweh are always further identified. Thus the reference is to priests of Yahweh who engage in idolatrous Yahwism (p 237). Keil argues the two words are to be distinguished: the first applying to idolatrous Yahwists and the second to those who were more strictly idolatrous (p 128). Calvin distinguishes between priests and their attendants (p 741). Perhaps it is best to see the one explaining the other. The prophet speaks of 'pagan priests' but then identifies them as the priesthood of Yahweh. Their outward orthodoxy is thus seen to hide hearts which are still far from God.

Verse 5a may single out the astral Babylonian religion (although Baalism included an astral element). Perhaps the latter is the best view and the shift is not to another religion but from public to *private worship* (Pusey, p 238).

5b refers more specifically to *syncretism*, the mixing of Yahwism and Baalism (in the form of Moloch-worship, derived from Ammon). Notes Pusey, 'They owned God as their king in words; Moloch they owned by their deeds' (p 238). This he argues on the basis of the deliberate ambiguity of the 'nonsense word' *MALCAM* whose Hebrew consonants can be re-vocalised as either 'king' or 'Moloch'.

Verse 6 is best understood not as a summary of the foregoing (Baker) but introduces a different group or groups. *Practical atheism* is clearly in mind (Baker, p 94). The question is whether two different groups are intended, viz the backslider (apostasy) and the unbeliever (religious indifference). Keil (p 128) favours one group, Laetsch (p 358) the latter.

Pusey suggests that indifference, listless service of God is in mind in 6a, not deliberate apostasy. This, says Calvin, is the fountain of all false worship (p 745). In the context the 'unbeliever' must be more precisely defined as the nominal professor who has never taken God really seriously.

## Comment

Zephaniah prophesied during a period in which a reform movement, calling people back to the old paths, had enjoyed considerable success. Such a movement was pleasing to God and was endorsed by his messengers (2 Kings 22:2). However, Zephaniah was called by God to remind the reformers that reform is never to be an end in itself. The outward forms of religion may be perfectly in order but the

lives of its adherents remain unrenewed and still under that judgement of God which is common to all unregenerate mankind, a point vividly made by the blood-curdling description of judgement in verses 2,3. His message is one which demands a careful examination of our own lives and then those of our churches so as to ascertain whether true spiritual life is present.

It is particularly interesting to note that today there is a distinct movement within the evangelical church which is self-styled as 'renewal'. However, many of the features of the movement are, from Zephaniah's perspective, far more characteristic of reformation than renewal. It is laudable that there is a desire to return to the old ways (even if the detailed understanding of what this means is debated). However, even so, the interest is sometimes primarily in forms and structures not in spiritual life.

Finally, it is important to note that such renewal was not (as is revival?) the sovereign intervention of God but a response demanded by God of his professing people. It is the responsibility of each believer to live a renewed life to the glory of God and to engage in such careful self-examination and repentance as will root out those attitudes which Zephaniah recognised as endemic within the 'reformed' people of God. These may perhaps be summarised as the unrenewed mind (4), the private denial of a public profession (5a), failure to acknowledge God's lordship (5b) and the practical atheism manifested in the person for whom religious acts have become a matter of routine or in the person who has never really taken God seriously in their life (6).

May we see *real* renewal in the evangelical church of our day!

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# The 'Campbellites' and The New Age Movement

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*Eryl Davies*

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*The 'Campbellite' churches and the more Eastern-orientated New Age Movement are both developing in such a way as to be troubling some Christian churches in Britain and in the United States. This article is a response to those who have requested reliable information about these two radically different movements.*

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## The 'Campbellites'

In Britain, concern was expressed soon after the founding in 1982 of the Central London Church of Christ which now calls itself just the London Church of Christ (LCC). There are other Churches of Christ in London but the LCC now claims over 800 members and it is in the process of establishing other branches in Britain. For example, the Central Birmingham Church of Christ was founded in 1988 and is growing apace. The LCC in turn was the product of a missionary initiative taken by the Boston, USA, Church of Christ; the latter being only 10 years old.

**Four areas of concern** have surfaced in Britain recently concerning the LCC. **First** of all, the LCC has concentrated its work amongst students. The church has set up Bible Study groups in a number of colleges and halls of residence without identifying themselves clearly to the students. Some college chaplains and leaders of Christian Unions in the London area have been unhappy about the Bible Study groups but in some cases LCC members have also joined in the activities of CUs without revealing their motives and affiliation. Due to this intense activity within the student population, a high proportion of LCC members are or have been students.

**Another area** of concern relates to the demands which the LCC makes upon its members. They are expected to attend several meetings each week and also engage in evangelistic activity as well as personal Bible Study and Scripture memorisation. There are claims that this pressure has caused examination failures and nervous breakdowns. While LCC leaders deny encouraging students to give up their studies, some proceed to full-time work for the LCC immediately after completing their studies. INFORM<sup>1</sup> know of a medical student who does not plan to do his 'house-jobs' year and will therefore fail to register as a doctor. There is also a tendency for members to withdraw from outside friendships.

**A third area** of concern is the degree of supervision exercised over LCC members. INFORM refer to a student who recently joined LCC and was telephoned each day during a three week vacation. Similarly, there are members who left the movement but were persistently telephoned over several weeks afterwards. Some ex-LCC



members have talked freely about their decision to leave the movement and mentioned reasons such as leadership pressure, the level of time commitment involved, etc. These people have shared too the attraction of LCC and have referred to factors such as the style of worship, commitment to Bible Study and the friendliness of the members.

**The final area** of concern has been the extent to which the LCC resembles genuine evangelical churches. For example, the LCC appeals to the Bible as its only source of authority and emphasises the importance of group/personal Bible Study whilst it actively seeks to evangelise and recruit new members. However, the LCC and other Churches of Christ are not biblically sound in theology and cannot be regarded as evangelical. One INFORM worker reports that an LCC leader spoke to him in a derogatory manner about evangelicals. Even more important are some of their distinctive beliefs which are in error. The LCC and similar churches, for example, deny major gospel truths by insisting that baptism is essential for salvation and that salvation in fact is never certain in this life. They also regard doctrines such as Original Sin, Predestination, Once Saved Always Saved as 'false doctrines' which made 'their official debut' in the fifth century.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, young students and even older Christians are often ill-taught themselves and are unable to discern between truth and error in the teaching of the LCC and related churches.

We must be careful how we use the term '**Campbellites**' in relation to the LCC and other Churches of Christ. Historically, the term 'Campbellites' is associated with the Christian church (Disciples of Christ) which began in the early 1800s in America with three ex-presbyterian ministers, namely, Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone. The Campbells were Irish but educated in Scotland and, while they were Presbyterian, they had been influenced by free church attitudes towards state churches and other matters such as creeds, liturgies and lay-oriented leadership. Within weeks of arriving in America and joining the Philadelphia Synod of the Presbyterian Church, Thomas Campbell's name was removed from the rolls of the Church in May 1807 because of heresy. Thomas then established the Christian Association of Washington (Pennsylvania) and was joined by his brother, Alexander, who broke his link with the Scottish presbyterians.

Various congregations were founded and for 17 years from 1813 they joined the Red Stone Baptist Association. This was a formative period for the Campbells in which their main doctrines were developed and articulated. However, some of these doctrines conflicted with Baptist principles and there was consequently a break with the Baptist Association in 1830. Alexander was by now teaching a sharp distinction between grace and law as well as the opposition between the Old and New Testaments. Both brothers now aimed to restore New Testament Christianity and one result was that they condemned any structure which impinged on the independence of local churches. In 1832 Campbell's churches merged with those of Barton Stone and they were commonly described as Christian Church and Disciples of Christ. By 1849, these churches had grown rapidly. Regional fellowships were arranged, colleges established and a publishing programme was launched. A convention was held in 1849 which adopted the name 'American Christian Missionary Society' and for the following 60 years it facilitated the work

of church extension and overseas mission. Since 1849, several divisions have taken place among the Churches of Christ in the United States and Britain.

Many of these groups acknowledge a link with the nineteenth-century 'Campbellites' but it is difficult to ascertain how many of them use the name to describe themselves. The situation is complex and this is illustrated in relation to Britain. For example, a representative of the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in Britain commented recently, 'we are of course Campbellites in origin'. The FCC represents only 37 Churches of Christ, previously there had been about 70 in the Fellowship. Nearly half of these churches in the FCC joined the United Reformed Church in 1980 so the FCC was depleted. It is interesting that in the UK CHRISTIAN HANDBOOK 1989/90 Edition<sup>3</sup> the Churches of Christ which left the FCC are included under the United Reformed Church and named in a footnote as the Reformed Association of Churches of Christ.

To illustrate the complexity of the situation further, there is another separate group of churches called the 'Old Paths' Churches numbering as many as 90 which split from other Churches of Christ in the 1920s. This group is closest to the LCC; in 1987 the LCC was listed in their directory but omitted from it in 1989.

Despite all these divisions, there are **basic doctrines which all these groups have in common**, namely, the necessity of baptism for salvation,<sup>4</sup> the possibility of losing one's salvation and a strictly congregational form of church government. A major reason for past divisions relates to the departure of some Churches of Christ from congregational principles by the establishing of a structured organisation threatening to exercise authority over local churches.

An FCC representative adds that the London Church of Christ differs from them not in any important points of doctrine but rather in methods and organisation. In fact, the mainline Churches of Christ in the United States have repeatedly criticised the Boston Church of Christ for its authoritarianism. One major difference between the older and newer Churches of Christ is the more aggressive missionary zeal of the 'new' Churches and a tendency to adopt a more authoritarian structure and approach. In the United States, some Churches of Christ have become quite liberal in theology and practice.

## **The New Age Movement**

Although the New Age Movement (NAM) emerged in the 1970s, it has developed significantly in America and Europe since the 1980s and is now enjoying considerable popularity. **The roots of this movement**, however, go back at least to the early 1960s when Western society was exposed increasingly to Eastern, mystical teachings with their occult bias. But it has several precursors including Transcendentalism, Spiritism, Theosophy, New Thought and Christian Science.

Regarding the Christian Church as both irrelevant and lacking in spiritual vitality, many young people in the 1960s, including the Beatles, consequently joined groups such as Transcendental Meditation, Rajneesh Foundation, Zen Buddhism and the Divine Light Mission, etc. However, some people refused to restrict themselves to one particular guru or group. While committed to the basic ideas they were

especially attracted to the prospect of a new age in which they believed that differences of culture, religion and politics would be replaced by universal love and unity.

In his valuable *ENCYCLOPEDIA HANDBOOK OF CULTS IN AMERICA*, J Gordon Melton claims that the Movement can best be dated from 1971. With the relaxing of immigration laws both in the United States and Britain in the 1960s, Asian religious teachers moved to these countries along with many other immigrants. The result was 'a major missionary thrust by the Eastern religions towards the West'.<sup>5</sup> Various ashrams and centres were established in key areas while in 1971 the *EAST-WEST JOURNAL* was launched by a Boston group. This may have been the 'first national periodical to focus the issues of the New Age Movement'.<sup>6</sup> The same year saw the publication of *BE HERE NOW* the earliest book popularising the ideas of the New Age and written by Baba Ram Dass. A Jew, Dass's real name is Richard Alpert who had been a professor of psychology at Harvard before going to India in search of a guru. By 1972, New Age directories were issued and groups had been linked together through national periodicals such as *NEW AGE?*, *NEW REALITIES* and the *YOGA JOURNAL*.

Among the early leaders of the movement were Marilyn Ferguson, David Spangler, Judith Skutch, Patricia Sun, Sam Keen, Shirley MacLaine and Paul Solomon. The latter was a Baptist Pastor in the United States but is now a committed and leading teacher in the New Age. He offers seminars/workshops on subjects such as guided meditation, dream analysis and master-victim consciousness. Solomon established a group called Inner Light Consciousness with a community in Virginia Beach. To the question, 'should Jesus be my Lord of life, or should I seek my higher self?', he answers: 'Both paths are valid since the historical Jesus is supposed to be one with the Consciousness of God, and if you seek your Higher Mind, you seek the expression of God that is the source of your being'.<sup>7</sup> David Spangler served as a leader of the Findhorn community in Scotland for three years before he established a New Age community called the Lorian Association near Madison in Wisconsin. In 1976 he published *REVELATION, THE BIRTH OF A NEW AGE* in which he expressed in popular style New Age ideas. Perhaps even more influential than Spangler is Marilyn Ferguson who is the editor of two bulletins, namely, *BRAIN/MIND* and the *LEADING EDGE BULLETIN*. What gave her greater prominence was her book in 1980 entitled, *THE AQUARIAN CONSPIRACY*, which is regarded as one of the best statements of the beliefs and aims of the Movement. Similarly, it was the publication of her book, *A COURSE IN MIRACLES*, in 1975 by the new Foundation for Inner Peace which gave prominence to Judith Skutch. This became a popular and well-used study book and between 1975-1985 several hundred groups were established in North America alone.

**Basic to the New Age philosophy are two convictions.** First of all, that all religions and secular systems of thought lead eventually to God. Secondly, they believe that New Age philosophy is superior to all other faiths, including Christianity. This can be illustrated in many ways but I want to use the example of the New Age community based in Findhorn.

The small village of Findhorn is situated 40 miles east of Inverness in Scotland. In 1963, a community called '**The Findhorn Foundation**' was established and as many as two hundred people have been living together there. Members are accommodated on a caravan site in the village and also in a nearby hotel in Forres which the Foundation owns.

Findhorn is an important centre for the movement in Britain. One workshop available there deals with 'Christianity in the New Age'. It offers 'an experiential exploration of the Cosmic Christ in the light of the Western mystery tradition and the Ancient Wisdom'. It will include a suggestive reading of the Gospel narratives both as an allegorical presentation of stages of subconsciousness in the unfoldment of the soul and as a practical path to "enlightenment" given us by the Master Jesus'.<sup>8</sup> Peter and Eileen Caddy founded the community. They claimed that 'the work of this centre is to usher in the New Age, to raise the vibrations by the awareness of the Christ consciousness within each one, to find contact with ME: to create light and more light and radiate it; to bring down my Kingdom on earth and see it start right here and go out to the four corners of the earth'.<sup>9</sup>

In order to understand this quotation, one needs to remember the New Age belief that mankind is in the process of moving into the age of Aquarius from the age of Pisces. Each age continues for about 2000 years and they further claim that the different ages are influenced by the earth's movement. They regard the Pisces age as the age of Christianity but they believe **that the age of Christianity is now ending**. The adjustment from one age to another is supposed to mean that we are affected by different and higher energies from the cosmos. These energies are believed to enter the planet by means of 'lay-lines' (that is, lines which criss-cross the globe) and the 'power-points' are precise places where these lines cross. Stonehenge is thought to have been built on such a 'power-point' but for the New Age the three main power-points for Britain are Glastonbury, Iona and Findhorn.

While Findhorn is an important centre in Britain, there are other and more important communes in the United States reflecting New Age ideals. These include the Lama Foundation and the Stelle Community while some eastern teachers have established their own organisational communes such as the Ananda Co-operative Community of Swami Kriyananda and also the New Vrindvan which belongs to the International Society of Krishna Consciousness in West Virginia.

New Age devotees attach great importance to occasions such as the full moon, equinoxes and solstices when they believe that the cosmos energies are at their strongest. Meditation is an indispensable means of adapting to these energies but it is also deemed important to develop a high regard for nature generally. Even man-made objects tend to be personalised in the New Age philosophy and one practical result of their reverence for nature is the claim to be able to grow exceptionally large vegetables/flowers even in poor soil and without the use of chemicals.

Eventually, the New Age for them will be characterised by one universal religion and a perfectly harmonised mankind committed to caring for the planet. This allegiance to the planet already finds expression in concerns such as ecology.

peace, natural/wholesome foods, co-operation in community living and the desire to effect social/political changes of a radical nature but by peaceful means.

They believe this New Age will be accomplished by means of a basic, universal energy distinct from other forms of energy such as heat and light etc. The energy is believed to pervade and undergird the whole of nature and human existence. Different names are used to describe this basic energy: mana, odic force, prana, the ch'i, the healing force but is transforming in its effects and is available to us by meditation and psychic development, etc.

In his detailed bibliography relating to the New Age Movement, J Gordon Melton refers to at least 97 specialist books or articles but observes correctly that 'the prime critics of the Movement are Evangelical Christians who see a challenge to the Christian faith in a revived gnosticism'.<sup>10</sup> **The charge of gnosticism is a fair one.** Jane Grumbridge, a former member of the Movement and of the Findhorn community who became a Christian in the early 1980s explains:

'The New Age belief is very close to gnosticism, for man is seen as being born without the knowledge of his soul and his true identity as part of God... It is from knowledge about oneself and the universe, and by then changing one's life to live according to that knowledge that release and salvation come...however, unlike gnosticism, matter is not seen as evil. We are meant to be making everything physical into something spiritual and beautiful by earthing the higher energies, rather than running away from the physical into an ascetic life-style.'<sup>11</sup>

Their brand of gnosticism involves a radical re-interpretation, and rejection of biblical truth and this can be illustrated in relation to **some major doctrines.**

For example, New Agers generally claim that **God is a power rather than a person** and that this power resides in each human person. One aim of their followers is to realise they are gods and to achieve the higher consciousness of their divinity. A prominent leader, Shirley MacLaine, once stood on the shores of the Pacific Ocean chanting, "I am God, I am God, I am God"! Their doctrine of God is clearly pantheistic; divinity is within, and identifiable with, everything including humans and nature.

How do they view the Lord Jesus Christ? Although they call Jesus a Master yet his unique Person as God the Son is denied. Their claim is that Jesus was the first one to realise and express the Christ-energy/consciousness. For them, **Jesus was only a man while the Christ is the God essence which indwelt him and all other humans.** Influenced to a certain extent by Teilhard de Chardin they prefer to talk about 'the cosmic Christ' rather than the Jesus of history. All humans, too, are regarded as 'gods in the making' who can become God! Because man has a higher nature of consciousness, there is no mention of the Fall and no real distinction is made between right and wrong. Sin is thought of only as ignorance of one's own divinity.

**Salvation** is a word and doctrine rarely found in their writings but it is interpreted as the recognition and appreciation of one's own divinity. Man, according to the New Age teaching, needs to develop his psychic powers and reach his higher

consciousness in order to become aware of his personal divinity. Meditation, yoga, drugs, martial arts, hypnosis and various occult activities are all legitimate means of attaining one's divinity. Because man is not regarded as a sinner nor as being guilty and exposed to the wrath of the holy God, there is no need of a Saviour and atonement. They further insist that **Heaven/Hell** are only good or bad conditions of consciousness in this life with no real counterpart beyond death. In New Age thinking, there are repeated reincarnations; these are not a curse or punishment but a spiritual path or SADHANA. This may involve following a guru or developing one's own Sadhana but the goal is the same, a kind of mystical awareness described as self-realisation, higher consciousness, or New Age awareness of Christ consciousness. Such a Sadhana is rarely completed in the span of one life on earth; through several lifetimes in a physical body spiritual development can occur culminating in a mystical consciousness of one's own divinity.

In one respect, the New Age Movement is unlike many cults for it discourages submission to one or more leaders. Believing each person to be a 'co-creator' and a part of God himself, they insist on personal freedom for all individuals to develop alongside others. In the Findhorn community, for example, 'every department functions as a group, not a group centred upon a leader who gives the orders, nor a group working democratically by majority votes but a group who are learning to receive direction with a vision on the good of the whole.'<sup>12</sup>

While far removed from biblical truth, **this Movement offers hope, albeit a false one, for the future**, also a mystical consciousness as well as freedom, an appreciation of nature and the support of a caring community. Here is a major challenge to Christian churches to preach the true gospel of Christ and at the same time to live as godly, loving fellowships in their own communities.

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# An Indigenous Initiative

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Paul Finch

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*Beyond the missionary venture there are some steps the missionary himself cannot take. Readers are here introduced to an Italian initiative for grounding indigenous evangelism in theology.*

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Rene Padilla movingly describes an episode in a plenary session during an international congress on the communication of the gospel in Latin America.

Someone made the observation that without theology, evangelism becomes proselytism and faith becomes an ideology. A response was not long in coming. A well-known evangelist spoke up to make what he undoubtedly regarded as a 'defence' of evangelism against theology. 'What sense is there in spending time and energy on theology, when the pressing need today is to preach the gospel?' That for him was the question.

That unforgettable episode throws into relief a fact that cannot be denied: *the church in Latin America is a church without theology* (italics mine).<sup>1</sup>

The missionary task is devoted to evangelism. The unspoken presupposition of missions, missionary agencies and missionaries is that they are called to evangelise, and the above quotation vividly illustrates that dedication. The question that Padilla is raising, however, is: 'Can that be done without a proper theological base?' And, as is implied above, in the following pages of his paper on *The Contextualisation of the Gospel* he argues for a grounding of evangelism in theology:

The church in the Third World needs a theology that answers to its own needs.

From western missions it has received the gospel reduced and wrapped in cultural clothing that robs it of much of its transforming power. This is its greatest tragedy and its greatest challenge.<sup>2</sup>

Rene Padilla is writing with concerned passion. He is himself the beneficiary of western missions. His own conversion lies at the door of the intense evangelistic missionary fervour in Argentina. He would not be writing had the missionaries not sacrificed, laboured, and given themselves to the preaching of the gospel. And yet he is aware that the missionary task has not been able to go beyond its own productivity. The gospel has been imported into South America — but it has not taken root there, because it has not been taken with a theological base. As a result Latin American evangelicalism is growing up without affecting society:

Neither Roman Catholicism nor Protestantism...has rooted deeply enough in Latin American human reality to produce creative thinking. In other words, both churches have remained on the fringe of the history of our peoples.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, Padilla contends that the evangelical church is unable to withstand the ideologies of current society, and there is strong proof of the fact as the churches repeatedly lose their own children to secular society.

What the church was unable to give them in terms of a purpose in life and an adequate perspective from which to understand history, they have found in a secular ideal that in the end destroys their 'inherited faith'.<sup>4</sup>

What Padilla graphically describes from his third world context is, however, also sadly true of **Italy**, a first world missionary context. Here, too, the gospel has been preached. Some have been converted. There are pockets of Italian Christians. The evangelical church in Italy does exist. Numbering less than one tenth of one percent of the population, it is still a very tiny minority, but it has arrived.

The issue which Padilla raises is: 'But has it taken root?' And when the questions are posed in his terms: Is creative thinking going on? Is the church at the centre of Italian history? Is there a developing theology from within Italy? Has the missionary endeavour, from without and within Italy, put down roots which see an Italian fruit sprouting from Italian soil? sadly the answers have to be 'no'. The great preponderance of Italian evangelical literature consists of translated titles from abroad. Most of the instruments of evangelisation have been created, and are still maintained, by foreign currency. If Padilla should ask: 'Where is the Italian John Stott?' I would have to say I don't know. Worse still would be if he should ask: 'And where is the Italian J I Packer?'. Italian evangelical theology is a nameless, anonymous waif.

**Until now**, almost the whole enterprise of Italy has been done without a theological base. As Padilla would say: 'There has not been a new reading of the gospel from within the historical situation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>5</sup> And as Italian society tends to follow patterns forged in the USA, so too, the Italian evangelical scene tends to imitate American evangelicalism. Her evangelistic methodology, her approach to Christian music, her growing number of large congresses all are assimilated from their foreign inheritance. They are forms of evangelicalism which have arrived, but they fail to produce an Italian fruit from Italian biblical creative nutrition.

The words 'until now' stand at the head of the former paragraph because perhaps there is now a **new beginning for Italy**, a beginning which is uniquely 'hers'. It consists of a theological library/research centre which has been inaugurated last autumn in Padova (Padua) by a group of earnest and committed Italian believers.

Known as IFED — Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione (literally translated: **Institute for Evangelical Formation and Documentation**), the centre is dedicated to the formulation of a biblical conscience which expresses itself dynamically in all areas of life, or as Padilla would frame it: 'Theological thinking is not basically an intellectual exercise, but rather a discovery of the will of God regarding the practice of truth.'<sup>6</sup>

The chief expression of such thinking is the already well known theological magazine **Studi di Teologia**, a monograph of about 130 pages which comes out twice a year. The magazine, now in its 12th year, is unique in its kind in Italy, and the editor of the magazine, Prof Pietro Bolognesi (a product of Vaux-Sur-Seine), was undertaking a brand new step when he first began, back in 1978, with an edition on Biblical Hermeneutics, a step which previous missionary endeavour had failed to take.



IFED is really that step which missionaries from overseas cannot take. For the first time in Italy, of Italian origin, of Italian creativity, a study-centre, geared to the maturation and expression of evangelical theology has been born. The three-windowed locale, already housing some 3,000 volumes, is pleasantly situated in a quiet neighbourhood near to the centre of Padova.

Besides being a library and central office for **Studi di Teologia**, IFED is also promoting two theological seminars per year. The first of these, in May 1989, focussed on the concrete necessity of solid theological foundations, and was introduced by Stuart Olyott. God willing, the second one was to be held in October on the whole question of Fundamentalism, endeavouring to articulate the categories behind the word which is so often controversial.

IFED's desire is to promote biblical study and research in all areas of life, and not being a Bible School which 'requires continuous residence by the student, is available to all who want to involve themselves seriously in the research of God's truth as it applies to life.

While the birth and development of the centre is a very significant step forward on the evangelical scene in Italy, it is very obvious that IFED must develop ties with the worldwide church community. Although Prof Pietro Bolognesi himself serves on the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship, this is not sufficient. Ties with God's people and like-minded institutions around the world must be developed in a real and meaningful fashion. Even when God has graciously raised up an Italian Dr Packer and an Italian Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Italy's theological and evangelical growth must mature within the healthy confines of God's global church!

The small, growing evangelical church of Padova, the churches in the immediate region, as well as other churches and believers scattered more to the south, covet God's blessing on this new initiative. The vision is that IFED should exist not only for their benefit and welfare, but that in God's economy Italy might have her own centre of growing creativity, fertile biblical and theological research, something Rene Padilla longed for in the continent of South America, and something Italy so vitally needs too.

*Dr Paul Finch is British and is field-leader with WEC International in Italy*

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4. *ibid*, p 105
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6. *ibid*, p 107

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# New Conceptions of God?

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Alan Tovey

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*A review article of the authorised biography,*

*A LIFE OF BISHOP JOHN A T ROBINSON, SCHOLAR, PASTOR, PROPHET*

*Eric James, Collins, 1987,*

*340 pp, £15.00*

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In the lovely churchyard at Arncliffe, beside the river Skirfare, in a remote Yorkshire dale, is a simply inscribed, unhewn tombstone. It reads: 'John Arthur Thomas Robinson Born 15 June 1919 Died 5 December 1983', all set under the engraving of a Bishop's mitre. Here lies one whose writings and opinions made newspaper headlines in the early sixties. John Robinson's *HONEST TO GOD*, published during his first years as Bishop of Woolwich, and his agreement to appear as a witness for the defence in the *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER* case assured him of instant fame or notoriety. In *HONEST TO GOD* Robinson had repudiated the traditional concepts of God. Following Paul Tillich he said we should think of God as the Ground of our being, rather than as 'out there'. That is, we should think of God as immanent rather than transcendent. In the *LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER* case the publishers were threatened with prosecution for publishing an obscene book. To Robinson, God was not so much a God of law, as of love. This made him sympathetic to the permissive society insofar as this involved actions which he regarded as expressions of true love. Before these events and afterwards Robinson published a whole series of books on theology in its contemporary application in doctrinal statements and social concerns; and, perhaps most notably, books of biblical scholarship, latterly, *REDATING THE NEW TESTAMENT*, its popular counterpart *CAN WE TRUST THE NEW TESTAMENT* and the Bampton Lectures, *THE PRIORITY OF JOHN*, all of which, in some respects, take a quite conservative stance, challenging the more sceptical views about the Gospels. So, *REDATING THE NEW TESTAMENT* argues for dates prior to AD70 for all the Gospels and *THE PRIORITY OF JOHN* argues for the historicity of that account, an account which, it is argued, should be preferred when it is at variance with the synoptics.

Who was this man? His career and influence have recently been traced in a sensitive (at times moving, especially the account of his fatal illness — he died six months to the day on which cancer of the pancreas had been diagnosed) but frank biography by his friend and literary executor, Canon Eric James.

Born the son of an elderly Canon of Canterbury Cathedral, John Robinson was educated at Marlborough and Jesus College, Cambridge; he did research at Trinity and prepared for the ministry at Westcott House. His PhD thesis was entitled 'Thou Who Art'. The notion of personality and its relation to Christian theology, with

particular reference to the contemporary ‘I-thou’ philosophy, and the doctrine of the Trinity and the Person of Christ.’ It was, says Canon James, ‘undoubtedly the foundation of much of John’s future theological writing.’ In it Robinson ‘explored both the history and the implications’ of the I-Thou philosophy ‘for how one could speak of personality in God rather than of God as “a Person”’ (p 16). Behind this discussion lies the teaching of the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber (1878-1965). Dr Colin Brown sums up Buber’s teaching as follows: ‘In I AND THOU Buber argues that there are two basic kinds of relationship, the I-It and the I-Thou. The former belongs to superficial experience, when we see things and people as merely phenomena. But when we probe deeper, it is possible to enter into personal relationships not only with other people but also with things. It is here that we encounter a Thou over against our I. And this is the realm also where we encounter God.’ And he goes on to quote Buber: ‘In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us we look out toward the fringe of the eternal **Thou**; in each we are aware of a breath from the eternal **Thou**; in each **Thou** we address the eternal **Thou**’ (PHILOSOPHY AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, Tyndale Press, 1969, p 234, quoting I AND THOU, English translation, T & T Clark, 1937, p 6).

Subsequently Dr Robinson held various positions and many lectureships in different parts of the world. He was Curate of St Matthew, Moorfields, Bristol, Mervyn Stockwood was his Vicar; Chaplain of Wells Theological College; Dean of Clare College, Cambridge; Suffragan Bishop of Woolwich (again under Mervyn Stockwood, his mentor, who by this time was Bishop of Southwark) and last of all, Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Several features of John Robinson stand out.

*Firstly*, his deep concern for people coupled with his awkward personality which at times could cause misunderstanding and embarrassment. His closing years at Trinity were not completely happy. In part this was due to the Bishop’s own lack of tact and sensitivity and love of the limelight.

*Secondly*, his description of what he conceived as his theological task. In the first part of his ministry he was radical in the sense of setting himself to update much of received Christian tradition though Alec Vidler points out that, prior to the publication of HONEST TO GOD in 1963, he and others also concerned with such issues thought of Robinson as firmly set within the biblical theology school and the liturgical movement (SCENES FROM A CLERICAL LIFE, Collins, 1977, p 179). In the latter part of his ministry Robinson was radical in the sense of wanting to return to the roots — from this derived his preoccupation with previous generations of his family and his biblical research.

*Thirdly*, his doctrine of God. Robinson heard the Hulsean Lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge by Dr Alan M G Stephenson in 1979-80; and he was fascinated by them. These were published posthumously as THE RISE AND DECLINE OF ENGLISH MODERNISM (SPCK, 1985). In these Lectures Dr Stephenson argued that the theological radicalism of the likes of John Robinson superseded the old Modernism — see Chapter 8 of Stephenson’s book. Modern Churchmen, though they found much to agree with in HONEST TO GOD, disliked

what one of them (Percival Gardner-Smith, who has himself died since the publication of Stephenson's book) described as Robinson's 'vague ethical pantheism' together with his dependence on 'such extremists as Tillich, Bonhoeffer, and Bultmann' (Stephenson, pp 190-191). Another, in a MODERN CHURCHMAN editorial, wrote: 'The Christian must resist any tendency to identify God with reality, even though it be termed Ultimate Reality, if that be taken to comprehend the world we see.' The writer goes on to emphasise the importance of the doctrine of Creation 'in its assertion of the transcendence of God and so in His separatedness from His creatures... And the Christian must resist any tendency to identify God with one of His attributes, even that of love. Love presupposes somebody who loves...an impersonal view of God must be rejected' (ibid, p 192). So although the Modernists liked Robinson's rejection of the miraculous and of a 'God who intervenes in history from his throne on high' and although 'they agreed with him in his assessment of the importance of love over Law' they were very critical of his doctrine of God (ibid, p 191). To be fair, Robinson was not strictly speaking a pantheist, but he was, like Martin Buber, as Robinson himself says, a *pantheist*. That is, he conceived of God as present in all that is around us though not necessarily identical with such. However, it has to be said that the understanding of God and His ways which emerges from John Robinson's writings is a far cry from the description of God in the Bible as the Father who is also holy, that is separate from us, the Wholly Other. Although there is a revelation of God all around us, as the Bible itself clearly explains, fallen man is dependent upon the biblical revelation itself, in order to know the categories by which he must contemplate God and His ways.

*Rev Alan Tovey is Secretary of an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches and senior pastor of Beverley Congregational Church*

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## Redating the New Testament

Although he was a radical, liberal scholar, John Robinson's book REDATING THE NEW TESTAMENT (1976) contains some useful material and a number of surprisingly conservative conclusions. This is a technical, detailed work which is the fruit of meticulous research.

The book is radical in three ways:

1. it challenges the unfounded assumptions of critical scholarship
2. it uses a rigorous critical method to reject the conclusions of critics
3. it insists that the historicity of the N T documents cannot be divorced from the area of NT theology as many critics have claimed.

"So, as little more than a theological joke", writes Robinson, "I thought I would see how far one could get with the hypothesis that the whole of the New Testament was written before 70 AD" (p 10). He found the internal/external evidence overwhelmingly in favour of this early date and thus rendered "otiose or invalid the critical work done on the documents of the New Testament over the past 200 years" (p 364).

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# Old Testament Literature: An Update

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## *Stephen Dray*

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The excellent series of Tyndale Old Testament commentaries is rapidly reaching completion following the recent addition of four new volumes. With them, the consistently high standard of conservative exposition is maintained.

Joyce Baldwin<sup>1</sup> has a gift for understanding Old Testament narrative (as her 'The Message of Genesis 12-50' and 'Esther', both IVP, demonstrate). This is reflected in the introductory essays to her volume on 1 AND 2 SAMUEL. However, such insights are tantalisingly few in the exposition. The result is that the reader will welcome her thoroughly conservative exposition but will probably look to D F Payne's 'Daily Study Bible' (St Andrews Press) or the more scholarly '1 and 2 Samuel' of R P Gordon (Paternoster) for insights into how to teach the books.

David Baker's material on NAHUM, HABBAKUK, ZEPHANIAH<sup>2</sup> and OBADIAH<sup>3</sup> is readable, concise and conservative. It lacks specific application but, after his exposition, it lies very close to the surface of the text! The analyses of Desmond Alexander and Bruce Waltke are equally valuable.<sup>3</sup> Alexander argues that Jonah is didactic *history* and is, thus, a welcome voice in the midst of the scepticism found even in conservative circles today. His thorough introductory material is followed by an equally valuable exposition of the text. Waltke on MICAH is a gem!<sup>3</sup> An adequate introduction is accompanied by exposition and regular application: for example, he compares Lachish and Hollywood! This feature is especially welcome in a series not noted for such material.

Hubbard on JOEL AND AMOS<sup>4</sup> is a high class exegesis of these two prophets. His approach is similar to that of Baker: exposition which, though without application, leaves the reader in little doubt as to the significance of these books for today.

All in all, IVP have done the student and Bible teacher proud with the addition of these volumes. We look forward to the rest...not least the forthcoming volume by Hubbard on Hosea.

Richard Brooks has contributed a volume to the Welwyn Commentary Series on LAMENTATIONS.<sup>5</sup> The overall presentation is uneven. The latter chapters are thoroughly expounded and applied, usually with relevant practical headings (the underlying sermon outlines shine through!) Earlier the material is more piecemeal and thorough explanation of the text is interspersed with the occasional application and a practical summary at the end of the chapter. The style is somewhat clumsy and quaint in places and there is some hermeneutical shallowness and idiosyncratic application. However, this is offset by the evangelistic and practical thrust of the overall presentation. As a practical exposition it ranks highly. The preacher will probably want to supplement it with W C Kaiser: A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering (Moody Press).

Michael Bentley has written a volume in the same series on Haggai and Zechariah **BUILDING FOR GOD'S GLORY**.<sup>6</sup> He offers an excellent, simple, forthright exposition which gets to the heart of the message of the two books and effectively and consistently applies it to the modern reader. This material bears the evident marks of having been preached and is the better for it! The exposition of the later chapters of Zechariah is especially sensible. Reading this book should take the fear away from preaching prophetic books relevantly.

A new series of Old Testament commentaries, entitled 'The Communicator's Commentary' has been started by Word. The first two volumes on **DEUTERONOMY** (by John C Maxwell) and **JOB** (by David L McKenna) are of the highest standard. The aim of the series is to bridge the gap between standard commentary and sermon by getting scholar-preachers to provide lucid, well-illustrated and well-structured material which shows how the Word of God speaks today. It is based upon a conviction that 'Biblical preaching is the secret of growing churches' (editor's preface). Maxwell<sup>7</sup> is excellent, especially in the more narrative portions of Deuteronomy. His material betrays a scholarly understanding of the issues and a thoroughly conservative view of the Bible. Supplemented by Craigie (NIOTC, Eerdmans) which offers more exegesis, the preacher and student is well-served on Deuteronomy. Can **JOB** be preached? Perhaps not unless a more schematic or 'overview' approach is adopted. However, McKenna<sup>8</sup> has shown that there is ample material in Job for study and practical reflection. It lends itself, especially, to devotional reading and meditation. Highly recommended.

The other major series of commentaries produced by Word continues to grow apace. Thirteen (!) new volumes in the 'Word Bible Commentary' have reached the reviewer.

Wenham's volume on **GENESIS 1-15** is now available.<sup>9</sup> He argues that chapters 1-11 are proto-history designed as a polemic against the prevailing religious and philosophical views in the ancient near east. While his unwillingness to discuss detailed issues of historicity will not satisfy all his readers, the way he unpacks the theology of the early chapters in the light of his basic thesis is very effective. Particularly valuable is his essay on recent research in Genesis: a model of its kind. He notes that modern scholarship has collapsed E into J and that there is an increasing tendency to see P as prior to rather than consequent to J. He notes, too, the fact that there is an increasing willingness to credit the accuracy of J against a second millennial context. He hints that J need not be post-Mosaic. Such critical scholarly and conservative work is welcome (but sadly, see below, too rarely found in this series). Typically, Wenham seeks to indicate the hermeneutical principles which enable the text to speak to us today (though perhaps less so than some of his earlier work). The scholarly preacher will welcome this volume though wish to supplement it with other more expository studies.

The commentary on **EXODUS** by Durham<sup>10</sup> is a massive, detailed theological analysis based around the central theme of Yahweh as present and in the midst of his people. The structure is similar to other volumes in the series and includes the author's own translation, notes, a consideration of form, structure and setting,

commentary and explanation. All these volumes *claim* to be the best in evangelical critical scholarship. However, most show a greater willingness to adopt the 'assured results of modern criticism' and go to such lengths in the use of form and source criticism as to leave the reviewer anxious that the baby has not been thrown out with the bathwater. Most seem to adopt the approach to scripture pioneered by B S Childs which drives a wedge between history/accuracy and theology and to emphasise the latter at the expense of the former. This is true of Durham who can happily speak about J E D P etc. Despite this, his approach is only moderately critical and the book is a treasure trove of valuable insights as to the message of Exodus. It will undoubtedly be the standard work for many years to come.

2 SAMUEL by A A Anderson<sup>11</sup> offers a conservative, thorough and clear explanation of the message of the book, though lacking detailed application. More detailed than R P Gordon (1 & 2 Samuel, Paternoster) it provides a thorough supplement. D F Payne (Daily Study Bible) is still the best survey and application of the message of the book.

J Goldingay on DANIEL is a curate's egg typical of both the strengths and weaknesses of this series. There is almost total capitulation to modern liberal criticism of Daniel and the *conservative view is dismissed* as involving a mistaken interpretation of the genre of the book. This over-confident and cavalier approach is highly disappointing. Nevertheless, his exegesis and application is valuable and it is likely that the volume will become a standard for some time to come. What a pity, then, that it fails entirely to present a conservative viewpoint or even interact with it adequately.

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1. J G Baldwin, 1 AND 2 SAMUEL, IVP, 299 pp, (paperback) £6.25
2. D W Baker, NAHUM, HABAKKUK AND ZEPHANIAH, IVP, 121 pp, (paperback) £3.75
3. D W Baker, T D Alexander and B K Waltke, OBADIAH, JONAH AND MICAH, IVP, 207 pp, (paperback) £5.50
4. D A Hubbard, JOEL AND AMOS, IVP, 245 pp, (paperback) £5.95
5. R Brooks, GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS, Evangelical Press, 157 pp, (paperback) £4.95
6. M Bentley, BUILDING FOR GOD'S GLORY, Evangelical Press, 229 pp, (paperback) £5.95
7. J C Maxwell, DEUTERONOMY, Word, 351 pp, £14.95
8. D L McKenna, JOB, Word, 331 pp, £14.95
9. G J Wenham, GENESIS 1-15, Word, 353 pp, £18.95
10. J I Durham, EXODUS, Word, 516 pp, £19.95
11. A A Anderson, 2 SAMUEL, Word, 301 pp, £17.95
12. J E Goldingay, DANIEL, Word, 351 pp, £20.95

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# Book Reviews

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## 1 Peter

Wayne Grudem

IVP, TNTC, 239 pp £3.95

Having appreciated over many years the previous Tyndale commentary by the late Alan Stibbs, I felt somewhat nervous about reading this replacement volume by Grudem. However, I assure you that this is a competent, conservative and challenging commentary. What is particularly pleasing is the priority the author gives to exegesis of the biblical text rather than to the sources or setting of 1 Peter. Grudem keeps closely to the Greek text and his exegesis is reasonably thorough. In many places, he challenges the adequacy of English translations and is not afraid to question established interpretations. More controversially, he argues cogently in 1:2 that the word 'elect' ('chosen') is used in the Greek only as an adjective and not in a verbal sense. Furthermore, he argues that this word is nine words distant from the phrase "according to the foreknowledge of God" which Grudem then takes as modifying the whole situation of the readers (v 1). This implies "that their status as sojourners, their privileges as God's chosen people, even their hostile environment in Pontus, Galatia, etc were all known by God before the world began...all were in accordance with his fatherly love for his own people. Such foreknowledge is laden with comfort for Peter's readers" (p 50). Similarly, the phrase 'to obedience...' in verse 2 he refers to the daily obedience of believers, not initial saving obedience to the gospel. The word is used in the former sense in

1:14, probably 1:22; cf Rom 5:19, 6:16, 2 Cor 7:15, 10:5-6, Philemon 21 and Hebrews 5:8. "No clear examples of *hypakoe* meaning 'initial saving response to the gospel' are found (Rom 1:5 and 15:18 are ambiguous)" (p 52).

You may not always agree with the conclusions but the commentary will challenge you to examine afresh and in greater depth the text and message of this epistle. Only occasionally does the author refer to other commentaries but he cites more frequently ancient biblical and extra-biblical texts. Grudem thinks it is essential for believers "to accept a particular interpretation...not because some expert has given his opinion in favour of it, but because they have seen for themselves the evidence which supports that interpretation, and the evidence has convinced them" (p 10).

In addition to 155 pages of exegesis, there are 23 pages of introduction, three pages of useful analysis and outline and a useful appendix of 37 pages supplementing the exegesis of 3:19-20, Christ preached through Noah.

## The Message of 1 Peter

Edmund P Clowney

IVP, *The Bible Speaks Today*  
234 pp £5.50

We are informed in the General Preface to this book not to expect a mere 'commentary', that is, a work which only elucidates the text. Rather, the series in which this work appears, is "characterised by a three-fold ideal: to expound the biblical text with accuracy, to relate it to contemporary life, and to be readable" (p 5).

There are 11 pages of introduction (pp 15-25) and 7 pages of appendix (pp 227-234) dealing with subjects like



'Resident aliens' — literal or figurative? Living Rock — living water; The office of elder in the New Testament.

In an easy-to-read style, the author explains the meaning of the text and spends time in its detailed application. One example is in 1:1-2 where he devotes 17 pages to these two verses. The treatment of passages like 1:13-2:3 (pp 63-81) also contain some memorable, striking statements like 'Christians must be addicted to the Bible' (p 78), 'Peter commends a milk product that is free from additives. The word of God abides without preservatives' (p 79). This is a splendid book which pastors can encourage their members to use to great profit in personal and group Bible study.

Grudem's commentary is deliberately more academic and detailed in its exegetical work. One cannot leave his commentary without having been challenged by the biblical text. Clowney's book provides us with a responsible and straightforward exegesis with much more helpful and contemporary application. For several weeks I have used both books for personal Bible study and found them helpful and complementary. I would not like to be without either of them now. Buy these two commentaries for they will help to give you a better understanding of 1 Peter and, at the same time, provide you with a lot of important, suggestive material for preaching.

## **The Universe Next Door**

*James W Sire*

*IVP, 246 pp £5.95*

Although printed in America in 1976, — *Dr Eryl Davies MA BD, ETCW*  
this is an updated and expanded guide book to world views. Written from a

clear biblical perspective, the author outlines the basic beliefs of theism, deism, naturalism, existentialism, Eastern thought, Marxism and secular humanism.

The value of the book is three-fold. Firstly, it includes within one reasonably priced book the major world views and philosophies of our contemporary situation. For this reason it will be a useful reference book. Secondly, the book should help preachers to communicate the Word more relevantly and effectively by making us aware of the radically different answers being given in our world to key questions such as, What is the nature of the world around us? What is a human being? What happens to a person at death? Why is it possible to know anything at all? How do we know what is right and wrong? What is the meaning of human history? Thirdly, this book is useful in the way it exposes 'serious flaws' in all unbiblical world-views; 'none of them...', argues James Sire, 'can adequately account for the possibility of genuine knowledge, the facticity of the external universe or the existence of ethical distinctions. Each in its own way ends in some form of nihilism' (p 217). The answer, concludes the author, is not found in 'the self nor the cosmos, but the God who transcends all — the infinite-personal God in whom all reason, all goodness, all hope, all love, all reality, all distinctions find their origin. It provides the frame of reference in which we can find meaning and significance'. A useful book although not always easy to read.

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1. To articulate that theology characteristic of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.
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3. To appraise and report on contemporary trends in theology, particularly those which represent departure from consistent evangelicalism.
4. To stimulate interest in contemporary theological matters among BEC churches by the way in which these topics are handled and by indicating their relevance to pastoral ministry.
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