



General Secretary
Rev Alan Gibson BD

c o n t e n t s

- 1 _____ Editorial
- 2 _____ Are all Elders Pastors?
David Fountain
- 5 _____ Exegesis 17: The Perfect Woman for the Solitary Man
Stephen Tracey
- 9 _____ Spurgeon and the Gospel Call
David Prothero
- 16 _____ Spurgeon and Evangelical Unity
Andrew Davies
- 25 _____ A Warning from Australia: Orthodoxy and Heresy
Keith Morris
- 38 _____ Reformed Theology and Ecological Ethics (Part One)
Eryl Davies
- 43 _____ Book Reviews
The Final Word – O Palmer Robertson
The Work of Christ – Robert Letham

Issue No. 32 - Spring 1994

113 Victoria Street
St Albans, AL1 3TJ
Tel: 0727 855655
Fax: 0727 855655

foundations

a journal of evangelical theology

published by the
British Evangelical Council



Spurgeon on Unity ■

A Warning from Australia ■

Ecology and Ethics ■

Prophecy Today ■

foundations

Price £2.00 Issue No.32 Spring 1994

Editor Rev Dr Eryl Davies MA BD
9 St Isan Road
CARDIFF Wales
CF4 4LU
UK
All MSS, Editorial Correspondence and Publications for
Review should be sent to the Editor.

Price £2 post free within the UK
Overseas subscribers PLEASE NOTE:-
We are now able to accept cheques ONLY IN STERLING
from overseas, ie NOT in any other foreign currency.
Currency exchange costs have made it uneconomic for us
to do otherwise.
Cheques to be made out to BEC.

Editorial

Welcome to this new subscription series of FOUNDATIONS! We hope that you like the new cover, as well as the content and mix of articles in the journal. Perhaps many of our regular readers will be able to identify four new contributors in this issue.

David Fountain courageously asks ARE ALL ELDERS PASTORS? Written from a Baptist perspective, the author questions the identification of *elders* with *pastors*. He argues biblically for the use of the term 'pastor' only with regard to men called to assume full-time pastoral ministry and the burden of teaching ministry within a local church. Not all will agree but correspondence on this and other articles is encouraged.

Stephen Tracy provides an EXEGESIS article entitled *The Perfect Woman for the Solitary Man*. Here is a competent and encouraging examination of the biblical text in Genesis 2:18-25 which is foundational to current discussion of gender roles in society and in the church.

Two articles relate to Spurgeon on extremely practical and important subjects. David Prothero, in SPURGEON AND THE GOSPEL CALL, asks whether contemporary evangelistic preaching properly assesses the relationship between the general and the effectual call of the gospel. Have we neglected to preach the gospel to the *lost sinner*? In a separate article, Andrew Davies writes challengingly on SPURGEON AND EVANGELICAL UNITY.

In A WARNING FROM AUSTRALIA: ORTHODOXY AND HERESY, Keith Morris traces the development and challenge of heresy within the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales and the influence of Samuel Angus earlier in this century. There are valuable lessons to learn from this history.

There is room in this issue for only the first part of my article on REFORMED THEOLOGY AND ECOLOGICAL ETHICS. This will be completed in issue 33.

An important review is provided by Neil Richards of Palmer Robertson's new book about prophecy, THE FINAL WORD and a briefer one by myself of THE WORK OF CHRIST by Robert Letham.

Enjoy the journal and if you have not yet subscribed to this new series then take action quickly.

Are All Elders Pastors?

David Fountain

In recent years Baptists have recognised that according to Scripture there should be a plurality of elders in every local congregation. However, this has led to some failing to make the distinction between those who are set apart for the *pastoral ministry* and those who work with such a ministry in the capacity of *ruling elders*. Presbyterians have always had ruling elders in their congregations and there has always been debate about a distinction between those set aside for full-time work and ruling elders who are not. There is an important difference, however, between the debate in Presbyterian circles and among Baptists. Baptists are accustomed to using the word *pastor*, whereas Presbyterians usually use the word *minister*. Presbyterian writings leave the whole question of the position of the pastor an open one.

In looking at this subject, some have asserted that just as all elders are also overseers (AV - bishops) so all elders are pastors. They appeal to Acts 20:28 and 1 Pet 5:1-4 (where all elders are to *shepherd* the flock) and to the fact that all elders must be *able to teach* and that the word translated *minister* is not exclusive to the Christian ministry. To them there is simply one office, that of elder, and this they believe saves us from the peril of autocracy. Many are uneasy about such views. They feel there must be a difference between those who are called full-time and those who are not. At the same time they recognise there are gifted brethren who can assist pastors in their work.

A Distinctive Teaching Ministry

In the *Old Testament* the elders of the covenant community never had a teaching role. There was a separate and distinct office to which was entrusted the ministry of the word. Priests and Levites shared with the elders the responsibility of judgment and rule but they were in fact ministers of the word and superintended the worship. Prophets were also set apart to declare God's word. The *New Testament* draws a close parallel in respect of financial support between priests and those who preached the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). There is also a parallel drawn between prophets and preachers. Rom 10:14-15 powerfully illustrates the New Testament concept of the preacher. Such men must be sent by God before they can preach. This distinction is clearly made in 1 Tim 5:17, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour especially those who labour in the word and doctrine". The terminology, "labour in the word and doctrine", is particularly helpful as it covers *all* those given by God to minister the word. This function continues to apply when apostles and prophets passed away. The distinction occurs again in 1 Thess 5:12, "We urge you brethren to recognise those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you". Heb 13:7 carries the same message where reference is made to those who not only rule but "have spoken the word of God to you". They are different from those referred to in the 17th verse, having the *additional* gift. Clearly there was a *distinct group* who have a full-time stewardship, labouring in doctrine and the word. This group, separate from the ruling elders, are referred to in Eph 4:11, where five categories are listed as gifts given by the Head of the Church.

Elders

Some may reasonably argue that since elders should be able to teach, they have a teaching function along with a ruling function. The words “able to teach” given in the list of qualifications for elders in 1 Tim 3:2 are repeated in 2 Tim 2:24 where the context is not public ministry but private admonition. Even more helpful is the passage in Tit 1:9 where qualifications of elders are repeated and instead of the expression “able to teach” we read, “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convict those who contradict”. The following verses show that this is not *public* ministry but *private* admonition.

It is said that there is only one office of spiritual oversight. The Scripture merely tells us that each church should have elders. But it is important to recognise that the word *elder* is a collective, generic term because *all* those who had gifts of ministry were also qualified to rule. We know from 1 Pet 5:1 that Peter, an apostle, was also an elder. We can also see from Acts 15:22 & 32 that there were prophets in the church at Jerusalem. Now the letter sent from the church to Antioch went from the “apostles, the elders and the brethren”. Clearly prophets were included along with other ministerial brethren under the title, “elder”. “Prophets” were therefore also elders, just as apostles were. When Paul called the elders from Ephesus to meet him at Miletus, there must surely have been prophets and teachers among them just as there were such at the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). There were, very likely, evangelists too among these elders from Ephesus.

It is clear, furthermore, that Peter was *first* an apostle and secondly an elder. Agabus the prophet (Acts 21:10) must have been an elder, likewise Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8). They were described by their ministerial gift, not as “elders”. In Acts 13:1 we also have men who must have been elders described by their ministerial gift. These men were *first* prophets and teachers, secondly they were elders.

In Acts 20:28 and 1 Pet 5:2 elders are called upon to “shepherd the flock”. Are not all elders, therefore, shepherds or pastors? This argument assumes that function is equivalent to office. We are all called upon to evangelise. Indeed, Acts 8:4 shows us that the whole scattered congregation at Jerusalem evangelised but that did not make them all evangelists. There are those set apart to be deacons, but the function of serving is a very general one. *Function does not equal office*. Elders are to support those whose calling is specifically that of a pastor. They “shepherd” but he is *the* “shepherd”.

The Pastor

In the Old Testament there are many references to the shepherd. In no case, however, can it be applied directly or indirectly to elders. It is used of those in positions of leadership - Moses, Joshua, the Judges, David, Cyrus. There are indirect references in its usage to priests and prophets, but never to elders.

In the New Testament, Ephesians 4 is of the utmost importance. We read in verse 8, “He gave gifts to men” and in verses 11 and 12, “He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers . . . for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”. Clearly there is a distinct *ministerial* gift of pastors. If the word *pastor* was synonymous with the word *elder*, then the word *pastor* would be out of place in a list of ministerial gifts, since the work of those who are elders and have no added gift is simply that of ruling. Furthermore, if it were possible to exchange the word *pastor* to *elder*, we could read, “He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some elders and teachers”. This would imply that it was a distinct gift and that prophets

and evangelists were not in fact elders! Now if the words *pastor* and *elder* meant precisely the same thing, since we know that prophets were elders they would in this case also be pastors, and evangelists would be pastors too! Such confusion would arise if the words *pastor* and *elder* were interchangeable.

Let us look at the very term *pastor* itself. Why should we use it? Is it important? The word *minister* (*diakonos*) is used for those who preach the gospel but also for deacons and those who serve in a general capacity. It is not a distinct title for those who preach the word of God nor does it occur in Ephesians 4. For this reason it is unhelpful to use it when defining the distinctive role of the one set apart to minister God's word.

Reference has been made to scriptures that speak generally of those who "labour in the word and doctrine". There are the distinct gifts referred to in Ephesians 4:11 which are covered by these general terms. In the post-apostolic church the word *elder* came to be limited to those whose function was simply to rule and the word *overseer* (AV - bishop) came to be limited to those gifted in ministry in addition to ruling. There was a clear distinction, but the titles *elder* and *overseer* came to be separately applied. Each local congregation had those gifted to minister at their head. In Revelation 2 & 3 each church had an individual *messenger* to give them God's word. It was clearly *wrong* to make a distinction between *elder* and *overseer*, but the fact that there was a distinction between those who laboured and those who ruled only, cannot be disputed. The emergence of separate titles is itself evidence that these groups existed.

We return to the claim that Eph 4:11 refers to one office when reference is made to "pastors and teachers". Now Acts 13:1 shows that there was a distinct office of teacher so there must also have been a distinct office of pastor. If there were *teachers* there must have been *pastors* too. Their work was clearly that of leadership but also of ministry (Ephesians 4:12). The picture of the shepherd is both beautiful and challenging. The pastor leads the flock and must set an example. Christ is the supreme example. The term is without doubt scriptural and is to be preferred to the more general term *minister*. The latter clearly has its place in Scripture but is not so distinctive as the former. Let us not feel we have to use the words *teaching elder* when Scripture uses the term *pastor*. While the pastor is an elder who teaches, he is also the leader of the local congregation. He leads the people out, like a shepherd.

In practice, leadership is essential and it is a gift from God. He gives men to the church who are truly called and set apart for the work, "who labour in the word and doctrine" and are able to view the flock of God spiritually and care for them. The pastor may well be supported by men highly qualified in a managerial and professional capacity. In human terms they may appear to be his superiors but by God's grace they should recognise that the Church of God is not merely a human institution. They must recognise and value his spiritual leadership. It is important for us all to bear in mind Paul's words, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another" (Romans 12: 3-5).

Pastor David Fountain, MA is the Pastor Emeritus of Spring Road Evangelical Church, Sholing, Southampton.

Exegesis 17: The Perfect Woman for the Solitary Man

Stephen Tracey

This article offers an exegesis of Genesis 2: 18-25 which is foundational to current discussion of gender roles.

The Context

These verses are the counterpart of Gen 1:26-27. This is not another account of Creation, as some scholars insist. Gen 2:4ff is a 'blow by blow' account of the sixth day of Creation. These verses are answering the question of the origin of 'woman'. Man was created male and female. But only the male was the head and representative of humanity. All others came from him, and this included Eve. Hence we need to understand the origin of woman. The explanation which these verses give of the place of woman prepares the way for the events of Gen 3 and the role of the woman in those catastrophic events.

God's Appraisal of Man's Need (v 18)

There is something in Creation that is "not good", *LO'-TOB*. Blocher, quoting from Cassuto, suggests that this is an emphatic negative, much stronger in meaning than the usual negative *'EYN TOB*. God's assessment of the man's situation is that there is not simply an absence of something but a painful deficiency.¹ What is clear is that the man, as male, was incomplete and this was part of God's purpose. God did not make a mistake, nor is He admitting to any fault in His Creation. He created man in this way, that it was not good for him to be alone.

The Hebrew word translated as "alone" *LEBADDU*, is from the masculine noun *BAD*, used to express solitude and isolation. Lifelong isolation is not good for man. God created him to be sociable.

God therefore declares He will make a suitable assistant for the man. The Hebrew word *'EZER* usually means "assistance", but frequently it is used to designate "an assistant", or "one who helps". The significant point is that the word does not imply inferiority in any way. Very often God is the "helper" of man, in a military sense. However the assistant is further defined by the word *KENEGDO*. The two words form one unit in the sentence. *'EZER* is compounded with the preposition *NEGED*, in order to define the deficiency in the man. This means that the assistant is "in front of", "face to face", "corresponding" to the man. Calvin suggests that the *KE* prefix is the *KE* of similitude. He thinks the LXX has caught the meaning well with *kat' auton*, "according to him". Calvin deduces from this that marriage extends to all parts of a man's life.²

The Man 'Discovers' His Isolation (vv 19-20)

This verse, and what follows, is an exposition of the preceding statement of v 18.

The verb *WAYYISER* is 3rd Masc Sing Imperfect, Qal, with Waw Consecutive. Some translate this simply as the past tense, "God formed". Some scholars took this to be a

contradiction of the events of chapter 1, suggesting that certain animals were formed after man. Although a simple past tense is sufficient, the pluperfect is also legitimate, giving the more accurate translation “God had formed”.

The use of the verb *WAYYABE* implies that God led the animals to the man and nothing more than that is necessary. The animals were in perfect subordination to the will of God; the Creator was known by the creatures.

The text is explicit in indicating the practical details of the naming ceremony. Two groups of animal are mentioned: *KOL HAYAT HASSADEH* and *KOL-'OP HASHSHAMAYIM*. It is not the “beasts of the earth”, as in Genesis 1, but the “beasts of the field”. This certainly implies a limit to the animals that were brought to the man. The fish are not mentioned, nor the “creeping things”.

The phrase *WEKOL' ASHER YIQRA' - LO HA'ADAM NEPESH HAYAH HU' SHE MO*, translated “whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name”, is unusual. The *-LO* stands in apposition to *NEPESH HAYAH*. Leupold suggests smoothness of grammar has been sacrificed for clarity. The point of the verse is clear. The animals were named in conformity with the life they lived.

In v 20 a third class of animal is mentioned in the naming process *HABBEHEMAH*, which translates as “cattle”, or “domestic cattle”. this may be synonymous with “beasts of the field”, but since this phrase also occurs in v 20 this is not clear from the context.

The conclusion of this process is that the man is now aware of his isolation. The phrase *'EZER KENEGDO* is repeated, and the emphasis is falling on the man's awareness of his need. After all the animals had been named the feeling of solitude is prominent in the man's mind. God did not make any mistake in man's creation. Before the naming process God was aware of the man's need; He has simply uncovered that need to the man's consciousness.

The Building of the Perfect Woman (vv 21-22)

The Lord caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, *TARDEMAH*, “a very deep sleep”. The same word is used of Abraham, Gen 15:12; of Saul and his army, 1 Sam 26:12; and also of Jonah, Jon 1:5. The indication is that God casts, or sends, this sleep; it is a direct intervention of God. Aalders suggests that the sleep is therefore akin to anaesthesia.³ The picture should not be carried too far. It is neither a hypnotic trance, nor an ecstatic state, the basic meaning is of a very sound sleep. This is confirmed by the use of the verb *WAYYIYSHAN* to explain the man's state during the creation of woman.

Various explanations are given of the phrase *'AHAT MISSAL 'OTAYN*, “one of his ribs”. This reference is the only place where the word clearly means “rib”. In other OT references the meaning is a more general reference to “side”. Aalders points out that God took one rib, and therefore it cannot mean anything but rib.⁴ Leupold observes that rib does not simply mean bare bone, but also flesh.⁵ The woman is not simply bone of his bone, but also flesh of his flesh. The word *BASAR*, flesh, signifies what is integral to Adam and his being and the woman is “flesh of his flesh”.

The significance of the formation of the woman from a rib is very clear and is discussed by Foh and Leupold. Foh makes the following points:

- 1) *Creation from the rib is part of woman's corresponding-ness to the man.*
- 2) Creation of man is one act, starting with male and ending with female.
- 3) Adam is the representative before God, and all, including Eve, come from him.

- 4) The man and the woman become one flesh, which is to be later explained as the essence of marriage.
- 5) The difference in the creating process hints at the difference in the function of male and female.⁶

In v 22 the verb *BANA* which describes God's action in creating the woman is used when fashioning an important structure. He literally built a woman from the man's rib. The other verb which could have been used is *YASAR*, but this is applicable to material such as clay, and not to flesh. *BANA* is therefore a much superior concept.

The verb *BO* is then repeated. As God brought the animals to the man, He now brings the woman to the man. God is superior to all His creatures. God not only forms the helper corresponding to man, He also presents her to the man.

The Man's Joy in the Woman (v 23)

In Adam's speech he repeats the word *ZOT* three times. Leupold says this indicates a "certain animation" on Adam's part.⁷ This is probably understating the case. The man immediately recognises the woman, and her nature, and is filled with excitement as well as joy.

This same thought is emphasised by the use of the word *HAPA'PM*. Here it has reference to an occurrence in time, "at last". It indicates that something was anticipated, and that Adam now finds what he previously lacked.

Adam then proceeds to name the woman. The Hebrew words for man and woman are very similar, *'ISH* and *'ISHSHA*. This has led some to suggest that *'ISHSHA* is the word for man, with a feminine suffix. However it is difficult to determine the etymology of both words. The names are similar but this may only convey the fact that Adam understands that the woman is taken from man, and corresponds to the man.

A Practical Application (v 24)

This verse begins with the phrase *'AL-KEN*, usually translated as "therefore". Some suggest that it could be translated as "that is why". The translation of these words is bound up with the debate as to who actually spoke these words. If the phrase is translated as "that is why", it appears to be an antecedent explanation and would suggest this was not apparent to Adam. If it is translated as "therefore", meaning "for this reason", it suggests that Adam himself already understood the nature of marriage, in terms of leaving the parental home.

The Hebrew word *'AZAB* is sometimes translated as "forsake", but this may be too strong. The sense of the word is not "to forget", but simply to move away from the parental home. Kidner suggests that it emphasises the exclusive nature of marriage.⁸ The word *DABAQ* signifies that this arrangement was to be permanent.

This thought of the permanence of marriage is strengthened by the phrase *LEBASAR 'EHAD*. This does not simply refer to flesh but the combination of two human beings into one unit, to "form a new cell in the social, economic, juridical, political, cultural (etc!) community."⁹ There was only one man and one woman, and these two become one flesh. God's numerics for marriage are very clear. Adultery is therefore seen as a severing of this body, and is consequently viewed in Scripture as a form of murder.

But who spoke these words, Adam or Moses? If Adam spoke these words, then they are prophetic, because he would not have any understanding of parenthood, of leaving home to cleave to a wife, and establishing a new home. If Moses wrote these words, then the

verse is a parenthesis. It is always dangerous to assert what Adam may or may not have known in his state of innocence.

Murray is of the opinion that Adam spoke these words because, firstly, there is a natural sequence of thought from v 23 to v24, and, secondly, the inference of v 24 is integrally related to v 23. Even if Moses wrote these words Adam may still have understood the principle outlined in v 24. Jesus in Matt 19:8 implies that Adam knew this truth, since it was "known from the beginning".¹⁰

The Intimate Harmony of the First Marriage (v 25)

Both the man and his wife were *ARUMMIM*, "naked". This does not imply any destitution, it simply means that they were not concealed from each other.

The verb *BOSH*, translated as "shame" is unusual. It is 3rd Plural, Imperfect. The verb has a hollow root, and so the Hithpoel is used. This is normally translated in a reflexive sense. However, Aalders points out that a reflexive sense implies a moral shortcoming in the couple, and since there was no sin, they could not be aware of this.¹¹

The Hithpoel is a variant of the Hithpael. This form of the verb can express a reciprocal action, hence the translation, "they felt no shame before each other". It can also be a declarative reflexive, pointing to self-esteem.¹² As God declares His greatness and displays His holiness, grounded on His self-esteem, so Adam and Eve esteemed one another with no shame. The phrase is therefore a simple declaration of the fact of innocence. There was a state of perfect harmony.

The unashamed simplicity of this concluding statement stands in the boldest contrast with the words which immediately follow, "Now the serpent was more crafty . . ." A detailed exegesis of Genesis 3 shows how sin disfigures the beauty of the relationship between God, the man and the woman.

References

- 1 H Blocher, IN THE BEGINNING, IVP, Leicester, tr D G Preston, 1984, p 96
- 2 J Calvin, GENESIS, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh 1975, tr & ed J King, p 131
- 3 G Ch Aalders, GENESIS, Vol 1, Bible Students Commentary, tr W Heynen, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981, p 95
- 4 Aalders, p 95
- 5 H C Leupold, GENESIS, vol 1, Evangelical Press, London, 1972, p 134
- 6 S T Foh, WOMEN AND THE WORD OF GOD, Presbyterian and Reformed, Phillipsburg, NJ, 1979, p 60-61
- 7 Leupold, p 135
- 8 D Kidner, GENESIS, Tyndale Press, London, 1967, p 66
- 9 Blocher, p 106
- 10 J Murray, PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT, Tyndale Press, London, 1957, p 27-30
- 11 Aalders, p 97
- 12 Bruce K Walkte and M O'Connor, INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL HEBREW SYNTAX, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990, p 424f, esp p 430-1

Rev Stephen Tracey, BA DipTh, is minister of Omagh Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Co. Tyrone, Northern Ireland

Spurgeon and the Gospel Call

David Prothero

Many of the canonical prophets under the old covenant had a definite experience of the Lord which had a great bearing upon the emphasis of their respective ministries. For example, the holiness of God was a keynote within the prophetic message of Isaiah and surely this was a result of what he had witnessed in the year King Uzziah died.

The influence of great men in the church age displays the same basic principle. Luther's search for peace with God led him to a re-discovery of the doctrine of justification by faith and this in turn became a means of blessing to the world.

C H Spurgeon, provides another example of how an initial experience of the grace of God led to a clearly defined emphasis throughout his years of ministry in Victorian London.

Doctrinal Position

Until the day he died, Spurgeon was a self-confessed adherent to a doctrinal stance which could be traced back to the days when East Anglia was dominated by the influence of Puritanism. From his earliest days as the pastor of the Baptist Church at Waterbeach, he preached that God is sovereign in the salvation of mankind and his personal commitment to a Reformed/Calvinistic soteriology was to remain clear and unequivocal.

Anyone who seriously studies the sermons or the auto-biographical material of Spurgeon, will search in vain for anything which would indicate that our salvation is achieved other than by a divine initiative and through divine power.

Preaching at the Metropolitan Tabernacle (On behalf of the Free Hospitals in London) on June 13th 1880, Spurgeon said:

The old proverb hath it, "Nothing is freer than a gift." Every blessing we receive from God comes as a gift. We have purchased nothing. Comfort in Christ is an absolutely free, spontaneous gift of sovereign grace, given not on account of anything we have done, or ever shall do, but because the LORD has a right to do as he wills with his own; therefore doth he select unto himself a people to whom this free gift of consolation can be given.

Spurgeon also emphasised his understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation in an illuminating section of his auto-biography:

I can put the crown nowhere but upon the head of Him whose mighty grace saved me from going down into the pit. Looking back on my life, I can see that the dawning of it all was of God; of God effectively. I took no torch with which to light the sun, but the sun enlightened me. I did not commence my spiritual life, no I rather kicked, and struggled against the things of the Spirit: when He drew me, for a time I did not run after Him: there was a natural hatred in my soul of everything holy and good. But, sure

I am, I can say now, speaking on behalf of myself, "He only is my salvation"

Spurgeon was bold in his denunciation of any view of personal salvation which appeared to militate against the free and unconditional grace of God toward the sinner. Consequently, he opposed those who tended to teach that divine power was somehow subordinate to a human response in the matter of personal faith. In all fairness, it ought to

be stated that his opposition to other views was a matter of principle rather than pride. Essentially, he was convinced that God was seen to be glorified in a salvation which comes to man by grace and through faith alone.

The Gospel Call

Having established the theology which formed the basis of C H Spurgeon's preaching it is important to stress that he was equally convinced of the need to offer the gospel call to the unconverted.

The frequency of his own gospel calls and the language which he employed can often be overlooked by people who would espouse the same basic theological position. How often do we hear preaching today which is truly *pathetic* and urgent in its appeal for sinners to repent and believe the gospel? Spurgeon's own preaching was well-structured, intellectually stimulating and certainly well illustrated. However, first and foremost his ministry had a hold upon people because it was warm and appealing and because he never failed to offer the hope of mercy to sinful man.

There can surely be no doubt that Spurgeon's own conversion experience had a lasting impact upon the development of his own preaching. It is described for us in these memorable words:

While under concern of soul, I resolved that I would attend all the places of worship in the town where I lived, in order that I might find out the way of salvation. I was willing to do anything, and to be anything, if God would only forgive my sin. I set off, determined to go round all the chapels, and did go to every place of worship; but for a long time I went in vain. I do not however blame the ministers. One man preached divine sovereignty; I could hear him with pleasure, but what was that sublime truth to a poor sinner who wished to know what he must do to be saved? There was another admirable man who always preached about the law but what was the use of ploughing up ground that needed to be sown? Another was a practical preacher. I heard him, but it was very much like a commanding officer teaching the manoeuvres of war to a set of men with no feet. What could I do? All his exhortations were lost on me. I knew that it was said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," but I did not know what it meant to believe on Christ. These good men all preached truths suited to their many congregations who were spiritually-minded people, but what I wanted to know was, "How can I get my sins forgiven?" - they never told me that. I desired to hear how a poor sinner, under a sense of sin, might find peace with God and when I went, I heard a sermon on, "Be not deceived God is not mocked," which cut me up still worse, but did not bring me to rest. I was like a dog under the table, not allowed to eat of the children's food.

He then describes just how he was brought to peace with God through the simple presentation of the gospel on a snowy January morning in 1850:

The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin looking man, a shoemaker or a tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was:

Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth.

When he had managed to spin out ten minutes or so he was at the end of his tether. . . Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said "Young man you look very miserable, and you will always be miserable if you don't obey my text; but if you

obey now, this moment, you will be saved ". I saw at once the way of salvation. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people looked and were healed, so it was with me. Between half-past ten o'clock when I entered that chapel, and half-past twelve o'clock when I was at home again, what a change had taken place in me! I had passed from darkness into marvellous light, from death to life.

Several important factors need to be highlighted in connection with this personal account of Spurgeon's own conversion experience.

Firstly, this was a young man who had been brought up in a home which was thoroughly alive to evangelical concerns. During the course of his childhood, Spurgeon had received a grounding in the truths of Holy Scripture which had provided him with a knowledge of God. Although he did not experience the effect of saving grace until the moment of his conversion he was more than familiar with the power of grace in the lives of his own family.

However, his reference to the time it took for him to pass from darkness into marvellous light is significant in that it was to have a tremendous impact upon his subsequent career as a great soul-winner. There is every indication that Spurgeon preached the gospel in such a manner that anyone who listened to him might have expected that God could effectively do the same for them.

Two excerpts from his later preaching at the Metropolitan Tabernacle will show what impact his own conversion had on his presentation of the gospel call:

When a man is converted it is done at once. There may be a long process by which he comes to it, and there may be a long succession of light-breakings before he gets clear about it; but there is a turning point. There is a line, as thin as a razor's edge, which divides death from life, a point of decision which separates the saved from the lost. It must be done at once. And possibly it is now or never, - ere the clock tick again. Wilt thou have Christ and go to heaven, or thy sins and go to hell? Quick! Sharp! God help thee to answer aright, for on that answer may hang eternal things. I believe it was always so. Men decide at once or not at all. It was so with me. I was thinking, as I stood up here to preach, that this is just the weather in which I found the Saviour. Some did not come out that morning, it snowed so hard; but I had a heavy heart, and I wanted to lighten it; and I went to the place of worship, and when I heard the gospel, and he that preached it said to me, Look! Look, young man! Look, now! I did there and then look to Jesus. When the word came to me, immediately I received it. There is one heavy knock sometimes at a man's door, and he must open then, or no other knock may come. I think someone has come in here tonight that in God's Name I may give that knock at his heart; and if the door be opened and he says, "Come in, blessed Saviour", then all will be well.

Today is a time of obligation. Every man is under a present necessity as a subject of God to obey his Lord today, and having rebelled against his God, every sinner is under law to repent of his sin today . . . This day creating work began, why should not the new creation begin in you this good hour? Today the *fiat* of the Lord went forth, and there was light. O for that *fiat* to be heard within your souls that they might live! These are days which kings and prophets waited for, and saw not - blessed days, when mercy keeps an open house for all hungry souls, and when whosoever will may come, and him that cometh will in no wise be cast out. You cannot have a better time for coming to Christ than the season prescribed in the text - namely today.

These references make it abundantly clear that Spurgeon expected that God could work immediately upon the lives of his hearers. There was no attempt on his part to educate people in order to receive the gospel nor did he offer a veiled call to faith and repentance. The Prince of Preachers made the general call to unconverted people in a plain, direct and arresting fashion.

In the second place, Spurgeon's own conversion experience had led him to a serious evaluation of gospel preaching. Great emphasis is placed, in the personal account of his own salvation, on the need to find a ministry which would have answered his desire to find peace with God. Although he did not denigrate preaching which centred on the sovereignty of God, the place of the law or practical Christian living - he never lost sight of the need to make the way of faith clear to the outsider.

In addition to this, it would be perfectly correct to say that the gospel calls offered by Spurgeon were directed at the *lost* sinner rather than the *elect* sinner. The sermons bear their own testimony to the fact that he did not allow the Reformed/Calvinistic *ordo salutis* to tie him up in knots when it came to presenting the claims of Christ to unconverted people.

If we were not so certain of his basic theological position, some of the appeals contained in the preaching of Spurgeon might lead us to question seriously his commitment to the great Reformation doctrines. However, the following words were addressed to people by one of the strongest defendants of the Reformation heritage and by a staunch advocate of the free grace of God:

Is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ able to forgive sin? We joyfully sing - Who is a pardoning God like thee, or who hath grace so rich and free? And you say that he cannot forgive you, and this in the teeth of many promises of mercy. He says all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. Come now let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow though they be like crimson, they shall be as wool. You say that this is not true. Thus you frustrate the grace of God, and you make out that Christ died in vain, at least for you, for you say he cannot cleanse you. Oh, say not so: let not thine unbelief give the lie to God. Oh, believe that he is able to save even thee, and freely, at this very moment, to put all thy sin away, and to accept thee in Christ. Take heed of despondency, for if thou dost not trust him thou will make void his grace.

Ah, friends, if Jesus were here this morning, he might weep over some of you and say - Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou. You were a lovely child! Even in your earliest days you were fond of everything good and gracious; you were taken to a place of worship, and sat on you mother's knee, pleased to be there. You grew up to be a lad right full of promise, and all felt sure that you would be a Christian. What exhortations your father, who is now in heaven gave you! And she that bare you and loved you until she passed away, how she prayed and pleaded for you! You have come right up to the border land but you have not crossed over the line. You are not far from the kingdom of God, but you lack one thing - the one essential point of decision for Christ. Today is God's accepted time; postpone no longer the hour of decision. Alas that thou should perish! Shall the son of such a father be driven down to hell? I cannot bear it. God have mercy on you, sons and daughters of Christian parents. You have been enriched with Christian privileges why will ye die? Young man, so promising but yet so undecided, it makes the Saviour himself weep that thou, even thou, shouldst still refuse to know the things that make for peace.

In the light of these examples of the general call from Spurgeon's sermons, it is necessary to set these appeals within the context of his approach to preaching and his pronounced emphasis on the **unconditional grace of God**.

Firstly, the call to the unconverted in Spurgeon's preaching was never made in isolation from the exposition of the text of Holy Scripture. He was not an evangelist who simply gave a testimony or told stories and then pegged on an appeal at the end for people to be saved. The rule was, that he would take a verse or two from the Bible, refer to the context in which they were to be found and then draw several lines of relevant application to his hearers. Thus, his gospel calls were always developed in a manner which was consistent with the revealed Word of God. Clearly, this procedure would have helped to prevent the danger of being unbalanced or manipulative in his appeals to the unconverted.

Secondly, although Spurgeon preached for a decision it is quite clear that he knew that salvation was a change of heart which could only be achieved by the power of the Spirit in the life of a sinner. Whenever he pursued anyone with the aim of pressing home the claims of Christ to unbelievers there was generally some recognition of his dependency upon the determinate will of God. An example of this can be found at the end of an introduction to a sermon based on Jeremiah 8:20:

I earnestly pray the Lord to bless the words I am about to speak, that they may be rendered useful to many undecided persons to lead them to decision, and induce them to give themselves up to Christ at once. May the Holy Spirit work this blessed work in thousands. I have so long been silent that I am hungering to speak with power. Come, Holy Spirit! Come!

Furthermore, Spurgeon would have accepted the vital distinction between the *general call* and the *effectual call* of the gospel. Although he used every persuasion to appeal that the unconverted should be brought to faith, he knew that behind the preacher's voice the Holy Spirit must call. Reference to his autobiography gives us a very definite indication of his thinking on this matter:

The general call of the gospel is like sheet lightning we sometimes see on a summer's evening - beautiful, grand - but whoever heard of something being struck by it? But the special call of the gospel is the fork flashed from heaven; it strikes somewhere.

Thirdly, there is little evidence to suggest that Spurgeon ever used his great skill as an orator to seek for an immediate public demonstration of an inward change. Time and again in his sermons you will meet with a story of someone who had trusted in the Lord as the result of his ministry. However, in the normal run of things these people had often come to faith privately and then had spoken to him afterwards about the goodness of God. Spurgeon's advice to the seeker was that they should go home or get alone and do business with the Lord:

Some of you seekers have hitherto thought the door of mercy to be bolted against you. See, it stands wide open. Come and welcome. If any softness of feeling is stealing over you, let it work while you gladly yield. Do not talk nonsense on the way home, and so lose the effect of the discourse. Hasten to your chambers, fall on your knees, and rise not till you have accepted Jesus as your own Saviour. If you do so salvation will have come to your house this day, and God will be glorified. Amen.

Conclusions

1. We should offer the gospel to all the lost

It has been established that Spurgeon drew a distinction between the general and the effectual call of the gospel. However, it is surely appropriate to ask whether or not our modern-day evangelistic preaching has failed to make a proper assessment of the relationship between these two calls. Are we in danger of failing the unbelievers who attend our places of worship because in the offer of the gospel we have neglected to preach the gospel to the *lost* sinner?

The apostle Paul once wrote, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. This, I would suggest, was the basis upon which Spurgeon appealed, with his utmost art and ability, for the immediate salvation of his hearers. He reckoned with the fact that God had promised to save mankind through the simple and unadorned medium of preaching. It was not within the power of the preacher to know who would be saved or lost, so it was imperative that he should use every promise and argument in Holy Scripture in appealing to men.

During his exposition of Romans 8:28-30, Dr D M Lloyd-Jones made an interesting aside which stands as a perfect commentary upon the position which was adopted by Spurgeon in his gospel preaching. I quote:

Our first duty to the unbeliever is to make him face himself. We are to be the attackers, and therefore direct these people to face themselves and their lives and their need of the Lord Jesus Christ. Men are not saved by believing the doctrine of election, or by believing in predestination. This is so important that I must adduce some authorities who confirm what I have been saying. Octavius Winslow believed these great doctrines of salvation; but when he deals with the question of how to handle the unbeliever, whether in preaching or discussion he says, "It is not essential to your salvation that you believe in election, but it is essential that you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ . . . You are to feel that you are a lost sinner, not that you are an elect sinner."

Of course, the Metropolitan Tabernacle was a hive of evangelistic activity and Spurgeon could preach to lost sinners in the certain knowledge that many of them attended his ministry. It has to be said that this fact would have provided him with a great incentive to preach the offer of the gospel so powerfully. Perhaps this type of preaching would be more prevalent in our own day if our churches were more active in bringing the unconverted under the sound of the gospel. However, where the opportunity prevails we can surely learn some vital lessons from one who was blessed so mightily in his evangelistic efforts.

2. We should aim directly at their hearts

It is clear that for Spurgeon the work of preaching the gospel would count for eternity in the lives of his hearers. His entire demeanour in the pulpit could be described as a *sanctified aggression* against the world, the flesh and the devil. The preaching heard at the famed Metropolitan Tabernacle was not merely an exhibition of doctrinal purity, blended together with exegetical exactness. Spurgeon took a direct aim at the hearts and lives of his congregation, he was a fisher of men who would not be happy with anything less than a catch.

If the unconverted before him were lying in the undergrowth of their own self-righteousness, he felt honour bound to chase them into the open field to meet with the Saviour.

If the unconverted before him entertained a hard view of God or themselves, he would aim to melt this opposition by emphasising the unselfish love of Christ. If the unconverted before him had not yielded to the sanctifying influence, the church, Christian family or friends, he would press them not to neglect the goodness of God. In countless other ways, he would appeal that the unconverted should seek the Lord whilst he may be found and all the energy of his pulpit exercises were applied to this great task.

3. We should labour to capture their attention

To preach without an object or an aim would have been regarded as an anathema as far as Spurgeon was concerned. Furthermore, the handling of divine and glorious gospel truth in a dull and laborious manner he would have regarded as being unthinkable.

Preaching at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on 1 Samuel 9:27 he made these telling remarks toward the close of his introduction:

I wish I could so speak that men would say of my preaching what they said of Whitefield's. One man said, "Whenever I went to church before, I calculated how many looms the church would hold - for he was a weaver - but when I heard Whitefield I never thought of a loom." Another said, "While I have been in church I have often built a ship from stem to stern; but when I heard Mr Whitefield I could not lay a plank; he took my mind right away from such things, and occupied me with higher thoughts." I pray you, help me in my endeavour to engross your attention. Let the ships go, and the loom go, and the kitchen go, and the business . . . and be alone now with yourself and God.

Spurgeon was a great preacher. Is there a temptation, however, to overlook the validity of his approach to gospel preaching simply because we do not possess his unique and amazing talent? Furthermore, accepting that God is sovereign, what was the real appeal of Spurgeon's preaching: did it rest in the *words* of the man or in his *tremendous heart* for the salvation of mankind?

Rev David Prothero is pastor of Rickstones Evangelical Church, Witham, Essex

Among the important elements in the promotion of conversion are your own tone, temper, and spirit in preaching. If you preach the truth in a dull, monotonous style, God may bless it, but in all probability he will not; at any rate the tendency of such a style is not to promote attention, but to hinder it. It is not often that sinners are awakened by ministers who are themselves asleep. A hard, unfeeling mode of speech is also to be avoided; want of tenderness is a sad lack, and repels rather than attracts. The spirit of Elijah may startle, and where it is exceedingly intense it may go far to prepare for the reception of the gospel; but for actual conversion more of John is needed, - love is the winning force. We must love men to Jesus. Great hearts are the main qualifications for great preachers, and we must cultivate our affections to that end.

*C H Spurgeon, 'On conversion as our aim'
Lectures, Second Series, 1877, p 188*

Spurgeon and Evangelical Unity

Andrew Davies

On the first Sunday mornings in January 1865 and 1866 Spurgeon preached on the theme of Christian unity. His texts, both given to him by a Church of England clergyman, were Eph 4:3 and John 17:20-21, and the titles of the sermons were *True unity promoted*, and *Unity in Christ*. Taken together with his article in the *Sword and Trowel* (October 1886) on *Unity and how not to promote it*, they are a useful exposition of his thinking on this important subject. After expounding the word “they” in John 17, he then used the following illustration:

Carnal minds hear that Jesus is to wear a crown of pearls; they find pearls in shells, they try to join the oyster shells together, and what a strange thing they make! But Jesus will have no union of the shells, the shells must be struck off as worthless things; the jewels and the jewels only are to be joined together . . . The one Church of God, of what is it composed then? Is it composed of the Church of England, the Congregational Union, the Wesleyan Conference, and the Baptist body? No, it is not. Is not then the Church of England a part of the Church of Christ, and the Baptist denomination a part? NO; I deny that these bodies, as such, unrefined and in the gross, are a part of the great unity for which Jesus prayed; but there are believers united with the Church of England who are a part of the body of Christ, and there are believers in all denominations of Christians, ay! and many in no visible church at all, who are in Christ Jesus, and consequently in the great unity. The Church of England is not a part of Christ’s true body, nor any other denomination as such; the spiritual unity is made up of spiritual men, separated, picked out, cleared away from all the mass with which they happen to be united.¹

Evangelical unity, therefore, is the unity of all true believers, in Christ. It is a given unity of those who share the same nature and have the same origin, the same strength, the same aim, the same Spirit. The God who is life, and light, and love has given them His nature; therefore they are united with Him and with each other spiritually, doctrinally and experimentally. “This unity of the Spirit has for its pillars, among other things, the witnessing of spiritually enlightened saints to the one faith which God has revealed in His Word”. There is a unity “in judgement upon all vital matters”, and “among true saints the points of union even in matters of judgement are ninety-nine, and the points of differences are only as one”.

Having defined the **nature of unity** in this way, he then proceeded to draw out a number of implications. Six were negative, and six positive.

Negative Implications

1. Evangelical unity was not an ecclesiastical unity, the unity of a denomination. Spurgeon disliked using the word *Church* for a denomination, and said “There is nothing in Scripture which says, Endeavouring to keep up your ecclesiastical arrangements for centralisation”.

2. Nor was it uniformity. Just as in nature there is variety, so there is in the Church. "The same, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, we rejoice to recognise; but as to uniformity of dress, liturgical verbiage, or form of worship, I find nothing of it in Scripture".
3. Nor was it the imposition on others of a monolithic organisational unity, like Roman Catholicism, which he called "the unity of evil, the unity of superstition, the unity of spiritual tyranny, the unity of error, of false doctrine, of priestcraft". There is unity, he said, in an iceberg, and in a plague of locusts. "I pray God evermore to preserve us from a unity in which truth shall be considered valueless, in which principle gives place to policy, in which the noble and masculine virtues which adorn the Christian hero are to be supplemented by an effeminate affectation of piety".
4. Nor did evangelical unity mean refusing to denounce error or even to separate from it. Spurgeon believed that true believers might well be found within bodies like the Roman Catholic Church or within Anglo Catholicism. He said that he loved George Herbert from his very soul because he loved the Lord Jesus Christ, but "I hate his High Churchism". A true believer within the Roman Catholic Church was like a flower on a dung heap, or a pearl within a shell. You esteem the flower and the pearl, but hate the dung heap and the shell.
5. Nor did evangelical unity mean rejecting distinctive convictions over secondary matters. Spurgeon was a convinced Calvinist and a committed Baptist, and was unashamed to say so. Indeed, he believed Arminianism and paedobaptism to be wrong. "I trust it will be our privilege to show in our own persons, some of us, how sternly we can dissent and yet love, how truly be Nonconformists to our brethren's error, and yet in our very nonconformity prove our affection to them, and to our common Master". Genuine Christians, he said, may not have been born on the mountains of Bethel or baptized in the waters of Meribah, but whilst always pursuing unity in essentials they were also prepared to disagree charitably over other matters.
6. Nor was evangelical unity going to be helped or encouraged if one Church thought of itself in terms of superiority or infallibility. Spurgeon resented the Church State connection of the Church of England and opposed the way in which Dissenters had to pay tithes, were excluded from Oxford and Cambridge (before 1871), and suffered from other civil disabilities. But it was not only the Church of England that might be guilty of a haughty spirit. A Baptist might be equally guilty of asserting that his church alone was the true church.

Positive Implications

1. The unity of true believers transcends both time and space. It is a catholicity in time and space. Therefore when a believer reads Luther, Calvin, or Juan de Valdes he discovers "the same life in each - they have been quickened by the same spirit, and made to live by the same energy; and though they knew it not, they were still one". Or again: "We, brethren, are divided many thousands of miles from the saints in Australia, America, and the South Sea, but loving as brethren, we feel the unity of the spirit".
2. True unity transcends denominational distinctives. Spurgeon spoke eloquently about this, both as something already felt but also something to be pursued:
It will be a blessed thing when all the Churches walk together in the unity of the Spirit, when this Church, although it has been baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ and laments the neglect of that ordinance by others, yet feels that the unity of the Spirit

is not to be broken, and holds out its right hand to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; when yonder Church, governed by its elders, feels a unity with another Church which is presided over by its bishop; when a certain Church, which holds with mutual edification and no ministry, is yet not quarrelsome towards those who love the ministry of the Word; when, in fact, we have agreed in this one thing, that we will search the Word independently and act out according to our light what we find to be true; but having so done, we will keep the unity of spirit in the bond of peace . . . Let us really aid and not oppress each other; let us mingle in prayer; let us unite in confession of sin; let us join heartily in reforming our errors, and a true Evangelical Alliance will cover our land. If any Church will take the Bible as its standard, and in the power of the Spirit of God preach the name of Jesus, there are thousands of us who will rejoice to give the right hand of fellowship with a hearty greeting to all such, and we are every day striving to get other Churches and ourselves more and more into that condition in which, while holding our own, we can yet keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

3. Unity must be expressed, and if it is genuine it will be expressed in a number of ways: in doctrinal agreement, in experimental soul dealings with God, in brotherly love, in the fellowship of prayer, in the singing of God's praise, in the preaching of the Word (even if the preacher is wearing that "white rag") and in working together against the common enemy and for the common truth.

4. This given unity of true believers has to be kept and maintained. That is no easy thing to do because sins such as pride and envy and anger, and even virtues such as boldness and watchfulness, may break it; and the devil is always on hand to mar it. Spurgeon was sufficiently self-aware to be able to say: "I am not, when I join a Christian Church, to say, I am quite certain I shall never break its unity. I am to suspect myself of a liability to that evil, and I am to watch with all diligence that I keep the unity of the Spirit". Particularly important to the maintaining of unity is believing the truth of God and conforming our views and sentiments to the teaching of God's Word. I have already told you that unity in error is unity in ruin. We want unity in the truth of God through the Spirit of God. This let us seek after; let us live near to Christ, for this is the best way of promoting unity.

Divisions in churches never begin with those full of love to the Saviour. Cold hearts, unholy lives, inconsistent actions, neglected duties, these are the seeds which sow schisms in the body; but he who lives near to Jesus, wears his likeness and copies his example, will be, wherever he goes, a sacred bond, a holy link to bind the Church more closely than ever before. And in order to keep this unity God had provided the bond of peace. To realise that we are fellow citizens, and friends, and brethren, and members of the same body, is the way to be bonded together. That is how peace operates in practice.

5. The necessity for the Holy Spirit to pour His life into the hearts of believers. "The unity of the Spirit is preserved, then, by the Holy Ghost infusing daily life floods into the one mystical body; and in proportion as the life floods become more strong, that union becomes more manifest. Let a spirit of prayer be poured out on all our Churches, conventionalities will be dashed down, divisions will be forgotten, and, locked in each others arms, the people of God will show to the world that they are one in Christ Jesus".

6. Although at present we do not see this unity in its completeness, one day we will. Only God, the Architect of the building, has the complete plans before Him. He alone sees

the harmony and symmetry of the whole. Only God understands the apparent muddle of a thousand factory wheels spinning in different directions. One day He will reveal it all to us, when the unity will be complete. Until then, the responsibility of believers is to promote it by winning souls to Christ. "Every soul that believes in Christ is built into the great gospel unity in its measure, and you will never see the Church as a whole while there is one soul left unsaved for whom the Saviour shed His precious blood". . . "Do not sit down and scheme and plot and plan how this denomination may melt into the other; you leave that alone. Your business now is to go and tell to sinners round what a dear Saviour you have found".

Unity in Practice

These, then, were Spurgeon's convictions in 1865 and 1866 on evangelical unity. The question we must now ask is, How did he seek to put them into practice? We shall look at three areas.

1. Unity and the local church. Spurgeon believed in the gathered church ideal; "Although myself much inclined to a Presbyterian union among our Churches, I cannot but perceive in Holy Scripture that each Church is separate and distinct from every other Church". In accordance with this conviction most of his energies were poured into the work of the London church where he ministered for some 30 years. Not only did he preach to regular congregations of 5,000 Sunday by Sunday, but he also opened an orphanage, a college for pastors, and founded over 100 churches. This was in addition to the constant outflow of printed sermons which emerged from the Tabernacle. It was an astonishing ministry at a time when Nonconformity was riding high (in 1871 50% of the population were Nonconformists); and in all that he did at the Tabernacle (including the adoption of the 1689 Baptist Confession, and, of course his insistence on a baptised membership but an open table) he was seeking to do his part in the great work of keeping the unity of the Spirit and completing the building of the universal Church by local church action.
2. Unity and the Baptist Union. Although Spurgeon was against a centralized denominationalism, he was a denominational man, ie he believed in Baptist distinctiveness (just as he allowed for other denominational distinctiveness). "I am a sectarian; I am not a believer in the modern Diana of unity, which some people cry up so loudly. I believe denominationalism, instead of being a blot, is one of the beauties of our Christianity. . . I believe that the Church of God and the world at large need the Baptists just now, and have always needed them". (Holden Pike, Vol 4, p 321). "I hope we shall never see the day when there will cease to be Baptists and Independents. I hold that though we are bound to love our mothers in law, we are not bound to live with them". (ibid p 199/200) Accordingly he linked himself and the Metropolitan Tabernacle to the BU as a loose alliance of like-minded churches whose original doctrinal basis and aims he approved. The BU was formed in 1813 to afford "the ministers and churches of the denomination the means of becoming better acquainted with each other, with a view to excite brotherly love and to furnish a stimulus for a zealous co-operation in promoting the cause of Christ in general, and particularly in our own denomination, and especially to encourage and support our missions". Although the succinct and Calvinistic doctrinal statement of 1813 was amended in 1832 to a general reference to "the sentiments usually denominated evangelical", and although Arminians joined the Union, Spurgeon evidently felt that the BU remained an evangelical body, so he stuck with it for

many years, and preached regularly at its meetings. Likewise he committed himself to the London Baptist Association and its regular gatherings. In thus associating with other Baptist Churches of evangelical convictions he believed he was further doing his part to keep and complete the unity of the greater body of Christ as defined in the two sermons.

3. **Unity and inter-denominational co-operation.** Although a committed Calvinist and Baptist, Spurgeon, as we have seen, believed in the given unity of all true believers in Christ. In 1846 the Evangelical Alliance was formed to give expression to this unity. Its Basis of Faith was clearly evangelical, if not Calvinistic, and it became an influential voice in Britain and America for evangelical convictions trans-denominationally. Spurgeon was an active member; on occasions, too active! The rise of *Tractarianism* in the Church of England, with its emphasis on baptismal regeneration, alarmed him so much that he spoke out against it in a sermon preached on 5th June 1864. He expressed his astonishment that evangelicals could remain within a Church that not only allowed such a view but even, in his opinion, included it in its Prayer Book. The sermon, and the controversy that followed, not only shook evangelical Anglicans, it also rocked the EA. As a result Spurgeon was asked to leave, which he did. Later he rejoined and participated in a number of EA activities, notably its week of prayer, but he realised that however valuable it was as a means of expressing evangelical convictions and organising joint ventures, its usefulness in dealing with church issues was limited.

In addition to his membership of EA, Spurgeon also involved himself in other evangelical trans-denominational societies such as the Y M C A, the Colportage Association, the Bible Translation Society, the Religious Tract Society and others. He also spoke at a number of denominational and interdenominational missionary society gatherings, and, of course spoke regularly at non-Baptist evangelical churches throughout the country. He appointed a paedo-baptist, George Rogers, as chief tutor at the Pastor's College and another, Mr Charlesworth, to lead the Orphanage. In these and other ways he was seeking to give positive expression to his deep commitment to that unity found among all true believers in Christ. It was a unity based on a shared life, a revealed gospel, and a common experience. It existed as a reality and was expressed in local churches, associations of churches and trans-denominational societies.

Unity Under Threat

But the unity which Spurgeon thus preached and practised was under threat. It was under threat because the gospel and the Bible, its twin pillars, were also under threat. We must now turn to examine the *Downgrade Controversy* and its aftermath, a controversy which was to have serious implications for evangelical unity then, and whose repercussions are with us today.

The Downgrade Controversy highlighted a profound change that had taken place in 19th century church life. As the century developed a change of mood occurred. It was due to three powerful influences. **The first was evolutionary theory**, which was taken from the scientific realm and applied to other fields such as big business, education, the so-called class struggle, and, of course theology. The idea developed that there had been an evolution in human thinking about life - from the theological (God created) to the metaphysical (forces behind phenomena) to the scientific (the laws according to which things work). For many, belief in God was therefore anachronistic and unnecessary. **The second was**

philosophical. The scepticism and radicalism of the 18th century came to full flower in the thinking of people like Hegel, with his belief that Absolute Spirit was coming to self-consciousness in an evolutionary process, **the materialists**, who believed the material world to be the only real world, and **the utilitarians**, for whom the only basis for right behaviour is not God-given law but the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. What these philosophies shared in common was a denial of the transcendent God who has revealed Himself in a particular person, a particular place, a particular time, and a particular Book. **The third influence was biblical criticism.** Adopting some of the presuppositions of the philosophers and evolutionists, a number of biblical critics began to view the Bible as a human attempt to interpret religious experience. Some were more radical than others. Here in Britain the prevailing tendency was at first to adopt the critical method whilst hanging on to some semblance of orthodoxy. However towards the end of the century one belief after another was jettisoned. Firstly the doctrine of eternal punishment, was dropped. Then, a lack of emphasis on the atonement became, for some, open denial. People began to speak of the Bible as merely *containing* the Word of God, and speculation increased that God's revelation of Himself to mankind might have come through a fallible Christ and a fallible Bible.

People in the pews were often unaware of what was happening. Impressed by the new generation of degreed and scholarly preachers, they did not realise that the old theological terms were being used to mean something quite different. Nor did they always notice the significant silences in so many sermons. But Spurgeon noticed, and was bold enough to say so. A Bible man and a gospel man to his fingertips he could not and would not keep silence. He had already voiced his concern in 1855 when he had spoken of T T Lynch's pantheistic hymns as "one volcano indicative of seas of latent fire in the bosom of our Churches". Five years later he issued a similar warning when J Baldwin Brown, a Congregational minister, published his *DIVINE LIFE IN MAN*. These warning continued to be made, both in his sermons and in the *Sword and Trowel*, but in the mid 1880's he spoke out directly and openly about the *downgrading* of the Bible and the gospel in the Baptist Union. Men, previously thought of as evangelicals, had changed their minds; a new generation of broad and comprehensive ministers had occupied many pulpits; terms like *evangelical* were being used dishonestly. 'It is mere cant to cry, "We are evangelical, we are evangelical"', and yet decline to say what evangelical means. If men are really evangelical, they delight to spread as glad tidings the truths from which they take the name'.

But his response to what was happening was more than verbal. He also took action. The March and April articles in the 1887 *Sword and Trowel* (written in all probability by Robert Shindler) were followed by one in August by Spurgeon himself. Then, on 28th October 1887 he resigned from the Baptist Union. It was this action, above all, which caused the subsequent furore. A battle with words from within was one thing; but to withdraw, to resign, that was another. It was the act of separation that so many found unacceptable. Had he not broken the unity of the Baptist Union? Had he not fractured evangelical unity? Charges of serious schism were made against him. It is important to answer these charges. As we have seen, for most of his life Spurgeon was a member of the Baptist Union. He believed that such a loose alliance of Baptist churches was useful and desirable, and he was prepared to identify himself with its original evangelical doctrinal basis and its subsequent evangelical ethos. His position was comparable, in some respects, to that of evangelicals within the Church of England. But now the ethos had changed. So had the

doctrinal position. As he himself put it:

The Atonement is scouted, the inspiration of Scripture is derided, the Holy Spirit is degraded into an influence, the punishment of sin is turned into a fiction, and the resurrection into a myth, and yet these enemies of our faith expect us to call them brethren and maintain a confederacy with them. . . It now becomes a serious question how far those who abide by the faith once delivered to the saints should fraternize with those who have turned aside to another Gospel. Christian love has its claims, and divisions are to be shunned as grievous evils; but how far are we justified in being in confederacy with those who are departing from the truth?

When he realised that the Baptist Union had no intention of agreeing to a clear cut, unambiguous creedal statement - it produced one sufficiently vague as to allow a variety of interpretations, - and when he saw that nothing could be done to discipline heresy, he had to withdraw. A united position on baptism could not keep him within a Union in which men who denied the gospel were allowed to remain. To him it would be sinful to remain: **“Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin”**.

He took this decision not because he was sick, or cantankerous, or a psychological isolationist. On the contrary. His mind was as sharp as ever, his heart as large as ever, and his sympathies as generous as ever. The decision was taken because, before everything else, he loved God, God’s Son, God’s Word, and God’s people. He was fighting “the greatest fight in the world”. It was not a fight for Calvinism or for baptism. It was a fight for the gospel and the Bible. When it came to the crunch he took his stand with Arminians and paedo-baptists for the Bible and the gospel rather than with the Baptist Union for the unity of the denomination. The issue was very clear. Evangelical unity is unity in the truth. Where the truth is denied there can be no unity, “The first question is - Are we one in Christ? and are we obedient to the truth revealed in the Scriptures? If so, union will necessarily follow”. To defend and confirm the gospel involves fighting its enemies as well as letting it loose. Spurgeon separated from people who separated from the truth. He did so because the gospel itself was at stake. That was why he had denounced the doctrine of baptismal regeneration in 1864 - it was because the biblical doctrine of regeneration was being denied, and therefore people’s salvation was being put into jeopardy. That was why he condemned liberalism, and separated from an alliance with it in 1887 - because the Bible and the gospel were being denied, and therefore the glory of God and the salvation of mankind were being affected. It was because of his concern for real evangelical unity grounded upon evangelical truth that he did what he did.

Problems which persist

His action in separating from those who had themselves separated from the truth posed several problems. They are very much with us today.

1. His attitude to those evangelicals who remained within the Baptist Union. At the spiritual level their unity with him in Christ remained. But at the denominational level a fracture had taken place. What then should he do? He clearly believed them to be wrong, particularly when they failed to speak out against error. Some of them he described as “tame” men who shrank from their duty, “timid” people influenced by heterodoxy “towards a vacillating policy”. He spoke of his “deep regret” in having to separate from those whom he “dearly loved and heartily respected”, and expressed the hope that “if they remain, they will resolve that reform shall be carried out, the truth vindicated”. Let them fight “boldly and without flinching” for the old truths; “let them

combine and work unitedly, and persistently, year after year". But he became more and more doubtful about the possibility of reform from within, and confessed his exasperation with those who were merely temporisers. "The bounden duty of a true believer towards men who profess to be Christians, and yet deny the Word of the Lord, and reject the fundamentals of the Gospel, is to come out from among them. If it be said that efforts should be made to produce reform, we agree with that remark; but when you know that they will be useless, what is the use?"

So his attitude to his fellow evangelicals within the Baptist Union was to urge them to do everything they could to reform it, but also to condemn their compromise as sinful and to press them to withdraw into a true unity outside the Union. In the meantime he retained his fellowship with them outside the denomination and found other ways of co-operation, even though an element of strain was inevitable.

2. How to express that deeper unity in the gospel which existed among those who had separated. To come out was one thing; but where were they then to go?

Knowing how easily alliances of churches might be corrupted, and aware that creeds and trust deeds do not necessarily guarantee unity in doctrine, he was wary of a formal alliance. But he hoped for "an informal alliance among all who hold the Christianity of their fathers" and believed that it ought to emerge naturally by demand. "Utterly isolated church life would have its evils, and in true union there will be not only strength but joy. This will come in due time if it be the Lord's will". "Whether we are few or many, we can unite to help our poorer brethren, and to conserve the faith". Such a union would hopefully come about soon, and would be "a larger communion than any sect could offer. Denominational divisions sink in the presence of the truth of God".

He did not live to see anything like this happen. But in 1890 with six other brethren he did form a fraternal with a basis of faith that was evangelical, Calvinistic, and pre-millennial. The numbers increased to about 30, and they met to consult, pray, and study together. More than that he was unable to do, other than to join the Surrey and Middlesex Association of Baptists, and to continue his association with his fellow evangelicals in the trans-denominational societies.

3. How to deal with the on going division among evangelicals over the question of whether or not to separate from error. It was a problem Spurgeon could not resolve, and it grieved him that he and his fellow evangelicals could not enter into a deeper experience and expression of their God-given unity in Christ. He continued to meet with many of them on a personal level outside denominational boundaries. But at church level a barrier remained.

Therefore, realistically, there were **three things he could do**.

(a) He could continue to protest. The authority of the Bible and the purity of the gospel were too precious to be compromised by vague doctrinal statements or unhappy alliances. He must continue to fight the greatest fight in the world. He could help his brethren best by speaking out rather than by keeping silent.

(b) He could continue to pray. Since unity came from the Holy Spirit of truth and life and love, it was ultimately a spiritual matter. As he had said in a letter written to American Baptists in 1870: "I wish we all had more light, more life, and more love". Therefore, it was vitally important to pray for greater measures of the Spirit's presence so that minds could become clearer, hearts warmer, and wills stronger.

(c) He could continue to preach. He saw that the completion of the unity of the true Church could only come about as people were converted. So the best way to bring that about was to win souls. Spurgeon was above all an evangelist. He defended the gospel so that there might be a gospel to preach. It was the only antidote to the poison of sin; it was the only remedy for man's terrible plight.

In January 1859 he gave a lecture to the Y M C A in Exeter Hall. He called it: "Concerning the propagation of the Faith". We shall let him have the final word:-

In the propagating of the faith, by the turning of men's hearts to love of Christ, there is no reason why men of every sect and every name should not be engaged. The fact is that God in heaven regards not the distinctions which our bigotry would desire Him to observe. There was William Huntingdon, who was to his day exceedingly popular in this city; he preached doctrines as high as the most ultra-Calvinist could desire, and in the judgement of some he did not give sufficient prominence to the precepts of the Word, and strained doctrine beyond its proper sphere; certainly he never went to excess in practical preaching. But if any one should tell me he was not useful in the conversion of souls, I could bring persons just tottering on the borders of the grave who could declare that they owed their conversion to him. There was John Wesley, a man who went to the other extreme, and in the opinion of others was not sufficiently accurate in his sentiments, but who shall deny his usefulness? If any did so the stars of heaven would speak against them, for the Lord has given Wesley spiritual children, as many as the stars of heaven. And looking at the intermediate classes of preachers, between the doctrinal extremes of Huntingdon and Wesley, everyone of them has been useful - everyone has had his sheaves which he has carried into the garner of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was not the doctrinal system which these men preached which was blessed to the salvation of men - it was their preaching of the Cross of Christ; and they did both preach the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner's only refuge. It was not their dealing with men's heads, else I might think either of them defective, or both, it was their dealing with men's hearts. When they preached, you saw before you men that were in earnest; and you could not help saying, "These men may make mistakes in their judgement, but they are in earnest, and I feel there is an unction with the word when they speak of Jesus". It is the uplifting of Christ on the cross which will make men useful to the souls of their fellows; and it is preaching Christ crucified every day that will render us, in the hands of God's Holy Spirit, the honoured instruments of bringing many sons to glory. (LECTURES TO YOUNG MEN, p 162-3).

This address was given at the 40th Anniversary Conference of the British Evangelical Council at Westminster in November 1992.

Rev Andrew Davies, BA (Hons), MA (Theology) is minister of Freeschool Court Evangelical Church, Bridgend.

A Warning from Australia: Orthodoxy and Heresy

Keith Morris

Introduction

In the New Testament there are warnings from the Lord Jesus concerning the coming of false prophets (Mt 7:15,24:11,24; Mk 13:22), which were later repeated by his apostles (Gal 1:6-9; 2 Cor 11:12-15; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 Jn 4:1).

The existence of false teaching in New Testament times is also known from other sources. There were Judaizers, Docetists, Ebionites and probably Gnostics, for example, who were spreading wrong doctrines in the early days of the Church.

The New Testament not only gives warnings but also urges action against false teachers (1 Tim 1:3,4; Titus 1:10,11, 3:9-11; 2 Jn 9-11; Jude 3,4). The notion of an orthodox faith revealed from heaven and to be guarded (1 Tim 6:20,21; 2 Tim 1:13,14) has been generally understood throughout the history of the Church, even though the application of this faith has sometimes been less than reputable.

However, in 1934 Walter Bauer published a German work which appeared in English in 1971 as **ORTHODOXY AND HERESY IN EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY**¹. Since then the notion of 'heresy' as accurately describing theologically deviant movements has been strongly contested. For Bauer the early Church scene was characterised by diverse theological views which battled for ascendancy. The winners of the battle won the accolade of 'orthodoxy'. Indeed, in some cases, argued Bauer, the original expressions of Christianity would later be judged to be heretical. This theory has muddied the waters of theological perspective and many are now uncertain of the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy altogether. Further, the idea of 'liberty of conscience', always a prominent idea in nonconformity, has been recycled to justify heresy and the Church's toleration of heresy within high office.

The validity and usefulness of confessions of faith are necessarily undermined by this thinking. "Does not freedom of theological enquiry and investigation render such formulations only provisional - of limited significance and of less authority?" it is asked. The answer to the question has profound implications both for the teaching office of the Church and for the future of the whole Church.

Bauer's hypothesis was an expression of a trend of thought which had been abroad for at least a century. Faced with the onslaught of the Enlightenment on revealed religion F D E Schleiermacher (1763-1834) attempted to recover its former influence for religion. But in his defence Schleiermacher repudiated any fixed doctrinal basis as the foundation of Christianity and instead he took experience - the human feeling of absolute dependence - as his foundation. Objectivity was replaced by subjectivity. Schleiermacher separated religion and theology; denying that doctrines and dogmas are religion, he said "They are not necessary for religion itself, scarcely even for communicating religion." (quoted in **THE LION CONCISE BOOK OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT**, T Lane, p 171). Here is the germ of the whole school of liberal theology, which is still being felt today, although its

zenith is probably now past.

In Scotland the instances of Thomas Erskine (1788-1870), John Mcleod Campbell (1800-1872) and Edward Irving (1792-1834) illustrate this movement which sought its theological basis in the *inner life*. Campbell was deposed in 1831 and Irving in 1833, showing that at this stage Presbyterians still held the concept of required orthodoxy, subscription to the Westminster Confession was required and deviation was dealt with. In 1881 W Robertson Smith, (1846-1894), Professor at Aberdeen, was condemned for holding and expressing Higher Critical views in an article on 'Bible' in the 1875 edition of the *ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA*. Smith accepted critical theories emanating from Germany but also professed hearty agreement with the Westminster Confession. He was very surprised at the furore his views produced.

Higher criticism was gaining ground across the world and undermining historic views of the Bible. In Australia the major impact was towards the end of the nineteenth century. The case of Charles Strong in Melbourne was a foretaste of what was to come. Because of his liberal views and contumacy Strong lost his post in 1883. The turbulence of the case resulted in the framing of a *Declaratory Act* to help the consciences of some who scrupled at some details in the Westminster Confession, as for example, the creation in six days. Others, such as Andrew Harper, then at the Presbyterian Ladies College in Victoria, had also accepted critical views but opted for a process of gradual change. In 1888 Harper became a member of the faculty at Ormond College to teach Hebrew and Old Testament exegesis. In 1902 he moved to St Andrews College in Sydney. It was chiefly Harper who championed the appointment of Angus in 1914, as he recognised in him a man of ability and a kindred mind, as he thought.

Other influences slowly affecting the churches at this time were the **evolutionary theory** of Darwin and the **dialectical philosophy** and theology of G F W Hegel.

The general trend is illustrated by two events. In 1870 the Baptist Union of New South Wales (NSW hereafter) was formed. In order to comprehend all Baptist churches the basis of union was deliberately formulated without any adequate doctrinal tests. Calvinist, Arminian and any others were thus included. Union was desired as the supreme objective. In 1894 the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in NSW, Rev George MacInnes, gave an address entitled *The death of the verbal inspiration theory*. In it he said (p 238):

It has been the ally, the vantage ground and the trenchant weapon of the infidel. It has banned enquiry, and 'loved darkness rather than light.' It has narrowed, perverted and bewildered theology. It has cramped the energies of the Church, checked her development and growth, and made the faith of many only a wretched half-faith. It has turned many to indifference or to unbelief, who but for it would have believed and followed Christ. The greatest gain from the disappearance of the 'Verbal Code of Rules' theory is that Christ is thereby restored to His proper place and authority...³

Both MacInnes and Harper were active in the Theological Hall and were moving the Church quietly towards an acceptance of the new critical ideas. Thus the scene was set for the appearance of **Samuel Angus**.

Personal History

Angus was born on August 27th 1881 in Ulster to parents of orthodox Presbyterian faith. As was common then, his father was a strong disciplinarian and, being a practical farmer, he had little understanding of his son's scholarly gifts and aspirations. It seems the relationship between them was not good. Perhaps personal animosity was a factor in

Angus' theology later. Emilson remarks significantly (p 47):

There can be little doubt that, over time, Angus came to associate the presence and memory of his estranged father with that of a passionless Punisher, akin to the vengeful Calvinist God he later rejected.⁴

Angus was educated at Collegiate School, Ballymena for 4 years from the age of 12. In 1899 he went to Queen's College, Galway, a secular institution, where religious discussion in lectures was prohibited. The Professor of Greek, Darcy Wentworth Thompson, greatly impressed Angus with his independence of thought, his enthusiasm and his demands for excellence from his students. Angus graduated BA with 1st class honours in ancient classics in 1902 and in 1903 he achieved the MA. At this period Angus was involved with the Student Christian Movement (SCM), which was in process of adapting to the changing theological climate, accepting the liberal ethos. In 1903 Angus went to Princeton, attending both the Seminary under the great B B Warfield and the University under Woodrow Wilson, future President of the USA. At the University was A F West, a Latin scholar of reputation, who interested Angus in North African Christianity. In 1904 Angus received the MA(hons) and in 1906 a doctorate for researches into Augustine's CITY OF GOD. But there was tension between Seminary and University because of alleged unorthodoxy in the University. Angus swayed in allegiance towards the University, which, in view of the future, is significant. The attitude of his fellow-students at the Seminary, Emilson describes (p 60):

These, having chosen the Seminary as a haven of orthodoxy and having wholeheartedly embraced its spiritual culture, adopted the policy of loving hostility towards the offender, praying for his conversion. Their response is not atypical of other equally conservative theological students, at the time, and since.⁴

Years later, A C Gaebelein, an American fundamentalist, wrote (p 265):

In reading this defence (Christianity and dogma) one feels that the Professor has never had a true Christian experience, that he does not know the Lord Jesus Christ as his own personal Saviour. Perhaps this is the trouble with many of these men - they were never born again and hence they have not the Holy Spirit.⁵

This time at Princeton was a crisis period for Angus. His ordination was deferred. He found most help through an understanding of Platonism, where he found a rationalism, honesty and practical emphasis, as an alternative to the dogmatic Christianity which he had known and was in process of rejecting. Subsequently Angus had neither much interest nor expertise in theology *per se*.

In 1906 he had what seems to have been a nervous breakdown. From 1906 to 1910 he held a post-doctoral research fellowship with some lecturing duties at Hartford Theological Seminary. During this period he married Katherine Walker Duryea, a widow active in philanthropic circles. He also spent a semester at Marburg, where he was influenced by Adolf Deissman. From 1910-1915 he was based in Edinburgh where the intellectual climate was much to his liking. Also at this time he spent some months in Berlin, where Adolf von Harnack was a major influence. Angus became more interested in history than philology, his previous discipline, and simultaneously antipathetic towards theologians and all dogmatic systems. There was also a short pastorate in Algiers and some publications. He contributed to the INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPAEDIA, and for Duckworths wrote THE ENVIRONMENT OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY (1915).

As a rising star in the academic religious circles, he was seeking a teaching post. This came with the call in 1914 to Sydney, upon the recommendation of a Committee set up to identify suitable men.

Early Days in NSW

On March 2nd 1915 Angus was ordained and inducted as Professor of New Testament exegesis and Historical Theology. In this event Angus owned and accepted the Westminster Confession and Declaratory Act as a statement of his faith. From what we know of his earlier history this cannot have been without mental reservation or equivocation. In 1933 he stated to the Sydney Presbytery Committee (Ward, p 349):

My conscience does not accuse me of any violation of my vows. I appeal to the Supreme Standard as of greater importance than the Subordinate Standard. There is none of my teaching which is not found in Scripture, and there is none of it which is not in accord with the teaching of Jesus . . . Presuming that the only essential in a doctrine is its truth, I have not transgressed the liberty of interpretation allowed even in the Subordinate Standard.³

Ward goes on to comment:

This extract shows both the subtlety of liberalism and a quite improper position. A Presbyterian Church is a creedal church precisely so as to avoid the promulgation of erroneous doctrine under the guise of professions of loyalty to the Scriptures or to the 'spirit of Jesus'.³

Certainly the Confession to which he subscribed represented what Angus now opposed and the Presbyterianism which now employed him. But concern over Angus' teaching did not appear until 1923.

As a teacher, Angus adopted the Socratic method of dialogue in order to elucidate the truth. He was not overly concerned to complete the syllabus, had a rather disordered lecturing style, discouraged the taking of notes, preferring to train his students to think for themselves. He presupposed New Testament Greek in his students and was very demanding of them. Naturally, he concentrated on the more able students and others were left floundering. Occasional provocation, sarcasm, and even aggression towards his students were not unknown.

Angus himself found Australia sadly lacking in intellectual stimulus. In June 1916 he formed with others, mainly theological teachers, a theological club called, provocatively, *The Heretics*. Meeting monthly, they discussed theological works and issues. Here Angus found stimulus and kindred spirits.

In public Angus was very guarded in what he said. He avoided contentious issues if possible, or else gave opinions more conservative than those which his students and other 'heretics' heard. Moves towards union of the denominations were mooted in those days and Angus opposed them, in opposition to his faculty colleagues A Harper and R G Macintyre.

Macintyre provoked a stir with the publication in 1920 of *THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH*, which presented a form of conditional immortality. In 1921 John Edwards, close friend of Angus, and Moderator of the NSW Assembly gave an address entitled *Theological Reconstruction: A Plea for Freedom*. In it he rejected the authority of the Bible, Church and Confessions in favour of freedom of conscience and reason. In his paper Edwards openly acknowledged his debt to Angus. It was A Harper who, through letters, took issue with Edwards. Seemingly becoming more conservative in his old age (now 80). Harper

wrote (p 125):

Is it possible to say that the difference between Mr. Edwards' theology and the theology of the Church is merely a matter of expression? At every point they touch in common, they seem to me to differ profoundly. Their conceptions of God and man and the world are different. Their thoughts of sin and salvation are not the same.⁴

The direction in which the wind was blowing in the Theological Hall thus began to appear indirectly, and for the first time with respect to Angus.

Beliefs

The writings of Angus provide the evidence required. Emilson (pp 138-141) contains in full Angus' pamphlet *Faith in God through Jesus* published in 1923. In this we find Angus teaching:

No statement of Christian faith can properly insist on demanding more than Jesus asked men to believe. The framers of all the historic creeds have been so absorbed in dogmatic conceptions and actuated by controversial interests that they have overlooked this obvious condition. Their yoke has been burdensome . . .⁴

For Angus there was authority only in the teachings and *spirit* of Jesus. The 'schematization' or 'explanation' of matters is rejected as invalid.

. . . religion unites; theology divides. Hence in a declaration of faith, experience should have right of way over speculation, which has a rightful place in philosophy and theology . . . The truths affirmed should be capable of confirmation by an immediate appeal by *every* Christian to daily experience, rather than by a process of argumentation for which only specialists are qualified, or by a *majority* decision of a church assembly. The experience of life in Christ must be primary.⁴

The influence of Schleiermacher appears and, with it, the difference of perspective from historic evangelicalism. It is generally admitted that experience is an element in Christianity but to make it the basis of Christianity is to take a different path, leading to another religion. For Angus following Jesus' example was more important than holding any dogma. He put it thus:

(Jesus) never insisted as a condition of fellowship on any dogmatic theory of atonement by vicarious sacrifice, but He tolerated no ambiguity in the demand that self-sacrifice should be written large in the lives of His followers.⁴

This position naturally led to a rejection of the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy.

"There should be no damnable clauses, nor threats of excommunication on grounds of **dogmatic** differences under the one divine lordship." Statements of faith should be inclusive not exclusive, not demarcating between right and wrong, nor between Christian and non-Christian, he thought. In the statement of faith which concludes Angus' pamphlet there is no mention of Scripture, atonement or justification. Though sin is mentioned there is no biblical concept of sin. With respect to man he is "by his nature a child of the Heavenly Father". As is often the case it is what is not stated, as much as what is stated, that gives cause for concern. Overall, the statement is clearly liberal in its theology. It is radically incompatible with the Basis of Union. **For Angus the centre of Christianity was not, as for the apostle Paul, Christ and Him crucified but Christlikeness.**

In the Westminster Society lecture for 1987⁶ Peter Barnes analyses Angus' theology as explained in *TRUTH AND TRADITION* (Angus and Robertson Sydney, 1934):

1 Repudiation of the God of Calvinism. "I can make no truce with the vindictive and arbitrary God of our historic Confession." (p 100) Are there perhaps echoes of the

relationship with his father here?

- 2 Rejection of the deity of Jesus Christ; the Gospels do not present Him as God, he argued, for He prayed, was tempted and was conscious of falling short of His own ideals.
- 3 Denial of any atonement by propitiation or expiation. To argue this Angus had to reject Mark 10:45 as not from Jesus, but as 'part of the hyper-Paulinism of Mark'. "The very thought that God would require the violent death of Jesus Himself as a sin-offering before forgiveness could be granted would have been repulsive to the mind of Jesus, as it is to our minds today" (p 12).
- 4 Denial of the virgin birth (p 55), the bodily resurrection (p 103) and the fall of man as historical (pp 86,87).
- 5 Denial of the reality of Satan ("a superstition" p 123), judgement and hell ("imaginary evils" p 106).

Such liberal theology as this had its zenith in the early decades of the twentieth century and was opposed vehemently by, amongst others, 'fundamentalists'. Sometimes theirs was an ill-informed opposition. An erudite opponent of liberalism was J Gresham Machen. His book *CHRISTIANITY AND LIBERALISM* gives this perspective:

... the great redemptive religion which has always been known as Christianity is battling against a totally diverse type of religious belief, which is only the more destructive of the Christian faith because it makes use of traditional Christian terminology... called 'modernism' or 'liberalism'. Both names are unsatisfactory... manifold as are the forms in which the movement appears, the root of the movement is one; the many varieties of modern liberal religion are rooted in naturalism - that is, the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity (p 2).⁷

Later Machen summarises the differences:

It (modernism) differs from Christianity in its view of God, of man, of the seat of authority and of the way of salvation. And it differs from Christianity not only in theology but in the whole of life (p 178).⁷

Angus himself recognised the radical differences. Ward (p 348) quotes from *TRUTH AND TRADITION* (p 138) to this effect:

If Presbyterianism is a religious legalism consisting of the letter of the Confession and based on the legislation of the Declaratory statement, as my opponents contend, then I emphatically repudiate such authoritarian religion and the Church cannot do better than expel me forthwith...³

But we are ahead of the sequence of events at this point, and we need to return to 1923 to consider the progress of events in what has been called *The Angus Affair*.

The Angus Affair

1923

Angus spoke to an SCM conference on *The Bible* and a summary of his paper was printed in the *Daily Telegraph* on January 9th. Controversy followed through the pages of the subsequent editions. At this time Angus printed *Faith in God through Jesus* (at which we have looked) in his own defence. However, despite all the controversy no concerted action was taken against Angus at this time.

1923-32

Angus spent some time overseas, and received 3 doctorates, from Belfast, Glasgow and Belfast again. He was also writing. In 1925 he published *THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY* and in 1929 *THE RELIGIOUS QUEST OF THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD*. In the latter, Angus claimed that Christianity had been transformed into a mystery religion. R G Macintyre, Professor at the Theological Hall, reviewed the book in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on November 9th and stated it was 'a polemic, pure and simple, against sacramental religion'. Some think Macintyre's purpose was rather to caution Angus publicly against imprudent expression of views which were in other contexts quite acceptable, than to lead a campaign against Angus. It was indiscretion rather than heresy which concerned Macintyre. In 1931 J Ward Harrison of Botany Methodist Church issued a series of pamphlets in reaction against Angus. In 1932 and 1933 the Methodist Conference debated the continuance of Methodist students in the United Course of theology, of which Angus was a teacher. In 1933 they withdrew their students but they returned in 1937.

In May 1932 Joseph Fulton petitioned the NSW Assembly alleging heretical teaching in the Theological Hall. The petition was not well-worded and R G Macintyre found it easy to gain support for his motion:

that the Assembly reaffirms the adherence of this Church to the doctrines of the evangelical faith as laid down in the Basis of Union (1901), and expects all its Ministers and Teachers in their preaching and teaching to conform thereto, giving chief place to the doctrines of Redemption which the Church has declared to be vital to the Christian faith. (p 140)⁴

This significant stance disclosed the reluctance of Presbyterians to apply the necessary actions to people like Angus within the Church. Emilson comments:

For many Assembly members, and for Macintyre in particular, the issue at hand was not so much a matter of orthodoxy as of correct behaviour. If Dr. Angus could maintain a suitable measure of discretion within and outside Assembly, the implication was there, he need expect little opposition from the Assembly. (p 191)⁴

The whole issue was considered too divisive and too distracting. Financial difficulties, and the losing battle with secularism in society, were considered the important issues, not to be neglected for matters like this.

1932-33

In March 1932 J T H Kerr began his course at the Theological Hall. He was an elder at the Ashfield congregation, with 325 communicant members, and Robert McGowan as Minister. McGowan was trained at Ormond College and ordained in 1899. He had been at Ashfield 25 years and in 1932 had completed a term as Moderator of the NSW Assembly. Kerr passed transcripts of Angus' lectures to McGowan and made no secret of it. McGowan was quite familiar with Angus' theological position and found nothing new in it. He was quite widely read. The transcripts convinced him that action was necessary. He preached to his own people warning of the dangers, wrote to the newspapers, and overtured the NSW Assembly through the Presbytery of Sydney. At the May assembly of 1933 McGowan withdrew his overture, because of recent bereavement and threat of civil action if he proceeded. Some criticised him for this apparent cowardice. A report from a Committee of the Sydney Presbytery which had met with Angus was conciliatory. David Flockhart and R G Macintyre easily won the Assembly's support for a motion that accepted

Angus' assurance of adherence to the doctrine of the Church and expressed confidence that Angus did not hold views contrary to the faith of the Church. In his public statement Angus presented a very good image which swayed many. The vote was 245:19. Seven members appealed to the General Assembly of Australia (GAA) and McGowan gave reasons occupying several pages in the Proceedings.

In September 1933 the GAA met in Melbourne and found that a case for formal investigation had been demonstrated. The matter was remitted to the Presbytery of Sydney with provision for a Judicial Commission of GAA to adjudicate, should there be appeals to the NSW Assembly and beyond.

1934

Angus was suffering severe mental and physical strain by this time. In March he met with men in a Preliminary Enquiry and he was in aggressive mood. After four meetings Committee members were bewildered and frustrated by Angus' evasiveness and the evident contempt he held for at least some of them. At the Presbytery meeting in April there was a mixed attitude amongst members. Angus took the opportunity to turn on his charm and gave a display of his 'graciousness' and 'spirituality'.

In the same month Angus published TRUTH AND TRADITION. It was, as we have noted, an assault on Biblical truths. It shocked many and alienated some who had previously been sympathetic towards Angus.

In May the NSW Assembly met in a crisis atmosphere. The Moderator, Joseph Lundie, urged restraint, and Angus appeared to be penitent and wished to be free of controversy. R G Macintyre urged the Assembly to declare Angus' teaching contrary to those of the Church. However, unusually, Macintyre did not have his way, the Assembly voting by 174:83 to affirm that the Declaratory Act was wide enough to encompass Angus. McGowan appealed to the Judicial Commission, after his motion to proceed against Angus by judicial process was defeated by 154:79. The Judicial Commission considered the evidence and the situation, and found substantially in favour of Angus. It also reaffirmed the Church's commitment to the historic faith. This was surely a strange and erroneous judgement. McGowan and others dissented. Immediately afterwards Angus entered hospital for surgery; in November his wife Katherine died after a long illness. No doubt it was a time of great sorrow and trauma for Angus.

1936

When Angus resumed teaching again in March 1936 he was informed by McGowan and A J Carter that they intended to take up again the investigation of his teaching.

Notice of the situation was being taken overseas. For example, New Zealand Presbyterians decided their students would no longer attend St Andrews College because of the teaching of Angus. Andrew Harper, now retired in Scotland, had made known his distress caused by the publication of TRUTH AND TRADITION.

So the case returned to the Presbytery of Sydney, then to State Assembly, and then to GAA.

The GAA met in Sydney in September 1936. Before it were some notices of motion and a petition signed by 111 ministers and about 250 elders from all the States except NSW. This petition stated:

1. That deep concern exists in our minds and in the minds of our faithful people caused by the widespread publication of the teaching of Professor S Angus, of Sydney, and

particularly set out in his book "Truth and Tradition" a book which in our view is a denial of the Supreme and Subordinate Standards of this Church which every teacher is pledged to "assert, maintain, and defend . . ."

Accordingly we petition the Venerable the General Assembly to take such decisive action as will vindicate our position as a Church holding the common Christian faith in Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and was made man and by His death and resurrection secured forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all believers (p 191).⁸

Amongst notices of motion were those of Geo Tulloch ("to proceed against Professor Angus by judicial process with libel. ") Minute 25, and F A Hagenauer seeking obedience and teaching according to the Basis of Union (Minute 18). R G Macintyre, influential as ever, was moving for peace and unity whilst affirming adherence to the faith (Minute 68). A D Marchant was for recognition of diversity in theology and an exhortation to get back to its 'real business' of 'teaching, preaching and practice of vital religion' (Minute 70). A compromise was reached (Minute 87) which encompassed much of the content of earlier notices of motion. It affirmed the essential doctrines in question and instructed Assemblies, Presbyteries and Ministers to obey:

... the doctrine of Redemption is essential to the faith and must be taught as set forth in the Subordinate Standard, and laid down in the Declaratory Statement unless and until altered in the prescribed manner (Minute 87 para 6).

Angus' attention was drawn to this and it was resolved no further action was necessary "unless it be disobeyed hereafter."

In his Moderator's address to the Assembly in Western Australia on Tuesday May 12th 1936 George Tulloch had expressed the views of many:

Every Professor and Minister, declares at his Ordination, on oath before God and men, that he adheres to (the Confession in the light of the Declaratory Act) and vows that he will "assert, maintain, and defend" these truths which are vital to the inner life of the Church. It is evident, however, that of recent years there has been a great and rapid weakening, on the fundamental facts of the faith. . . This is, without doubt, an absolutely dishonest position. The Church cannot be responsible for the doubts which may arise in the minds of her teachers on the great and vital doctrines of the faith. But surely, the teacher, if he is honest, must consider his position.

If any Minister of the Church finds that he can no longer adhere to his solemn Ordination Vow, he is duty bound to resign his commission. . .

We do not deny the liberty which is the right of every man to hold divergent views on matters of secondary importance; but on the vital facts of the Gospel and supreme loyalty to the Deity of Christ, as the King and Head of the Church, there can be no divergence within the Church.⁹

This view is undoubtedly correct. That it was not upheld at the GAA indicates confusion of thought in some minds, personal dishonesty of this kind in others, and lack of resolution, perhaps, in some. At this distance, certainty is impossible but that the GAA failed in its duty to Christ and the gospel cannot be doubted.

1939

In early 1939 Angus published ESSENTIAL CHRISTIANITY and by it caused the opposition to his teaching to flare up again. Three petitions were sent to the GAA meeting in Melbourne in September. These were from F A Hagenauer, 26 Ministers & other Elders

in Victoria, and from R J H McGowan (a quotation appears in the Appendix). Open disobedience to the injunction of the 1936 GAA was alleged, and the request was for such teaching contrary to the Basis of Union to be terminated.

War had, by the time of the GAA, broken out, and so Hagenauer gave notice of motion that in view of the war "... no disciplinary action be taken against Dr Angus for this disobedience, but that he is hereby most solemnly enjoined that the Laws of the Church must be kept, and that henceforth he must obey the specific instructions of the General Assembly (BB 1936 Min 87) ..." (10 Minute 20)

A R McVittie wanted to postpone all consideration until the next meeting of the Assembly. George Tulloch gave notice he would move "... he be, and is hereby, suspended from office in the Church until the next meetings of this General Assembly. ..." (Minute 22), this until proof of complete change of view by Angus be forthcoming, and the two offending books be withdrawn.

H Perkins gave notice of motion to refer the matter to the Committee on the attitude of the Church to her Creed. Amongst reasons offered were: "Dr Angus does not stand alone in this matter but represents a large body of devoted Ministers and Church members. ..." Perkins had no doubt Angus was loyal "to the faith of his Church as he interprets it" (Minute 54).

In the Third Sederunt sitting the 3 petitions were received; of the notices of motion McVittie's motion was put first, and then amended to read:

That consideration of these Petitions and all matters anent the teachings and writings of Dr. Angus be postponed till the next meeting of this Assembly (Minutes 72,73).

There was a division and the motion passed 154:100 with names recorded; Tulloch and some others dissented (Minutes 79,80).

It is noteworthy that Angus himself was rather contemptuous of the cowardice of the GAA in failing to deal with the matter. In a letter of January 1940 he wrote:

What you term the twentieth century heresy hunt came to an ignoble postponement in September. Heaven knows what the trembling Church would have done without the excuse of the European War to reprieve the culprit until 1942. The Church displayed no courage, courage being evidently the quality of heresy. Macintyre, openly neutral, worked hard behind the scenes 'to stop Angus denying the vital doctrines of the Church' (p 263)⁴

Shortly afterwards Angus suffered a stroke and was off work until March 1941. There were petitions to the 1942 Assembly but the war crisis and sympathy for Angus, still in poor health, brought about a unanimous resolution to pass from 'all communications dealing in any way whatsoever with the case of Dr. Angus' without prejudice to the rights of the parties.

On November 17th 1943 Samuel Angus died of cancer.

Angus and heresy

Far from being the dawn of a new enlightened day, the liberalism of Angus was, in his day, showing signs of decline, chiefly through the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth and others. Liberalism has proved to be barren, contributing rather to the decline than to the upbuilding of Christian Churches.

Angus was never formally charged and tried for heresy, though there is ample evidence to require this procedure. The thought world of the day, illustrated by Bauer's work noted earlier, is one factor which probably influenced matters. No doubt also, the prosecution

of a heresy charge is distasteful work to the minister of the gospel, whose heart is in preaching Christ and him crucified. The political skills of Angus' friends in the Church courts may also be a factor, together with a lack of such skills in those wishing to deal with Angus according to due legal process.

Loyalty to Christ and the gospel requires that men like Angus are fairly tried. Parker (p 285) draws attention to the parallel with the case of J Gresham Machen, an evangelical prosecuted at the same period in the USA. He argues:

... the Australian conservatives lacked any outstanding spokesman who could handle the intellectual issues and meet figures such as Angus on his own ground.⁵

This judgement may be questioned. Though there was no theological teacher of conservative views equipped with similar training to Angus, it is doubtful whether this is necessary. Angus was not controversial because of his intellect, but because of his repudiation of the Basis of Union. Men of lesser intellectual gifts were more than capable of discerning Angus' heresy. McGowan, for example, lectured part-time at Croydon Bible College, and Emilson describes him as (p 197): "An 'Ormond' man, ... a clergyman with a wide knowledge of Church history, he found little that was new in Angus' theology".⁴ Ward (p 347) thinks that the Procurators of the time lacked a deep grasp of the Presbyterian Constitution and that there was generally considerable ignorance of proper procedure. It seems that Presbyterians feared a divisive heresy trial and some thought tolerance and comprehensiveness were necessary. Ward gives an eight point procedure to be followed in such cases (pp 346, 337). The sequence is, firstly, friendly remonstrance, then attention to the level of understanding of those making allegations; then consideration of the seriousness or otherwise of the matter alleged. Further, the minister is entitled to demand a libel to be drawn up before speaking to co-presbyters, though this might not be best policy. Fifthly, a libel is to be properly written, signed by the prosecutors and listing witnesses and relevant documents. The grounds of libel Ward suggests are chiefly the life or doctrine of the minister, or the need of the presbytery to vindicate itself from prejudicial reports. If this stage is reached, the accused is to be summoned to appear, with ample notice. At the presbytery meeting the presbytery may refer the case to a higher court if this is believed to be expedient.

What we can learn from this

1. There were many in the Church who put peace, comprehensiveness, tolerance and unity above everything. It seems their only rule of faith and practice was expediency. At the time of the 1939 GAA the Keswick Quarterly commented:

To shrink from outward controversy, when doing so involves a betrayal of the Truth and a compromise with falsehood, is a shame of which no true man of God should be guilty. Rather than allow the present blot to remain on the Presbyterian Church of Australia, let all members of the body of Christ pray that God in His infinite mercy will work for us by cleansing the Church, and freeing us from the incubus of sin that now lies upon us. (p 277)⁵

The conclusion of Keswick Quarterly was that the Presbyterian Church failed 'to contend earnestly for the faith' and was culpable for retaining 'at the very centre of their denominational work' one who denied the faith of his Church (p 278).⁵

Certainly Angus was not alone in his views within the Church, John Edwards and Prof Kenneth Edward, for example, also held like opinions. How many others were there? Perhaps the answer to this would go far to explain why Macintyre sought only silence

or discretion from Angus. However this may be, the observation seems irresistible, that when expediency gains the upper hand in the thinking of the courts of the Church, the Church is on a slippery slope hurtling downwards from historic Christianity. In the case of the Presbyterian Church it appears that, in God's mercy, the formation of the Uniting Church in 1977 has rescued her from total apostasy.

2. The political manoeuvrings and prevarications in the various courts of the Church appear to have prolonged and exacerbated Angus' personal sufferings and his decline in health. The machinations of his friends may have been, in fact, as unhelpful to Angus, as they were to the cause of justice and truth.
3. The failure of the Church to proceed judicially against Angus, as Macintyre and others wanted in 1934, must have appeared incomprehensible to intelligent observers of the religious scene. The newspapers became cynical, as the cartoons printed in *Emilson* between pages 118 and 119 show. The Church appears to have played into the hands of her enemies.
4. The NSW Church was paralysed for about a decade. Membership data illustrate this. In 1931 there were 34,483 communicant members. This fell to 29,329 by 1936 (p 350)³, but recovered by the end of the decade. A just decision reached in proper procedure, without undue delay, may not have been so damaging, and would have been more to the honour of the Church.
5. The fact that the Declaratory Act was used as a reason for inaction against Angus should be pondered. No doubt it was a misuse, but it may be that this misuse could be somehow avoided in future. Speculation about that is not appropriate in this article.
6. Theological teachers are in crucial positions in the Church. Their influence for good or ill can be enormous. They are inevitably influential in shaping the thinking and attitudes of generations of students, who become ministers. The long-term health of the Church depends considerably upon having men in her theological halls who are committed to the doctrines of the Church. Angus had many students in NSW who defended him strongly, thinking they 'knew him', despite the plainest evidence of heresy. Doubtless they could no longer discern truth and heresy and so personal affection became the predominating factor.
7. Angus was not the cause of problems in Presbyterianism at the time. He was a symptom of the disease which had sprung up in Germany and sprouted in Australia in the last decades of the nineteenth century. MacInnes' address in 1894 was the first clear signal in NSW Presbyterianism and it attacked the very basis of Christianity - the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. As P Barnes put it (p 6):
The lesson should be plain enough - once biblical inerrancy is denied, it will only be a generation or two before there are profound theological, spiritual and moral aberrations in the church.⁶

Appendix

A petition of 26 ministers and other elders of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria to the General Assembly of Australia in 1939 was based on the following quotations from Angus' book, *ESSENTIAL CHRISTIANITY*:

Dr Angus did affirm that Christian faith has too long been based on "alleged historic facts of debatable historicity . . . such as the Virgin Birth, the physical Resurrection of Jesus", and did further state "that Christian faith has too long been confounded with certain dogmatic interpretations of . . . 'alleged historic facts such as theories of

propitiatory atonement”.

“Similarly, the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus is not the disputed and disputable ‘fact’ of an empty grave and a physical raising, but that Christ’s Spirit still moves the souls of men.”

“Hence Jesus’ views of reconciliation with God through repentance and love on our part, and the love of the Father on the other, are slowly winning against the cruder conceptions of a God who ‘set forth Jesus to be a propitiation in his blood’, to reconcile the world.”

“Further, deeper reflection upon ethical values and the nature of personality has made it impossible to accept vicarious acquittal by the sufferings even of Jesus.”

Bibliography

Unfortunately I had no access to Angus’ writings and have had to rely heavily on secondary sources. These are, however, first class and have provided all the necessary information.

1. W Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, 1934, English translation, ORTHODOXY AND HERESY IN EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1971
2. D Chambers *Theological Hall* in Ormond College CENTENARY ESSAYS, pp 103-121. Details of early Presbyterian educational history are supplied.
3. R S Ward THE BUSH STILL BURNS: The Presbyterian and Reformed Faith in Australia 1788-1988, Private 1989
4. S Emilson A WHIFF OF HERESY: Samuel Angus and the Presbyterian Church in NSW, NSW University Press, 1991 (a major source of information).
5. D Parker, *Fundamentalism and Conservative Protestantism in Australia 1920-1980*, PhD dissertation unpublished, 1982
6. P Barnes, *An Evaluation of the theology of Professor Samuel Angus and its effects upon the Presbyterian Church of Australia*, Westminster Society Lecture 1987
7. J Gresham Machen, CHRISTIANITY AND LIBERALISM, Eerdmans, 1923, reprinted 1987
8. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the General Assembly*, September 1936
9. Moderator’s Address by George Tulloch in THE PRESBYTERIAN, June 1 1936, pp 86-93
10. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the General Assembly*, September 1939

Rev Keith W Morris, B Sc is minister of Peppermint Grove Presbyterian Church, Perth, Australia

Inerrancy must be maintained. To drop it will leave one immediately with less than a whole Holy Bible, and less than a whole divine-human Saviour and Lord. What it leaves us with will itself diminish, and sooner than we think. The church will have neither the Christ of God nor the Word of God. This is no strife about words to no profit. The inerrancy of Scripture is an integral part of the pattern of sound words (ie health-giving and health-preserving) which we are to hold fast and of the delivered faith for which we are to agonize.

Hywel R Jones, BEC Conference, 1977

Reformed Theology and Ecological Ethics:

Part One

Eryl Davies

Definitions

Reformed theology is both Theocentric and Christocentric in its understanding, systematisation and application of revealed, biblical truth; it relates and submits the entire universe and its history to the sovereign rule and care of the Triune God. The distinctive feature of this theology, therefore, is the centrality and sovereignty of God.

Surprisingly, most writers use the term *ecology* without attempting a definition¹ but one of the exceptions is Francis Schaeffer who, in his seminal POLLUTION AND THE DEATH OF MAN², defined ecology as 'the study of the balance of living things in nature'. For Edward P Echlin, the term means 'connectedness, shared dependence, relatedness. . .' and concerns the 'interconnection' of the entire community on earth³. It was the German biologist Haeckel who first coined the word *ecology* in 1866, based on the Greek word *oikos* (home). Haeckel used the word to refer to the habitats of plants and animals. Ecology is 'the study of relationships among organisms, and between organisms and their environment'. 'Man takes his place', writes N D Martin, 'among these relationships'⁴. The word *ecological* derives from scientific ecology and describes the way that plants, animals and humans are interconnected with their environment and are interdependent⁵. This is an 'holistic' rather than an 'atomistic' approach. According to the ethical use of the word ecological, for example, pollution by injection of wastes and biocides into the atmosphere, soils and ground water or the destruction of the ozone layer or rain-forests and the widespread extinction of animals and plant species are regarded as 'morally bad' and 'unecological'. In its popular usage, ecology refers particularly to the extensive damage and devastation inflicted by man upon nature and the environment as well as to attempts to remedy this problem; it is identified with such concerns as population growth, resource depletion, technology and the endangered atmosphere⁶.

Ecological Ethics is a complex term hiding numerous ambiguities and problems. One immediate ambiguity is the term *ethics*. Generally, it describes the activity of reflecting in an orderly, systematic way about behaviour. This involves analysing issues of right/wrong, good/bad and establishing criteria by which behaviour can be assessed. Ethical theories tend to be either relative or absolute. Norman Geisler claims there are 'only six major ethical systems', each designated by its answer as to whether moral laws are absolute or relative and subjective⁷. Where do we place 'ecological ethics'? There is no single, uniform ecological ethic although there are common concerns, fears, attitudes, values and motives among ecologists and 'greens'⁸. 'Greens', however, differ in their views. There are, for example, 'shallow' and 'deep' ecology groups. The former is anthropocentric while the latter is ecocentric, acknowledging that nature has its own intrinsic value. The latter aim to reform society by the application of a new set of radical, nature-oriented values and tend towards a mystical approach to nature. There is now a tendency for deep ecologists to refrain from describing man's misuse of nature as being

wrong or immoral. Instead, they prefer to conceive of man's response as lacking, but urgently demanding, kindness, love and understanding.

Base

A major question overshadows ecological concerns and environmental-friendly initiatives, namely, on what basis can human concerns for the environment be commended and even enforced in society? In his influential paper in 1967, historian Lyn White emphasised the need to establish an adequate 'base' for ecological involvement⁹. More recently, a scientist, Calvin Dewitt, claimed with justification that a 'missing element in addressing environmental problems has been ethics'¹⁰. Despite the development of a secular environmental ethic, Dewitt argued there is still a desperate need to 'find an ethic with the necessary power to constrain people from degrading the Earth'.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s when damage to the environment became more apparent, Western responses were mainly legal and technical in an attempt to channel science and technology in ways which would reduce ecological damage. However, as early as 1967 Lyn White warned that 'more science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis'¹¹. Subsequent history has justified White's warning. Perceiving the weakness of legal, technical and political responses, a secular based environmental ethic slowly emerged. This ethic was largely existential, devoid of categories and absolutes, secular, pragmatic, situational but tending towards pantheism and monism. Some wanted to take effective action to reduce and, ultimately, to prevent environmental degradation. The main philosophical base in the 70s and 80s, however, was still that of the 60s¹²: it was secular, relative and far removed from biblical theology.

Within this context, Christianity was blamed for contributing significantly to the ecological crisis by means, for example, of a faulty view of nature, some Platonic tendencies and also a misunderstanding of man's 'dominion' over nature. Over the past 25 years or more, 'Christianity' has been further discredited by its failure to respond competently to the contemporary environmental debate. Confusion also characterises much of the discussion among ecumenists and liberal theologians with regard to ecological ethics. Ruth E Lechte, Energy and Environment Director for the World YWCA, is not alone in suggesting that we may 'err in searching for environmental ethics' rather than an 'ecological consciousness'¹³. Professor Roger L Shinn acknowledges different criteria for making ethical judgements on the part of American churches. While such criteria are in a 'continuous process' of reflection and definition, he insists that somehow ethical activity must continue as a matter of urgency. Clearly the ethical 'base' is unclear and variable within many areas of Christendom, especially where submission to the authority of God's word is lacking. On the other hand, the rather nebulous base among environmentalists has led some to embrace in varying degrees New Age ideas and the Gaia hypothesis.

Challenge

The challenge to Reformed theology is immense and at least two-fold. Firstly, we dare not be silent, for nothing less than the Godhood of God is at stake. His divine works of creation and providence are being denied, divine law is ignored while God's saving purposes are deemed irrelevant to *post-moderns* approaching the mythical age of Aquarius. And the earth, which is the Lord's, is in process of being degraded and endangered by humans. There is a second challenge. Attempts continue to be made at different levels by governments, international organisations, the United Nations and others to address

urgently the ecological crisis. Time is running out. Whether it is the Brandt Report, the World Conservation Strategy, The Brundtland Commission, the UN Commission on Environment and Development or the Economic Summit Nations, a deep concern has been expressed for the environment. Some are attempting to identify and articulate a universally accepted ecological ethic. For example, the Economic Summit Nations met in May 1983 to discuss 'Environmental Ethics'. In the opening address, the call was made for an environmental code of practice on the ground that 'the values which have been accepted up to now by all industrial societies. . . must be replaced by different values and a different approach to the environment'. A Working Party was then appointed to devise such a code and this was presented in May 1990. One of its principles was the setting out of an environmental ethic of stewardship of living and non-living systems of the earth in order to maintain sustainable development. Or consider the United Kingdom Government report, *THIS COMMON INHERITANCE*, also published in 1990, which assumed 'the ethical imperative of stewardship which must underlie all environmental problems', insisting that we have 'a moral duty to look after our planet. . .'.¹⁴

For Christians, the challenge is to develop further a biblical ecological ethic and, at the same time, to identify itself with, and support, those ethical principles being articulated by governments and others which may be consistent with Scripture. We must ensure that 'a biblical rather than a monist world-view shapes what will undoubtedly be one of the most central global problems of our lifetime' writes Ronald Sider. 'Modern folk will find some spiritual foundations to guide and shape their environmental concerns. If it is not biblical faith, then it will be something far less adequate'.¹⁵

Outline

I propose a **five-fold** structure as a basis for a Reformed ecological ethic, namely, one that is a) revealed b) relational, c) responsible, d) redemptive and e) restorative. This structure is biblical and God-centred; it provides biblical balance with regard to notoriously misunderstood and complex issues such nature/grace and divine sovereignty/human responsibility.

a) Revealed

'We cannot spy out the secrets of God by obtrusive curiosity', writes Carl Henry. 'Not even theologians of a technological era. . . have any special radar for penetrating the mysteries of God's being and purposes'.¹⁶ Without the divine initiative and self-revelation, therefore, humans would have no objective foundation for God-talk. Put it another way. If God had chosen to remain *incommunicado* then we would never know anything concerning Him because of the hiddenness and transcendence of the infinite God and our own creaturliness. The divine self-disclosure is by means of general and special revelation; this two-fold revelation is unified and complementary.

Radically different, often conflicting, assumptions and beliefs underlie the contemporary discussion of ethics. Aligning ourselves with Luther and Calvin, it is within the framework of revelation that we attempt to construct an ecological ethic. Other revealed truths will be referred to in this paper but foundational to our subject is the doctrine of creation. Briefly, its significance will now be illustrated in *four* ways.

CREATION

'The fact of God's sovereign creation *ex nihilo*. . .' affirms Oliver Barclay, 'is the clearest biblical teaching'.¹⁷ Creation is also a crucial doctrine and integral to the purposes of God. What significance does the fact of creation have for an ecological ethic? *Firstly*, it

establishes divine ownership of the world (Psalm 24:1). This is God's world. God remains the 'landlord'¹⁸ and we only lease the earth as 'tenants' and stewards under the Lord. A necessary corollary is human responsibility and also accountability.

Secondly, because God is the creator, nature has an intrinsic value. While a tree, for example, is not divine, Christians value it as having been created by God, similarly a river or ocean. Their proper value is not established by a utilitarian and anthropocentric usage. Rivers and oceans have real value in themselves, not as an extension of God but because God created them and created them purposely. This has major implications for the way in which we should use and regard water resources. I concur with Loren Wilkinson that it is 'God's good creation that is at risk - not "nature" or "resources" or even "the environment"',¹⁹.

Thirdly, the Creator-Lord has provided for creation and creatures in a multitude of necessary, effective ways. Among God's provisions are the regulation of earth's energy exchange with the sun, biogeochemical cycles and soil-building processes, ecosystems/processes, biological and ecological fruitfulness, water purification systems of the biosphere, global circulations of water and air, human ability to adapt to, and learn from, creation, etc.²⁰. However, human greed, exploitation, consumerism, pleonexia²¹ and even urbanisation are some of the factors contributing to the misuse and endangering of God's bountiful provision for creation.

Fourthly, God's covenant of creation secures the regularities of nature and evidences His faithfulness. He pledges Himself to preserve and actively uphold the created order (Gen 8:22, 9:16; Jer 33:20-21). In contrast, humans contribute to the spoiling of God's faithful upholding of creation. Consider, for example, the ozone layer. God maintains the earth's atmosphere at a level conducive to life as sunlight is filtered by stratospheric ozone. In this way there is vital protection from the lethal ultraviolet radiation from the sun. Today, this process is being altered significantly by adding substances to the atmosphere that destroy large areas of the protective shield of stratospheric ozone. Depletion of the ozone is largely due to the decomposition of chemicals known as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) which are mostly used by developed countries. It is estimated that a ten per cent decrease in stratospheric ozone could result in a forty per cent increase in the number of skin cancers. Crops are also susceptible to stratospheric ozone decreases. This divine provision for creation is being spoilt by man.

Allow me to summarise some implications of creation for our subject. God's creation and ownership of the world gives worth to all He created and renders humans responsible and accountable to Him as stewards of His creation. His covenant care in continually providing for creation challenges man to review attitudes of selfish indulgence which endanger both nature and humanity. Dare we remain indifferent to these concerns? Admittedly, evangelism and personal salvation are priorities we dare not neglect. The word of God, however, does not stop here and nor must we. We are called to declare and apply the whole counsel of God as it relates to creation well as soteriology. Are we doing this?

(to be continued)

References

1. See, for example, Norman Geisler's *CHRISTIAN ETHICS*, pp 293-310; it is not even defined in his *Glossary* on pp 311f; Apollos, 1990. Other examples include *ECOLOGY AND HUMAN LIBERATION*, T S Derr, WSCF, Vol 3, No 1, 1973. No definition of the term was given by H W Beck in his *The Ecological Crisis and*

- the Christian Doctrine of Creation* pp 281ff in CHRISTIANITY FACING THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY, Soong Sil University Press, Seoul.
2. p 9. The new edition is published by Crossway Books.
 3. THEOLOGY IS GREEN, p 30, Issue No 1, January 1992
 4. ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF BIBLICAL AND CHRISTIAN ETHICS, p 124; R K Harrison (general editor), Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987
 5. THEOLOGY IS GREEN, p 32, Issue No 1
 6. See, for example, John Stott, ISSUES FACING CHRISTIANS TODAY, pp 116-117, Marshall Pickering, 1990
 7. CHRISTIAN ETHICS: OPTIONS AND ISSUES, p 25, Apollos, 1990. He identifies the six major ethical systems as (1) antinomianism, no moral laws (2) situationism, one absolute law (3) generalism, some general laws but no absolute ones (4) unqualified absolutism, many absolute laws which never conflict (5) conflicting absolutism, many absolute laws conflict but obligation to do the lesser evil (6) graded absolutism, absolute laws sometimes conflict but we need to obey the higher law.
 8. *Green* refers to individuals who are environment-friendly or environmentally aware and adjust their lifestyle accordingly. Criteria for being 'green' are provided by Jonathan Porritt in his SEEING GREEN, p 267, Fontana/Collins, 1984.
 9. *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, SCIENCE, vol 155 (March 10, 1967), 1203-1207. This article has been reprinted many times; see, for example, Schaeffer's POLLUTION AND THE DEATH OF MAN, pp 121-144.
 10. *A Scientist's Theological Reflection on Creation*, p 13, TRANSFORMATION, vol 10 No 2, April/June 1993
 11. op cit
 12. This is confirmed, for example, by Schaeffer; op cit, pp 11-12.
 13. *Partnerships for Ecological Well-being* p 158, THE ECUMENICAL REVIEW, vol 42, No 2, April 1990
 14. p 8
 15. *Redeeming the Environmentalists*, Ronald Sider, p 28, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, vol 37, No 7, June 1993
 16. GOD, REVELATION AND AUTHORITY: *God Who Speaks and Shows*. Vol 2, p 8, Word Books, 1976
 17. NEW DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY, p 177, IVP, 1988
 18. ISSUES FACING CHRISTIANS TODAY, p 117. Collins/Marshall Pickering. Second Edition, 1990
 19. *How Christian is the Green Agenda?* p 19, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Vol 37, No 1, January 11, 1993
 20. See, eg, Calvin Dewitt, *A Scientist's Theological Reflection on Creation*, TRANSFORMATION, Vol 10, No 2, pp 12-13, April/June 1993. Also quoted in EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY, Vol 17, No 2, April 1993, p 137.
 21. Coined by Schwartz in 1974, it describes the obsession of accumulating goods and material possessions.
-

Book Reviews

The Final Word

A Biblical Response to the Case for Tongues and Prophecy Today

O Palmer Robertson

Banner of Truth, 150pp, £3.95

The value of this little book is out of proportion to its size, it sets out to deal with prophecy in the contemporary church and discusses the thesis set out by Wayne Grudem in his book *THE GIFT OF PROPHECY* in the New Testament and today (Kingsway Press, 1988). Palmer Robertson in no way misrepresents Wayne Grudem and the tone of the book is such as should always characterise differences among Christians. For this reason and because of its careful examination of the relevant passages this is a book which deserves to be widely read.

Palmer Robertson begins with the **history of prophecy in the Scriptures**, and by doing so lays a good foundation for all that follows. (In fact, there is no direct reference to Grudem's book until chapter 4). "The starting point for any discussion about prophecy today should begin with the long history of the revelational character of this gift of the Spirit." His main points are these: Biblical prophecy always involves direct revelation from God. The climax of prophetic revelation is reached in Jesus Christ, in whom God speaks directly to his people without any other prophetic figure between.

When the Old Testament prophesied about New Testament prophecy, ie Joel 2:28, that prophecy is always viewed as revelational in the same sense as Old Testament prophecy.

This view of New Testament prophecy is confirmed by the writings of Peter and Paul, who always view prophecy as revelation in the fullest sense.

This leads on to a discussion of the **nature and significance of the gift of tongues in the New Testament**. Robertson's reasons for doing this is his contention that tongues are themselves a form of prophecy and are revelational. This he argues on two grounds: first, that tongues are said to declare divine 'mysteries' eg 1 Cor 14:2, "He who speaks in a tongue utters mysteries". A *mystery* according to the New Testament is something hidden from mere human wisdom and insight but which God has now revealed. Tongues were therefore "a divine instrument for communicating revelation". Second, that tongues edify in exactly the same way that prophecy does, by bringing light and understanding to the hearer. Hence Paul insists on the necessity of interpretation. Tongues not understood cannot edify, 1 Cor 14:16,17. So Robertson concludes, "If prophecy is revelational and tongues interpreted are equivalent to prophecy, then tongues also must be a form of revelation that God used in the church", and so if God's revelation is complete in Scripture then we should not expect tongues to continue. Interestingly, Robertson argues that *tongues* were foreign languages, chiefly on the basis of Acts 2, and says, "The effect of this conclusion is to place a large portion of modern tongues-speaking activity outside the realm of valid New Testament experience from the outset". Furthermore, tongues were given as a sign of judgement on unbelieving Israel and of the in-gathering of the Gentile nations. Tongues point to a universal gospel.

The question of whether revelation has ceased is often misunderstood, and so is met with a gut reaction, *What God has done in the past he can and will do today*. But this raises another question: What is the 'goal'

of God's revelation? Is it that we should be forever receiving more revelation? Surely not. "Revelation . . . is a means to an end. It is the way by which the eternal God makes himself known to sinful men who are hopelessly lost apart from his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation has as its end the making known to men of the one and only God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent". Viewed in this way, the cessation of revelation is not something to be regretted. The process went on over many centuries but has now reached its climax in the coming of God's Son (Heb 1:1). So the termination of God's revelatory activity must not be regretted as though it were some loss to us; instead we should rejoice and be thankful for the priceless treasure we have in Jesus Christ.

Robertson now develops this along two lines. First, what it means that revelation has ceased. It does not mean that God no longer speaks to his people. The heavens still declare his glory and the Holy Spirit still guides believers into the truth of God as found in Scripture, and applies it constantly to the life and conscience. This written revelation which God has given to us in Scripture contains all that is needed for life and godliness. "It is not just that the canon is closed, meaning that no more words are to be added to the Bible. The end of revelation means that all those former ways of God's making his will known to his church have now ceased."

His second point here concerns what he terms "The History of the Cessation of Revelation" in Scripture itself. God's revelation does not come in a steady flow but rather in periods or epochs. Our attention is drawn to the significance of the "Do not add ..." declarations in Deuteronomy, Numbers and Revelation. These "indicate that the idea of a cessation of revelation is not a strange concept in the process of God's working of redemption for his people. Revelation never came in an

unbroken experience." In the New Testament the gifts which are so closely related to the giving of revelation seem themselves to fade away as the era comes to an end. Hence there is no reference to prophecy or tongues in the later writings of Paul.

Robertson concludes this chapter by answering the main objections to his thesis. For example, Paul's words, "Despise not prophesyings" (1 Thess 5:20), and "Do not forbid to speak in tongues" (1 Cor 14:39) are considered. "It is a fact that cannot be denied that some divine injunctions have bound the people of God for a particular era, but have subsequently been revised, modified or even cancelled." "If it is recognised that the apostolic office has come to an end, then the possibility must be acknowledged that the foundational office of prophet also has ceased to function in the church today." The objection that the claim that *revelation has ceased* limits God is answered helpfully. Clearly we have no power to restrict God in any way. Yet what if God should place a restriction on himself? What if he has chosen to give his people a full and sufficient revelation of himself in Scripture? Surely, in that case to say that revelation has ceased is simply submitting to what God has chosen to do. The reviewer found some points in this section less convincing. The absence of reference to prophecy and tongues in Paul's later writings seemed capable of other interpretation. Is the relation between miracles and revelation so unbreakable that we must rule out miracles for the remainder of this age? In one sense that view simplifies matters for us but it does leave us, very occasionally, groping about for a natural explanation for some event which has all the appearance of a direct intervention of God.

All this brings us to Wayne Grudem's book and the possibility of some form of prophecy in the church today. As

Robertson says, “this view of prophecy has found significant acceptance in large areas of the evangelical church”, and we must add, even in churches otherwise committed to the Reformed faith. Grudem’s view is that there was in the New Testament a form of prophecy which involved revelation from God but which did not carry with it either infallibility or divine authority. Grudem calls this “ordinary congregational prophecy” and alleges that it is still to be found in the church today. Such prophecy involved divine revelation but, whereas in the case of the Old Testament prophets the Holy Spirit ensured the purity and trustworthiness of that word on their lips, no such inerrancy exists in this case. The message of New Testament prophets is flawed by the human instrument. It may be appropriate here to point out that this article is not an attempt to review both books. Those who wish to read further into the matter will find an approach generally sympathetic to Dr Grudem’s position in D A Carson’s *SHOWING THE SPIRIT* and a contrary view in Gaffin’s *PERSPECTIVES ON PENTECOST*.

Grudem sees the gift of Prophecy as superior to all other gifts of the Spirit. because it is based on divine revelation, the prophet can speak to the specific needs of the moment when the congregation is assembled. Preaching is general, prophesying is specific. The things revealed might include “the secrets of people’s hearts, their worries and fears, or their refusal or hesitancy to do God’s will” (*THE GIFT OF PROPHECY*, p 153). The prophet would not always know to which person in the congregation his (or her) words applied but at least on occasions the prophet would be able to point to a particular person and deliver his message to them. That is what Grudem understands to have happened in the New Testament and what he would have us look for today: direct words from God. But these prophetic words

“should not be considered as having divine obligations” but rather as “the prophet’s own fairly accurate (but not infallible) report of something he thinks (though not with absolute certainty) has been revealed to him by God”. So if you disobey the message of the prophet, you might not be disobeying God; on the other hand, you might! We are left wondering what advantage this has over preaching. There we have a far higher authority, plus the secret application made by the preacher with the Holy Spirit’s help and a guidance, plus practical application of the word which the Holy Spirit himself makes in the hearts of the hearers. It is hard not to agree with Robertson when he says that this approach to New Testament prophecy creates instability and confusion in the hearts of God’s people. What happens when the prophet does get it wrong? And how can we be sure anyway as, except within the frame-work of Scripture, no way exists for judging objectively whether the prophetic message does actually come from God.

On what Scriptures, then does Wayne Grudem base this view of prophecy? The key text is 1 Cor 14:29, “two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said”. The question is, to what does the word *diakrino* refer?

Grudem takes it to refer to the *words* of the prophets, which must then be evaluated or sifted. Robertson understands the word to refer to the prophets *themselves* - who will speak and in what order. The words “weigh carefully what is said” do not appear in the Greek text, but are an attempt by the NIV translators to help us understand the sense. Grudem’s point is that if the prophecy referred to here were of the same character as Old Testament prophecy then the idea of weighing it carefully would be wholly inappropriate. Robertson challenges this understanding of the verse and sees it, as we have said, as a discrimination among people

and not of words or ideas. So Paul's concern in 1 Cor 14 is not with a new kind of prophecy but with an abundance of prophetic gifts that needed to be handled in the church in an orderly way. Even if the "discrimination" envisaged here did relate to the prophetic words (and Robertson denies this) "nothing in this procedure would distinguish New Covenant prophecy from the prophecy of the Old Covenant. For judgement was rendered regularly about the true or false character of words spoken by a 'prophet' in the Old Covenant (cf Deut 13:1-5, 18:21,22)." The New Testament itself contains warnings against false prophets (eg Mat 7:25; 24:11,124). In view of this, is it not more likely that 1 Cor 14 is urging discrimination between true and false prophets?

Again, Dr Grudem suggests that a lesser kind of prophecy is envisaged because Paul seems unconcerned that some of the prophets' words would be lost for ever and never heard by the church. "But this is surely to read too much into the passage. Is it not possible that some of the prophetic teaching could properly wait for another occasion?" Paul's words in 1 Cor 14:36,37 are advanced as further evidence of the lower status of New Testament prophecy, because of the way in which Paul asserts his own apostolic authority; but again, is that really a necessary inference? Other commentators have not come to this conclusion. Calvin is especially helpful and worth reading on this whole passage. Commenting on v 29 he says, "But it may seem odd that men are allowed to make judgements concerning the teaching of God, which ought to be established beyond any dispute. My answer to that is that the teaching of God is not subjected to the judgement of men, but their task is simply to judge, by the Spirit of God, whether it is his word which is declared, or whether, using this as a pretext, men are wrongly parading what they themselves have made

up..."

Dr Grudem argues at length that a distinction must be made between the authority of "apostolic prophecy" and "ordinary congregational prophecy". He sees Paul's reference to *apostles and prophets* in Ephesus 2:20 and 3:8 as describing a single office, apostles/prophets, and not two separate offices. It was this single office that came to an end once the foundations of the church had been laid. Other prophets, of the lesser kind, continued. Robertson seeks to show that in spite of Grudem's lengthy argument the case cannot be made.

One further argument is advanced in favour of this distinction, and that is Paul's statement in 1 Thess 5:19-22: "... do not treat prophesies with contempt,..." Grudem says that for Paul to speak in this way these prophesies could not possibly have had the authority of Old Testament prophecy. But as Robertson points out we must remember that for four hundred years the prophetic gift had not functioned. So it might not have been too easy to come to terms with the presence of prophets in the church. The exhortation to *test everything* was just what had always been taught with regard to prophetic activity. All in all, says Robertson, - and I am inclined to agree with him - the case for a new and lesser category of prophecy has not been made. Having read Grudem's chapter on *Encouraging and Regulating Prophecy in the Local Church* I was surprised to find myself identifying with some of his examples of prophetic activity, and saying, "Yes, of course that happens sometimes", and I gladly recognise the Spirit's activity, but I would not give to it the status of prophecy. Whatever uncertainties remain in our minds over the way in which New Testament prophecy functioned we have no good ground for looking for its continuance. The issues raised in Palmer Robertson's book are important for us all. The idea of a

continuing prophetic gift in the church can appear as a panacea for many of the ills of the evangelical church. There are real weaknesses in evangelicalism, one of which is certainly a failure to cultivate holiness and its corollary, a closer loving communion with God. When such weaknesses are used to bolster the case for modern prophecy the argument seems to have force. But there is another case to be argued and that is to consider **the blessings that come from affirming the Scriptures as God's final and all-sufficient word:**

1. A concentration on Scripture as God's living word to us today, not just as a record of what God *once* said, but of what he *still* says. How much preachers and congregations need to feel that as the Scripture is opened God himself addresses us.
2. A more prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, to be to us the divine interpreter of God's word, and to clothe that word with his own power.
3. A preaching ministry that not only unfolds the great doctrines of the faith and reveals Jesus to us, but which applies that word with wisdom, insight and sharp relevance to our everyday lives. I suspect that it is, in part, the lack of such preaching that has given rise to a desire for modern prophecy.
4. An openness to light and wisdom given by the Spirit within a framework of Scripture truth, enabling us to see our way forward in dark and perplexing circumstances. Richard Gaffin says, "Often, too, what is seen as prophecy is actually a spontaneous Spirit-worked application of Scripture, a more or less sudden grasp of the bearing that biblical truth has on a particular situation or problem." (PERSPECTIVES ON PENTECOST)

Neil C Richards

Wheelock Heath Baptist Church

The Work of Christ

Robert Letham

IVP, 1993, pb, 284 pp, £12.95

This book is a welcome addition to the **CONTOURS OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY** series under the general editorship of Gerald Bray. The author, Robert Letham, was formerly Senior Lecturer in Christian Doctrine at London Bible College and is now minister of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware, USA.

Dr Letham successfully combines historical theology with biblical theology in this book but rightly gives priority to the latter. His use of traditional, biblical models such as Prophet, Priest and King (pp 91-223) in explaining the work of Christ is competent, uncompromising and stimulating. Concluding the section on Christ as Prophet, Letham emphasises that 'The Bible does not compete with Christ. It is complementary' (p 102). 'Is there a dual object of faith?' he asks. 'Does this open the door to scholasticism and rationalism?' His answer is unambiguous. 'If the prophetic office of Christ encompasses redemptive revelation in Scripture, there is no dualism. The doctrine of Scripture is an inherent part of the gospel, not an additional extra tacked on to supplement the redemptive actions of Christ'.

Christ's work as Priest is studied biblically in some depth over at least four main chapters before assessing various theories of the Atonement (recapitulation, ransom, satisfaction/vicarious, moral influence, governmental, vicarious sympathy, etc) then examining helpfully the relationship of Atonement and Justification (pp 177-194). Numerous aspects and emphases of Letham's work on the Lord's priesthood are both welcome and stimulating. He notes, for example, that the neglect of Christ's priesthood had serious consequences for the church. The struggle over Christ's deity in the patristic period led to a focus on his

deity to the neglect of his humanity. 'The net result was that his mediation faded into the background, leaving a gap for the sinner making confession and looking for compassionate and understanding assistance. Who better to step into the breach than the kind and loving mother of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary? The development of the cult of Mary met a real need in the church. The need was created by the church itself, however, by its neglect of the human priesthood of Christ, exercised in our place and continuing at God's right hand to meet our present need for grace. The vital point to note is that Christ is utterly sufficient to meet us in our need' (pp 119-120).

Letham's treatment of Christ's sole priesthood, though brief, is useful not only in criticising the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of the priesthood but also in challenging Brethren and 'open worship' advocates who reject an ordained ministry on the basis of the priesthood of all believers. 'In the first place', writes Letham, 'its preoccupation with the individual is foreign to the Bible, in which the corporate has priority. Where the Bible talks of a priesthood for the believer the primary reference is in fact to the church. It is a corporate priesthood given by Christ to his church. . . Secondly, a stress on the priesthood of all believers can often undermine the biblical focus on the exclusive priesthood of Christ' (p 122). '... Christ is our great high priest to the exclusion of all others. He has no rival. . . If we place the priesthood of all believers in centre stage, Christ is displaced from his throne. His is the sacrifice, the intercession and the benediction, his the faith and worship acceptable to God. . . He represents us. We represent nobody.'

On *The Nature of the Atonement* (chapter 7, pp 125-157) Letham is again orthodox and encouraging. Concerning its necessity, he rightly favours the position of 'consequent

absolute necessity' on the grounds of divine justice and the nature of sin as an assault on God (p 127). Obedience, penal substitution, propitiation, reconciliation, redemption and conquest are major biblical categories used by Letham to describe the nature of the atonement.

His appendix on *The Intent of the Atonement* (pp 225-247) I found most rewarding. After briefly describing the historical background and the issue at stake, Letham claims that 'only effective atonement does justice to the biblical insistence that the cross was a work of penal substitution' (p 233). He then proceeds to develop and examine this doctrine of effective atonement from different theological angles, such as election, covenant doctrine, union with Christ, the unity of Christ's high-priestly work and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. On the latter, Letham writes: '... universal atonement maintains that the Father chooses some (conditionally), the Holy Spirit applies the gospel to some but the Son dies for all. This is by far the most serious problem with provisional atonement. It threatens to tear apart the Holy Trinity. It introduces disorder into the doctrine of God. The Father and the Holy Spirit have different goals from the Son. The tendency is towards tritheism, and the unity of the Godhead is undermined. 'Ultimately', warns Letham, 'the doctrine of the Trinity will be blown apart (p 237).

The final section in the book examines *The Mediatorial Kingship of Christ*, both in its cosmic and corporate dimensions, particularly as creator, director and goal of the universe and as Saviour of the church. Stimulation and a greater appreciation of Christ's work should inevitably be the testimony of ministers and others who read this book carefully. It deserves to be on your bookshelf or in your church library. And, even better, on your study desk!

Editor

EDITORIAL POLICY

1. To articulate that theology characteristic of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.
 2. To discuss any theological issues which reflect the diverse views on matters not essential to salvation held within the BEC constituency.
 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.
 5. To keep our constituency informed about the contents of new books and journals, as a means of encouraging their stewardship of time and money.
-

Orders should be sent to:
BEC
113 Victoria Street
ST ALBANS AL1 3TJ
UK

ISSN 0144-378X

Printed in the UK by Horseshoe Press, Stowmarket
