

FOUNDATIONS

contents

Editor's Notes	1
Word and Spirit – a theological orientation <i>Iain Campbell</i>	2
The Spirit in the Word – and beyond? <i>Christopher Bennett</i>	3
Exegesis 22: The gospel in Word and power <i>Paul Brown</i>	4
A Spirituality of Word and Spirit for a post-modern world <i>Andrew Paterson</i>	5
Richard Baxter on present-day revelations of God's will <i>Nick Needham</i>	6
Another Celtic Spirituality – part 2 <i>R M Jones</i>	7
A pastor muses on Word and Spirit <i>Erik Pattison</i>	8
Contemporary pneumatology <i>Eryl Davies</i>	9
Book Reviews	10
<i>Jesus and the Victory of God</i> , N T Wright	
<i>Jesus the Messiah</i> , Robert H Stein	
<i>A Theology of Encouragement</i> , Michael A Eaton	

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FOUNDATIONS

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

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Editor's Notes

Over the past few months a number of readers have commented favourably on my first issue of *Foundations*. This has been very encouraging and I trust that the journal will continue to prove stimulating and helpful. Please go on sending me your comments or suggestions, as I want the journal to be the best one of its kind on the market.

There have been two kinds of comments that I would like to highlight as they touch on the nature of a journal like *Foundations*. The first kind has been something like this: "Do you agree with everything in *Foundations*?", after which the questioner points out something that he (and by implication I) could not possibly agree with. My reply is, "No I don't agree with everything, nor should I". As a journal *Foundations*, like its parent the BEC, is as broad and as narrow as the gospel itself. I trust that there will never be anything in *Foundations* that contradicts the essential evangelical doctrines of our faith. But this journal is intended to be a forum in which men and women who confess the evangelical faith can explore theological issues. Inevitably there will be areas in which writers and readers disagree. That is good. If there are no disagreements among us it is pretty certain that we are not tackling as we should the great issues facing evangelicalism today. *Foundations* is not a party magazine or a denominational organ; it is the theological journal sponsored by a very diverse body seeking to serve an even more diverse readership. One of the banes of conservative evangelicalism, particularly among those of us who are independents, is the tendency not to tolerate legitimate diversity and to insist on theological conformity that is too precisely defined.

The other comment I want to highlight is one that takes exception to my commendation of J I Packer, Wayne Grudem and John Piper as examples of theologians who combine vital godliness with sound learning. It was pointed out that these men were associated with positions allegedly inconsistent with conservative evangelicalism. No doubt they have their faults and inconsistencies, but overall their ministries have been a blessing to many and have done great good for the kingdom of God world-wide. Whether or not we agree with them on every issue, surely they must be commended as men of God who are trying to work out their evangelical faith in a world that is changing very fast and throwing up new challenges to us all the time. The bottom line for *Foundations* is our commitment to the Bible as the inerrant, written word of God and to the gospel of God's grace to sinners. On that basis we need to strive together in doing theology that is creative, relevant, exciting, bold and strengthening to the spiritual life and evangelistic mission of the churches.

We go some way towards fulfilling that ambition in this issue. The theme is **Word and Spirit**, an expression that has been much used in recent years as churches have tried to come to terms with the charismatic movement. Advocates on all sides of the debate have appropriated the phrase and claimed that they are trying to keep the two together. I don't pretend to think that this issue deals with the matter exhaustively but I do think the various writers have shed some interesting light on the debate. I will let them speak for themselves and assure readers that we would be happy to publish letters which continue an appropriate dialogue with contributors.

Word and Spirit

– a theological orientation

Iain Campbell

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is axiomatic for all Reformed theology. When Paul declared to Timothy that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine” (2 Timothy 3 :16), he clearly set down the parameters within which the people of God must do their thinking. But the profitableness of the Word, he goes on, reaches to reproof, correction and instruction, “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”; as John Stott expresses it, “the profit of Scripture relates to both creed and conduct”.¹ For the formulation of a man’s doctrine, as for the regulation of a man’s life, we come back to the *sola scriptura* of the Reformation, and to Calvin’s principle that “The beginning of religion [is] ...humbly and soberly to submit to God’s word”.²

Of equal moment and importance in Reformed theology has been the emphasis upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit of God. The mechanistic and consequentialistic theology of the pre-Reformation church gave way before the dynamic theology of Calvin and Luther. The medieval mindset of a fossilised propositionalism bowed before the spiritual wave of new life that precipitated the Reformation, what TF Torrance has described as “a radical shift...from an abstract theology of logically ordered propositions to a lively dynamic theology”.³ This is captured for us by William Cunningham in the following sentence: “Calvin derived his system from the study of the sacred Scriptures, accompanied by the teaching of the divine Spirit”.⁴

Where Reformed theology has been less clear and assertive is on the relationship between these two axioms. How does the dynamic, gospel-age, last-days ministry of the Holy Spirit relate to the written, closed-canon text of sacred Scripture? The need to address this question of the interface between the sufficiency of Scripture and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit is seen not least in the wave of Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal thinking which has to such a large extent substituted biblical theology with personal experience. At the other extreme is much of our own experience of doctrinal orthodoxy which knows little of real Holy Spirit power. Lloyd-Jones warns that “Nothing is more dangerous than to put a wedge between the word and the Spirit, to emphasise either one at the expense of the other”.⁵ This is to assert Calvin’s belief that “The Spirit is joined with the word”.⁶ In what sense is this so? What is the sacred union between the living Spirit and the written Word, and how does this interact with our daily experience as believers, theologians and preachers?

Inspiration

The Bible clearly asserts that it is more than an ordinary book. Many human documents have survived from antiquity, but the Scriptures stand in a category of their own. Of the Scripture, Peter says that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private

interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved (lit. “ferried”) by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21). There is a strong image here of the writers of Scripture being influenced upon in a special way by the Spirit at the point of writing. The Holy Spirit superintended the activity to the extent that the writers, acting freely and responsibly, were borne along by a supernatural ministry. The result was that when they wrote what they wrote in the Scriptures, they were kept free from error. While they may have written many other things, these have not been preserved as their Scripture writings are preserved, nor do they have the quality of infallibility that these sacred writings have.

To talk of biblical criticism may seem to slight the high doctrine of biblical inspiration and infallibility. Yet it is only within the context of the Bible being the inspired Word of God that we can pursue any meaningful study of it. Because of the direct and supernatural activity of the Spirit of God, the Bible is, to use Warfield’s phrase, “an oracular book”⁷ – what it says, God says. The disciplines of scholarly criticism, looking at questions of authorship, source and purpose of the biblical writings, as well as questions relating to the formation of canon and text, bring us face to face with the authentic and immediate self-disclosure of God in human language. At the point of origin, therefore, there is the most intimate connection between the God of the Word and the Word of God.

Illumination

There is more, however. The Holy Spirit not only gave us the Word of God, but He authenticates the revelation by persuading men of its truthfulness. Paul says in Romans 8:7 that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be”. There is, therefore, an actual resistance in the heart of natural man to the Word of God; an enmity that is reinforced by a spiritual inability to submit to the claims of truth. The same point is made in 1 Corinthians 2:14: “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”.

For us to have an understanding of the truth, therefore, the natural bias of our heart has to be altered. Our natural resistance has to be overcome. Our inability to bow before the truth of God’s Word must be dealt with. It is particularly the provenance of the Holy Spirit to restore this ability, and to make primary attestation of the Word of God to us. The Westminster Confession of Faith captures this for us in its argument that notwithstanding all the evidences that demonstrate the supernatural quality of the Word of God, “our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts” (I. I. v). Or, to use John Owen’s words, writing on “The Reason of Faith”, “it is the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to believe the Scripture to be the word of God, or the supernatural, immediate revelation of his mind unto us, and infallibly to evidence it unto our minds, so as that we may spiritually and savingly acquiesce therein”.⁸ This was one of the evidences, for example, of the power of the gospel in Thessalonica, that the gospel came to that city, “not...in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance” (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

The Spirit of Promise

There is, however, an even more intimate connection between the Spirit and the Word. Not only did the Spirit's influence and ministry extend to the superintending of the words of revelation – the Spirit Himself was the subject of that very revelation. In other words, as the Spirit spoke *by* the Scriptures, the Scriptures spoke *of* the Spirit.

The reason for the outflowing of the Spirit at Pentecost was, according to Acts 2:16ff, the fulfilling of the prophecy by Joel (2:28-32). As the Spirit of Christ in the prophets spoke beforehand of the glory to follow the sufferings of the Lord (1 Peter 1:11), so there was anticipated the outpouring of the Holy Ghost by the exalted Lord. This Spirit was promised as the Spirit of grace and supplications (Zechariah 12:10), by whom men would look on a pierced Messiah.

So much was this the case that Christ emphasised it as the most positive boon to be enjoyed in the wake of His personal departure to the Father: "It is to your advantage that I go away...if I depart I will send [the Helper] to you" (John 16:7). The coming of the Spirit marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the church – a time of supernatural endowment, testifying to the ascension glory of the risen Lord. The Spirit by whom the word had been given had now come, in fulfilment of the promises of that very word inspired under His influence. The Spirit with which we have been sealed is none other than "the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).

Regeneration

In the New Testament, the new birth is ascribed both to the Word and the Spirit. Peter says that God's people are born again "not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides for ever" (1 Peter 1:21). At the same time, the act of regeneration is clearly that of the Holy Spirit: "unless one is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

Both of these agencies are brought together in 2 Corinthians 3:3, where the Corinthian believers are declared to be "an epistle of Christ...written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart". There is an allusion to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, when the finger of God etched the revelation of His mind and will on the tablets of stone. The writer, the Spirit of God, writes now on the hearts of His people. This was, indeed the essence of the new covenant: God's laws written on the heart and inscribed on the mind (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16). So Thomas Goodwin, the notable Puritan says that "all that Christ did would have profited us nothing, if the Holy Ghost did not come into our hearts and bring all home to us".⁹ The *message* that saves is the message of the gospel, the message of the Bible, with its one great theme of reconciliation. The *power* that saves is the power of the Holy Spirit applying these doctrines with conviction, bringing a knowledge of sin and a sense of the glorious provision of salvation in Jesus Christ.

It is a mistake to think that somehow it is possible to be born again through the influence of the gospel and not have the Holy Spirit. The Bible knows nothing of such a condition. It was on this point that Lloyd-Jones was misunderstood on his distinction between *baptism with the Spirit* and *regeneration* when he asserted with authority "that you can be a believer, that you can have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, and still not be baptised with the Holy

Spirit".¹⁰ Lloyd-Jones went on to accuse anyone who asserted that regeneration is to be identified with baptism with the Spirit as "flying in the face of Scripture".

Yet Scripture shows that the Christian has been empowered for service and consecrated to Christ through an act of Holy Spirit baptism. This is, by definition, what the Christian life is about. To be sure, there must be ongoing obedience to the Word of God, growth in grace and knowledge. But at no point can a Christian be not baptised with the Spirit. This was the very contrast between John the Baptist's ministry and that of Christ: according to John 1:33 the One who sent John to baptise with water, Himself would baptise with the Holy Spirit. This was fundamental and definitive.

This is not to downplay the New Testament warnings against grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit of God. Ephesians 4:30 contains the statement that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God, and counsels us against grieving the Spirit. In context, Paul is pressing home the need for resistance of the devil and reformation of life on the part of the child of God. The more we lose of the Spirit's influence, the more exposed we will be to the "wiles of the devil". There must be progress, with growth in knowledge, in holiness and in purity. That means development in exposure to the truth claims of God's law. We live now in the Spirit, and must walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

In the great manifesto of Christian liberty, in Romans 8, Paul deals with this whole matter of the new life of the child of God, no longer carnally minded, but spiritually minded; no longer in bondage but at liberty; no longer under condemnation, but justified freely by grace. New life in the Spirit means walking a new road, a new way. And in Romans 8:4 Paul specifically ties the leading of the Spirit, and the impulse of the spiritual life, to the requirements of God's Word. Grace came into our souls, he says, so that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit".

In the first instance, Paul is insisting that for all those who are spiritually minded, the highest claims of God's holy law have been met and vindicated by the self-giving of Christ. But at the same time, those of whom this is true are freed from the condemnation of the law in order to serve God, after Christ's example, by willing obedience to the law's demands. As Charles Hodge expresses it, "The gospel is not antinomian...Holiness is the fruit and evidence of reconciliation with God".¹¹ Holiness, life in the Spirit, cannot be divorced from "the righteousness of the law". "Our Lord did not keep that law that his people might be lawless...His obedience provided no licence for our disobedience...The 'righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us' when we 'walk after the Spirit' in lowly conformity to Christ's example".¹² And as John Murray points out, "by the operations of grace there is no antinomy between the law as demanding and the Holy Spirit as energising";¹³ those who are filled with the Holy Spirit of God are Christlike, and are empowered to demonstrate the reality of their profession by a holy, consistent walk with God that delights in God's law and in honouring God's Word. The only way we can truly "keep in step with the Spirit", as Galatians 5:16 demands of us, is by being filled the more with a knowledge of the truth of God's Word, the right way, in which there is peace for our souls.

Guidance and Assurance

The sons of God, according to Romans 8:14, are "led" by the Spirit of God. They

are guided and conducted by the God who promised to lead his people in ways they had not known, to make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight (cf. Isaiah 42: 16). The children of God are not alone in this world. They know that their Heavenly Father has ordained all things for them, and will work all things together for their good.

But these great assertions of the Spirit's leading will not always clarify for the believer in any given situation the course or direction which he must take. Decisions must be taken. Choices must be made. How does the spiritual man know the mind of the Spirit on matters of personal choice?

There are several principles which must apply in every area of life. **First, the Holy Spirit will never contradict himself.** Paul applies this principle with ruthless logic in his treatment of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14, especially v32: "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets". Every spiritual gift must be assessed in the light of Scripture. We must exegete Acts in the light of Ephesians, and not the other way round. Pentecost was definitive, not normative. The ongoing work of the Spirit in the lives of God's people requires no new Pentecost but a continued filling and empowering. And the Holy Spirit in us will not contradict the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

In other words, the claim of some Christian sportsmen, for example, that God has given them guidance to play sport on His day, stands in marked opposition to the law and word of God. Does the Spirit bend the rules? Not at all – He speaks with a unified voice. He will give no guidance that will offer a concession over a Scriptural principle of doctrine or morality.

Second, the Holy Spirit will never cross Christ's path. In Him there is no un-Christlikeness. His work is to renew the image of Christ in the souls of God's people. All that there is in Christ of devotion to God, dependence upon God, purity and spotlessness of character, holy love and holy anger combined, sympathy and intercession, will be reflected in those who are guided by the Spirit of God.

Clearly, every circumstance that confronts the Christian is to be weighed up in the light of God's Providence, our own gifts and our usefulness to the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit will guide, but He never promises to give us signposts in the sky that clarify the guidance beyond all doubt. There is often a balance to be struck between looking for clear signs of spiritual guidance and using our own common sense, trusting that the Lord will keep us and bless us. The two extremes that are to be avoided are a view of guidance that relies on secret, personal promptings from the Spirit with no reference to the Bible at all and, on the other hand, a biblicist view of guidance that leaves no room for the working of the Spirit on a man's mind and will, planting desires and creating interests that will lead a man's life in a particular direction.

Similarly, with assurance of our salvation, the promise is that the Holy Spirit will testify, or bear witness to, our spirits that we are God's children (Romans 8:16). At the same time, we have to search the Scriptures to find Christ in them (John 5:39), and to "buy Christ in the covenant", to "work out our own salvation" (Philippians 2:12). With assurance of salvation comes Holy Spirit joy and peace, which describes the effect of the Gospel in 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6: "our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance...and you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit".

In Thessalonica, evidently, the phenomenon which occurred was this: Paul and his companions preached the Word, the Christ-centred, God-glorifying, salvation-displaying, Satan-threatening gospel, and the Spirit whose word it was accompanied it with power, assurance and joy. The Thessalonians embraced the truth claims of the gospel by the Spirit, persevered against opposition and in affliction by the Spirit, and knew in the depth of their hearts, through the ministry of the same Spirit, that they were indeed the people of God.

Whatever Paul means when he says that the Holy Spirit ministers with our spirits, he is talking of something deeply personal, and deeply moving. He is talking not of Christians who are alive *on* their feelings, but *in* their feelings. The tragedy with much modern Charismatic excess is that it leaves Christians often relying on feelings of exuberance, joy and satisfaction, plunging them into despair when the momentum cannot be kept up. The tragedy with much of our dead orthodoxy is that we are so often doctrinally precise and Biblically based that we leave no room for the stirring of the heart by the application of truth in the hands of the Holy Spirit of God.

The Puritans, as Leland Ryken observes, believed in “the *affective* power of the Bible”.¹⁴ Ryken quotes John Bunyan who discovered “his soul and Scripture .. to embrace each other, and a sweet correspondency and agreement between them”. The common factor in this sweet agreement is the Holy Spirit, taking of Christ’s things and revealing them to His people. So Thomas Brooks, in his treatise on assurance, *Heaven on Earth*, describes assurance as “a pearl that most want, a crown that few wear”, and defines it as “a sensible feeling and an experimental discerning of a man’s being in a state of grace, and of his having a right to a crown of glory; and this rises from the seeing in himself the special, peculiar and distinguishing graces of Christ, in the light of the Spirit of Christ, or from the testimony and report of the Spirit of God”.¹⁵

The Puritan treatment of assurance is dealt with thoroughly by Sinclair Ferguson in his *John Owen and the Christian Life*, (pp. 116-124). He quotes from Owen who made the important point that “it is indeed not any act of the Spirit in us that is the ground of our assurance, but the communication of the Spirit unto us”,¹⁶ by way of removing, as Ferguson puts it, “the suggestion of any theology of subsequence from his doctrine of the Christian life, without destroying the element of progression and development in experience of God”.¹⁷ Prof. Ferguson also refers to Thomas Goodwin’s distinction between assurance that is *discursive* and assurance that is *intuitive*, the former being assurance gathered from the effects of grace working through faith in the heart, and the latter being, in Goodwin’s own words, “light that cometh and overpowereth a man’s soul, and assureth him that God is his and he is God’s, and that God loveth him from everlasting”.¹⁸

The Puritans, experts in *felt* religion, have much to say to us in these areas. The Word of God comes not in word only. It is a living word, vibrant and affective. It kindles a fire by the power of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the child of God. There is life and spiritual movement. Richard Sibbes expresses it thus: “Those that have the Spirit of God are full of act and vigour...if a man have the Spirit of God in him, it will work in him; it is very operative”.¹⁹ Sibbes demonstrates the practical meaning of this by saying that “no man is ever spiritual but they are readers, and hearers, and conferrers of good things, and attenders upon the means of salvation, because God will work by his own tools and instruments”.²⁰

Revival

A final area of importance is that of revival, a subject much discussed and much misunderstood at the present time. There is no doubt that the church of Christ requires more than anything else in these days, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God in gospel blessing and in reviving power. Habakkuk prayed “O Lord, revive thy work.” (Hab. 3:2), and it is always the great prayer of the people of God.

The church experiences revival blessing at the interface of the power of the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The Word is always powerful, living and sharp whenever it is preached, never going forth without accomplishing God’s purpose (Isaiah 55:11). The Holy Spirit is always present with His people, blessing and encouraging them as they fulfil the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). But at times of special blessing the measure of the Holy Spirit’s power and presence is enlarged, and the gospel net drags many more fish into the kingdom than is usually the case.

There are two principles here. The first is that with the coming of the Holy Spirit, great attention is given in revival to the doctrines of the truth. There is evidence both ancient and modern that this is so. In his thoughts on the revival in New England, for example, Jonathan Edwards wrote that following the “strange alteration” in the manners and lifestyles of people with the coming of the Spirit, “through the greatest part of New England, the holy Bible is in much greater esteem and use than before. The great things contained in it are much more regarded, the subjects of meditation and conversation...Multitudes in New England have lately been brought to a new and great conviction of the truth and certainty of the things of the gospel...that the great doctrines of the gospel...are matters of undoubted truth”.²¹ Similarly, Rev. Murdo Macaulay, writing of the revival in the Isle of Lewis in 1934, states that the central observable fact during this period of spiritual awakening was a thirst for the Word of God, with no concession being made from the pulpit to “the stirred feelings of the listeners”.²²

Likewise the singular effect of the renewing, reviving times at the Reformation and during the Puritan movement was a desire to give men the Bible. Calvin insisted that the Spirit was promised “not to reveal a new doctrine, but to impress the truth of the Gospel on our minds”.²³ From this conviction sprang his labours on behalf of the common people and their right to the Bible, “to effect that these true Scriptural doctrines should be extensively disseminated...The Lord did this by His Spirit at the era of the Reformation, and He employed in doing it the instrumentality of the Reformers”.²⁴

In other words, the new outpourings of the Holy Spirit which we call revival, are not new revelations, or necessarily new insights, but the empowering of the old gospel message contained in the all-sufficient Scripture. The *locus* of the Holy Spirit is to be found in the doctrines of grace and their application to individuals; the *focus* of the Holy Spirit is the Lord Jesus Christ, in His glory and power to save. It is quite erroneous to regard religious phenomena as evidence of spiritual revival. The one distinguishing feature of genuine outpourings of grace is the exaltation of the Christ of the Scriptures.

The corollary is this: that revival can only be precipitated and preceded by the faithful exposition of truth. Calvin could speak in his day of there being “a great dispute as to the efficacy of the ministry”.²⁵ His words could be echoed today, when all around us we see gospel concerts, evangelistic crusades and celebrity gospel rallies displacing

the centrality of the ministry of the church. But every gospel minister is Christ's gift to His church (Ephesians 4:8-16), and as such we must realise that "God, the author of preaching, connects his Spirit with it..."²⁶ We are to labour faithfully, in word and doctrine, exalting Christ in the proclamation of the everlasting gospel, with the assurance that the Spirit will bless that gospel to men and women. We can neither call down the revival blessing nor engineer its advent. But we must proclaim Christ, showing Him to men as He is shown to us in the Word, and praying that the Lord will bless that message by the power and effect of His own Holy Spirit. For it is, as Wayne Grudem reminds us, "important that all our ministry be done *in the Holy Spirit...in an atmosphere of God's manifested presence*. That is why people in the New Testament can walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31), and why it is possible just to be 'in the Spirit', as John was on the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10, cf.4:2)".²⁷

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The Spirit in the Word – and beyond?

Christopher Bennett

The relationship between the Bible and the Holy Spirit has been a major issue in the Christian church for centuries – one only has to think of the Puritan period, or the struggles of Martin Luther with the Anabaptists. At the present time, as our culture becomes ever more subjectivist, intellectual thought about objective truth is increasingly despised. In the first part of this article I would like to indicate, with massive help from the 17th century theologian John Owen, the close relationship between the Spirit and the word in one particular way – what JI Packer has called “the external witness of the Spirit” in and by the word.¹ After that, I will issue a warning against merging or in any way identifying the Spirit and the word.

The Spirit in the word, according to John Owen

In Owen’s fascinating but more than ordinarily obscure treatise, *The reason of faith* (in vol.4 of the Goold-BOT edition of Owen’s works), his main subject is not *why* we believe but *why we should* believe; not what actually *causes* us to believe but what *warrants* us to. In his teaching he substantially agrees with Calvin, who deals with these subjects especially in his *Institutes*, book 1, chs. 7 and 8; but he goes a little beyond him, clarifying one aspect of the Spirit’s work that Calvin only pointed towards.

1. Owen goes along with the teaching of Calvin about the inner witness of the Spirit: we believe (not with a probable faith, not with a 51% confidence that on balance this is right) because God opens our eyes to see the manifest truth. His light is coming towards us from creation, from conscience and supremely from his word, but we are by nature blind because of sin. In grace he opens the eyes of our understanding: “Then he [the Lord] opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures”, Luke 24:45 (NIV). Owen comments on p. 57 of Vol. 4: “The work of the Holy Ghost unto this purpose consists in the saving *illumination* of the mind; and the effect of it is a *supernatural light*, whereby the mind is renewed: see Rom 12:2; Eph 1:18,19; 3:16-19”. It is called a “heart to understand, eyes to see, ears to hear,” Deut 29:4; the “opening of the eyes of our understanding,” Eph 1:18; the “giving of an understanding,” 1 Jn 5:20. Hereby we are enabled to discern the evidences of the divine original and authority of the Scripture that are in itself, as well as assent unto the truth contained in it; and without it we cannot do so, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,” 1 Cor 2:14; and unto this end it is written in the prophets that “we shall be all taught of God,” Jn 6:45. This inner witness is *in* us, not in the Bible or in the preaching. Calvin likewise talks about the need for the Spirit to seal the truth in our hearts by his inward witness, and says that the same Spirit who spoke through the prophets must penetrate into our hearts.²

2. However, the central matter in Owen’s treatise is “the external work of the same Holy Spirit, giving evidence in and by the Scriptures unto its own Divine original”.³

The inner work of the Spirit simply enables us to respond to his external work or speaking – just as eyesight enables us to see light that is there; without objective light even the best eyesight would produce no sight. Owen is saying that we should believe the Bible because it is the Spirit speaking in a way that makes it *obvious* that it is *God* speaking in a self-authenticating manner. So there is a corresponding truth to that of the *inner* witness of the Spirit: his *external* witness. The former could be misunderstood as subjectivism or mysticism: “I believe the Bible because God has personally told me it is true.” It is not as purely private as that implies; we say instead – if we agree with Owen – that we believe the Bible because it is manifestly God speaking; and we humbly thank him for enabling us to recognise his voice.

Owen sets out this teaching particularly in chs 5 and 6 of his treatise. On p. 70 he says, “We believe the Scripture to be the word of God with divine faith for its own sake only; or, our faith is resolved into the authority and truth of God only as revealing himself unto us therein and thereby. And this authority and veracity of God do infallibly manifest or evince themselves unto our faith, or our minds in the exercise of it, by the revelation itself in the Scripture, and no otherwise; or, “Thus saith the LORD,” is the reason why we ought to believe, and why we do so, why we believe at all in general, and why we believe any thing in particular. And this we call the formal object or reason of faith.” So the warrant for believing is that this is what God says! Owen then deals with the details under two headings but I think it is clearer to do so under 3.

a) The Bible is God speaking. 2 Tim 3:16 of course in effect asserts this by saying that all Scripture is God-breathed – his word from his mouth. The external witness of the Spirit means that what the Spirit is saying now to us, to the world and to the churches is the words and message of Scripture.

b) Scripture manifests itself to be God speaking. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path,” Ps 119:105 – you do not need another light or an argument to show you a light! It is its own light – this is also the point in R L Dabney’s article *The Bible its own witness*.⁴ Owen says (p. 74) that this is the reason why God requires faith and obedience from the whole of Israel in future generations just when they hear his law being read out, Deut 31:11-13. It must be that Scripture shows itself to be God speaking, otherwise such immediate faith and obedience would not be demanded. The same of course applies in the case of Luke 16:27-31: if they do not believe Moses and the prophets, the problem is in them, in their unbelief, not in any lack of evidence. The word carries its own evidence. “Now, this could not be spoken if the Scripture did not contain in itself the whole entire formal reason of believing; for if it has not this, something necessary unto believing would be wanting, though that [a confirming miracle] were enjoyed.”⁵

c) And *how* does Scripture evidence itself to be God’s word? What is the *nature* of this external witness of the Spirit? Basically two things: its own light shining, and then its effects. On the former, 2 Pet 1:19 and 2 Cor 4:4 can be mentioned in addition to the verse in Ps 119. But in particular Jer 23:28-29 is interesting: false prophecy is like straw and chaff, but God’s word is grain. “What has straw to do with grain?” (v. 28). They are different in their nature, and obviously so. This is the point that it would seem to me W Goold, the 19th century editor of Owen, failed to see, as revealed in his comments at the start of the treatise in the BOT edition: “The grounds on which it [Scripture] is

thus to be received resolve themselves into what is now known by the designation of the experimental evidence in favour of Christianity, – the renewing and sanctifying effect of divine truth on the mind” (in *Prefatory note*). These are the *effects* of Scripture, which is part of what Owen is saying, but it is not the whole of it. There is this sight of the objective, self-evidencing light of Scripture as God’s word. Give me Calvin rather than Goold! He says that Scripture gives as good evidence of its truth as black and white things do of their colour, and bitter and sweet things do of their taste.⁶ We are rendered as sure of Scripture’s divine origin as if we beheld God’s image visibly stamped on it.⁷

3. Now this does not mean that apologetics has no place. Indeed in ch. 4 of his treatise Owen gives about the clearest and best summary of the purpose, place, and nature of apologetics I have ever come across. He says that apologetics does not create faith but is very useful rubbish clearance, because the reason people do not believe is not only original sin but also prejudices stemming from “traditions, education and people’s converse in the world.” Apologetics can help in undermining people’s faith in some of these roadblocks that Satan has put in the way of them even considering the gospel. In a subsidiary way apologetics also helps in confirming the faith of believers when stupid things are said against the truth.

4. This central point (that the Bible is, manifestly, the Spirit speaking) delivers us from the element of uncertainty that attends even the finest apologetics. Ultimately we believe not because of *any* argument *about* the Bible, but rather because of God acting in the world, speaking, and enabling us to hear him. It delivers us from the subjectivism of only believing in the inner witness of the Spirit. And it delivers us too from that formalistic view of Scripture that focuses on its inerrancy, as if the Scripture is a book originally from God which he sometimes uses, when the Spirit chooses to. I call that a low and dead view of Scripture because if Owen is right and the Bible is God’s word, then the Bible is God speaking *now*: whenever it is read or heard or its teaching is being communicated, to some extent at least God himself, the Spirit himself is directly involved and is speaking. We have got so accustomed in evangelicalism to calling the Bible “God’s word” that we seem to have forgotten what that means: here God is speaking. This of course must be the reason why Jesus uttered those words in Jn 6:63: “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” Even Rom 1:16, “the gospel is the power of God for salvation”, is easier to understand in the light of Owen’s point about the external witness of the Spirit. Likewise with Heb 4:12. Packer makes something explicit that I believe is only implicit in Owen when he says, “Scripture through the covenanted action of the Holy Spirit, constantly ‘shines’...”⁸ In other words, the Spirit has covenanted faithfully to speak, to be involved, whenever the Scripture or its message is entering the minds of men.

The Puritans – certainly Owen and William Bridge – held that not only is the Bible itself God’s word, but anything else, especially a sermon, that communicates the truth of the Bible is. More importantly, the Bible sanctions their view in 1 Pet 4:11! It is as though the Bible is like undiluted squash in a bottle, preaching is with water added, for ordinary consumption. Owen says, “...whatever by just consequence is drawn from the Word of God, is itself also the Word of God, and truth infallible. And to deprive the church of this liberty in the interpretation of the Word, is to deprive it of the chiefest benefit intended by it. This is that on which the whole ordinance of preaching is founded;

which makes that which is derived out of the Word to have the power, authority, and efficacy of the Word accompanying it. Thus, though it be the proper work and effect of the Word of God to quicken, regenerate, sanctify and purify the elect, – and the Word primarily and directly is only that which is written in the Scriptures, – yet we find all these effects produced in and by the preaching of the Word, when perhaps not one sentence of the Scripture is *verbatim* repeated. And the reason hereof is, because whatsoever is directly deduced and delivered according to the mind and appointment of God from the Word is the Word of God, and hath the power, authority, and efficacy of the Word accompanying it.”⁹

A further consequence of this high, dynamic view of Scripture as the voice of God today is that we are assured that Spurgeon was right when he said that he would rather defend a lion than the Bible. We should just let the lion out of the cage. This is a wonderful incentive for proclamation in preaching, i.e. preaching that is *not* just explaining what the text says and showing people how to apply it to their lives, and hoping they will believe it and sometimes giving some reasons why they really ought to believe it. Preaching is centrally an authoritative declaring of the word of God in his name, done by an ambassador of Christ. And the very message we convey shows it is God who is speaking. So speak, don't be ashamed, shine God's light.

Furthermore, if we write articles and commentaries we ought to make it plain, not only in some other book we have written or in a lecture we gave at the South Pole, that we believe the Bible anyway because it is God's word. Otherwise, even if our conclusions are evangelical, our method of argument and of communication with the reader is dishonouring to the Holy Spirit; it is unbelieving, rationalistic. The next step down from reaching Christian conclusions by rationalistic means is to reach some rationalistic conclusions. I confess to shuddering sometimes at the method of argument in some helpful evangelical writing. It is like watching an escapologist: how *will* he get out of this straightjacket of humanistic assumptions and come up with an orthodox answer? But often, lo and behold, he does – after all, the book is *published* by evangelicals!

5. Two obvious questions arise from such teaching. First, what about 1 Thess 1:5 “...our gospel came to you not simply with words, but ...with the Holy Spirit”? Isn't that implying that we can have the word *only*, without the Spirit's involvement at all? No, I believe that is reading too much into Paul. If it is God's word that is going forth, then the Spirit *is* speaking. Paul must be envisaging some situations in which those preaching the word know so little help that nobody unsaved is paying any attention – in that case the Spirit is not speaking to the unconverted; or he may have in mind times when none of those hearing the word are given the Spirit's enlightenment, he is not working *in* them, with his inner witness. But to draw from 1 Thess 1 the idea that people can be hearing Scripture preached and the Spirit is not speaking at all is to build far too much on a statement of Scripture only about what is *not* the case.

The second question that arises is “Do we need the Spirit, if the word is always God speaking? Do we need to pray earnestly for his outpouring on gospel work?” Emphatically “Yes”, because how clearly and powerfully the message is put across depends on the Spirit's help given to the preacher. How many people pay attention to the message depends on his work in the situation and in them. Whether people

understand and respond to the message they have heard depends on the Spirit's work in them – the inner witness again.

The Spirit beyond the word?

Now that we have seen the Spirit's involvement with the word, to give us a dynamic view of Scripture, it is necessary to dissuade Christians from merging the Spirit into the word or from being people more of the word than of the Spirit. Rom 7:6 says "...by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the letter." (NIV)

1. The Spirit is needed in the hearers as well as in the word. The Lord opened Lydia's heart in Acts 16: it was not enough to hear Paul preach, however much the Spirit may have been with him. This highlights the need of the Spirit's free, sovereign inner witness, already mentioned.

2. When the Spirit works in us, he works – as some of our forefathers put it – not just through the word but *with* the word, i.e. he himself works directly in the heart. It is not just the word that actually "touches" our souls, but God does so, immediately. As Charles Hodge puts it in his *Systematic Theology*, "...the truth (in the case of adults) attends the work of regeneration, but is not the means by which it is effected... Men see by the light, without light vision is impossible. Yet the eyes of the blind are not opened by means of the light. In like manner all the states and acts of consciousness preceding or attending, or following regeneration, are by the truth; but regeneration itself, or the imparting spiritual life, is by the immediate agency of the Spirit".¹⁰ Jn 3:1-8 and Eph 1:17-19 show that he must be right. This is one note that I was sorry to miss in Sinclair Ferguson's generally superb recent book on the Holy Spirit. I felt I saw Pelagius' shadow flitting across the background of his chapter on the new birth.

3. Does the Spirit work without the word, without using the Scripture or teaching derived from it? Well, Scripture itself says that God speaks through creation, in Ps 19 and Rom 1:19ff. Furthermore it is obvious that an event such as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD must have shed a lot of light on the passages in the gospels that predicted that dire event. God showed people, in his providence, what the Bible meant. And if creation and providence shed light for us upon God, upon his dealings with us, the meaning of Scripture, and his will, why should his gracious actings *by the Spirit* in our lives not reveal something to us about him and his ways? Even BB Warfield, interestingly, was prepared to see the sources of theology as being not Scripture alone, but "...we accept all these sources of knowledge of God – nature, providence, Christian experience – as true and valid sources, the well-authenticated data yielded by these are to be received by us as revelations of God, and as such to be placed alongside of the revelations in the written Word and wrought with them into one system".¹¹

So revelation is bigger than Scripture, even if Scripture has a unique, authoritative role as defining what is true revelation; and the work of the Spirit, including his revealing work, is not exclusively through the word. Whether the Spirit nowadays gives what Scripture calls "prophecies", regularly or even occasionally, is another question, albeit an interesting and important one, upon which I had better not enter now.

4. Lastly, and most importantly, we must acknowledge that the Spirit is not the word, and the Spirit is God and the word is not; and therefore the Spirit, the living God

himself, must occupy that place of supremacy and centrality in our lives that even his holy word does not. Let no evangelical accustomed to calling Scripture “the word” be misled thereby into thinking that Jn 1:1-2 is in any way telling us that the Bible is God or we can treat it as if it is God! There is such a thing as bibliolatry, and the more we get terrified by various forms of mysticism, the more we are likely to fall into it. I come back to Rom 7:6 again: surely it is saying something about relating to the living God, not just to his word, and also about treating his word not mainly as a book of rules about what to believe, what to do and what not to do, but as a revelation of his powerful, active, supernatural grace. Warfield describes what happened among the Jews in the period between the Testaments as the development or slide that led eventually to the Pharisees: “...the idea of law more and more absorbed the whole sphere of religious thought, and piety came to be conceived more and more as right conduct before God instead of living communion with God”.¹²

“The Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants” said William Chillingworth. In the sphere of authoritative, infallible revelation he was right. Indeed the Bible is more than infallible, inerrant, and a test of everything that claims to be revelatory: it is God speaking, in a living, dynamic, positive, edifying and powerful way. But understood in any other sense, the statement is wrong – this may have something to do with the fact that Chillingworth was one of Laud’s Oxford informers, and had converted to and then back from Roman Catholicism! It would be nearer the mark to say “the Spirit alone, and communion with the living God in him, is the religion of Protestants”. I am therefore suggesting that if we want a controlling model of what the Christian life is all about, it is to be found not in following the Bible, being biblical, right belief, or right conduct, but in communion with God, in the wide sense that includes but is not restricted to the felt fellowship of the heart with him. And I trust that a reading of John’s gospel and his letters would prove me right.

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- ³ *op.cit.* p. 102.
- ⁴ RL Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, repr. 1982, vol 1, pp. 115ff
- ⁵ *op. cit.* p. 76.
- ⁶ *op. cit.* 1.7.2.
- ⁷ *ibid.* 1.7.5.
- ⁸ *op. cit.* p. 119.
- ⁹ J Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Goold, repr. 1990, vol 3, p. 147.
- ¹⁰ in part 3 (not vol 3), ch. 14, sec. 4.
- ¹¹ BB Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, 1932, p. 59.
- ¹² BB Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines*, 1929, p. 28.

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Exegesis 22: The gospel in Word and power

Paul Brown

A consideration of 1 Thessalonians 1:5 with its relevance to our preaching

The book of Acts only gives us a snapshot of Paul's preaching at Thessalonica. 1 Thessalonians gives us a far broader picture of the impact of the gospel there, and its effect throughout the whole region (see chapters 1 and 2). 1:5 is a thrilling summary of what happened when Paul preached.

I

The opening word, *hoti*, ("for" NKJV) directs us to the previous verse. As Eadie puts it, v.5 "assigns the grounds on which the assertion begun with *eidotes* [i.e. knowing] rested."¹ *Hoti* is either causal, "because", or exegetical, "how that"; either understanding gives much the same sense.² Interpretation of this verse must be based on its connection with v.4.

"Our", in "our gospel", focuses attention on the content of the gospel message. It is the message received by Paul which he and his colleagues believed and preached, the essential elements of which are discoverable from his preaching in Acts, and his letters. "Gospel" carries with it associations about the manner in which it is presented. You do not lecture about "gospel"; good news is not to be presented dispassionately, half-heartedly or apologetically. The verbs that belong with "gospel" are seen in the Acts account, "reason", "explain", "prove", "proclaim", "persuade" (Acts 17:2-4; NIV). "Gospel" also implies a situation which is sad and tragic, into which it comes as a message of hope and gladness, a message whose reception is marked particularly by joy (v.6).³ Those who bring good news do all they can to urge it upon those who need it.

II

The word *egenethe* is unexpected. The Revised English Bible (REB) appears to take it with "our" and translates "when we brought you the gospel we did not bring it in mere words", and this translation is supported by Louw and Nida.⁴ On the other hand Hiebert⁵ says, "Paul's emphasis upon the gospel itself, not the messengers, is further evident from the fact that he says 'our gospel came... unto you' rather than 'we came to you with the gospel'". Many other writers agree with this. The word is used twice more in verses 5 and 6, "what kind of men we *were*" (v.5), and "you *became* followers of us" (v.6). In all three instances there is an emphasis on the verb. 'Came' is the correct translation here, and there is a certain forcefulness about the word.

eis, "to", "into", rather than *pros* or *en* may suggest that the gospel gained an entry *into* the hearts of the Thessalonians. Too much emphasis ought not to be placed on prepositions, but the context suggests that this is so.

The gospel did not come in word only, but it did come in word. It was a message

concerning Jesus Christ expressed in words addressed to the mind, and through the mind to the consciences, emotions and wills of the Thessalonians. Because the gospel was not in word only, but also in power etc., it reached the innermost soul of the Thessalonians producing a transformation in them.

In these days “Word” is used with a particular nuance to mean “Word of God”. However, “word” here simply means “message” or “words”. It would introduce a completely erroneous polarity to read this verse as if it said, “Our gospel did not come to you in Word only, but also in power...” Discussions about Word and Spirit need to be especially careful at this point.

It is improbable that Paul intends us to think in terms of just two possibilities; either the gospel comes in word only, or else it also comes in power etc. Do we not have here the two extremes of what might be called a sliding scale? Paul was accustomed to preach the gospel with the Holy Spirit’s power, and took steps to try and ensure that this was the case (1 Cor 2:1-5). In Thessalonica the gospel came with particular power, “much assurance”, *plerophoria polle*. It is doubtful whether Paul actually envisaged the possibility of preaching the gospel “in word only” (cf. 2:13), though he does say that dressing it up in words of human wisdom would rob it of its power (cf. 1 Cor 1:17). Even in Athens where some scoffed, others said they would listen to him again, and some believed, including a member of the Areopagus and a prominent woman (Acts 17:32-34). His general attitude is expressed in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

III

There is a textual variation in the phrase “but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance”. This study follows the text of UBS 3⁶ by including *en* before *plerophoria*. Fee argues for its omission, maintaining that “one can offer no reasonable explanation for its omission by scribes”. On the other hand he can only offer Aleph, B, 33 and lat. for textual support and this seems perilously thin.⁷ He then maintains that the second *kai* should be understood exegetically, “but also with power, *namely*, with the Holy Spirit and full conviction”. Calvin links “in power and in the Holy Spirit” together as a hendiadys to mean “in the power of the Holy Ghost”⁸, but this is almost certainly a mistake. Eadie says, “The second *kai* is not exegetical, but in the phrase *en Pneumati hagio* it has an ascensive force, and the second clause says something much fuller and higher than the first.”⁹

Does *dunamei* refer to miracles that accompanied the preaching? Lunemann says, “By *dunamis* is not to be understood miracles by which the power of the preached gospel was attested...; for if so, the plural would have been necessary...”¹⁰ Fee points out that though miracles would have accompanied the preaching, “the *primary* emphasis in v.5 seems to be on Paul’s Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel that brought about their conversion.”¹¹ There can be little doubt that this is right. Signs and wonders do not guarantee conversions, nor can they be adduced as evidence of the election of those who witnessed them.

Plerophoria is used four times in the New Testament. Even without its accompanying adjective it means “full assurance”, “certainty”.¹² By adding *polle* Paul expresses

considerable emphasis. Translations include “full assurance”, “deep conviction” (NIV), “complete certainty” (Louw and Nida), and “full persuasion” (Eadie).

IV

Does “in power...” refer to Paul’s experience in preaching, or to the Thessalonians’ as they heard? Did Paul experience *plerophoria* or the Thessalonians? Eadie takes up what Paul says about knowing the Thessalonians’ election, “And he knew it on two grounds – first, a subjective ground, from the memory of his own consciousness in preaching; his own recollections of divine assistance poured in upon him as he proclaimed the truth... Secondly, an objective ground, their immediate and cordial reception of the truth, ‘and ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction and in joy of the Holy Ghost.’”¹³ Verse 5 presents the subjective ground; verse 6 the objective.

Commenting on the words “much assurance” Eadie adds, “But the meaning is that they preached at once in the full persuasion of the truth of the gospel,... This inborn assurance, combined with the Spirit’s inworking and the powerful utterance vouchsafed to them, were to them a token that there were in their audiences those whom they could soon recognise as God’s elect...”¹⁴ But can a preacher really know that God has his elect among his hearers by feelings of assurance and power experienced when preaching? Is it not possible for the Spirit to be resisted when the preaching comes in power (Acts 7:51)? May not a preacher speak in weakness, fear and much trembling and yet be surprised by many conversions? It is, of course, possible to hold that Paul is referring both to his own assurance and that of the Thessalonians, and many writers suggest this. Certainly Fee seems right to say that these phrases refer to the “Spirit-empowered *effectiveness*”¹⁵ of Paul’s preaching. Bruce seems to identify the primary referent when he says, “The reference is to the Thessalonians’ deep inward persuasion of the truth of the gospel, a token of the Holy Spirit’s work in their hearts.”¹⁶

One of the reasons Eadie and others understand verses 5 and 6 as they do is the final clause of v. 5, “as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” Doesn’t this show that the focus of v. 5 is entirely on the preachers? Not necessarily. Bruce, whose comment on *plerophoria* we have already seen, adds at this point, “The spiritual power and conviction with which the message was received matched the spiritual power and conviction with which it was delivered.”¹⁷ This, however, probably still misses the mark. Fee understands the clause as a parenthesis, pointing out that the structure is, “our gospel came (*egenethe*) to you... and you became (*egenethete*) imitators of us”.¹⁸ Its main purpose is to prepare for what Paul is going to say about the Thessalonians imitating them and the Lord. We tend to forget that those living in pagan cities had never seen Christians before Paul and his colleagues visited them. In an important footnote Fee says, “Indeed, his calling on his converts to “imitate” him as he “imitated” Christ is almost certainly the key to the ethical instructions given in his churches, where they have no “book” to follow. 1 Cor.11:1 provides the starting point: Paul considered himself a follower of the example and teaching of Christ; his following Christ then served as a ‘model’ for his churches, who in turn, as in v.7 in our present passage makes clear, became ‘models’ for one another.”¹⁹

The final clause does not then directly refer to the Spirit-effective preaching of Paul,

and the earlier part of the verse applies primarily to the Thessalonians because:

- a) Paul is talking about the way in which “our gospel” *came “to you”*.
- b) “Much assurance” on the part of the preachers would not necessarily give any certainty that the hearers were chosen by God.
- c) When the gospel came with much assurance into the hearts of the Thessalonians, so that they welcomed the word, were filled with joy by the Spirit, and were prepared to suffer affliction (v.6), this was real evidence of their election.

V

Does the text help in understanding exactly how this work of the Spirit took place in the Thessalonians? Did the Spirit work primarily through the speakers, in the hearers, or through the gospel itself? While we must beware of unnecessarily compartmentalising aspects of the Spirit’s work which belong together, there are implications for our thinking and praying that hang on the answer.

We naturally tend to focus on what Paul says of himself; both because we want to learn from him and because we hope that if we become more like him the results of our preaching will be more like his! Obviously there is much we can learn. “What kind of men we were” is amplified in 2:1-12, i.e. men full of the joy of the Holy Spirit in the midst of opposition, bold in God to speak the gospel (2:2) – thus assured of its power to save – men of integrity (2:3-6) gentleness (2:6,7), love (2:8,11), and self-sacrifice (2:9). Yet becoming like that, greatly desirable though it is, cannot guarantee that what happened at Thessalonica will be repeated now in any given situation.

In the text “power” seems closely associated with “gospel”; “Our gospel came, not in word only, but in power...” John Woodhouse, in a chapter subtitled, “Preaching and the Holy Spirit”, comments on this verse, “Paul is describing one experience, what they experienced when ‘our gospel came’. The gospel is never just words.” And having also quoted 2:13 he says, “The gospel comes in power and in the Holy Spirit precisely because it is the Word of God. Notice, too, that Paul says that this Word of God is at work “in you who believe”. Paul can equally say that God is at work “in us” by his Spirit. These are not two works of God, but one. It is by his Word that God’s Spirit is at work.”²⁰ This contrasts rather pointedly with the exposition of Dr Lloyd-Jones, “The first thing is the message that was preached. ‘Our Gospel came unto you not in word only,’ that is the message. But there was this other factor, ‘not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance’. Now there are the two things: the message and the power of the Spirit upon it.”²¹

There is much to be said for Woodhouse’s view. The gospel is always the power of God for the salvation of those who believe. It is not just “word”; it is Word of God; it is the Spirit who speaks it (Heb 3:7). Conversion is the result of the invasive, life-giving power of the Word. The Word is like a seed; it has innate power which brings new life and new birth (1 Peter 1:23; James 1:18). But Woodhouse’s view, or his exposition of it, is inadequate. At Thessalonica something took place which did not – and does not – always happen. Moreover this preaching demonstrated the election of the Thessalonians. The gospel would itself still have been the same – perhaps Paul’s persuasion of its efficacy would have been the same – but if the Thessalonians had not been chosen of God the gospel would not have come in the way it did.

What happened at Thessalonica cannot simply be ascribed to the implicit power of the gospel. The gospel, powerful though it is, is always resisted by the unregenerate heart. It is probably right to see the power of the Spirit as coming with and through the message, but it came with *conquering* power because these were the elect, beloved by God. The gospel is the power of God: it would be a mistake to separate the gospel from the living, active God who speaks it and speaks through it by his Spirit to call those dead in their sins to new life in his Son.

This verse reminds us that Spirit-effective preaching is gloriously possible. It should raise our expectation and stir our prayers. The gospel is powerful through the Spirit as an instrument in the hands of a sovereign God who uses it to save those whom he has chosen. The wonder of it is that such a gospel is entrusted to us to preach (2:4).

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A spirituality of Word and Spirit for a post-modern world

Andrew Paterson

We are at a significant time in human history. For the last 220 years our thinking has been shaped by the assumptions of that period which historians call the Enlightenment, with its emphasis upon human reason and its exaggerated optimism about human potential. It is a period that elevated the potential of the mind above the necessity for God's revelation. It encouraged the view that science and human achievement give a god-like capacity for understanding and controlling the world. Such arrogance has not only witnessed astounding technological advance, it has also seen a collapse of morality, resulting in horrendous brutality and horrific degradation. A major by-product of this period where rationalism reigned supreme, has been the fracturing of knowledge and life into increasingly minute compartments. Everything has been coolly dissected and separated from its other component parts and as a result genuine evangelical spirituality, with its emphasis upon the comprehensive grace of God, has been severely disabled, and for the last 200 years has shown stunted growth.

Yet something is happening. The Enlightenment has been slowly dying for the last 20 years and is on the point of expiring. Rationalism has been exposed as phoney and its presuppositions knocked away. Peter Drucker, the management guru, wrote in the *Harvard Business Review* – “Every few hundred years throughout Western history, a sharp transformation has occurred. In a matter of decades society altogether rearranges itself – its worldview, its basic values, its social and political structures, its art, its key institutions. Fifty years later a new world exists. And the people born into that world cannot even imagine the world into which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. Our age is such a transformation.”

As a result of these changes many believers are re-discovering spirituality. For some, it has never been lost but for others, shaped by the mind-set of the age, there comes the discovery that genuine spirituality should no longer be derided as ineffective and irrelevant. Assumptions that we made twenty years ago have been radically challenged. Our whole mind-set is undergoing a re-tuning operation. God's word has not changed but the way that we approach God's inerrant, all-sufficient word has probably been changing. But this change is not a journey out into the unknown, rather it is a journey back into the riches that have been so long neglected. It is to be approached not with fear but with excitement.

It is my major contention that genuine spirituality consists in a re-discovery of the cohesive and comprehensive nature of the grace of God in the life of a believer. It rejects the isolating, fracturing and compartmentalising effects of the last two centuries, and looks back to the time of the Puritans and Pietists, when there was an approach that was far healthier, vibrant, holistic, real, scriptural and God-honouring.

There are **three main areas** where this must be worked out. **Firstly**, we must rediscover the comprehensive nature of God's grace. By this I mean there are significant areas of our experience that may have been unconsciously excluded from the far reaching effects of God's grace. It was Martin Luther who insisted that Christianity is concerned with "*totus homo*" – the entire human person. Of course, he had an excellent precedent for saying so – it was Christ himself who said, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength". During the last 200 years, however, Protestants have placed great stress on a coolly detached intellectualism, that has separated the use of the mind from the other faculties of our human personalities. As Bruce Demarest wrote "Protestantism suffers from the scourge of intellectualism when it believes that deepest human needs can be satisfied by right thinking about God." And Martin Kelsey observed, "In Protestantism, God became a theological idea known by inference rather than a reality known by experience".

I am not arguing for an anti-intellectualism. We do not need to think less, on the contrary, we need to use our minds more. But when we truly do so, when we begin to comprehend the stench of our sinfulness and the wonder and vastness of Christ's saving grace, then this will transfuse every part of our being. There will be tears of repentance, or there will be the overflowing joy of forgiveness. We will not be ashamed of those legitimate displays of emotion that flow directly from our understanding of God's truth. We will not brand as passionate, fanatical or Welsh anyone whose response to God's truth bursts through that cool English reserve. And of course, the way we approach God's word will be with a greater hunger and expectation than has previously been the case with so many. We will not read it simply to get sermon ideas or answers to questions that might pop up in some game of Religious Trivial Pursuits ("what was the name of Abraham's chief servant?"). Rather we will read God's word in the expectation that the living God will meet us there, and that such a meeting will not only stimulate the mind, it will move the heart and challenge the will. Alister McGrath commented, "Intellectual resilience must be supplemented by a spiritual vitality. As evangelicalism moves to claim the intellectual high ground in Western Christianity, there is a real danger that in scaling these heights of the human mind, it may neglect the needs of the human heart."

We must be very careful, therefore, that we understand genuine spirituality as comprehending both a rugged, clear and rigorous understanding of God's word alongside those appropriate responses of the emotions, spirit and will. We must never elevate one above the other but must wrestle to hold them all in a proper equilibrium. We will therefore be careful about those who manipulate the emotions whilst telling us to empty our minds, as we will equally be concerned about those who promote truth as something which can be coolly detached from the rest of our human personality.

Secondly, another effect upon us of the Enlightenment's fracturing philosophy can be seen in the way that family life and spiritual responsibilities have become uncomfortably divorced from each other. It would appear that many children from Christian homes learn more about God from their school assemblies and from their Sunday School teachers than from their parents. We have copied the individualism of the age, and have failed to see a godly overflow into every area of family relations. Sadly, so few men seem to pray for their wives or with their wives. So few give care

and attention to the nurture of their partner's spiritual life. So few share and talk openly about the things of God. There is an embarrassment and a reticence. It does not seem to be the "natural" thing to do.

The *Directory for Family Worship* (written by the Westminster Assembly in 1647) suggests what should happen in homes after Sunday morning worship, "The public worship being finished after prayer, the master of the family should take an account of what they have heard; and thereafter to spend the rest of the time which they may spare in catechising, and in spiritual conferences upon the word of God: or else (going apart) they ought to apply themselves to reading, meditation, and secret prayer, that they may confirm and increase their communion with God: so that the profit which they found in the public ordinances may be cherished and promoted, and they more edified unto eternal life." Tragically, many of our children are not seeing the natural overflow of godliness into every area of family life. Mum and Dad have been infected by the spirit of the age and relegate spiritual affections to being a private matter.

Alongside the fracturing effects of the Enlightenment came the isolating effects of the Industrial Revolution. Rural communities were decimated as factories sprang up, with their need for a large, localised work force. Thus work no longer revolved around the home, and women increasingly had to take the lead in teaching moral and spiritual values to the children as fathers found their employment away from the home situation. The home, in a sense, became privatised. In this way, spiritual and religious convictions were left behind at the front door of the home or church, and the factory, office or community at large was not considered to be the place where one's faith should intrude. Sadly this division still remains with so many. We fail to be salt or light. We prefer the comfort and security of our own ghettos. How different were the Puritans who saw no such distinctions. The grace of God was to be experienced and expressed in every part of life. Richard Baxter, in his massive work *The Christian Directory* gives instructions about every area of life, i.e. Vol. 1 is entitled – The Christian Ethic, Vol. 2 – Christian Economics; Vol. 3 – Christian Ecclesiastics; Vol. 4 – Christian Politics.

Having suggested that the death of the enlightenment provides an opportunity to rediscover the breadth of God's grace in human experience, **my third contention** is that this point in time gives us the opening to reclaim the heritage of our godly forbears that has been buried by the pride of the preceding 200 years of western history.

Whereas many who come from Catholic and Orthodox backgrounds are steeped in a knowledge and understanding of their so-called spiritual heritage, the sad truth is that many of our own young people are not acquainted with the gloriously rich heritage that is theirs. Few truly appreciate that within this country just three to four centuries ago, there blossomed one of the richest flowerings of godly preaching, writing, and living that the world has ever seen. Unfortunately, the antiquated style of much that was written by the Puritans has made them inaccessible to people today and it is high time that the task of modernising their works was pursued with greater diligence, rather than our being content that we are among the elite few who can follow a John Owen sentence through to its conclusion!

It is the Puritans holistic approach to experiencing God's grace which strikes a chord with many who keenly feel the vacuum left by the Enlightenment's demise. The Puritans revelled in a grace so glorious, from a God so holy and powerful, bought by a Saviour

so loving, and mediated by the Spirit so gentle, that it could do no other than shape and control their whole lives. They had such an apprehension of the majesty and beauty of God, and such a deep-seated loathing for sin, that they were characterised by a humility, purpose and seriousness which shames us in our trivialities today.

My plea, however, for a re-discovery of a genuine evangelical spirituality in view of the Enlightenment's death, carries with it **certain warnings**. We must always remember that human nature is fallen and stained with sin in every area. As we write about the experience and outworking of God's life in us, we must exercise care. New-agers will seek to hijack genuine spirituality and make it a vehicle for self-indulgent, self-glorifying, irrational, feel-good philosophies, whilst some mystics will seek to bypass the legitimate processes of the mind, and marry their intuitive feelings with an existential encounter. As a result of the gross contamination by the spirit the age, some church groups will emphasise subjective emotionalism; others will emphasise objective intellectualism; some will place great stress on individual effort; others will encourage dependence on the gifts and insights of the community; some will advocate the use of silence, others the use of techno raves. But this should not surprise us, for even among the groups we have commended, there were also evident failings that arose as one truth was unduly elevated above another. We will do well to learn the lessons of history and avoid the mistakes of the past.

For example, there were complaints that the Pietist movement in continental Europe was indifferent to doctrine, that it was not sufficiently interested in the visible order of the church, and that it was even shifting the emphasis from God to man. And such criticisms were valid. With the Puritans in Britain, it has been observed that there was an unbalanced emphasis on sin and repentance, without the corresponding emphasis on grace and forgiveness. Ironically, a side-effect of this was to produce a spiritual insecurity, and insufficient stress on the assurance of salvation and the perseverance of the saints. Additionally, as the Puritan movement lost its original Holy Spirit driven power, some sought to legislate for activities that had previously been prompted by the Spirit through the Word. But legalism can never be a substitute for life and even the most godly of directories produced by the Puritans to guide believers in their spiritual life became vehicles for a dead orthodoxy.

If such towering giants of spiritual life could be in error at times, what hope do we pygmies have? Well, ultimately our dependence must be upon the Word and the Spirit. If ever we are to re-discover our rich evangelical heritage and apply it with wisdom, insight and relevance, we must cry out to God in our utter need. We must seek to read, understand and apply God's word, as free from our cultural baggage as it is possible to be. Though these are confusing days of change they present an opportunity for evangelicals which must not be missed. Let us not mourn the passing of the Enlightenment with its arrogant optimism, rather let us commit ourselves to the re-discovery and enjoyment of God's super-abundant grace in Christ.

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Richard Baxter

on present-day revelations of God's will

Nick Needham

When John Hus, the Bohemian reformer of the 15th century, was condemned to death by the Catholic Church in 1415, he said: "You may roast this goose [Hus means 'goose'], but in a hundred years a swan will arise whose singing you will not be able to silence." Almost exactly a hundred years later, in 1517, Martin Luther wrote his 95 theses which sparked off the Protestant Reformation. Did Hus, prompted by the Holy Spirit, utter a predictive prophecy? We might perhaps question the authenticity of the record, and argue that Hus' "prophecy" is a Protestant legend. However, the interesting thing is that Luther himself believed it, and appealed to it in support of his own career. "St John Hus prophesied of me, writing out of prison to Bohemia: 'Now shall they roast a goose' (for Hus means a goose), 'but a hundred years hence they shall hear a swan sing, that they shall be forced to endure.' So must it be, God willing." It seems, then, that one can believe in the possibility of post-apostolic predictive prophecy without being a charismatic, for Luther was certainly not of that ilk. No second-blessing theology of the Spirit in any form found favour with Luther, nor any view of the Spirit's work in believers which involved "ecstasy" (short-circuiting the mind's rationality), nor any belief in glossolalia as a necessary or desirable gift, nor any acceptance of modern-day apostles or even prophets (the distinction between the *office of prophet* and the *possibility of prophecy* we will touch on later).

Or let us consider John Calvin. In his *Life of Calvin*, prefixed to Calvin's *Letters*, Theodore Beza (Calvin's distinguished successor at Geneva) records the following incident:

"One thing must not be omitted, that on the nineteenth of December [1562], Calvin lying in bed sick of the gout, and the north wind having blown two days strongly [*i.e.* in a direction which could not carry sound from Paris to Geneva], he said to many who were present, 'Truly I know not what is the matter, but I thought this night I heard warlike drums beating very loud, and I could not persuade myself but it was so. Let us therefore go to prayers, for surely some great business is in hand.' And this day there was a great battle fought between the Guisians [Catholic followers of the duke of Guise] and the Protestants not far from Paris, news whereof came to Geneva within a few days after."

There is no reason to doubt the historicity of this account. Beza clearly believed it. So it seems possible to accept the possibility of clairvoyance without being a charismatic, as most certainly neither Calvin nor Beza were.¹

I want to suggest in this article that Protestant history offers an interesting "third way" regarding present-day revelations, occupying middle ground between a) the charismatic movement, and b) what (for the sake of argument) I will call an ultra-cessationist position which would condemn Hus, Luther, Calvin and Beza as

charismatics, or at least sadly deluded, for having accepted *any* experiences of predictive prophecy and clairvoyance. The most clear-thinking exponent of this third way was the great 17th century Puritan divine, Richard Baxter (1615-91). Baxter explores the whole subject at some length in his *Christian Directory*. He had encountered the claim to predictive prophecy, clairvoyance, and other forms of “personal” revelation and guidance, in the context of the spiritual upheavals of the English Civil War and Commonwealth period, when mighty preaching, true spirituality, dubious claims and strange sects both abounded and intermingled. Baxter’s treatment of the topic is stimulating, to say the least. Let us follow him through it and allow one of the most luminous theological-pastoral minds in Christian history to clarify our own thinking. The material is found in the *Christian Directory*, question 140, on page 720 of the Soli Deo Gloria reprint.

First Baxter states the question:

May we not look that God should yet give us more revelations of his will, than there are already made in Scripture?

Before answering the question, Baxter pauses to make some vital distinctions:

You must distinguish between (i) new laws or covenants to mankind, and new predictions or informations of a particular person; (ii) between what may possibly be, and what we may expect as certain or probable.

In other words, there are four distinct questions. First, might God ever give new revelations which add to the ethical guidelines or theological beliefs already contained in Scripture? Second, might God ever predict things *about* an individual, or reveal things *to* an individual, which fall outside the categories specified in the first question, for the individual’s personal guidance, by means of some new revelation (however conceived)? Third, what is theoretically *possible* in this second case? And fourth, by contrast with abstract possibility, what do we have Scriptural warrant *positively to expect*, as either a certainty or a probability, regarding this kind of guidance for believers?

Having cleared the decks, Baxter proceeds to reflect on the questions thus enumerated. He begins with the most serious: the possibility of God revealing truths which add to the ethical guidelines or theological beliefs of Scripture:

It is certain that God will make no other covenant, testament, or universal law, for the government of mankind or the church, as a rule of duty and of judgment. Because he hath oft told us that this [new] covenant and law is perfect and shall be in force as our rule till the end of the world.

Baxter cites Galatians 1:7-9, Matthew 20:28 and 2 Thessalonians 1:10-11. Any alleged revelation of a new moral duty, or a new theological doctrine, binding on mankind or the church, would contradict the sufficiency and perfection of the new covenant and its Scriptures, as clearly asserted by themselves. As Jude says, we are to “contend earnestly for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Anyone who adds to the substance of the faith violates its finality. There is simply no room for a Joseph Smith and a book of Mormon, or any pretensions to *that* species of

new revelation. Baxter's reasoning would also rule out Montanism from the early church era, with its claims to new and binding ethical revelations about how believers were to live in the light of the supposedly imminent return of Christ (a false prophecy, if ever there was one).

Baxter continues:

It is certain that God will make no new scripture or inspired word as an infallible universal rule for the exposition of the word already written. For (i) this were an addition which he hath disclaimed; (ii) it would imply such an insufficiency in the gospel as to its ends (as not being intelligible) as is contrary to its asserted perfection; (iii) it would be contrary to that established way for the understanding of Scripture which God hath already settled and appointed for us till the end (Eph. 1:18-19).

Baxter will have no dealings with any claim to be able to interpret a passage of Scripture by an appeal to a personal revelation – “God told me that this verse means such-and-such.” This is by no means a straw-man danger; I have encountered it myself among charismatic friends. It makes the meaning of Scripture subordinate to the authority of the alleged private revelation: the equivalent of making a new Scripture, which as Baxter says is inconsistent with the sufficiency of Scripture as a moral and theological guide.

Baxter, then, is abundantly clear on the finality of the New Testament canon. There can be no new ethical or doctrinal revelations (either overt or covert) binding on mankind or the church. The one universal rule is Scripture.

Now we come to the possibility of present-day revelations of God's will which do not violate these criteria. Let us hear Baxter speaking for himself:

It is possible that God may make new revelations to particular persons about their particular duties, events, or matters of fact, in subordination to the Scripture, either by inspiration, vision, apparition, or voice; for he hath not told us that he will never do such a thing. He may tell them what shall befall them or others, or say, ‘Go to such a place,’ or, ‘Dwell in such a place,’ or, ‘Do such a thing,’ which is not contrary to the Scripture, nor equal with it, but only a subordinate determination of some undetermined case, or the circumstantiating of an action.

Baxter suggests that present-day revelation could convey information about three things: a) particular duties, b) events, and c) matters of fact. By a “particular duty” Baxter does not mean some new moral principle such as the Montanists embraced (e.g. to live on dried food). He simply means something like, “Go to such a place” or “Dwell in such a place.” No new moral principle, axiom or law is involved. Scripture is not violated. If God reveals to me that he wants me to visit a certain person, such a revelation does not contradict Scripture or create a new ethical value. Of course, we might argue that this sort of revelation violates the *sufficiency* of Scripture. Baxter's response would be that Scripture is sufficient *for all the purposes for which God intends it*. It is sufficient as a theological guide and a source of moral axioms. God has said in Scripture itself that Scripture is sufficient for these things. But God has nowhere said in Scripture that he will never offer individual guidance *in a way which does not violate Scripture's sufficiency to teach us theology and morality* – “He hath not told us that he

will never do such a thing.” The rhetoric of sufficiency can become a device which binds Scripture in a way in which Scripture does not actually bind itself.²

Baxter also suggests that God may, if he chooses, reveal events or matters of fact. I presume that by “events” Baxter means future events. John Hus’ prophecy comes to mind. As for “matters of fact”, an example might be God’s revealing to a missionary that there is a certain man in a certain village who wants to hear about the true God. The missionary could of course have found that out by human report – in which case no-one would say the report violated the sufficiency of Scripture! Baxter does not think it would violate the sufficiency of Scripture if the report were to come via angelic or divine agency rather than human. Most matters of fact are not revealed in Scripture but learned elsewhere. Scripture was never intended to be our sole guide regarding matters of fact; and many matters of fact, learned from extra-Scriptural sources, have a serious bearing on how we obey God’s will. How would it impair the sufficiency of Scripture if one or more of those vital facts were made known to me by an angel or by the Holy Spirit, rather than by (say) a newspaper, an eyewitness, or personal observation?³

Now we come to the serious caveats which Baxter offers, and which ultimately set him apart from all forms of charismatic piety. First, he makes the point that genuine special guidance is not only not *contrary* to Scripture; it is also not “equal with it”. By this he means that special guidance can only ever be “a subordinate determination of some undetermined case, or the circumstantiating of an action”. For instance, Scripture commands me to work for a living if I am able, but not which particular lawful job to take. God may perhaps give special personal guidance about the latter. This would not be equal to Scripture, because it is merely an individual application of the universally binding moral axiom, whereas Scripture reveals the axiom itself. To expand on Baxter, I would suggest that such personal guidance is also not equal with Scripture in another sense. As soon as I understand any precept of Scripture which binds me, I must obey without further hesitation. But I am still at liberty to hesitate about a clearly understood piece of personal guidance, because I may still be unsure about its source. Is my own imagination deceiving me? Is it Satan disguised as an angel of light? No such questions need be asked of passages of Scripture clearly understood. But I am fully entitled to ask such questions, and indeed I would be sinfully imprudent not to ask them, of purported guidance conveyed through dreams, visions, voices and impressions, no matter how clearly I understand them.

Baxter continues his caveats:

Though such revelation and prophecy be possible, there is no certainty of it in general, nor any probability of it to any one individual person, much less a promise. And therefore to expect it, or pray for it, is but a presumptuous testing of God.

That is, Baxter has been discussing what is *possible* – what God in his sovereignty may perhaps choose to do, consistently with his declared intentions in Scripture. But the possible is not the same as the probable or the certain. There is neither probability, nor certainty, that God will actually do any of these things. Still less is there any promise in Scripture that he will guide in this or that way, if only we fulfil our part. Baxter has no doctrine of a “right to expect” special guidance, as a precondition for an effective walk with God or a flourishing church life. He sees no continuing place for a

permanently functioning office of prophet. But he refuses to rule out the possibility that a sovereign God may, at his own discretion, reveal a particular duty, event, or matter of fact, to one of his servants, at a particular point or points in his or her life, “either by inspiration, vision, apparition, or voice; for he hath not told us that he will never do such a thing.” To give a contemporary illustration, it seems to me that many pastors and preachers do in fact explain their sense of calling to the ministry in language which implies some kind of direct guidance – not, of course, at the expense of wise discernment of their character and gifts by themselves and the church, but alongside this and coordinated with it. Does that make them charismatics? Not necessarily; Richard Baxter stands with them.

However, Baxter sternly forbids both the *expectation* that God will guide in these special ways, and the act of *praying* for such guidance. Spiritual expectancy and/or prayer for God’s action, he says, must be based on a promise, and there is no such promise regarding special guidance. If God does ever choose to guide in these extraordinary ways, then it happens as a purely sovereign act of God. We are neither to expect it nor pray for it; that would be “a presumptuous testing of God”. Baxter adds the following powerful warning, very timely for our own day:

“All sober Christians should be the more cautious of being deceived by their own imaginations, because certain experience telleth us that most of those in our age who have pretended to have prophecy or inspirations or revelations, have been melancholy crack-brained persons near to madness, who have proved to be deluded in the end; and that such persons are still prone to such imaginations. Therefore also, all sober Christians must take heed of rashly believing every prophet or pretended spirit, lest they be led away from the sacred rule [Scripture], and before they are aware, be lost in vain expectations and conceits.”

By neither expecting nor praying for these forms of special guidance, we erect safety barriers against the deceptive wish-fulfilling power of our own and others’ imagination, and against demonic deception. As far as the active piety of the normal Christian life is concerned, we are to pray for wisdom and be guided by wisdom (Romans 12:2, James 1:5); and this means understanding and applying God’s written Word with sanctified Spirit-illuminated minds. As Baxter says, “It is certain that God will give all his servants in their several measures the help and illumination of his Spirit for the understanding and applying of the gospel.” But as we walk in the way of wisdom, which is God’s customary way, Baxter tells us not to rule out the possibility that, from time to time, without infringing Scripture’s sufficiency as a moral and theological guide, God in his sovereign freedom may choose to direct us in a more immediate fashion.⁴

References

- ¹ For further references to such experiences among non-charismatic Protestants, see the examples scattered through the historical anecdotes of that staunch 18th century Calvinist, Augustus Toplady, in his *Collected Works* (p. 495ff in the one volume edition), and also the whole of Thomas Boys’ fascinating *The Suppressed Evidence* (1832).
- ² One often hears sweeping statements about Scripture’s sufficiency. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 is sometimes quoted: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable... that the man of God

may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Why should we need God to tell us anything more, then, than he has told us in Scripture? However, this interpretation creates an insurmountable problem. Paul wrote this verse at a time when he himself, and other apostles and prophets, were themselves actively engaged in revealing God’s will by inspired word of mouth, as well as by writing! One cannot think that Paul meant to appeal to Scripture in a way that invalidated his inspired oral ministry, especially not when he appeals to both as equally authoritative in 2 Thess.2:15. Not that I am arguing for *present-day* apostles and prophets; I accept neither – they were once-for-all foundational offices (Ephesians 2:20). I am simply arguing that one cannot legitimately use 2 Tim.3:16-17 to rule out the bare *possibility* of God’s revealing his will today in the carefully guarded ways suggested by Baxter. As far as we in the post-apostolic era are concerned, the completed canon of Scripture is indeed able to equip us thoroughly for every good work; but even so, would it contradict God’s sovereignty and grace to help us out with extra promptings, if he so chose? Does he not in his generosity often give us more than we strictly need, in every sphere of our existence? See also the next paragraph in the main text on Scripture’s sufficiency as related to “matters of fact” in the Christian’s life and walk.

- ³ I do not here touch on the question of clairvoyance as a possibly *natural* phenomenon. Like many others, both believers and unbelievers, I have had precognitive dreams, and dreams which have conveyed accurate information about recent events which had not yet come to my attention. Such experiences, while striking, usually have no moral significance, and can be about utterly trivial matters. One is reluctant to invoke either God or Satan as the explanation.
- ⁴ Baxter’s position, as outlined in this article, was not something he invented. He could have learned it easily enough from the great patristic and medieval theologians. Augustine of Hippo (e.g. in *City Of God* 5:26) and Thomas Aquinas (e.g. in *Summa Theologiae* 2:2, Q.174, article 6) both took the general view of the subject espoused by Baxter. Referring to the post-apostolic era, Aquinas says: “At all times there have not been lacking persons having the inspiration of prophecy, not indeed for the declaration of any new doctrine of the faith, but for the direction of human acts.”

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But does not the Spirit lead Christians beyond the limits of the specific situations with which Scripture deals? It depends what you mean by that. If you mean, Does he lead us to apply biblical principles to modern circumstances with which, in the nature of the case, Scripture does not deal, the answer is yes. But if you mean, Does he lead us to treat as historically and culturally relative principles that Scripture sets forth as revealed absolutes and so to treat them as not binding us, the answer is no. Those modern movements that appeal to isolated texts or extrapolated biblical principles in a way that the rest of biblical teaching disallows and those that appeal to alleged revelations of future fact or present day duty which are neither clear implications nor clear applications of what is actually said in the text have no right to claim the Spirit’s leading. Nor may any caucus or consensus in the church claim to be Spirit-lead simply because for the moment it commands a majority vote.

Jl Packer, Keep In Step With The Spirit, p. 240-241

Another Celtic Spirituality – The Calvinistic Mysticism of Ann Griffiths (1776-1805)

RM Jones

The second and concluding part of an article begun in issue 38 of Foundations, pages 39-44

Mysticism is of course a non-Christian as well as a Christian phenomenon, – just as “enthusiasm” itself, or “believing” as an act – and anyone trying to discuss Christian mysticism must necessarily define its terms *vis-à-vis* the experiences that Hindus and Buddhists as well as Moslems have undergone. The fashionable ecumenical stance, of course, is all-embracing compromise; and perhaps, a serious Christian in reaction against that may feel hurried into a glib and rather unconsidered condemnation, *en-bloc*, of anything outside the Christian tradition.

What are the conditions that must be laid down in examining the mystical experience of union with the Deity and spiritual apprehension of truths *outside* the Christian tradition? I suggest five:

1. That there is no other name under heaven by whom one can be saved than Jesus Christ our Lord: that is, naturally, not to say that Jesus *has* to be named (ignorance may prevent that, but is no “excuse”), but there must be no *other* name.
2. That *man* of himself, in his own experience or through his own powers, is helpless and deprived utterly of God; and God-given grace (and faith) alone can be the channel to save him from the consequences of his own lost condition.
3. That any subjective experience of the reality of a personal God revealed to an individual in any part of the world can only be checked by the objective word breathed by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures.
4. That experience-centred rather than God-centred religion, and that hankering after experience rather than a longing for God, must be suspect.
5. That the wholeness of holiness – in thought, feeling and will, that is to say, in the central theology, in experience and in practical or moral application – must not be supplanted by the wonderful enthusiasm of a felt knowledge of God. God claims the heart, that is to say, the wholeness of man: he must have the whole lot.

We readily recognise that the wiles of the Devil can conjure up a stupendous conglomeration of so-called experiences, but the Christian is fortunate in possessing a measuring-rod that is final and authoritative. Scripture is now our reliable check. It demonstrates that God and not human experience is the centre of things; that He has revealed Himself objectively with clarity; that though man is of himself morally unacceptable, God has acted historically to reconcile Himself to man. For each and every Christian at the present moment, a personal relationship with this living God is not only possible but is absolutely necessary. Such a mystical relationship – *union mystica*—is of the heart and is complete. Ann Griffiths – like the Scriptures – sometimes conveys this union with God in terms related to the senses, a custom that has

much enamoured some secular observers. Much has been made of the influence of the Song of Solomon on her diction. Just for the record, I would like to note that according to my calculation, in her small handful of hymns there are 24 references to the Psalms, 23 to Revelation, 22 to Isaiah as to Exodus, 21 to Hebrews, 20 to Luke, and that the Song of Solomon tags along seventh with 19, in the incredible list of books Ann refers to in her handful of scripture-crammed hymns.

Permit me to quote one of these so-called erotic hymns, which brought no qualms to our healthy Methodist forefathers, although in our more licentious times readers feel a little more uneasy:

As my life is so corrupted,
 And my failings beyond count,
 What a privilege allows me
 Dwelling on Thy holy mount,
 Where the veils are rent asunder
 And the covering open flies,
 Where Thine excellence of glory
 Blinds this brief world from my eyes.

Oh, might I from high salvation's
 Fountains drink and drink each day
 Till my thirst for fleeting pleasures
 Has completely quenched away;
 Waiting ever for my Sovereign,
 Quick to answer to His call,
 Then to open for His entrance,
 Enjoy His image all in all.

In another hymn, she speaks of “kissing the Son for all eternity”, a phrase she got of course from Psalm 2:12, which was also used in singing the metrical versions of the Psalms, but which our present-day congregations would probably find somewhat embarrassing.

What has perturbed most recent Welsh students of her work, however, has not been this ecstatic warmth, of course, but that this was related to objective truth, that the *content* of her faith could be communicated, and that there were certain propositions that were inherent in her praise. In other words her Methodism would be all well and good, were it not *Calvinistic* Methodism.

Calvinism is for most people a sort of swear-word. In a memorial volume to Ann Griffiths, the Welsh poet and critic Euros Bowen discussed her imagery, occasionally referring to her theology. Whenever he confined himself to analysing her poetic devices, his discussion was excellent, but when he made a few scattered references to her theology, almost inevitably he was not only completely inaccurate, but the truth about Calvinism was diametrically opposed to what he claimed it to be.

For instance, take his discussion of the word *delw* (image or form). Hymn V of the published edition uses the word three times to refer to the objective form of Christ. This sacred image is independent of Ann's own personality, but she longs to conform to it. It is an image of holiness to be loved and worshipped. Notice the last line of the hymn I translated: “Enjoy His image all in all.” A similar line occurs in Hymn XX. This emphasises the concreteness of her meditation on Christ, as well as her own individuality, as contrasted with God in man: they are distinct. The image is stamped upon her: she conforms to that image. She does not dissolve Hindu-like into its being. In other words, she is primarily concerned with her privilege now as a new creation, newly formed on the image of Christ, to conform more nearly with him through sanctification every day.

Dr Bowen's complaint is, of the little handful of hymns she has written, that she gives too little attention to the first creation and to the primary formation of man on the

“image” of God *before* the fall. Dr Bowen contends, and rightly contends, that this fundamental starting-point is of utmost importance in establishing man’s essence and value, his purpose and dignity. But having made the point that Ann does not get around to this particular doctrine—nor might it be asserted does she encompass a great number of other doctrines as her motive was to express her warm delight in her saviour rather than systematise theology—then Dr Bowen waxes eloquent about this being a basic fault in Calvinism itself. As this seems to be a blind spot with some sacramentalist divines (I find them making frequent accusations that Calvin neglected the Creation in favour of Redemption), might I be permitted to refer to Calvin’s *Institutes*. What I am trying to demonstrate is the fundamental position of the doctrine of Creation. In Book One, as you may well remember there are four chapters (5, 14, 15 and 16) dealing particularly with God in Creation; but what is of particular interest are some sections in Chapter XV that use the word “image”, this term which is of key importance in the study of Ann Griffiths. I will confine myself to section summaries of 3, 4, 5:

3. The *image* of God is one of the strongest proofs of the immortality of the soul. What is meant by this *image*. The dreams of Osiander concerning the *image* of God are refuted. Whether there is any difference between *image* and “likeness”. Another objection of Osiander is refuted. The *image* of God is conspicuous in the whole Adam.
4. The *image* of God is in the soul. Its nature may be learnt from its renewal by Christ. What is comprehended under this renewal. What the *image* of God in man was before the fall. In what things it now appears. When and where it will be seen in perfection.
5. The dreams of the Manichees and of Servetus, as to the origin of the soul, are refuted. Also of Osiander, who denies that there is any *image* of God in man without essential righteousness.” (my italics)

In a later chapter (VII of Book Three) Calvin opens out on why “we should consider the *image* of God in our neighbours.”

Now, the word “image” is important for Ann Griffiths as we have seen. Although there is none of Calvin’s discussion in her work, I strongly suspect that even when Ann uses this word “image”, the whole doctrine of creation and of man made in the image of God is well and truly fixed in the back of her mind. Even when she speaks of Christ’s great act of Redemption, Creation is not too far removed: she is amazed and expresses it (as she does so often) in paradox, that –

The *author of life* has been put to death
And the great resurrection was buried.

The main significance of Ann Griffiths’ particular use of the word “image” is, I believe, in what it tells of her mysticism. The Christian picture of union with Christ is something like the impression made on wax by an image: the wax does not disappear, but takes the shape of the object that is printed on it. This is Ann’s way of explaining what has happened to her heart. We can contrast, on the other hand, the union described by the Hindu as he imagines his union with “God” like a drop of ink being completely dissolved in water, so that union really implies deletion. You may remember too the well-known tale of Sufism which I shall try to relate with due seriousness:

The lover knocks at the door of the Beloved. “Who is there?” asks the Beloved. “It is I,” replies the lover. “This house will not hold Me and thee,” comes the reply. The lover goes

away and weeps and prays in solitude. After a long time he returns and knocks again. The Voice asks, "Who is there?" "It is thou." Immediately the door opens; lover and Beloved are face to face at last."

Well, we know something of that sort of divinity in Welsh pulpits, with *man* becoming "God". It was the sort of situation that Tillich would try to imagine,—man disappearing as he became divine. Ann Griffiths' attitude was exactly opposite. Her imagery, the scriptural imagery, to convey the union was marriage—the marriage of Christ and His church, each completely joined, indeed made one, yet distinct and different in character and purpose.

One of Ann Griffiths' great terms was "object". Just as Morgan Llwyd emphasised the "outer" Bible, so too Ann had no doubt that her experience was objective as well as subjective. However private the knowledge of Christ was for her, she knew she shared it with thousands of other believers. The Calvinist Welsh mystics such as William Williams of Pantycelyn and Islwyn would have resisted any suggestion that their experience was merely emotive rather than cognitive. The experience that came to them, the ecstasy, the knowledge of the spiritual, this was validated by scripture.

The major myth about Calvinism proclaimed by some sacramentalists and liberals alike is that it is too systematic, too formal. That there should be so much order in God's act of Redemption is surely difficult to swallow: God must be more adaptable than this, and perhaps more pragmatic and compromising. Calvinism is too legalistic to permit true Christian love, which in the liberal sense is an undisciplined mess of sentimental and amoral blubber. So, how in the world can one have a *Calvinistic* mystic, such as Ann Griffiths? They must have made a mistake. And then valiant efforts are made to prove that Ann Griffiths was not really a Calvinist. The ridiculous suggestion is made in the discussion I have just mentioned that Calvin emphasises the sovereignty of God and Christ giving His life in order to gain forgiveness for sinners at the expense of proclaiming the love of God. Now, it is presumed, — as the love of God is so conspicuous in Ann Griffiths' work, she couldn't properly have been a Calvinist. Following the same reasoning, neither could Calvin have been much of a Calvinist.

As we all know, when Calvinism is mentioned by liberals, scholarship goes by the board: anything will pass. But, I think the inherent prejudices that are displayed here against a meaningful faith, a faith that possesses order and content and is discriminating, may help us to define something about Christian mysticism. Ann Griffiths' knowledge of God is ordered and structured not by her own whims and tempers but by the meaningful way of salvation set down by God, revealed externally in Scripture, accomplished objectively and historically by the second Person and then by the third Person in the Deity. Her growth in a timeless union with God is felt yet ordered: she has a complete hymn in praise of the "Way". The way of submission and utter abandonment, which she describes throughout her work, proceeds according to inevitable stages of spiritual growth: from effectual calling together with conviction of condemnation by the law, through regeneration, faith and repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, union with Christ, on to glorification. Her content is so ordered because the truth itself is ordered. This is her mystic way.

The attention the Law receives in her work sometimes persuades other critics to conclude that she probably *was* a Calvinist after all, so presumably she couldn't have

been a true mystic. They don't want to have it both ways. The Law itself, it should be said, appears in her hymns under two guises. Occasionally she refers back to it as it was on Sinai, in all its awfulness, standing between her and God: it is a condemnation. But more often than not, she portrays the Law as seen now through Christ's love: Christ standing between her and the Law, and the Law itself now being seen as lovely, an expression of God's own character. Her soul leaps with pleasure at seeing the law honoured (Hymn I). She meets with Christ, and there He is fulfilling the Law to its uttermost limits (II). She longs for complete sanctification in order for herself now to honour the Law completely, and to conform immovably with the pure and sacred laws of heaven (VII). She refers once again in Hymn XX to Christ giving due honour to the Law of His Father.

This emphasis on the honouring of the Law is not, of course, because she would deny that sin is primarily a transgression of something that God has set down, but rather that for her in essence it is a personal relationship. She would accept that God has certainly established a general and public pattern of behaviour, but in the first place He has created a family, and sin is not merely an infringement of a universal rule but a personal insult and an act of hatred towards and a separation from this loving Father. This accounts, of course, for the wrath of God.

The late Professor JR Jones argued that Ann Griffiths' mysticism was "shapeless and undeveloped". "No recognised system," he said, "was placed like a skin or shell around it. She knew nothing of such things." And again he claimed, the framework necessary for mysticism was completely opposed to the legal relationships demanded by Calvinism. What I have tried to argue is this: Ann Griffiths found in Calvinism the mystic road that led to the real objective Christ. For her there was no contradiction between the beauty of the Law (or what EF Kevan's book on Puritan theology calls *The Grace of Law*) and the sublime Christ she adored ecstatically. To contemplate the fullness of the Law, honoured and accomplished, was to contemplate the living Christ himself. They were both "mysticism": they were both Calvinism. She would not have heard of mysticism as such, although she would probably have heard the term Calvinism related to her particular brand of belief, which meant for her receiving the gift of God without resisting the divine action, being elevated beyond ordinary meditation and affection into holy contemplation, aspiring above all earthly images to fix her gaze on the One who had changed her: it meant a thrilling personal relationship that had been made possible by something God Himself had done in Jesus Christ. The personal relationship that was intended for every Christian.

Most of what I have been saying has been in correction of the excesses of a vague mysticism that loses contact with revealed historical truth. But I would like to conclude with some points offered in what seems the opposite direction: some considerations I would suggest to those of our brethren who are particularly involved in the proper defence of the doctrines of the *Reformed* faith. With no doubts about her Calvinistic tenets, what may we learn from Ann Griffiths about the wholeness of a living faith?

First of all, her hymns seem to tell us not to be afraid of the body. The body is inevitably confused with lust, and has to be suspect, but has a proper role; so equally, one must be guarded against the inhibitions of unbalanced pietism.

Secondly, these hymns seem to remind us that we are not on this earth primarily to

explain or defend: we are here to praise. If Jesus Christ is altogether lovely, let us say so. Let us sing it aloud. Let our whole personality, our affections, rationality, our will, let our whole being proclaim it with joy and adoration.

And lastly, if we are to be troubled by excesses—and we are always troubled by excesses—let them not be excesses of decorum and propriety and respectability. It is high time that those of us who cling to the doctrines of grace and to the belief that justification is by faith were suspected of being intoxicated in excessive expressions of our love for Jesus. Ann Griffiths had no modesty where her delight in the love of Jesus Christ was concerned. She was not too proud to sing forth her reverent affection for the Person who had snatched her from the emptiness of existence. She was not so anxious about what others thought to conceal the rapture and exaltation she felt towards her God Incarnate.

Tight-lipped and sedate orthodoxy and an obsessive self-discipline can be sinful when we encounter the real Lord. He is the One who should transport us with delight, as He did Ann Griffiths. This is what she is still telling us today. How can we believe these things about what has happened to ourselves without shouting aloud with elation? How can we be so subdued and so sober about such a Lord as ours?

So often in our sombre desire to interpret and argue against our error we have lost contact with our main task, which is to praise, to magnify, to speak well of our Lord, to tell of His beauty and majesty. For the old Welsh poets, praise was the structure of existence: this positive affirmation of goodness was their chief office. Nowadays, fashion dictates that poets should be ironic and ambiguous, critical and absurd, and praise is slightly reactionary and embarrassing. This attitude to the fundamental work for which we were created seems to have rubbed off on the community in general, and even on the church itself. It is not that we have not been over-enthusiastic about declaring the central propositions and doctrines of the faith, but rather we have not been enthusiastic enough (in the modern sense) about contemplating the Son. Ann Griffiths' central attention was directed at everything about the Lord Jesus,—His incarnation, His death, His resurrection, His intercession, His wonderful Person. She praised Him. She adored Him. He was absolutely everything to her. She could never fathom His love. She was driven to proclaim in majestic verse her longing for His company. She wanted to look at Him for ever. And she was right. More than our need for orthodoxy—and there is no denying that fundamental need—is our need for Jesus. He is deserving of an unbridled love, unbridled by worldly inhibitions. We are not primarily related to truths but to the One who is the Truth, to the One who has given Himself for us, not for us simply to believe things about Him, although that is a part of knowing Him, but for us to give ourselves “uncontrolledly”—and I use the word advisedly in its usual secular and rational sense—uncontrolledly to Him. We should not be satisfied until our services of worship are resounding once again with the sound of “Hallelujah”, until our whole life is full of hosannas to the living Lord, until He is exalted in every way:

Seas to swim yet never compass
God as man, and man as God.

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A pastor muses on Word and Spirit

Erik Pattison

A rainy day in EC1 found me mooching around the CLC shop casually hoping to find a cut-price christian classic and trying not to “tut-tut” at the shelves of overblown biography and psycho-pap. My eye settled on *The Word and the Spirit* co-authored by Paul Cain and RT Kendall and I quickly read a few pages. They were repeating the stale old cliché that we have to find a synthesis between the Spirit (tongues, healings, prophecies etc. plus spontaneity) and the Word (expository, doctrinally rigorous Bible study, preaching and application). This combination was something I had sought for a number of years until I finally decided that I was trying to balance two incompatible views of God and his dealings with the world, a decision largely forced on me by trying to expound 1 Corinthians to my congregation.

Your editor has asked me to read the whole book and to compare it with John Woodhouse’s essay “The preacher and the living Word”, chapter 3 of *When God’s voice is heard*. I am glad I read the whole Cain/Kendall book because there are a couple of interesting features in it. Firstly, it assumes that most church people have a deep ignorance of scripture (after all those renewals, restorings, revivals and refreshings?!) and, secondly, it is not optimistic about the future of the current charismatic tradition.

Cain and Kendall are expecting something new to happen. The great Post-charismatic era is coming and will be embodied in a new, holier mass movement of people passionately loyal to scripture and moving miraculously through the world converting vast numbers to Christ. I heard echoes of *The Puritan Hope* mixed with the Kansas City prophets’ description of a new kind of Christian. Cain/Kendall are hard on the current charismatics. They are merely Ishmael compared with the Post-charismatic Isaac. Like Ishmael they are under God’s grace in some way but not heirs of the promises made to the church. As an ex-charismatic I am familiar with the way our teachers used to adopt fantastic OT typology to serve the cause – we have all heard calls to “move on” and “inherit the land” of charismatic fullness. To read RT Kendall using the same technique to unsettle the charismatics was amusing. He seems to have impressed Colin Dye, Sandy Millar and others. It is a shame that the biblical Isaac is so colourless and dull compared with Abraham and Jacob (or even Ishmael). Still, every analogy can be pushed too far.

Turning to John Woodhouse was like stepping into a different world, the real one. He is addressing the error and confusion represented by the whole attempt to find a midway house between opposing spiritualities. To be fair, there are some like Cain/Kendall who are seeking something “beyond” – a new synthesis out of the interplay of thesis (Word) and antithesis (Spirit). But if Woodhouse is right we need to go back to a more thoroughgoing spirituality of the Word before we can make real progress.

Woodhouse believes God creates, sustains and interacts with this world by speaking words. Some of those words have been laid down in Scripture and, by extension, those words live in the mouths of Gospel preachers. Every word which is truly from God is a spirit-filled word, powerful and active. He is keen to stress that the inspiration of scriptural words is a present tense experience rather than a simple past tense fact. Hence, the idea

that scripture is God-breathed in 2 Tim 3:16 means that God's breath (Spirit) is in it *now* and that is why it is so "useful". He points out the many verses where God's word is an active agent creating life and changing people and their world.

The Word is attributed with doing all the things Jesus promised would be done by the Holy Spirit. This apparent unity between the work of the Spirit and the work of the Word leads to the conclusion that the Word is the Spirit's only chosen method of implementing the Kingdom of God. The fruit of Christ's great work will come only through the work of the Word. After reading the essay, 1 Peter 4:11a was firmly lodged in my mind: "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God".

The preacher's job is to be a conduit and servant of the Word. The teaching ministry is not therefore to do with the collection and dissemination of spiritual data. Our business is to hear God's voice (which is the scripture) and become, like John the Baptist, a voice. The elders of the church are a Public Address system through which the breath of God changes the world. God humbles Himself and tolerates the harmonic distortion, negative feedback and clipped dynamics we provide and speaks as we speak. We are not free to add applications or interpretations to His Words and we certainly have no right to add what we think is lacking. We take the Word and get it in any way we can to contact people, confident in its inherent power.

Woodhouse would find little or no room in his thinking for the idea of the "anointing" that has played such a large part in the lives of many preachers. The Word of God simply is the power of God whether we are aware of the power or not. I have to admit that my own experience is that I am usually unaware when my words are having a saving or life changing effect on my hearers. Furthermore, I have sometimes felt "anointed" without the sermon seeming to have any lasting effect.

Most of the supernatural or paranormal phenomena that mean so much to charismatics are not treated as relevant by Woodhouse. Presumably they are not the unique work of the Spirit but just the work of angels or psychic forces (or worse?). For him there is no balance to be sought between the work of the Spirit and the work of the Word because they are one and the same. I have a terrible feeling I am not being fair to Woodhouse's depth. Read him for yourself. I am 90% convinced. In any case he seems to be barking up the right tree.

By comparison, Cain and Kendall are just barking in the dark. For some time I have been concerned that key charismatic ideas about spiritual warfare, prayer and personal anointings had been borrowed from paganism or sacramentalism rather than learnt from scripture. These ideas have entered the evangelical mainstream. Ask your friends what they think it means to "listen to God" or "struggle against evil" or "be in the Spirit" and the answers might surprise you. The truth seems to be that if there is no work of the Word then there is no work of the Spirit beyond common Grace. We would only be left with sorcery on one hand and theologising on the other. As Woodhouse points out, marrying those two might breed a monster.

"When God's voice is heard" IVP 1995, Ed. Green & Jackman £9.99 ISBN 0-85110-656-0
"The Word and the Spirit" Kingsway 1996, Cain & Kendall £3.99 ISBN 0-85476-413-5

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Contemporary pneumatology

Eryl Davies

During the twentieth century, protestant theology in the West has been predominantly “liberal” with variations ranging from a Trinitarian framework to one in which Jesus Christ was regarded exclusively as a man, often an unknown historical figure. Consequently for many, the Holy Spirit was conceived in impersonal terms such as the influence of Jesus of Nazareth on people or merely God in relation to the world. Karl Barth exercised a dominant influence on British protestant theology and because of renewed interest at present in his Trinitarian theology, his significance at least needs to be noted here.¹ Breaking with the older liberalism and challenging its man-centred approach, Barth reaffirmed the “Infinite qualitative distinction” between God and man. He developed his famous three-fold understanding of the Word of God in which the Scripture only “becomes” the Word of God in moments of encounter with Christ. Within a strongly Christocentric and Trinitarian framework, however, Barth acknowledged the Holy Spirit as being divine, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Son and one of the “three indissolubly different modes of being”. While in places Barth’s language appears superficially to be modalist yet he uncompromisingly underlines the deity and distinct “personality” of the Holy Spirit.

In Britain during the 1970s, there began a detailed study of pneumatology by academics. James Dunn published his *Baptism In The Holy Spirit* in 1970 with the subtitle: “A Re-examination of the New Testament teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism today”. Essentially a New Testament study, Dunn concluded that the baptism in, or gift of the Spirit, was initiatory, alongside other constituent elements such as Gospel preaching, faith in Jesus as Lord and water baptism in the name of Jesus. Rather distinctively, Dunn regarded the reception of the Spirit as the “chief element”, “often dramatic” and “climactic”, the “high point” in his preferred description of initiation as “conversion-initiation”. In 1975 Dunn published his *Jesus & the Spirit* which concentrates on a study of the religious and charismatic experience of Jesus and the first Christians as recorded in the New Testament. Both books are thought-provoking, yet, like others, I find myself in profound disagreement with Dunn over a number of key points and interpretation of Scripture. One clear tendency is that of identifying Christ and the Spirit thus moving in a binitarian direction². More recent developments in his pneumatology demand attention and evaluation elsewhere.

Dunn’s research supervisor, Professor CFD Moule, published a useful but small work in 1978 entitled *The Holy Spirit*. Moule’s work contains some stimulating material but regarding the distinct personality of the Holy Spirit he is somewhat vague. “Plurality in unity”, he claims, “was the supreme revelation”³ but he regarded it as a matter of secondary importance whether this points to binitity or to Trinity.

It was in 1977 that Geoffrey Lampe published his famous *God as Spirit* in which he endeavoured to replace traditional incarnational doctrine with a Spirit Christology⁴. John Macquarrie regarded this work as “a substantial...contribution to current theology...This

is liberal theology at its most questioning and adventurous".⁵ Lampe insists that "Spirit" refers to the entire activity of God in His relation to man but definitely not to a divine hypostasis distinct from God the Father and God the Son. "Spirit" for Lampe refers to God's general presence within creation; to speak of the "Holy Spirit", according to Lampe, is to talk of the "transcendental God becoming immanent in human personality".⁶ And the implications of this position are radical and far-reaching, leading Lampe into a Unitarian theology. A similar radical position was adopted by Maurice Wiles.⁷

Prior to, and alongside these developments in academic pneumatology, there was the emergence and development of the Charismatic Movement which initially, at least in the sixties, adopted an uncritical Pentecostal approach towards Spirit-baptism and the charismata. In the sixties, the Charismatic Movement was criticised legitimately for its lack of theological reflection. *Gospel and Spirit*⁸ in 1977 observed that "The main concern of the charismatic renewal, at least until recently, has been experiential rather than theological". Earlier in 1971 Michael Harper acknowledged that the movement "has no great theologians. Its teaching is varied and unsystematic".⁹ To meet this need, Thomas A Smail began to work for the Fountain Trust in 1975. He edited their *Theological Renewal* (1975-1983); an able and well-read theologian, he also authored three major books but his third book, *The Giving Gift* (1988), was his substantial contribution to pneumatology. Smail himself refers to "changes of stance and emphasis" in this book particularly relating to the central message of "the distinct Personhood of the Holy Spirit",¹⁰ rather than to aspects of his work or gifts. From 1968-1988, Smail observes that nearly all the books published about the Spirit's work "hardly so much as glance at the question of His Person". Even Packer's *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, he adds, "had almost nothing to say on the subject".¹¹ Undoubtedly Smail's book represents the most important theological and academic work by a charismatic in England on the subject. He made a daring attempt to tackle some complex questions and even attempted to reconcile the different emphases of East and West concerning the procession of the Spirit.¹²

Michael Green's *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*¹³ (1975) also made a useful contribution as a competent, theological treatment of the subject sympathetic towards charismatic renewal. John Gunstone was one of the first Anglo-Catholics to claim the experience of being baptised in the Spirit and he published his *Baptised in the Spirit*, then, in 1982, his *Pentecostal Anglicans*.

Between 1965-1990 only a few books of any substance have been written in Britain by British evangelicals on the subject of pneumatology and their purpose was largely pastoral. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones establishes the point that "in almost the entire range of the details of the great doctrine of the Spirit and His work, there is agreement"¹⁴ amongst evangelicals. He acknowledged, however, that with regard to the subject of the baptism with the Holy Spirit "there is a divergence and disagreement". Lloyd-Jones' contribution is certainly controversial but it is, in my view, the most extensive and detailed treatment of pneumatology in the above period. Publications by Donald MacLeod¹⁵ and John Stott¹⁶ were critical of Lloyd-Jones, insisting that Spirit-baptism is exclusively initiatory. The former especially is polemical in tone but both books leave many questions, raised by Lloyd-Jones, unanswered. Stott has since published a valuable commentary on *Acts*¹⁷ in which his position is more fully developed. The late Douglas MacMillan wrote a small but helpful book entitled *Jesus: Power Without Measure*¹⁸ while Professor EH Andrews

contributed in 1982 *The Promise of the Spirit*¹⁹. Like Lloyd-Jones, Andrews indicates areas of agreement on the part of evangelicals concerning pneumatology such as the Holy Trinity of Divine Persons, the personality of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Spirit in Creation, “providential upholding of the universe”, applying the atonement, a continuing work in believers, empowering the preaching of the Word and distributing gifts to each church member.²⁰ Andrews discusses “four viewpoints concerning the more controversial aspects of the Spirit’s work. These viewpoints are the Old Pentecostal, New-Pentecostal or Charismatic, “Reformed Sealers” which include Lloyd-Jones, and the Traditional Reformed viewpoint represented by Warfield and others, including Andrews himself. Despite its defects, this book represents a serious attempt to address issues in pneumatology which divide and confuse evangelicals. James Packer’s *Keep in Step with the Spirit*²¹ was a popular and interesting overview in 1984 of the relevant Biblical data on pneumatology. In the Old Testament, according to Packer, the Spirit is “God active as Creator, Controller, Revealer, Quickener and Enabler...”²² Packer acknowledges that the Spirit’s “distinct Personhood is not expressed by the Old Testament writers”²³ although clearly taught in the New Testament.²⁴ While Packer holds a similar view to Lloyd-Jones concerning revival yet his view of Spirit-baptism is at variance with that of Lloyd-Jones as he understands it to be initiatory. Overall I find Packer’s treatment of pneumatology in this book disappointing in crucial sections; more detailed analysis and exegesis as well as greater consistency are required.

Hopefully, this brief overview of the more significant books on aspects of pneumatology by charismatics and evangelicals in Britain enables us to recognise the dearth of quality writing on the subject within our constituency between 1960-1985. Even for Pentecostals, it is only within the past eight to ten years that there has been a significant contribution by their own scholars and I will refer to this later.

Against this background I was delighted to read Sinclair Ferguson’s *The Holy Spirit* published in 1996 by IVP.²⁵ As part of the excellent *Contours of Christian Theology* series, the book aims to complement traditional textbooks and also “to rework the orthodox evangelical position in a fresh and compelling way”.²⁶

In his preface, the author rightly insists that to many contemporary Christians the Holy Spirit is no longer ‘forgotten’ but rather ‘an anonymous, faceless aspect of the divine being’;²⁷ even “*unknown*”.

Chapter One (pages 15-33) serves as a general introduction and deals first with the Biblical significance of the terms “holy” and “Spirit” (*ruach* in Hebrew). The latter term in the Old Testament has the dominant idea of power²⁸ but also “God extending Himself in active engagement with His creation in a personal way”.²⁹ In considering *Creator Spiritus*, the author understands Genesis 1:2 as a clear reference to the activity of the divine Spirit³⁰ yet “much remains opaque”³¹ here concerning the distinct divine hypostasis of the Holy Spirit. The “Governing presence” relates to the Spirit’s power-presence amongst His people distributing gifts and equipping individuals with exceptional strength and wisdom. In this context, Ferguson follows liberal scholars like Lampe and Wiles in describing *ruach* as “a bridge term”.³² The Spirit’s moral and redemptive work is then underlined before outlining the crucial work of inspiration with regard to Scripture. Pages 28-33 are vital in their discussion of the hypostatic Spirit and demand careful reading in the light of what scholars like Lampe, Moule and Dunn have suggested in their different

approaches to the subject.

Chapter Two, "The Spirit of Christ", is exciting and important. I am pleased he emphasises the legal nature of the language in John 13-16 which "continues a motif which runs through John's Gospel: Jesus is on trial".³³ Several "witnesses" give their testimony concerning Christ in chapters 1-12; the Apostles, too, are sent out as His witnesses but in 15:26 we learn that "the chief witness for Christ will be the Holy Spirit..."³⁴ The precise relationship between Christ and the Spirit continues to be explored by theologians but Ferguson rightly points to "an economic identity",³⁵ not "ontological fusion".³⁶

Chapter Three explains the significance and distinctiveness of Pentecost in terms of the Lukan and Johannine interpretations. Luke portrays Pentecost as "an event of rich redemptive-historical significance" which "marks the end of the limitations built into the divinely-ordained impermanence of the Mosaic economy and the beginning of the new era".³⁷ Ferguson interprets John 20:21-23 as "quite distinct from, although theologically related to" Pentecost in which the Apostles were equipped with the Spirit to "serve in His absence as His ministerial representatives".³⁸ A useful discussion of the procession of the Spirit is also included in this chapter from pages 72-78.

But what about Pentecost today? Passages like Samaria (Acts 8:9f), Cornelius (10:44-48) and Ephesus (19:1-7) mark "decisive points of advance" in the spread of the Gospel³⁹ and do not teach a "two-stage experience" as being normative for the future⁴⁰ but the "power" aspect of Pentecost is "repeatable".⁴¹ He adds in relation to revival: "Pentecost is the epicentre; but the earthquake gives forth further after shocks".⁴² Chapters five, six and seven touch respectively and helpfully on the *ordo salutis*, the "central role" of the Spirit in revealing Christ and uniting us to Christ, regeneration, conversion and holiness.

The communion of the Spirit with its "inherently eschatological structure"⁴³ is the theme of chapter eight; in such communion the blessings which the Spirit brings "provide grace for those who are in need"⁴⁴ so that "the Spirit is another Paraclete, like Christ". It is the corporate aspect of the Holy Spirit's ministry which is emphasised in Chapter Nine; 1 Corinthians 12:13 is understood as referring to the "initial reception of the Spirit"⁴⁵ and our "incorporation into Christ's body". Two thoughtful sections reflect on water-baptism and the Lord's Supper without being polemical; a necessary emphasis is provided by Ferguson that the observance of the Lord's Supper is neither *ex opere operato* nor memorialist. "A genuine communion with Christ in the Supper"⁴⁶ by the Spirit can be enjoyed by believers. A more controversial chapter, "Gifts for ministry", provides an argued and reasonable presentation of a cessationist position, interacting in a stimulating way with continuationist-restorationist arguments, particularly Grudem's view that there are two levels of prophecy. The concluding section in this chapter on "The Spirit and Preaching"⁴⁷ is disappointingly brief and hopelessly inadequate. "The cosmic Spirit" is the title of the concluding chapter and handles the relationship between the created order of things and the redeemed order. Rejecting all forms of "unitarian immanence theology"⁴⁸ as well as religious pluralism and universalism, the author insists that "The New Testament places the Spirit and the world in an antithetical, not a conciliatory, relationship".⁴⁹ In this respect he identifies and illustrates an important and relevant hermeneutical principle.⁵⁰ Ferguson gives us a helpful and necessary reminder that the Spirit's indwelling in believers is "a limiting concept" with "limited implications for the present", but the Scriptures point us to "a future period when the redemptive activity of

the Spirit will be unlimited”⁵¹ in effecting the renewal of creation and the resurrection of the body.

I commend this book to you for careful reflection and stimulation. In addition to his fresh, contemporary and interactive approach to the subject, Ferguson provides us with ample scope for further reading, to all eleven chapters on pages 272-277. Do not neglect this book, even though you may disagree with the author in several places.

Another valuable and useful book recently published is *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, edited by Wayne Grudem and published by IVP in 1996 at £8.99 (368 pages). Contributors include Richard Gaffin (cessationist), Robert Saucy (open but cautious), Samuel Storms (Third Wave), and Douglas Oss (Pentecostal/Charismatic). The format of the book promotes clarity, fair representation of differing views, identification of the real issues and differences as well as mutual respect. Each contributor wrote a fifty-page “position paper” covering the following topics: baptism in the Holy Spirit, post-conversion experiences, continuation or cessation of gifts, specific gifts such as prophecy, healing and tongues, practical implications for church life and the dangers of one’s own position and that of others. An eight-page response was made by the contributors to each position paper. What is interesting is that the interaction did not stop at this point. The four authors together with the editor met for a “two-day, closed-door conference” in order to discuss together in detail what they had all written. Detailed evaluations of this conference are included in each author’s “concluding statement” written after the conference.

Another interesting publication is *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* by Max Turner and published by Paternoster in 1996 at £17.99. A large number of the chapters rely on or revise or develop earlier published articles by the author. The contents are divided into two main sections; the first has the overall theme of the development of New Testament pneumatology, whereas the second considers spiritual gifts then and now. In the first section, there is some helpful material. Chapter One, for example, is useful as it explores the background to New Testament pneumatology, “The Spirit in the Old Testament and in ‘Intertestamental’ Judaism”. The next chapter examines “Jesus and the Spirit in the Synoptic Tradition”. Turner concludes that the main emphasis here is the “empowering for mission”⁵² of Jesus in His Jordan experience. Undoubtedly it is Chapter Three with the title of “The Gift of the Spirit in Acts” which will attract the attention of new readers. In a concise and valuable way the author first indicates areas of consensus on Lukan pneumatology before discussing areas of continuing disagreement, namely: (a) “Was the Spirit in Acts Joel’s ‘Spirit of prophecy’ alone...and what range of charismata and effects are attributable to this gift? (b) How did Luke relate the Spirit to conversion-initiation? (c) Was the Spirit for Luke merely a *donum superadditum* of charismatic empowering, or did the Spirit also have soteriological functions?”⁵³ Many other interesting chapters follow in this first section touching on Johannine and Pauline pneumatology then the establishing of a Biblical and systematic Theology of “the Gift of the Spirit” to believers. In the second and final section discussion is focused mainly on prophecy, tongues and healings in the New Testament.

There is no longer a dearth of new literature relating to pneumatology and some of us have a lot of reading and reflection to do!

References

- ¹ Tim Bradshaw, for example, has argued that pneumatology in Barth's theology has not been sufficiently appreciated: see *Theology & Ontology*, Rutherford House Books, 1988, pp. 162-178, 302-324. Also *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 39, pp. 145-164, "Karl Barth on the Trinity". However, during the past seven to eight years, the situation has changed somewhat with a growing appreciation of Barth's pneumatology.
- ² See his "1 Corinthians 15:45, last Adam, life-giving Spirit" in *Christ and The Spirit in the New Testament*, ed B Lindars & SS Smalley, Cambridge, 1973, p. 141.
- ³ p. 26
- ⁴ See, e.g., John Bowden's *Who's Who in Theology*, SCM, 1990, p. 741
- ⁵ *The Expository Times*, volume 89, April 1978, p. 216
- ⁶ *God as Spirit*, p. 61
- ⁷ See his *Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, 1974, and his article "The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology" in *Explorations in Theology* 4. SCM, 1979
- ⁸ A Joint Statement by representatives of the Church of England Evangelical Council and leaders of the Fountain Trust who met in dialogue on four occasions over a period of eighteen months.
- ⁹ *None Can Guess*, p. 142
- ¹⁰ p. 10
- ¹¹ p. 12
- ¹² For the development of Smail's theology and his assessment of the Charismatic Movement, see his two essays in *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology*, T Smail, A Walker, N Wright, SPCK, 1993
- ¹³ Hodder
- ¹⁴ *Joy Unspeakable*, Kingsway, 1984, p. 267
- ¹⁵ *The Spirit of Promise*, Christian Focus Publications. 1986
- ¹⁶ *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*, IVP, 1964, revised edition, 1975
- ¹⁷ *The Message of Acts*, IVP, 1990
- ¹⁸ Bryntirion Press 1990
- ¹⁹ Evangelical Press
- ²⁰ Idem, pp. 13-18
- ²¹ IVP, 1984
- ²² Idem, p. 58
- ²³ p. 59
- ²⁴ pp. 61-63
- ²⁵ Priced at £14.99, this paperback has 288 pp.
- ²⁶ p. 9
- ²⁷ p. 12
- ²⁸ p. 17
- ²⁹ p. 18
- ³⁰ p. 20
- ³¹ p. 21
- ³² idem
- ³³ p. 35
- ³⁴ p. 36
- ³⁵ p. 37
- ³⁶ p. 54
- ³⁷ p. 64
- ³⁸ p. 65
- ³⁹ p. 83
- ⁴⁰ p. 84
- ⁴¹ p. 89
- ⁴² p. 91
- ⁴³ p. 176
- ⁴⁴ p. 189
- ⁴⁵ p. 194
- ⁴⁶ p. 206
- ⁴⁷ pp. 237-239
- ⁴⁸ p. 242
- ⁴⁹ p. 244
- ⁵⁰ p. 246
- ⁵¹ p. 248
- ⁵² p. 34
- ⁵³ pp. 41-42

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Book Reviews

Jesus and the Victory of God

NT Wright

SPCK, 1996, 741pp

£30.00, (pb ISBN 0281047170)

£50.00 (hb ISBN 0281050538)

People who read the first of Tom Wright's projected five volume series on "Christian Origins and The Question of God" have waited impatiently for five years for this, the second book. The wait has been rewarded with a book which should command our attention for some years. Primarily, this is Wright's contribution to what has been termed "The Third Quest for the historical Jesus" – taking seriously and identifying the historical role of Jesus in first century Israel. But it is more than that, for here he has tried to bridge the gap, in both liberal and evangelical theology, that exists between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. If Wright's interpretation of the Gospel evidence is correct, we are left with serious questions about the formulation of our systematic theology. For those who have read widely in the scepticism of the Jesus Seminar, or in other third questors, here is a refreshing acceptance and defence of the authenticity of the Gospels' presentation of the life and death of Jesus the Christ. In common with most academic work, Wright has concentrated on the evidence of the Synoptic Gospels, but there are some references to Johannine material.

The book has four parts. The first is an analysis of the state of academic Third Questing and a presentation of the five questions that need to be addressed:

- (a) How did Jesus fit into Judaism?
- (b) What were Jesus' aims?
- (c) Why did he die?

- (d) Why are the Gospels what they are?
- (e) How and why did the early church begin?

He adds to this the sixth question of how the result of such an historical investigation is to be related to the contemporary church and world. Questions a, b, c and e are largely answered in this book. It is (a) to which Wright gives most attention and in so doing, casts fresh light on several Gospel passages. He is especially useful in identifying OT backgrounds and allusions. Question (d) is only partly answered here and we are promised another book on the resurrection of Jesus as the vindication of the victory on the cross. The sixth question, (e), is the most difficult one and will need to be addressed in preaching, teaching and evangelism.

Part 2 presents Jesus as the prophet who announces the coming of the Kingdom of God. Part 3 deals with the aims and beliefs of Jesus. The short part 4 is entitled Conclusions.

Wright argues that there was a strong belief in Second Temple Judaism that the exile had not ended. This meant that the prophecies of the return had not been fulfilled. Jesus presents himself as the fulfillment of all these prophecies in his coming to Jerusalem. It is there that he gains the victory of God over the true enemy of Israel, Satan, who is to be found at the heart of Israel. Jesus redefines in his own person all the symbols of the People of God – especially Temple and Torah. Eschatological passages are interpreted as referring to the coming of God in the person of Jesus during his earthly ministry or to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD70. Wright does not see in

the Gospels any prediction of an end to the space-time universe or the Second Coming of our Lord. This is not to say that he would not recognise it as part of Christian belief from other NT documents, but it should not be an interpretative tool for understanding the Victory of God in the work of Jesus. The Victory has taken place. It is not something still awaited.

This book is refreshing and exciting, but some parts will be challenged. Wright tries to interpret almost every parable in the light of the history of Israel. Is this the best way to understand the Sower or the Prodigal Son? The challenge that God must be defined totally in terms of Jesus during his ministry (p. 662) would be debated as will his whole understanding of eschatology. Each reader will have his own area of dispute with Wright, but no one will fail to be stimulated to look again at the Gospel evidences. Wright has come a long way since his first book was published by The Banner of Truth in 1972, but the intention of that book in directing us back to what Scripture really says, is also in this new book.

Rev. Ray Porter MA MPhil FRAS

Jesus the Messiah

Robert H. Stein

*IVP, Leicester, 1996, 290 pp., hb., £12.99,
ISBN 0-85111-750-3*

Robert Stein has long been recognised as a scholar who is determined to make good biblical scholarship accessible to a wide audience. In this recent volume he applies his skills to "A Survey of the Life of Christ" (the book's sub-title), particularly suited for new theological students, but also appropriate for any thoughtful Christian. Indeed, it is the kind of book that would

provide very useful background reading for believers listening to a series of sermons on one of the Gospels, and perhaps pastors should be more ready to encourage their people to tackle such works.

The book is divided into two parts. Part one deals with issues of historical method, where Stein identifies the importance of identifying presuppositions in our study, discusses the various sources available to the student of Jesus, and outlines the chronology of the events under consideration. This section is particularly useful for students concerned about the controversial results of some recent scholarship. In sharp contrast to some recent works on Jesus, Stein states that "this life of Christ has been written from a believer's viewpoint" (p. 13). This does not entail, in his view, the abandonment of historical judgement, it simply means that biblical sources are treated with the respect they deserve, and that the presuppositions of the interpreter are acknowledged from the outset.

Part two deals with the life and ministry of Jesus in numerous brief chapters which allow the reader to become acquainted with the thrust of the issue without getting bogged down in the detail. This section is much more accessible to the general reader, introducing him or her to familiar topics such as the baptism of Jesus, the transfiguration and the last supper, in a fresh way, making use of the best in contemporary research. It is particularly encouraging to see both the death and the resurrection of Jesus dealt with in a book on the "historical Jesus".

Other chapters, however, deal with less familiar subjects such as Jesus' family, the languages he spoke, and the accounts of his trial. Some of the

discussions are quite demanding and require serious thought, but this means that difficult questions are not avoided, and the clarity of Stein's prose means that the reader will not be lost in technicalities. Stein also regularly points out the significance of a particular discussion for the faith of individual believers and the life of the church.

The very title of the work indicates that Stein is aware of the Jewish setting of Jesus' life and ministry. It is not surprising, therefore, to be introduced to various portions of Jewish literature, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, numerous "intertestamental" works, and Rabbinic literature. Stein helpfully shows how such documents can illuminate the canonical Gospel accounts without treating them as equally authoritative for understanding Jesus.

Unusually, for a textbook, Stein's work contains no footnotes or endnotes. Initially this is disconcerting for one used to the conventions of contemporary biblical studies, but after a few pages it becomes liberating as the text is allowed to address the reader without constant interruption. The "References" section at the end of each chapter both indicates the breadth of Stein's acquaintance with important literature and points to many avenues for further research once the student has worked through Stein's book.

It is unlikely that everyone will agree with all of Stein's views, but his clear arguments and sensitive use of evidence will allow further discussion to be better informed. IVP are to be commended for producing such an attractive, hardback textbook at a price which is realistically accessible to students.

Rev. Alistair I Wilson, Highland Theological Institute, Elgin, Scotland

A Theology of Encouragement

Michael A Eaton

Paternoster Press, 1995, 261pp, £14.99, ISBN 085364-617-1

Michael Eaton, a baptist pastor in Nairobi, tells us here that he absorbed a lot of Reformed teaching in his early years, and would still hold to quite a bit of it, but he has a problem with some of it, and this book both describes the problem and suggests a solution. In part 1 he shares his problem of introspection and lack of joy, assurance and dynamism, which he believes he also sees in many other Reformed Christians. Then he goes on to show the snags in developed Calvinism (i.e. since Beza) and evangelical Arminianism. He believes he finds a common problem: legalism, or "Mosaism" as he calls it. So part 2 outlines his solution: briefly, abandon limited atonement, and realise we are not in any sense under the Mosaic law, including the Ten Commandments, as a rule of life, and that the connection between obeying God's commands and justification/assurance of justification is not nearly as close as traditional Calvinists and Arminians think. Part 3 is very short and shows where some positive motivation to holiness *does* come from, and part 4 deals mainly with the warning passages in the NT. Here he explains warnings about not inheriting the kingdom of God, and such like, as having nothing to do with hell but relating to loss of inheritance and reward both now and later *in* heaven – similar in thrust, in other words, to 1 Cor 3:15. In the course of arguing for this he more or less advocates a kind of doctrine of purgatory (see pp. 206-7: "In New Testament times 'gehenna' could have 'purgatorial' [sic] overtones").

The book includes quick skips through Galatians, Matthew and Hebrews, as well as a chapter on "The faith of Christ", which maintains that *pistis Christou* means not our faith in Christ but "the faith Christ exercised". This, like so much else here, obviously has to do with the writer's desire to have a theology that makes introspection almost *impossible*: we do not even look at ourselves to see if we have faith, let alone obedience!

Eaton has surely identified a genuine phenomenon in the lack of joy, assurance and dynamism in many Reformed Christians; and it would be the present writer's view that when he regrets the high level of introspection encouraged in Reformed teaching and the way we use the law in sanctification, he may well have discovered part of the cause of our malaise. There *is* an immediate assurance in the NT, we *are* told to fix our eyes on Jesus, and Galatians 5 does *not* say that we love by keeping the law, but that by walking in the Spirit and loving we end up, almost "accidentally", keeping the law. "This love, [Eaton is referring to Gal 5:13] which evidently has no need of Mosaic guidance, in fact 'fulfils' all that the law was pointing to. Thus the law is fulfilled without legalism (5:14). ...The Judaizers evidently believe that Mosaism will restrain the flesh. Paul...says it is the Spirit who restrains the flesh (5:16)" (p. 112). The fact that modern Reformed writers tend to interpret Rom 13:8-10 and Gal 5:13-15 as saying that the way to love is to keep the details of the law, when Paul is so obviously saying the very opposite, inclines me to think that on *this* issue – the enormous prominence of the law in sanctification, its "third use", in Reformed teaching – Eaton has a point. He says, "This radical combination

of quasi-antinomianism combined with fulfilment of the law indirectly is an insufficiently explored paradox in Paul's teaching" (p. 119).

However – and I mean a pretty big "however", with trumpets, or better, alarm-bells – in trying to drive a wedge between holiness and assurance, and then referring the warnings of Scripture to loss of positive reward and even to the threat of something "purgatorial", Eaton has over-reacted. He is far from proving his case on these matters, and he almost admits as much ("...my statements may need to be modified, as more is discovered in days to come", p. 37). In the light of the personal difficulties he shares in the opening chapter, one cannot help wondering if the writer has not seen something true that has also proved subjectively helpful to himself, and then allowed his experience to lead him to take this truth too far.

Furthermore, on the issue of the law's place in sanctification, I doubt if OT law, (especially the Ten Commandments, but even the detailed Mosaic law that applies the decalogue to the ordinary lives of God's people between Moses and Christ) is quite as irrelevant to the Christian as Eaton seems to suggest. I am no theonomist, but this is too far the other way: it would make much of the OT simply interesting and useful in evangelism rather than truly profitable to the Christian.

So there are things worth pondering here, but this "theology of encouragement" is in serious danger of being a theology that cheapens God's grace.

Rev. Christopher J L Bennett

EDITORIAL POLICY

1. To articulate that theology characteristic of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.
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