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**Berkouwer's Subjectivism**

**Infant Salvation**

**Falling Away**

**More on The Downgrade**

**The Christian and Violence**

**Books on Christian Unity**

**F O U N D -  
A T I O N S**

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

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# Editorial

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As editor, I was encouraged by the response of readers to the last issue of FOUNDATIONS. Letters and telephone calls to me conveyed the appreciation of readers, both for particular articles and also the mix of articles in the November '92 issue. One of the letters is included in this issue, together with a response from Gareth Crossley. Please do write to me if you wish to comment on articles or to suggest topics which might be covered in the future.

In this issue there is more material to stimulate and inform you. Geoffrey Thomas has contributed SEEKING AND FINDING, an article which reflects on the writings and beliefs of Professor G C Berkouwer. He concludes that Berkouwer is a 'warning to us of what happens when one deliberately and progressively chooses the subjective path of the New Hermeneutic.'

Gary Brady provides us with a thoughtful Baptist perspective on INFANT SALVATION, a subject which is pastorally relevant but one which is often approached sentimentally rather than biblically and theologically. You are welcome to correspond with the editor and author if you disagree or wish to develop the discussion further.

Our EXEGESIS article on FALLING AWAY is by Michael Plant who re-examines critically the traditional Calvinistic interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6. Perhaps you may not agree with him but his careful study will drive you back to the text for a re-think. The pastoral implications of this article are especially helpful.

THE BIG MAN MUST GO! is the final part of David Boorman's material on Spurgeon and the Downgrade Controversy. His contribution to the last issue was appreciated by many readers.

Wyn Davies has written a well researched article on THE CHRISTIAN AND VIOLENCE, a topic all too relevant and urgent today. He concludes by setting before us our Christian responsibility in this violent society.

BOOK REVIEWS this time major on church issues, with Peter Brumby covering the IVP evangelical discussion on unity and Eryl Davies commenting on some ecumenical reflections arising from the WCC Assembly in Australia. There has also been room to include a review of Peter Lewis' book on the Person of Christ.

Our prayer is that this issue will again minister in various ways to the needs of evangelical churches and their leaders.

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# Seeking and Finding

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Geoffrey Thomas

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Professor Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer will be 90 years of age this year. Retired from his chair as professor of theology at the Free University, Amsterdam, for twenty years, more than two dozen of his books have been translated into English. He lectured in that wonderful stately building where the Free University began, and taught capacity audiences of theological students in the post war atmosphere of Europe.

Every year he brought out a study of some aspect of Biblical teaching, never in any logical order. The doctrine of sin was written the year after a book on election, and a book on the second coming of Christ followed that. In 1949 his first study, FAITH AND SANCTIFICATION, appeared, which was translated into English in 1952.

Shortly after his retirement he wrote A HALF CENTURY OF THEOLOGY which appeared in America in 1977, but in the last few years he has published another book of 436 pages entitled SEEKING AND DOING (which is yet to be translated into English). It is similar in scope to the earlier book of remembrances and assessments of European Christianity. Oh dear, I don't understand Dutch, but I am glad for a synopsis and overview of the book which Dr Raymond Zorn has done in the November edition of *Christian Renewal*.

## The Soul at Death

We soon learn that G C Berkouwer has a high regard for Dooyeweerd's Christian philosophy – the so-called *philosophy of cosmonomic law*. He recognises that Dooyeweerd's suspicion of any dualism coming into Christianity (even of man being body and soul) has caused biblical problems. When Dooyeweerd was once asked what if anything remained of the soul at death, he replied "Nothing!" He did not see this being inconsistent with maintaining man's continued existence after death.

There is one position which seems the fatal flaw in Berkouwer's theology. He claims that "the Gospel is not an eternal, timeless truth which, once for all fixed and formulated, can be transmitted without consideration of the period in question" (p 47). This is the virtual thesis of his book, and proves to be the rationale for many of the changes which have taken place in his denomination, eg joining the World Council of Churches, changing their official attitude to the opening chapters of Genesis, modifying the verbal authority of Scripture so that it was binding in what it teaches *concerning the doctrine of salvation*, giving women office in the church, rejecting the Bible's teaching on reprobation, and tolerating homosexuality. His denomination veers ever more to the left, theologically and ethically.

## **Scripture and Nature - Two Books?**

A H de Hartog was a colleague of Berkouwer and a lecturer in the Free University before the war, and he had influenced Berkouwer. Calvin's making Scripture the exclusive spectacles of revelation, de Hartog considered to be unnecessary because "both in Scripture and in nature surprising insight is given of God's unfolding activity in history" (p 105). This idea that God has given us "two books" results in general revelation being given equal authority with Scripture. It also makes man dependent upon "experts" to tell him what is to be regarded as revelation, and what is to be regarded as superseded.

When Berkouwer's book HOLY SCRIPTURE appeared in 1975, J I Packer wrote that the author berated American fundamentalists and others for their *docetic* concept of Scripture (not taking the Bible's humanness seriously, the Dutchman was saying), and their stress on formal biblical inerrancy, a concept which Berkouwer finds needless and unhelpful.

## **God - Man's Horizontal Partner?**

When Berkouwer examines the doctrine of the sovereignty of God he recognises that the church's loss of emphasis upon the transcendence of God has reduced God to the dimension of a mere relationship, with man as a horizontal partner of God. Then how meaningful is prayer, asks Berkouwer, if God is not a supernatural Person, but to be identified with our neighbour? But confusion is served rather than clarity by the use of a quotation attributed to Bavinck by which he is supposed to have said after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, that it was then difficult "to continue to think about a God who rules the world in his goodness" (p 173). Surely human doubts are found in Scripture in the context of the struggles of faith (cp Psalm 73). But Berkouwer regards texts being quoted in the context of human suffering, as "pat answers", a manifestation of a know-it-all position that forgets Paul's statement that "we walk by faith and not by sight" (p 170). According to Berkouwer, Scripture is full of unanswered questions so that we will not become complacent but rather ever remain busy with the mandate to continue to seek, assured of the divine promise that as we do so, we shall find (p 184).

## **Jacob and Esau**

Berkouwer also rejects the interpretation of Romans 9 that Paul is teaching a decree concerning two persons Jacob and Esau, because the words, 'the older will serve the younger' are a reference to two nations, Israel and Edom, as their subsequent history reveals and to which Malachi 1:2, quoted by Paul in verse 13, makes reference (p 383). But Raymond Zorn has pointed out that while it cannot be denied that Malachi uses the Genesis 25:23 reference to point to the subsequent history of the nations of Israel and Edom, Paul as a matter of fact does not do this. He deliberately calls attention to the two individuals, Jacob and Esau, for the history of these two nations was a consequence of the Lord's action with respect to the two individuals, one whom God chose in his sovereign electing love and the other whom he rejected in his sovereign discrimination. And it is just this approach by Paul that elicits the objections of

his hearers in verse 14, that is, "is there unrighteousness with God" (God can be faulted for being unjustly arbitrary), and in verse 19, (since God does what he pleases) "why does he yet find fault?" (who can oppose his will?) Paul also makes it clear in this passage that Esau, Pharaoh, Israel and humanity are responsible for their sinful actions, so that while God's election is by means of his grace alone, his condemnation of unrepentant and unforgiven sinners is appropriately the result of justice on his part.

The apostle Paul is speaking about peoples and destinies which can be traced back to God's sovereign discriminating electing love which alone was responsible for the choice of Jacob and the preservation of the elect remnant within Israel by which his redemptive purposes in Christ were accomplished. Berkouwer may have his problems with what he calls a little dismissively *decretal theology*, and raises its opponents' claim that it makes God the author of sin, but one is left wondering whether the way of interpreting Scripture chosen by Berkouwer has not paved the way for so many of the ministers in his denomination accepting the universal salvation taught by Karl Barth, which sees all mankind as somehow "in Christ", with eternal retribution and hell having been banished. What is then left of the divine justice, the need of missionary endeavour and the continued antithesis between the kingdom of God and that of the evil one?

### **Building on a Rock?**

When Berkouwer describes contemporary trends in the Roman Catholic Church he writes of the way it has been influenced by the higher critical approach to Scripture. He suggests the question which every conservative would ask, having seen the very way Berkouwer's own thinking and that of his denomination has changed over the years: "Does one in all these new developments, perhaps build one's house upon sand, rather than upon a rock, so that it will not stand against a storm?" (p 402).

Berkouwer in his 90th year is a warning to us of **what happens when one deliberately and progressively chooses the subjective path of the New Hermeneutic**. Only confusion can come into Christian preaching with the arbitrary rejection of things that Scripture teaches. The late Gerald Priestland spent his last hours writing an article for *The Friend*, the Quaker magazine, "It was about how he was teased for pointing out which bits of the Bible he believed and those he did not," said Sally Juniper, editor of that magazine (*The Times*, 22 June 1991). The precise problem is the lack of any authority other than the Lord Jesus Christ to tell us what "bits" of Scripture are the Word of God, and what are not. And the Son of God taught that the Scripture cannot be broken, and that every jot and tittle was exactly how God intended it to be. The infallible Christ has driven us to an infallible Scripture. Our submission to it reflects our devotion to him. A subjective interpretation of the Bible leads to its reconstruction in the reader's own image.

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# Infant Salvation - A Reformed Baptist Perspective

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*Gary Brady*

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The question of infant salvation is one that will not go away. It cannot be sidestepped. In the western world infant mortality rates are thankfully low but babies still sometimes die. Miscarriages are not uncommon either and with the continuing situation regarding abortion we can be sure that this perplexing issue is bound to come into focus again and again. 'Is my little one in heaven or hell?' comes the question from distressed parents. Pastors and elders must be either naive or callous not to realise that *they must have an answer*. This article arose out of a pastoral situation where the author was brought face to face with this vexed question in his own fellowship.

## **Augustine and Original Sin**

In coming to the question of infant salvation we first face the matter of original sin. That is the truth that all are born sinners because of Adam's original sin. Some do try to short-circuit the argument by saying that infants are innocent, devoid of guilt, sinless. They are not worthy, therefore, of any sort of punishment. Yet the Scriptures clearly teach that all are born in sin (eg Ps 51:5, 58:3, Rom 5, Eph 2:3). This was the teaching of Augustine. He fully recognised that by nature all infants deserve damnation. They inherit both Adam's guilt and his inclination to sin. This 'free' and 'wrong' agency must be punished. He goes on to stress that the guilt of infants cannot begin to compare with that of adults who are clearly guilty of actual sin. Nevertheless their original sin cannot be discounted.

## **Roman Catholicism and Limbus Infanta**

Although the Council of Trent is carefully non-committal on the subject many Roman Catholic theologians have spoken of a *Limbus Infantum*. This is said to be a place for unbaptised infants on the outskirts of hell. It is understood in different ways ranging from a place of positive punishment through to a place where *the beatific vision* simply remains unseen. Of course, if the baby has been baptised the Roman creed guarantees it a place in heaven.

## **Variety Among The Reformers**

Luther seems to have been unwilling to leave behind this stress on baptism whereas Zwingli apparently took the view that all who die in infancy go to heaven regardless of baptism. There has been some debate over Calvin's view arising from the fact that he only approaches the subject indirectly. He certainly taught that some of the elect die in infancy. Evidently his view that *there are reprobate infants* must be tempered by the fact that he believed such reprobates always come to years of maturity. It is then that they 'procure' their destruction.

It is asserted by some that Calvin did not believe that any dying infant would be lost but there are certainly ambiguous phrases in his writings.<sup>3</sup>

## Reformation Documents

The *Canons of the Synod of Dort* (1619) are unambiguous. In Article 17 of the first part we read:

Since we are to judge of the will of God from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but by virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they, together with their parents, are comprehended, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleases God to call out of this life in their infancy.<sup>4</sup>

The question of what happens to the children of unbelievers is not addressed. The *Westminster Confession* (1647) is more ambiguous, the *Baptist London Confession* some forty years later much less so.<sup>5</sup> They read, in X.iii respectively:

Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit who works when and where and how he pleases.

Infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit who works when and where and how he pleases.

It is unlikely that the Westminster Divines were making the point that 'non-elect infants dying in infancy' are not regenerated! Rather the contrast is between elect infants that die in infancy and elect infants who go on to mature years. However, there was certainly a reluctance on the part of some to speak in the less ambiguous terms of the Baptist Confession. Thus Shedd can speak of 'elder Calvinists' who, unlike John Owen for example, were reluctant 'to make the circle of election large enough to include all dying infants, and not a part only.' This, he claims, was due to a fear of Arminianism.<sup>6</sup>

## Later Calvinists

There was little reluctance amongst later Calvinists particularly by the nineteenth century to teach that all who die in infancy are elect. At a meeting of the *Eclectic Society* in 1802 when this subject was discussed each speaker (including John Newton, Thomas Scott etc) accepted this view.<sup>7</sup> Charles Hodge, the Princeton theologian, also taught this, as did many in a similar tradition such as Shedd and Warfield.<sup>10</sup> C H Spurgeon was a popular advocate of the position. In a private letter he wrote,

I have never, at any time in my life, said, believed, or imagined that any infant, under any circumstances, would be cast into hell. I have always believed in the salvation of all infants ... I do not believe that, on this earth, there is a single professing Christian holding the damnation of infants; or, if there be, he must be insane, or utterly ignorant of Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

Later writers in the Reformed tradition seem to be more cautious in their beliefs, especially in the matter of children of unbelievers.<sup>12</sup>

## Biblical Parameters

There is no paucity of names to conjure with. Ultimately, however, we must come to the Word of God. What does it say there? Let us begin with these points.

1. Infants are not born innocent in the proper sense. They are under Adam's curse and in his image.
2. Salvation is only possible through the sovereign grace of God in election and regeneration. Election is from before the womb (Jer 1:5, Rom 9:1-12, Gal 1:15). Regeneration can occur <sup>14</sup>in the womb (Lk 1:15)<sup>13</sup> and is possible regardless of baptism or parentage.
3. There is a moral difference between a baby and an adult. An infant has no actual sin, it does not actively strive against conscience before the age of responsibility.<sup>15</sup> The judgement will be according to works (cf Mt 25:31f, Jn 5:28,29, Rom 2:5,6, 2Cor 5:10 etc also Deut 1:39). Even if we do accept that some or all of those who die in infancy are not saved it is hard to see what actual punishment there justly can be.<sup>16</sup>

### General Considerations

These are some of the general considerations that have led men to believe in the salvation of all dying in infancy. Firstly, there is **the goodness of God**. He is a gracious and compassionate God, the God who is love. As Spurgeon stresses, we do not worship Molech but the God who cares for his creatures. Nevertheless, as a contemporary of John Newton remarked, 'Yet there are other things which appear to be reconciled with these attributes with so much difficulty, that perhaps this ground is not tenable.'<sup>17</sup>

Then there is **the character of the Lord Jesus** and especially his attitude towards and teaching about children. (Mt 11:25, 18:3, 19:13f, 21:16 etc)<sup>18</sup> Deut 1:39 and Jonah 4:11 are sometimes mentioned at this point too.

Another favourite argument with Spurgeon, Newton and others is that of **the numerical superiority of the elect**. They teach that in the end there will be more sinners in heaven than in hell. The greater part of the former will be made up of those who died in infancy.<sup>19</sup> Such a general argument lacks solid biblical proof. At very best it can only serve as supporting argument. Post-millennialism does not demand belief in a universal salvation for those who die in infancy.

Those who accept the Presbyterian and Reformed **covenantal view of children of believers** seem to be in little doubt that all such who die in infancy will go to heaven. 1 Corinthians 7:14 is their most hopeful verse. Combined with 2 Samuel 12:23 they believe the problem is solved. As David Kingdon points out, however, <sup>20</sup>having believing parents is no ground for supposing a child to be regenerate.<sup>20</sup> Of course, if one then seeks to extend the circle of election to all infants, the covenant argument becomes superfluous.

Many give great weight to the Lord's words in Luke 18:15,16, especially the phrase 'for of such is the kingdom of heaven'. Yet surely the point of Jesus' remark is that *childlikeness* is vital to receive the kingdom.<sup>21</sup> It does not follow that simply being a child will secure entry to the kingdom. To be born and to be born again are two quite separate things.

Hodge and others turn for support to Romans 5 especially verses 18 and 19. He says,

All the descendants of Adam, except Christ, are under condemnation; all the descendants of Adam, except those of whom it is expressly revealed that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God, are saved.<sup>22</sup>

The approach seems to be one of 'innocent until proved guilty'. These verses (like 1 Corinthians 15:22,23) really have nothing to say about infants. Paul addresses the matter of the heathen who never hear at the beginning of Romans but he has nothing to say about those who die as infants.

Other passages appealed to include 1 Kings 14:13, Psalm 8:2, Ezekiel 16:21, Zechariah 8:5 and Matthew 18:10. In which ever way these verses are understood they give very little hint of the scope of infant salvation which is the issue under discussion.

## 2 Samuel 12:23

The single most important verse for consideration of this matter is 2 Samuel 12:23. Here David recognises that God has not heard his prayer for his son by Bathsheba and so he speaks those famous words, 'But now that he is dead why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? *I will go to him* but he will not return to me.'

It is clear in the first instance that David is not merely saying, 'I too will die like my child. The baby will not come back but I will follow on and die too.' Equally he is not holding to some primitive or pagan idea that all go to the same place at death.<sup>23</sup> No, he expects to see his child in heaven.

The question this raises is, on what basis does he have such confidence and on what basis may we have equal confidence? Presbyterians may say that it is simply that David himself was a believer and so he believed his son would be saved too. But what about Absalom! David did not react to Absalom's death in the same way. 'O my son Absalom! My son my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you - O Absalom, my son, my son!' What a contrast.

Surely the secret of David's confidence springs rather from the fact that he had committed that little one to God in prayer. While the child was alive he had fasted and prayed for its life. Now that the Lord had taken its life David could only conclude that although his initial request had been denied, the deeper concern that lay behind the prayer had been noted. Like Abraham he was confident that the Judge of all the earth would do right.

Pastorally, on the basis of this incident, we can assure parents who have faithfully prayed and committed their little one to the Lord in prayer that all will be well. Despite their many failings (perhaps as great as David's) they have every reason to expect to see their child in heaven. It is particularly striking that David had this confidence despite the sinful circumstances surrounding the birth.

Where this is not the case we are not in a position to say the child is in hell, especially if, although the parents do not believe, others have been praying. Further even if there are babies in hell we can be sure there is no unjust suffering of any sort. Believing parents and all who turn to the Lord in time of trouble can cast themselves on the sovereign God of mercy.

David Kingdon is surely right when he warns,

We dare not add to Scripture, but neither must one make the deduction from Scripture that God cannot or will not save all children dying in infancy. The salvation of all children dying in infancy is not asserted in Scripture, nor is the condemnation of such children asserted. The mercy of our God is free

and large. That we know.  
 Finally some appropriate closing words from Spurgeon to grieving parents,  
 Do you know what sorrows your little one has escaped? You have had enough yourself. It was born of woman; it might have been full of trouble as you are. It has escaped those sorrows; do you lament that?  
 Remember too your own sins, and the deeper sorrow of repentance. Had the child lived it would have been a sinner, and it must have known the bitterness of the conviction of sin... I think I might say, reserve your tears, bereaved parents for the children that live.... There is subject for weeping for you. I pray that you may never cease to weep for them until they have ceased to sin. Never cease to weep for them until you yourself cease to breathe.... Plead with Him, go before Him with the power of faith and earnestness, and He will surely hear you.<sup>24</sup>

## References

- 1 See W G T Shedd, CALVINISM; PURE AND MIXED (1893, BoT ed 1986) p 109
- 2 According to Harry Buis in THE DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT (P&R 1957) p 137
- 3 See Loraine Boettner's quotation of R A Webb in THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION (P&R 1932) pp 147,148. See also A H Strong, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY (P&I 1907) p 663
- 4 As quoted by W Hendriksen in THE BIBLE ON THE LIFE HEREFTER (Baker 1959) p 103
- 5 The Baptist London Confession follows the Westminster very closely. It was completed in 1677 but because of difficulties due to persecution was not adopted until 1689. The Congregationalist Savoy Declaration (1658) at this point is almost exactly the same as the Westminster.
- 6 Shedd, op cit, p 109
- 7 Shedd, op cit, p 111; Strong, op cit, p 663. I have been unable to trace Strong's incorrect reference to Owen.
- 8 Shedd, op cit, p 111
- 9 See THE THOUGHT OF THE EVANGELICAL LEADERS (1856, BoT ed 1978) p 260f. In a letter Newton wrote that in his private judgement he believed all dying in infancy are elect. He checked himself however, not wanting to 'indulge opinions about points not clearly and certainly revealed.' (WORKS, Vol V1, 1820, BoT ed 1985, p 182)
- 10 See the quotations given by Hendriksen, op cit, p 102. Strong quotes Prentiss, 'Lyman Beecher and Charles Hodge first made current in this country the doctrine of the salvation of all who die in infancy.' (p 664). A A Hodge is quite conservative compared with his father when he says 'It is not positively revealed that all infants are elect, but we are left, for many reasons, to indulge a highly probable hope that such is the fact.' (THE CONFESSION OF FAITH, 1869, BoT ed 1958, p 175)
- 11 LETTERS OF CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON, Iain H Murray (BoT 1992, letter 1869) p 150. Also see NEW PARK STREET PULPIT, Volume 3 (1857) and METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE PULPIT, Volumes 7, 24

(1861 & 1874)

- 12 Eg Bavinck (1854-1921), Berkhof (1874-1957), Hendriksen (1900-1982), Boettner (1901-1990), David Kingdon. See Hendriksen, op cit p 102 and Kingdon, CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM (Carey 1972) p 97. Boettner sounds more cautious than Charles Hodge, Warfield or Spurgeon. How much the climate of the age influences the sounder theologians is difficult to assess.
- 13 Strong posits the idea of regeneration in connection with the infant soul's first sight of Christ in the world to come. This is mere speculation, op cit, p 663
- 14 'As infants are included in the effects of Adam's sin without actual concurrence of their own, why should they not be included in the salvation of Christ without actual concurrence?' asks Rev B Woodd (sic) THE THOUGHT OF THE EVANGELICAL LEADERS, p 262
- 15 cp David Kingdon's helpful remarks, op cit, pp 70, 73, 94, 95
- 16 'Infants are not capable of remorse and anguish of conscience. There is reason to believe that this will be the chief feature of a future punishment.... But as infants commit no actual sin, so there is no consciousness of it: nor can it be conveyed to them by any imputed guilt from Adam. Infants are not capable of a sense of divine dereliction... as they have acquired no ideas of a God, a creature, a law, obedience and disobedience, sin and duty, the favour and the anger of God, they could not acquire these but by the immediate impression of God on their minds, and it is not to be imagined that God would give them these ideas purposely to punish them.' J H Pratt, THE THOUGHT OF THE EVANGELICAL LEADERS, p 260
- 17 Rev B Woodd, op cit, p 262
- 18 That 'Little ones' are chiefly believers is demonstrated by B B Warfield in the essay included in SELECTED SHORTER WRITINGS OF BENJAMIN WARFIELD (Essay 1904, P & R, ed 1970) p 234f
- 19 Eg Newton (tentatively, op cit, p 183), Spurgeon, NPSP, Vol 3, 1857, p 28
- 20 He quotes John Tombes, a 17th century Baptist, 'To make God consider (as the object of children's election) the faith of their parents, is worse than the opinion of the Arminians who make faith and works foreseen the object of every particular man's election.' Op cit, p 83f
- 21 Eg NICNT LUKE, N Geldenhuys (Eerdmans 1979) p 454
- 22 SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY (Abridged, Baker, 1988), p 38
- 23 See the helpful article on Sheol in Hendriksen, op cit, p 83f
- 24 MTP, Vol 7 (29th September 1861)

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**Comments on this article by readers, particularly paedo-baptists, would be welcomed by the editor.**

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# Exegesis 15: Falling Away

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*Michael Plant*

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A consideration of Hebrews 6, verses 4-6, the problems it raises and the solutions proposed.

## **The problems**

This passage has always been regarded by Arminians as a key text which clearly shows Calvinism to be unbiblical and unreasonable. My concern is that, in the attempt to answer Arminian criticism, the Calvinistic response has been to turn to an unconvincing and strained exegesis of the text. The result has been to make the Calvinistic case look weak and has led to unhelpful pastoral consequences. My aim is to give a more convincing and more pastorally helpful explanation of the passage.

**The Arminian attack** on Calvinism based on Hebrews 6 vs 4-6 is straightforward and can be expressed as:-

- a) The people described in Hebrews 6 vs 4 and 5 are evidently true Christians.
- b) Such people are warned against the real danger of falling away from grace and experiencing the punishment of the wicked.
- c) We cannot suppose that God's word, which is truth itself, would warn people against the danger of falling away when they actually stand in no such danger.
- d) Therefore true Christians can fall away from grace.

It is only fair to point out that the Arminian should not be blind to the obvious weakness in his own case. The Arminian should ask whether he really wants to tell someone that they cannot, "be brought back to repentance". In other words the falling from grace that we are talking about here is total and final and does not fit the Arminian teaching that repentance may be renewed many times if necessary.

## **Calvinistic Solutions**

It is fair to designate these solutions as minimising, in that they each endeavour to discount one of points a) - c) above in order to avoid the conclusion d) and so minimise the apparent force of the passage.

1. **The punishment of the apostate does not mean they experience the fate of the unsaved.** Harry Tait<sup>1</sup> puts forward a full account of this view, pointing out that this solution has the advantage of reading verse 4 naturally, that is as referring to a genuine experience of conversion. He then observes that there is nothing impossible, so experience shows us, in such a man apostasizing. He uses the example of F W Newman, the brother of Cardinal Newman, who spent many years as an apparent apostate before a repentance late in life. His conclusion<sup>2</sup> is that, "A Christian can sin wilfully after he has received the knowledge of the truth."

Now Tait concedes that Newman is the exception to the rule, which is that an apostate will not find repentance but will die in his apostasy. He asks whether such a man is eternally lost but concludes that he isn't. Firstly, because he concludes from the very important Exodus/Promised Land typology of Hebrews 3 and 4 that this means the apostate Christian is left to , "a wilderness life" but that, "He is not cursed. How can he be? The curse was borne for him once and for all by him who became a curse for us (Galatians 3 v 13) but, like the barren field in the author's illustration, he is 'near to being cursed.'" Secondly, he links the phrase (v 8), "In the end it will be burned" to the warning of 1 Corinthians 3 vs 12-15, which leaves us with a sort of protestant purgatory with Christians receiving after death chastisement.

In response it is important to say that the point made on the basis of the typology in Hebrews 3 and 4 is weak. It puts much weight on the significance of the non-return to Egypt which is not referred to at all in the text of Hebrews 3 and 4. This is an unsafe and unsound procedure and the results seem to fly in the face of Hebrews 3 v 14, "We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence that we had at first." Secondly, his linking of the passage to 1 Corinthians 3 vs 12 - 15 is unsatisfactory and fails to relate the passage to its context which is evangelism and the building up of the church<sup>4</sup>. Finally, the use of Hebrews 6 v 8, "it is near (NIV: in danger of) being cursed" is careless for Tait makes it sound as if near = "close to but not actually there," when actually it means "in danger of, because the next step is burning." There is a progressive parallelism between the phrases, "in danger of being cursed" and, "in the end it will be burned" which indicates that being cursed (an intentionally unusual expression for poor land) = to be burned. It is precisely the curse, borne by Christ for Christians, and the burning of eternal fire which the apostate faces.

**2. Apostasy is not actually possible at all.** In this interpretation the writer is not talking about a situation that existed or indeed could exist. He is saying, "If it were possible for the believer to fall away, these are the fearful things which would surely befall him. So since these things would be so if you were to give up the faith, see that you stand fast!" This is the approach commended by Hewitt<sup>5</sup>. "The theory has much in its favour and little against it. It in no way contradicts other passages of Scripture, neither is it in conflict with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints." Tait's comment<sup>6</sup> is that, "These are virtues indeed, if of a rather negative sort, and as a way out of the difficulty may commend itself to many readers, particularly if they find the alternative solutions even less acceptable."

This explanation seems to me to be one of the least acceptable and most improbable of them all because it puts into question God's honesty and integrity. As I think parents are wrong when they say "If you get out of bed the bogey man will get you" and so frighten their children with a non-existent danger, will I not feel the same about the Lord if he tries to frighten his children with a non-existent danger? This approach must mean that the readers should realise the danger is not real. In which case what good will be achieved by the warning? Once your children get to a certain age there is no point in warning them about the bogey man!

**3. The people spoken of are not true Christians at all.** This is the standard Calvinistic response to this passage. It is one which is held by John Calvin, John Owen and John Brown and therefore worthy of very serious consideration. For it to be successful its advocates must be able to show that naturally and reasonably the terminology used would convince us that these people are not actually regenerated and so may experience eternal judgment.

Calvin discusses the description of, "those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of God and the powers of coming age," and then writes, "Now there arises from this a new question, as to how it can be that one who has arrived at this point can afterwards fall away. The Lord calls only the elect effectively, and Paul bears witness (Romans 8 v 14) that those who are led by His Spirit are truly His sons, and he teaches us that it is the sure pledge of his adoption if Christ has made a man a partaker of His Spirit. Moreover the elect are outwith the danger of mortal lapse, for the Father who gave them to Christ the Son to be kept by Him is greater than all, and Christ promises (John 17 v 12) that He will care for them all, so that none perishes."

My answer is that God certainly bestows his Spirit of regeneration only on the elect, and that they are distinguished from the reprobate in the fact that they are re-made in his image, and they receive the earnest of the Spirit in the hope of the inheritance to come, and by the same Spirit the gospel is sealed on their hearts. Calvin is compelled to say that the description of those who, "have shared in the Holy Spirit" is decisive, that they are Christians.

He then goes on to say, "But I do not see that this is any reason why He should not touch the reprobate with a taste of His grace, or illumine their minds with some glimmerings of His light, or affect them with some sense of His goodness, or to some extent engrave His word on their hearts. Otherwise where would be that passing faith which Mark mentions (4 v 17)? Therefore there is some knowledge in the reprobate, which later vanishes away either because it drives its roots less deep than it ought to, or because it is choked and withers away." True though these observations undoubtedly are, this conclusion does not follow logically from his previous exegesis of the passage.

The longest and most exhaustive survey of this passage comes from John Owen. He writes<sup>8</sup> that to have been, "once enlightened" means, "they are such as were 'illuminated' by the instruction they had received in the doctrine of the gospel, and the impression made thereby on their minds by the Holy Ghost; for this is a common work of his and is here so reckoned."

The second expression, that they have, "tasted of the heavenly gift," Owen explains as meaning<sup>9</sup>, "that they have had some experience of the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit from heaven, in gospel administrations and worship." He here enters upon a discussion which is important for assessing his exegesis of the passage<sup>10</sup>, "The expression of *tasting* is metaphorical, and signified no more than to make trial or experiment; for so we do by tasting, naturally and properly, of that which is tendered unto us to eat. We taste such things by the sense given us naturally to discern our food; and then either receive or refuse them, as we find occasion. It doth not, therefore, include eating, much less digestion and turning into nourishment what was so tasted; for its nature being

only thereby discerned it may be refused, yea, though we like its relish and savour, on some other consideration. The persons here described, then, are persons who have to a certain degree understood and relished the revelation of mercy: like stony-ground hearers, they have received the word with transient joy."

The third expression that they, "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost" is explained as being unto *spiritual operations* rather than *personal inhabitation*. Owen<sup>11</sup> takes this to be the central point of the description, "this participation of the Holy Ghost is placed, it may be, in the midst of the several parts of this description, as that whereon they do all depend, and they are all instances of it. They were 'partakers of the Holy Ghost,' in that they were 'once enlightened,' and so of the rest." Additionally A W Pink<sup>12</sup> points out that the Greek word here used for "partakers" is not that used in Colossians 1 v 12 and 2 Peter 1 v 4 when real Christians are in view, "The word here simply means 'companions', referring to what is external rather than internal."

The fourth and fifth expressions that they, "have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come" are also explained in a way that relies heavily on the way the metaphor "tasted" is explained above, when speaking of the second expression, "tasted of the heavenly gift." Owen writes<sup>13</sup>, "The apostle as it were studiously keeps himself to this expression, on purpose to manifest that he intendeth not those who by faith do really receive, feed, and live on Jesus Christ, as tendered in the word of the gospel." So to taste the good word of God is to be attracted to it without arriving at sincere obedience to it. To have, "tasted... the powers of the world to come" is to have<sup>14</sup>, "had an experience of the glorious and powerful workings of the Holy Spirit in the confirmation of the gospel."

There are several objections to this exegesis and I will mention only those which have a direct reference to Owen's aim to establish<sup>15</sup>, "That the person here intended are not *true* and *sincere believers*." Firstly, it is by no means clear that the second, third and fifth expressions all refer to the same thing, namely the external and miraculous operations of the Holy Spirit. If, as Guthrie<sup>16</sup> holds, "The last three (participles) are apparently used to make clear the sense in which the first is used" it clearly could not be so. In addition Philip Hughes, after surveying the history of interpretation of the second clause from Chrysostom to the 20th Century, writes<sup>17</sup>, "To 'taste the heavenly gift,' then, may perhaps best be understood as signifying to experience the blessing which God freely and graciously bestows in Christ." In other words it is a far more general expression than Owen wishes to concede.

Secondly; the Greek word translated "to taste," which is crucial in Owen's interpretation of the second, fourth and fifth expressions, does not have the emphasis that Owen wishes to assign to it. He wishes to say that "to taste" is used because it is opposed to the idea of "eating." David Brown<sup>18</sup> describes Owen's comments as, "just and important" but exegetical conscience compels him to add, "whether the words of the apostle were intended to suggest the idea conveyed in it may admit of a doubt." He adds<sup>19</sup> that, "This view of the meaning... is not warranted by the Scripture use of the term." Scriptural evidence is simply that "tasting" is a metaphor for "experiencing" something.

It is significant that the same Greek word is used in Hebrews 2 v 9, "Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels... so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." Hughes writes,<sup>20</sup> "In our discussions of 2:9 above, where Christ is said to have tasted death, we noticed that some commentators have wished to give the verb 'tasting' a diminutive connotation, as though our author were saying that Christ only briefly sipped death; so here a few (but, interestingly, not the same) commentators, take 'tasting' to indicate no more than a temporary or superficial participation. The metaphorical use of the verb 'to taste,' however, does not seem to warrant an interpretation along these lines, accurate although this reading of the situation may otherwise be. The two occurrences of the verb in this passage are parallel to the assertion of 1 Peter 2:3, 'you (Christians) have tasted the kindness of the Lord.' Behind such statements is discernible the influence of the invitation of Psalm 34:8, 'O taste and see (that is prove) that the Lord is good,' where no diminished or inadequate experience is implied."

Thirdly; to be, "partakers of the Holy Ghost" does not imply anything external and, in its nature, deceiving. The same word is used in Hebrews 3 v1 of those who, "share in the heavenly calling" and, most significantly, of the incarnation in Hebrews 2 v 14 which reads, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too *shared in their humanity.*" The verbs to which Owen and Pink wish to give a diminished meaning are actually the verbs describing the reality of incarnation and atonement.

This must lead us to accept that the expressions used, and the sense of the passage, are naturally taken by us as referring to true believers and that Owen and those who support him have not proved their case convincingly. Tait<sup>21</sup> comments on Owen's understanding of the passage, "However we may feel that in order to make the hollow man (the non-genuine professor of faith) fit the words of Hebrews we have to exalt him, as it were, far above the ordinary run of folk in our churches today. Were we preachers to find in our people such response as this man made, such drinking in, such receiving with joy, such enlightenment, to say nothing of participation in the Holy Spirit, would we not feel something akin to revival had come?"

**Some Pastoral implications.** A central plank of some Calvinistic pulpit ministry has been the type of preaching which aimed to closely distinguish between the experience of true and false, not necessarily consciously hypocritical, professors of religion. It is to this kind of preaching and teaching that the most common Reformed interpretation of this passage lends itself. So we might, when preaching on Hebrews 6 vs 4-6, spend some time minutely diagnosing *the almost Christian* and pointing out how far it is possible to progress without genuine faith and repentance. In practice this results in the attitude, "Oh, I'm sure my original profession of faith was genuine" or, from those of a less optimistic temperament, "I hope I did it right." This will mean that the focus of the passage as we preach it will be the question of assurance and what past experiences may assure us that we have really become Christians. This totally misses the intended pastoral thrust of the passage.

## **Towards a more consistent solution**

1. **Context.** Hebrews was written to deal with a problem located in a Jewish-Christian community. The people involved have been converted and have embraced Christianity. Their temptation, because faced by persecution and propaganda from the Jewish community, is to abandon their Christian faith in favour of a return to Judaism. The writer produces what is basically an exhortation to continue in the faith (13 v 22) which is doctrinal in its approach. Assuming, as he does, a working knowledge of biblical history, the writer uses the categories of salvation in the Old Covenant to highlight the superiority of the New Covenant.

6 vs 4-6 are part of *the warning passage* which extends from 5 v 11 - 6 v 20 and which is the author's reaction to the slowness to learn, indeed the seeming regression, which is displayed by the Hebrew Christians.

We can outline this passage:-

5 v 11 - 6 v 3: **The crucial differences between spiritual babyhood and maturity and the obvious desirability of maturity.** To continue in spiritual immaturity means that both morally and doctrinally we are ignorant and vulnerable (v 14) and unable to be of help to others (v 12). Therefore we should leave the (vs 1-2), "elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement." There has been some discussion of the meaning of these terms and as to whether they represent purely Christian foundations or the foundations for Christianity as found in the Jewish faith. I think no hard and fast line is being drawn here and maturity for a Jewish Christian was precisely to go on to be grounded in those items of faith which are exclusively Christian. F F Bruce writes <sup>2</sup>, "When we consider the 'rudiments' one by one, it is remarkable how little in the list is distinctive of Christianity, for practically every item could have its place in a fairly orthodox Jewish community. Each of them, indeed, acquires a new significance in a Christian context; but the impression we get is that existing Jewish beliefs and practices were used as a foundation on which to build Christian truth."

6 vs 4-8: **The dangers of continuing spiritual babyhood.** V 3 shows that this very desirable progress to maturity is not inevitable and v 4ff explain why this is. Unhelpfully the connective word *gar* is left untranslated in the NIV and this means that the connection is lost. V 4 should then be translated, "Because (or for) it is impossible. . ." If anyone apostasizes they will not be able to go on to maturity. Vs 7 - 8 are an illustrative parallel in pastoral terms to the spiritual concepts of vs 4-6. God's goodness should lead to blessing but can, if it is abused, lead to cursing and judgement. Notice the use of emotive and theologically significant words in the illustrative parallel - for example, "drinks in the rain often falling on it" (compare Deuteronomy 32 v 2, "Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew"), "cursed" and "burned."

6 vs 9-20: **An exhortation to continued effort in Christian living.** They are encouraged to continuing effort through recollecting past evidence of God's grace in their lives (vs 9-10), through remembering that God has put himself on oath in regard to his covenant faithfulness (vs 13-18), and that our hope rests

in Jesus and hence is already lodged in heaven (vs 19-20).

**2. New Testament Diversity.** Whilst the natural understanding of the passage is that it describes and is addressed to true Christians, we may still be puzzled at how such warnings can be given. It is important that we take seriously the difference in approach that exists between the various New Testament writers. Geerhardus Vos writes<sup>23</sup>, "The peculiarity of the author's conception of religion is that it lies almost entirely in the sphere of consciousness. This may be contrasted with Paul's conception, which represents much of religion as lying *beneath* consciousness. Paul holds up the mystical aspect of union with Christ through the Holy Spirit, something which is wholly lacking in the epistle to the Hebrews. The writer of Hebrews rather regarded only the *phenomenal* (emphasis original) aspect of religion - a point important to remember in connection with the exegesis of the difficult and important passage 6:4-6." Phenomenal aspects of the religion are those directly observable to us - for example: professed faith and repentance is in this category but election is not. In Hebrews we find that salvation is thought of in this same way - as related to observable phenomena. It is assumed to have taken place when faith is expressed; but it is only certain when perseverance in the faith, another observable phenomenon, has actually taken place. This I think is the reason why 3 v 6, "And we are his house if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast" and 3 v 14, "We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the end the confidence we had at first," fit well into the epistle to the Hebrews but would read very strangely in a letter of Paul's. The author's point is not that salvation is earned by perseverance in the faith but that it is evidenced by it. This is very plain in Hebrews 3 v 14, "We have come to share in Christ (the verb is perfect, indicating a past action with present consequences) if we hold firmly (a subjunctive conditional mood of the verb relating to future actions) to the end the confidence we had at first." Now a past event can only be conditional upon future events if we are dealing with phenomena and evidence, rather than underlying causes.

**3. Visible Christians.** We can safely say that Hebrews 6 vs 4-6 is addressed to visible Christians who are described in terms of the discernible realities of their profession. If we ask the question, "What experience is here being described?", then the answer is Christian conversion. The writer is not trying to convey that there is anything at all suspect about their faith and the expressions used fitly describe the realities of coming to faith in Christ. These Christians, hearing the words, "if they fall away" are being warned against the real danger of falling away from grace and ceasing to be Christians. Calvin<sup>24</sup> writes, "The apostle is not talking here about theft, or perjury, or murder, or drunkenness or adultery. He is referring to a complete falling away from the Gospel, not one in which the sinner has offended God in some one part only, but in which he has utterly renounced his grace." The fate of such people when they cease to be Christians is that they will be eternally lost and this is made absolutely clear by the terminology of v 8, "cursed" and "be burned."

The question of whether the people spoken about in Hebrews 6 vs 4-6 are elect or non-elect, regenerate or unregenerate, is simply not part of the concern of the writer at this point. He is addressing God's visible people who stand in

danger of apostasy. Phenomenologically we must all, whether Calvinists or Arminians, admit that Christians apostasize. Whether we wish to make the theological statement that the elect can fall from a state of grace or that someone truly regenerate can do so will depend on our interpretation of other passages, many of which admit of no doubt. Hence the Arminian use of these verses to attack the perseverance of the saints is mistaken.

It is at this point that we are to interact with the concerns derived from our systematic theology and this will mean that we come to the conclusion very close to the views of Owen in his understanding of the phenomena of apostasy. This explains why some writers both approve of the sentiments expressed by him but doubt the soundness of his exegetical base. For example David Brown<sup>25</sup> describes Owen's comments on tasting as, "just and important," but exegetical conscience compels him to add, "whether the words of the apostle were intended to suggest the idea conveyed in it may admit of a doubt." Similarly, Philip Hughes<sup>26</sup> writes, "The metaphorical use of the verb 'to taste,' however, does not seem to warrant an interpretation along these lines, accurate although this reading of the situation may otherwise be." Hebrews 6 in confronting us with professing Christians apostasizing makes us ask what explains such events. Owen's comment, "The persons here described, then, are persons who have to a certain degree understood and relished the revelation of mercy: like stony-ground hearers, they have received the word with transient joy," makes sense not as an exposition of verses 4 and 5 but as an explanation of the phenomena of v 6.

**4. Some Pastoral Considerations.** Sensitive Christians cannot read a passage like Hebrews 6 vs 4-6 without concern regarding their salvation. The traditional Reformed understanding has the drawback of turning people's gaze inward and backward in their search for assurance instead of upward and forward where it ought to be located. Our task is not necessarily to analyse the *almost Christian* but to change him. So we are to follow the pattern of the letter to the Hebrews and deal with people on the basis of their professed faith. We are to point them to the obvious desirability of spiritual growth and maturity. We are to warn of the dangers of not progressing and we are to draw them with incentives drawn from God's promises, God's commitment to his oath and so to the cross, and from the person and work of Christ. By God's grace our people will be edified and built up as we honour the meaning and aims of the Holy Spirit in giving us this Scripture.

If these conclusions are correct then we must accept that one of the Christian's motivations is to be fear. Fear of the judgement of God and fear of the God of judgement. It is these that the Lord uses, as the moral and outward means, to preserve his elect in his invincible grace. The pastoral lessons are:-

- a) All of God's visible people are to be warned that if they apostasize they will be eternally lost. This warning is among the moral and outward means by which the elect are enabled to persevere.
- b) We are not to fear damaging the assurance and comfort of true believers when we issue this warning. The writer to the Hebrews actually uses this to turn their eyes from the misdirected search for assurance from past experiences to the promises and oath of God fulfilled in Christ.

- c) Bearing in mind that there will be those with temporary faith in our congregations, we can have good hope that this preaching may be used to bring them to real faith in Christ, rather than resting on past experiences.

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# The Big Man Must Go! (Part Two)

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## David Boorman

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*The first part of this article, published in Issue no 29, traced the Denominational Changes and Modern Thought which formed the background to Spurgeon's resignation from the Baptist Union in 1887.*

If the UNITARIAN HERALD was adamant that "the big man must go", the Baptist Union, through its Council, felt that efforts should be made to persuade Spurgeon to stay. To accept his resignation raised the very real possibility of alienating the considerable body of evangelicals still existing within the Union's ranks. Nor was declining Spurgeon's resignation without its difficulties since such action could be interpreted as an acceptance of the charges which Spurgeon had made. That the Baptist Union did not founder on either Scylla or Charybdis owed much to its secretary, Samuel Booth, of whom it was said,

"An even keel" was a phrase that in these times of stress and storm was frequently on his lips, and no man of all the ship's crew strove more earnestly to live up to all that the phrase involved. A more masterful, or even an abler man, might easily have wrecked or crippled the vessel, which, under Dr Booth's captaincy was at length steered into calmer seas.<sup>1</sup>

### The Union Council

Before the Council met on 13th December 1887 its officers and a small group of ex-presidents had met and agreed on a statement, drawn up by Dr Angus, Principal of Regent's Park College, affirming confidence in the evangelical loyalty of the denomination - an affirmation which missed the point completely since Spurgeon had not labelled the majority of his fellow Baptists as unorthodox and heretical. His argument with the Union arose from the fact that nothing was being done about the minority who were departing openly from the faith.

Asked at the Council meeting if Spurgeon had made any private remonstrances to them, the Union's officers gave the incredible reply that 'in no conversation or communication they had had with Mr Spurgeon had he formulated any charges as to laxity of doctrine in the Union which would have justified an appeal to the Council'.<sup>2</sup> Without doubt Spurgeon had made representations by word of mouth and in writing. However, Booth refused to allow Spurgeon to produce the correspondence between them on the grounds that it was confidential! In the circumstances it was not surprising that James Spurgeon, who was a member of the Council, should have to listen to another member remark, 'I call his brother to witness that I do not impugn the veracity of Mr Spurgeon. I think he believes he has done the thing he has not done...'<sup>3</sup>

Despite Spurgeon's request that the Council should not send 'anyone to ask for a reconciliation', it was decided that Doctors Booth, Clifford, Culross and Maclaren should seek a meeting with Spurgeon to consider 'how the unity of our denomination in truth and love and good works may be maintained'.<sup>4</sup> The deputation (with the exception of Maclaren) met Spurgeon on 13th January 1888. Spurgeon refused to withdraw his resignation and declined to name the men in the denomination who were departing from the faith since he believed that the Union had no power under its constitution for 'dealing with the utmost divergence of doctrinal opinion'.<sup>5</sup> Five days later the Council accepted Spurgeon's resignation. At the same time it adopted the following resolution which, once it became known, was strongly resented by Spurgeon and his friends:

That the Council recognizes the gravity of the charges which Mr Spurgeon has brought against the Union previous to and since his withdrawal. It considers that the public and general manner in which they have been made reflects on the whole body, and exposes to suspicion brethren who love the truth as dearly as he does. And, as Mr Spurgeon declined to give the names of those to whom he intended them to apply, and the evidence supporting them, those charges in the judgment of the Council, ought not to have been made.<sup>6</sup>

By now, some of the Council's members were beginning to regard the sending of the delegation as at worst 'a farce' and, at best, as 'one of love's blunders'.<sup>7</sup> In an attempt 'to preserve the facade of denominational unity',<sup>8</sup> Angus moved a revised draft of the declaration of the previous December at the Council meeting of 21st February. However, since in Ernest Payne's words, 'many Baptists had become deeply suspicious of doctrinal statements and creeds, if used as tests of orthodoxy or membership', the proposal ran into stormy waters. It was only carried by prefacing the declaration with the following preamble:

First - That the doctrinal beliefs of the Union are and must be determined by the doctrinal beliefs of the churches and Associations of which the Union is composed. Secondly, that the Council of the Union therefore disclaims altogether any authority to formulate a new and additional standard of theological belief as a bond of union to which assent shall be required.<sup>10</sup>

If the BAPTIST MAGAZINE was optimistic as to the outcome of the Council's decision, Spurgeon was not, remarking in a letter to Booth on 2nd March, 'The Preamble gives (the Declaration) another meaning altogether. It is an historical document but it is not a basis of union as I had recommended.'<sup>11</sup> Spurgeon was pressing for the sort of doctrinal basis which would be a real means of finding out the respective numbers of those standing for the old faith and those advocating the new, one which would not allow men to 'say one thing and mean another', one which would give an unequivocal answer to the question, 'Is the Union an assemblage of evangelical churches, or is it an indiscriminate collection of communities practising immersion?'<sup>12</sup>

## The Union Assembly

It now looked as though there would be a momentous struggle when the Baptist Union Assembly met on 23rd April. Writing in the April *SWORD AND TROWEL* Spurgeon viewed the forthcoming meeting with pessimism: the Union, while not wanting to turn down the demand that it should declare its faith, 'balances sentences, discusses everything except the main question, and proffers a base imitation of a declaration in lieu of that which is sought from it'.<sup>13</sup> A few days before the Assembly the Council met to agree the wording of the Declaration which was to be proposed for adoption, agreeing at the eleventh hour to drop Clifford's preamble.

The historic meeting was held at the City Temple where, besides ministers and delegates, there were about 600 visitors. Spurgeon was a notable absentee. 'The whole place was crammed and in tumult', wrote one journalist. 'The battle at the Temple doors will go down in history in conjunction with the truce inside.'<sup>14</sup> The Council's resolutions relating to the resignation of Spurgeon were accepted unchallenged while the Declaration, moved by Charles Williams and seconded by James Spurgeon, was approved by an overwhelming majority of 2000 to seven! As far as many delegates were concerned, the vote was one of overwhelming support for 'the gospel'. James Spurgeon hailed it as a 'great victory', conveniently ignoring the fact that, in moving the resolution, Williams had quoted Tennyson in favour of a liberal theology and justification of doubt, and that he himself, in seconding the motion, had found it necessary to stress that he was in no way endorsing Williams' remarks!

What, then, was this remarkable Declaration which found such ready acceptance with men who were divided among themselves on the great centralities of the Christian faith?

'The following facts and doctrines are commonly believed by the Churches of the Union:

1. The Divine Inspiration and Authority of the Holy Scriptures as the supreme and sufficient rule of our faith and practice: and the right and duty of individual judgment in the interpretation of it.
2. The fallen and sinful state of man.
3. The Deity, the Incarnation, the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His Sacrificial and Mediatorial Work.
4. Justification by Faith - a faith that works by love and produces holiness.
5. The Work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of sinners, and in the sanctification of all who believe.
6. The Resurrection, the Judgment at the Last Day, according to the words of our Lord in Matthew xxv.46.'

To the last point was added a footnote: 'It should be stated, as an historical fact, that there have been brethren in the Union, working cordially with it, who, whilst reverently bowing to the authority of Holy Scripture, and rejecting dogmas of Purgatory and Universalism, have not held the common interpretation of these words of our Lord.'<sup>15</sup>

At first sight the Declaration, without its footnote, appears inoffensive. But, on closer reading, its weaknesses are soon apparent. Spurgeon went to the heart

of the matter when he wrote, 'Does everybody understand it in the same sense as everybody else? Does not the whole virtue of the thing lie in its pleasing both sides a little? And is not this the vice and condemnation of it?'<sup>16</sup> Whereas the situation cried out for an unequivocal credal commitment, all that was provided was a historical statement which neither bound nor condemned anyone. And then, of course, the footnote recognised the existence within the Union's ranks of those who entertained the 'larger hope'. Seemingly, such men were to be tolerated and not disciplined for their heresy.

Spurgeon's view of the situation was far removed from that of his brother. 'I believe we are hopelessly sold. I feel heartbroken.'<sup>17</sup> Addressing the annual Conference of the Pastors' College, he had this to say about the Declaration:

'Without intensely hearty belief of the truth, these precious documents are wretched affairs. Declarations of the kind I refer to may be compared to flags, which may be useful if carried by brave standard bearers; or they may be tawdry ornaments, used for meaner ends. A teacher was once instructing a class in patriotism and nationality. He happened to see the national flag hanging upon the wall, and he asked a child, "Now, my boy, what is that flag?" "It is the English flag, sir." "And what is the use of it?" The truthful boy replied, "It is used to cover the dirty place in the wall behind it." I need not interpret the parable. Let modern ecclesiastical history point the parallel.'<sup>18</sup>

## Warning Notes

Such then was the course traced by what Ernest Payne has called 'the most serious crisis in the history of the Union'. What warning notes does the Downgrade Controversy sound to the Christian church one hundred years later? Among many, two may be highlighted.

1. Although, as Christians, we are not to engage in controversy for controversy's sake, there is an inescapable Biblical imperative to 'contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints'. There may be circumstantials over which, in charity, we agree to differ among ourselves but there is also such a corpus as the 'common faith' which does not admit of different interpretations. When that is under attack, we are not to withdraw quietly from the battle or to watch from the wings but, rather, are to spring to truth's defence. The fact that we shall be misunderstood, misrepresented and even maligned is not to deter us in the least. Dr John Clifford was right when he wrote in the PALL MALL GAZETTE in February 1888:

All readers of Mr Spurgeon's article will have noticed its martial tone. It is a shrill summons to war. The sword is out of its scabbard, and the scabbard thrown away. Christendom is invited to gaze on a widely-ranging contest. Already the conflict has begun; churches, associations, as well as the Assembly of the Baptist Union, are to be turned into battlefields for the continuance of the fight.<sup>19</sup>

Was Clifford being incredibly naive when, later in the same article, he exclaimed:

Oh! it pains me unspeakably to see this eminent "winner of souls" rousing the energies of thousands of Christians to engage in personal wrangling and strife, instead of inspiring them, as he might, to sustained and heroic effort to carry the good news of God's Gospel to our fellow-countrymen! Would it were possible even now to reverse the direction of those newly quickened forces and to guide them into the application of Christianity to the lessening of the sin and misery of our race!<sup>20</sup>

Whatever else Spurgeon was engaged in, it certainly was not 'personal wrangling and strife'. There was no remedy for man's sin and misery other than that provided in the gospel which Spurgeon saw to be under attack. Where the glory of the Saviour, the purity of the gospel and the salvation of sinners were at stake Spurgeon could do no other than raise his voice in protest at what was happening within the ranks of the Baptist Union. Neutrality or silence were no more options for him than they are for us.

Another great evil is the want of decision for the truth among truly good men, those who are our brethren in the faith of our Lord Jesus... Neutrals, in the end, have the respect of neither party, and assuredly they are the *difficulty* in every controversy. In the churches there will always be trouble so long as men are afraid to denounce sin and error. A negro preacher in a certain village said that among his flock he carefully abstained from preaching against the sin of stealing chickens, because it seemed so much to damp brotherly fellowship....Brethren, we want grace to say, "I can be poor; I can be ridiculed; I can be abused; but I cannot be false to my Lord".<sup>21</sup>

2. Not only are we to contend for the truth but also we are to separate ourselves from error. Two principles to which Spurgeon adhered consistently through the Downgrade Controversy were:

*'For Christians to be linked in association with ministers who do not preach the gospel of Christ is to incur moral guilt.'*

*'It is error which breaks the unity of churches, and to remain in a denominational alignment which condones error is to support schism.'*<sup>22</sup>

The advocates of an 'in to win' policy are not a late twentieth century phenomenon. There were plenty of them in Spurgeon's day. Such men shared his concern but regretted his decision to leave the Union, arguing that his influence for good would have been greater had he remained within the ranks. In a sermon preached in 1891 Spurgeon considered possible excuses which Daniel's three companions might have given for submitting to Nebuchadnezzar and keeping out of the fiery furnace. They could have argued, 'We can do more good by living'; death would 'cut short our opportunities of usefulness'. Spurgeon remarked;

Ah, my dear brethren! there are many that are deceived by this method of reasoning. They remain where conscience tells them they ought not to be, because, they say, they are more useful than they would be if they went without the camp. This is doing evil that good may come, and can never be tolerated by an enlightened conscience. If an act of sin would increase my usefulness tenfold, I have no right to do it; and if an act of righteousness would appear likely to destroy all my apparent usefulness, I am yet to do it.

It is yours and mine to do the right though the heavens fall, and follow the command of Christ whatever the consequences may be.<sup>23</sup>

The truth of God cannot be compromised. It is impossible to come to some form of accommodation, in the name of 'unity', with those who depart from the historic faith.

We who have had the gospel passed to us by martyr hands dare not trifle with it, nor sit by and hear it denied by traitors, who pretend to love it, but inwardly abhor every line of it.... Look you, sirs, there are ages yet to come. If the Lord does not speedily appear, there will come another generation, and another, and all these generations will be tainted and injured if we are not faithful to God and to His truth today. We have come to a turning point in the road. If we turn to the right, mayhap our children and our children's children will go that way; but if we turn to the left, generations yet unborn will curse our names for having been unfaithful to God and to His Word.<sup>24</sup>

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# The Christian and Violence

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G Wyn Davies

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Fifty years have passed since Franklin D Roosevelt, addressing the United States Congress on January 6, 1941, enunciated his four Freedoms: "freedom of speech and expression ... freedom of everyone to worship God in their own way ... freedom from want ... and freedom from fear . . . everywhere in the world." Subsequently, the Atlantic Charter incorporated these four freedoms, but sadly at the end of the 20th Century, the lives of millions continue to be enslaved by fear in each of these four areas; fear of want, fear of bigotry, fear of repression and fear of violence.

Persistent and widespread violence amongst the poorest countries of Africa, Asia and South America is almost taken for granted. What really disturbs us is the growing violence of the rich, urbanised, 'Christian' countries of Europe and the United States. It is the prevalence and nearness of gratuitous violence and recurrent riots on the streets of Birmingham, Oxford or Cardiff! We are also disturbed to hear time and again that when doors and windows are locked, alarms are set and the threat of violence should be shut out, for many - especially women and children - this daily routine is but a prelude to terror. Both recurring news reports of domestic violence and research findings from a number of countries, including our own, consistently tell us that, for example, children are more likely to suffer abuse from their parents or relatives than anyone else<sup>1</sup> and that many, if not most rapes are committed in the home by men known to the woman.<sup>2</sup> 80% of women who kill another person also do so in their own homes!<sup>3</sup> Tragically, therefore, many - young people, especially - abandon their homes, regarding the risk of violence on the streets as a relief from certain and habitual violence in the home. However, the risk of violence on the streets is also such in many communities that it seriously affects people's quality of life, since psychological violence - such as intimidation, rage, or fear of aggression - is as potent as a physical attack in inflicting its own kind of damage. Psychological violence also includes the more subtle, 'middle class' coercion which is frequently put upon children which

... often takes the form of demanding too much from them and imposing heavy sanctions if they fail. Because the sanctions are defined as being part of the order of nature and come with the possibility of rewards which are defined to the children as being great the children accept the sanctions, and when they themselves get power over others, they uncaringly impose the same sanctions.<sup>4</sup>

Acts of *personal* or *individual* violence, such as mugging, child abuse, rape or murder, together with acts of *group* violence such as football, or race riots and gang fights, are those which almost daily make the headlines and arouse fear, outrage and calls for action. However, there are at least four other major areas of contemporary society where violence is also prevalent and reaction to its

increased presence and use in these areas is much more ambivalent and varied, ranging from strong disapproval to strong support. First, **both democratic and totalitarian states** employ violence: either overtly (eg, through war) or covertly (eg, through both economic structures and subversion).

All kinds of violence are the same... the violence of the soldier who kills, the revolutionary who assassinates; it is also true of economic violence - the violence of the privileged proprietor against his workers, of international economic relations between societies and those of the third world; the violence done through powerful corporations which exploit the resources of a country that is unable to defend itself.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, in **medicine** - especially in its acceptance and advocacy of abortion and the growing support for euthanasia. "Some 200,000 unborn babies are aborted annually in this country" and "it is undeniable fact that fetal life is now taken for the most trivial reasons. Indeed, in many areas, there is virtual abortion on demand."<sup>6</sup> Both Christian and secular writers have recognised the increasing acceptance of abortion as a watershed - as a "major blow to the sanctity-of-life view" and the opening of the door to the acceptability of killing others - such as the handicapped or aged - who are unwanted, or whose quality of life is judged unacceptable. "If human life can be taken before birth, there is no logical reason why it cannot be taken after birth."

Thirdly, in **religion** the rise of liberation and revolution theologies within Christianity embody the latest attempt to justify violence as a legitimate means of countering injustice. This is a new version of the traditional arguments for 'a just war' which in turn, Ellul argues<sup>7</sup>, reflect the influence of Islam. Islam perceives itself as "the only religion that conforms perfectly to nature. In a natural state we would all be Muslims... In making war to force people to become Muslims the faithful are bringing them back to their true nature". In both religions, therefore, there are those who argue that worthy ends justify violent means!

Fourthly, the **mass media** - especially television - shows both real and fictional violence with increasing frequency and explicitness. The programme planners' assumption that viewers find other people's violence and suffering entertaining appears to be borne out by the frequency with which programmes with violence as a central story-line appear amongst the 'Top Ten' weekly viewing figures. Such violence is not new. Human history is substantially a history of conflict and aggression. However, this century has experienced war and organised brutality on a massive scale and whilst we may not have evidence to determine reliably whether or not it has been more violent than some other periods, scientific and technological developments have certainly made it more dangerous, for as Mumford concludes: "Modern man is the victim of the very instruments he values most. Every gain in power, every mastery of natural forces, every scientific addition to knowledge, has proved potentially dangerous because it has not been accompanied by equal gains in self-understanding and self-discipline."<sup>10</sup>

## The Roots of Violence

This brings us to the main purpose of this article which is to examine why human beings are so given to violence: why in spite of witnessing and experiencing its damaging and so often deadly effects, we appear addicted to its use and willing to utilise every advance in human knowledge and skill to increase the variety and effectiveness of the violence we inflict on others. Why are even the most privileged positions of power and influence used time and again so as to harm others? Since limited attention appears to have been given to violence in contemporary Christian writing, this article aims to assist Christians, in particular, in understanding and reacting to violence. It is therefore written on the basis that the Scriptures, being the inspired Word of God, are the only source from which sound insights can be gained.

The Bible makes clear that from the moment Adam and Eve accepted Satan's invitation to rebel against God in order to become 'as gods' (Gen 3:5), violence became an inevitable and endemic feature of human behaviour. For if I regard myself 'as god' - an autonomous being, with the right to do what I wish, to the limits of my power, then I will be inclined to view other human beings either as rivals - to be overcome or eliminated - or as useful resources - to be exploited and manipulated to further my own purposes, and then discarded. Genesis traces the rapid development of such thinking and the consequent brutalisation of human relationships. Following Adam's insolent attempt to put the blame for his own sin on Eve and on God (Gen 3:12) came Cain's jealousy of his brother's acceptance by God which generated hatred and culminated in murder (Gen 4: 4-8). By the end of chapter 4 (23-24), we find Lamech boasting to his wives of his power and intention to wreak vengeance seventy-seven fold on anyone who offends him and bragging that he has already killed two men who hurt him. Leupold comments that the arrogance, hate and vengefulness expressed by Lamech here makes this "one of the most ungodly pieces ever written."<sup>11</sup> Fallen man - 'as god' - makes his own rules, extols violence as virtue and celebrates murder as success! It is not surprising, therefore, that by chapter 6 we read that 'the earth was filled with violence' and that this was the immediate cause of God's universal judgement (Gen 6: 11-13) on the human race. Later, in the New Testament we again find reprobate persons described as filled with violence (Rom 1:28-32). Finally, when God renews with Noah the covenant He originally made with Adam, it is with a significant difference. Now, He tells Noah, because the created head of the creation has become a renegade, violent being, 'the fear of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth and upon the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered (Gen 9 1-2). As Schumacher argues, the concept of violence has to be widened beyond conflicts between people to include "an ever-increasing warfare against nature and violent attitudes."<sup>12</sup>

As might be expected, our Lord's diagnosis confirms this deep-seated corruption of man's nature. He declares that 'out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies' (Mt 15:19). Man's rebellion against God was a moral offence resulting in the

spiritual, psychological and physical abnormality of human nature. Having opted to obey the arch-rebel, Satan, human beings became infected by the same motives and affections and, alienated from God, powerless to free themselves from that condition and the judgement of God upon it. 'You are of your father the devil' says Christ to the Pharisees, 'and the lusts of your father ye will do . . . ' (Jn 8:44). Violence in all its forms is, therefore, a manifestation of the spirit and methods of the kingdom of darkness and the endemic violence in human behaviour is evidence that the whole world is infected by its wickedness (1 Jn 5:19).

## Triggers of Violence

Having established that human nature in rebellion against God is violent, it is stating the obvious to say that it is not uniformly so. Individuals and communities are influenced in their espousal of violence, in the forms and degree of violence they practice, as well as in the purpose to which they put it, by varied and complex factors. Whilst it is not feasible to consider such factors and their operation in any detail in an article such as this, I suggest that five separate, but interacting, groups of factors are triggering the human predilection for violence and its proliferation and escalation within our society. First, **cultural factors**. The massive defection from Christian belief and values which has taken place during this century has left naturalism as the dominant world-view. This maintains that "nature is nothing but matter in motion" and since "the scheme of things is purposeless and meaningless, then the life of man is purposeless and meaningless too."<sup>13</sup> This secular world-view also leads inevitably to the conclusion that morality has no objective validity. 'We may speak about certain behaviour as being "right" or "wrong" but such words do not describe anything real, for there is nothing, and can be nothing, in the impersonal universe that corresponds and gives substantive meaning to such words.'<sup>14</sup> The loss of belief in a self-revealing God and in the uniqueness and dignity of human life created in the image of the Creator, inevitably results in the reduction of morality to human likes and dislikes. As we saw above, this in turn has made acceptable the routine termination of life even to those whose profession is the care of people. It is not surprising, therefore, that others, less well disposed towards their fellow human beings, should be increasingly prepared to use various forms of violence, including murder, in order to get their own way.

The argument most frequently used by the 'media masters' for the increasing frequency with which such violence is reported and depicted - particularly on television - is that they report the facts; they reflect society; they respond to demands. However, the undisputed effectiveness of television as a means of communication and education also means that what is shown and how it is shown influences people's perception and choices. Rowe argues that "television is a much more powerful means of ensuring uniformity of belief than was the Inquisition."<sup>15</sup> If that is not so, then the value placed on it by politicians, advertisers, and educationists is seriously misplaced! Whether or not media violence is a *direct* cause of violent behaviour, it certainly stimulates violence in

at least two ways. First, the fact that "the manner in which people commit violent acts or adopt a violent style of behaviour often shows similarity to popular media scenarios" means that at a minimum, the media provides people with "the costumes in which to clothe aggressive behaviour."<sup>16</sup> Secondly, the frequent showing of violence in the 'soaps' as well as in the news, used by police as well as by criminals, in the homes as well as on the streets, conveys the impression that violence is a normal and legitimate way of solving problems. As a consequence, the 20th century version of the song of Lamech can frequently be heard in the board rooms as well as on the football terraces of this land: 'Aggression Rules - OK'!

Secondly, **power factors**. By no means all power is immoral or its exercise violence but it becomes both immoral and violent when we exercise it to enforce others to comply with our will - in spite of their resistance and what it may cost them. This applies to the exercise of economic, political and religious power as well as to the use of personal, physical and psychological power. The war in Yugoslavia, sectarian killings in Northern Ireland and the 8% increase in crimes of violence in England and Wales in the year ending March 1992<sup>17</sup> are indicative of man's predilection for using violence in pursuit of all kinds of causes - or of no cause at all! People 'as gods' have "a taste for power as such and the pleasure of being obeyed"<sup>18</sup>, apart from any substantive advantage they may gain through its use, and since we all have power in relation to someone, the temptation to abuse that power is one each of us has to face.

Feelings of powerlessness and injustice also give rise to resentment and to violence. Scheler concludes that in a society "where everyone has the 'right' to compare himself with everyone else, yet 'factually cannot so compare himself', here - quite apart from any individual character and experience - the actual *structure of society* cannot fail to ensure a tremendous build-up of resentment within the society."<sup>19</sup> Such resentment often expresses itself destructively, for example, in vandalism, or in attempts to change a society by violently removing the perceived injustice - usually by 'removing' the people perceived to be unjust - for example, by a revolution. On the other hand, such feelings of injustice, coupled with powerlessness may also turn into an urge for self-destruction. "In the UK, on average, two people try to kill themselves every hour; every day over 12 will succeed, totalling 4,500 deaths a year. Suicide is the third largest cause of death for people under 25, and the trend is accelerating. Whilst eating disorders appear to be the province of women, killing oneself is something men seem to excel at."<sup>20</sup>

Thirdly, **personal factors**. As we have seen, the Bible makes clear that violence has its source in the depravity of the human heart. All of us are therefore capable of some forms of violence, although differences in temperament make violence more appealing to some than to others.<sup>21</sup> There appear to be two personal characteristics in particular that render the individual prone to violent speech and actions. First, envy, which the Bible describes as 'rottenness of the bones' (Prov 14:30) leading to 'confusion and every evil work.' (Jas 3:14) Shoeck defines it in more prosaic terms "as a disgruntled emotional state arising from the possessions or achievements of another, a spiteful wish that the other should lose them"<sup>22</sup> Shoeck, along with others concludes that envy "plays a

significant role in the criminal personality", involving a consuming desire that no one should have anything" and resulting in acts which have as their only motive the destruction of other people's possessions or pleasure. All too common expressions of envy in our society are vandalism, malicious gossip and delight at the misfortune of another.

A second personal characteristic which triggers violence is "the inability to express oneself". This "produces frustration, and this frustration can lead to violence. Escalating emotions in a obscenity-filled shouting match become the stepping stone to violence".<sup>23</sup> Parents are known to resort to violence in attempting to control their children when they fail to do so by using other (moral) means and even Christian husbands have been known to use violence in order to try and achieve what they regard as an overriding obligation - the obedience of their wives.

Fourthly, **the effectiveness factor**. Violence is popular because it is an accessible and, in many cases, a highly effective means of achieving both inherent and instrumental rewards. Lamech clearly delighted in the sheer sense of his power to avenge and kill (Gen 4: 23 - 24), whilst Ahab and Jezebel used their power to obtain Naboth's vineyard through illegitimate means, the legitimate having failed (1 Kings 21). Similarly, the playground bully and dominating husband<sup>24</sup> amongst others, find it a ready means of satisfying the desire to dominate and be feared.

Finally, **spiritual factors**. The existence and active operation of evil spiritual powers have to be included in any serious attempt to understand violence. Incidents such as the testing of Job in the Old Testament and the violence of the devil possessed in the New (Lk 8:26f), the Lord's prayer that His people should be kept safe from the evil one (Jn 17:15), together with other biblical teaching, reveal that powerful, malevolent spiritual powers are at work and that they are directly opposed in character and purpose to God. God's love for a rebellious humanity has been clearly shown by His initiative in sending His Son into the world to redeem it through His sacrificial death on the Cross. During this age, God's declared intention of bringing the good news of that redemption to every nation will only be accomplished in the face of determined and persistent opposition by the powers of evil, including the use of both physical and psychological violence (Mt 16:18; 24:14; Eph 6:10f). Where the New Testament message is received and strongly influences individuals and societies, violence, amongst other evils, is curtailed. Where it weakens, and especially where it is replaced by naturalism with its denial of human uniqueness and a rapidly growing interest and involvement in the occult, as in this country currently, violence is unleashed and stimulated. In the absence of widespread mutual respect amongst the population at large and a consequent, voluntary eschewing of violence, curbing violence in the society becomes a difficult task and usually results in the state using increasing amounts of force.

## Responding to Violence

Ellul concludes<sup>25</sup> that historically Christians have responded to violence in one of three ways.

Firstly, **conformity**. This means that Christians support and act out the view that violence is a justifiable instrument - at least of government. Since the end of the 3rd century, when the church abandoned its non-violent position, Christians have frequently sought to justify war *per se*, and have endorsed particular wars as 'just'<sup>26</sup> This view has also led to Christians supporting activities such as slavery<sup>27</sup> and the violent suppression of trade unions<sup>28</sup> whilst in recent years, it has given rise to Liberation and Revolutionary Theology seeking to justify revolution against oppressive governments.<sup>29</sup> Christians who respond to violence in this way have a most difficult task in demonstrating that their response is in accordance with the teaching and example of Christ - which is why, perhaps, many such appear to have a weak belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures. The Lord absolutely refuses to use, or to endorse the use, of violence (Mt 26:52; Jn 18:36) and His command to His followers is that we are not only to love our neighbours but 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven*; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust' (Mt 5:44,45). The Lord makes quite clear here that the loving of enemies is an essential mark of genuine sons and daughters of God. However, the sole aim of violence, exercised by an individual or group, is to dominate, damage or destroy others and, therefore, such action is always wholly irreconcilable with the spirit of authentic Divine love, and its expression in human behaviour..

Secondly, **compromise**. This occurs when Christians agree that, in principle, violence is sinful but that in specific situations its use is justified.

A general formulation of the compromise position is that when all reasonable options have failed, and subject to certain criteria, violence is justified. It is from this position that the seven conditions of just war were developed by the Roman Catholic church. It is also on this basis that some, including Christians, seek to legitimise abortion. For many, the 'last resort' argument is very persuasive when applied to extreme cases. For example, if you or I are faced with a threat to injure or kill our loved ones, is it not justifiable to resort to violence if all other means fail to remove the threat? For the Christian this argument, reasonable though it sounds, presents the same serious difficulties as does the whole of the compromise position. First, it shifts the basis for determining whether violence is right or wrong from the character of God - who is light and love (1 Jn 1:5; 4:8) - to the nature of the circumstances with which we are faced. In other words, we move from acknowledging that "God's character is the moral absolute of the universe"<sup>30</sup> and that His character is revealed for us in the inspired Scriptures, to *situational ethics* - which means that we believe, or at least act as if we believe, that what decides whether actions are right or wrong are the circumstances in which the actions take place, and our understanding of what is acceptable or effective behaviour in that situation and at that time. Secondly, to resort to violence as a last resort proclaims to the world that we concede the limitations of Christ's teaching and example and accept the supremacy of violence over love and faith as a means of resolving certain problems. The compromise position, therefore, reveals an absence of faith, an inability to believe that even though there may be short

term suffering or loss, 'all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose' (Rom 8:28). However, we have to be careful not to make harsh and hasty judgements regarding the behaviour of others in this matter since we are each weaker in faith in some circumstances than in others and each of us is liable in such situations to adopt the ways of non-faith. It is important for relationship with God and for our spiritual well-being that, rather than seek to justify such unwarranted compromise we confess them to be what they are - the sins of unbelief - and seek the forgiveness of God and the strengthening of our faith to enable us act with integrity in such difficult situations.

Thirdly, **confrontation**. This means responding and witnessing to the violence of this world with *total non-violence*. Outside the Christian world, the model of non-violence and its expression in passive resistance, is Gandhi. Within the Christian world it is regarded as Jesus Christ. However, I suggest that there are two fundamental differences between non-Christian and Christian non-violence. First, Christian non-violence is not passive but active. Not only is it a reaction to the evil and folly of violence but is the result of conviction that men and women bear the image of God and are not therefore to be in any sense violated. It entails an expression of love towards both neighbours and enemies, which is inspired and energised by the love of God towards mankind - especially as it is manifested in and through Jesus Christ. The New Testament writers clearly understand that the way to respond to evil is through practically working for the good of the evil-doer<sup>31</sup> and that this excludes violence. Secondly, Christian non-violence recognises limitations. In response to Pilate, 'Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence' (Jn 18:36). The Lord explains here that His Kingdom does not use armed force, even in self-defence, since it is not of this world. Since they are citizens of His Kingdom, neither will His followers engage in violence: and surely this continues to be the standard for His followers in every generation.

However, there is also a clear acceptance by the Lord that were He a leader of one of this world's kingdoms, in similar circumstances, He would have resorted to violence. He does not condone the use of force by earthly rulers, as some have argued, but makes a statement of fact highlighting the contrast between the principles and methods of the heavenly and earthly kingdoms. Earthly kingdoms use and cannot survive without the use of force. 'To say that the state should not employ force is simply to say that there should be no state. It is the same with regard to war. To the extent that the state is charged with ensuring the survival of the social group that it leads and represents, it cannot avoid war.....And war, like violence, is not "just". It exists - that's all.'<sup>32</sup> It is a corporate expression of the abnormality and corruption of the human heart (Jas 4:1f) and until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of God they will continue to operate imperfectly, using the means perceived by leaders, who are themselves sinful, as expedient and effective in achieving their goals. As citizens of Christ's Kingdom, Christians can, therefore, quite consistently reject violence as sinful in every sphere of life but at the same time acknowledge that

it is an inescapable and tragic reality in the world as it is, and that there are circumstances in which the use of violence by the state is a necessary - though sinful - means of preserving its very existence and a measure of order and peace in a world which would otherwise tear itself apart. In the end it would do so anyway, were it not that the King of Peace will return and establish His righteous reign of peace! (Mt 24:22)

## Christian Responsibility in a Violent Society

However, for Christians to acknowledge that violence is wrong and inescapable does not justify inaction. Indeed, for Christians to stand aside from the violence in our society is as much an abdication of the gospel as is conforming with violent attitudes and methods. As I understand the Scriptures, they place upon us two general responsibilities in dealing with violence. The first is *to be* particular kinds of persons and the second is *to act* in particular ways - and to be such persons is a prerequisite to acting in such ways! First, we are called to act in ways which **compensate** for violence. The principle behind the Lord's examples in Mt 5:38 - 48 is that we are to respond to personal violence and injustice by generosity and love, manifesting the nature of the kingdom to which we belong. In the case of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25f), we are taught to practise compensatory love towards the victims of violence - even at risk and cost to ourselves. And surely, this is at the heart of our Lord's ministry who came with good news for the poor; liberty for the captives; recovery of sight for the blind and freedom for the oppressed (Lk 4:18) and laid down His life in order that they might be freed from such violation of their humanity.

Not only so, for we are also called to **confront** violence in all its forms. Being 'salt' and 'light' (Mt 5: 13 - 15) with regard to violence inevitably involves confrontation, for being such people challenges the wisdom and way of living of this world. It involves that fight against wicked spiritual forces in which Paul bids us engage in union with the Lord who has overcome them, using the whole armour which God has provided for the purpose (Eph 6:10f). A distinctively Christian witness involves resolutely opposing evil and error whilst clearly pointing men and women to the example and redemptive work of Christ, always showing respect and love for others as beings created and loved by God. Such confrontation is our reasonable obligation because - and only because - our Lord took on the powers of evil on the Cross and "the resurrection assures us that the decisive victory (of pure, sacrificial love) over injustice and violence has already been won and that the completion of that victory will surely come."<sup>33</sup>

It is not surprising that given the demanding nature of what we are called *to do*, that the emphasis of the Scriptures is continually on what we are called *to be* in union with Jesus Christ. There are two characteristics, in particular, which are essential if we are going to be able to confront and compensate for violence. First, **courage** which is, a quality of mind derived from "faith in the present Christ. Here is no 'grin and bear it' attitude, but a more than natural one which sees an occasion for victory in every opposition (cf 1 Cor 16:9)."<sup>34</sup>

As Paul makes clear to the Philippians (1:27f) such courage grows from the conviction that it is a privilege to serve Jesus Christ, not only through believing in Him but by suffering for Him. The capacity to exercise such courage is also evidence of His grace and power working in us.

Secondly, we are called to act with **compassion**. In both the Old and New Testaments the expectation is that those who have experienced the compassion (or mercy) of God will be inclined to show compassion to others, especially the fatherless, the widow, the foreigner (eg, Dt 10:18; 14:29) and the poor and afflicted. (eg, Ps 146:9; Zech 7:9-10) and will do so positively and practically (1 Jn 3:17-18). The victims of violence in its various forms are time and again left to fend for themselves and we read that when our Lord saw such people - harassed and helpless - His heart was 'moved with compassion' and He said to His disciples 'The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the labourers are few. So pray the Lord of the harvest to thrust labourers into His harvest' (Mt 9:37,38). Who can doubt that as He views this violent age, His compassion and His call remain the same? Are we not also therefore called to be intercessors and labourers together with Him, ministering to the hurt and helpless around us, and above all bringing the good news of forgiveness and peace with God through Jesus Christ to violators and victims alike.

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*A common Old Testament word for violence is GEZELAR. It means to pluck, snatch, tear away or take by force - usually by fraud and with the implication of injustice. It is used in particular of the rich and powerful taking or seizing from the poor. Micah uses the word in condemning wealthy land-owners who 'covet fields and seize them' (Mic 2:2).*

Dave Cave, THIRD WAY, April 1993

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## Letters to the Editor

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Dear Sir,

### **Counselling: Pastoral Care or Psychotherapy**

May I say how much I enjoyed the article by Gareth Crossley (Autumn 1992) with the above title. For many years I have been concerned by the encroachment of the professional psychiatrist who is a Christian into the area of pastoral care where it is the province of the minister.

His analysis of the true situation is excellent, made even more so and with greater authority by the fact that he has passed through the upper reaches of secular psychology. Despite all that training, he has been bold enough to state that it should not be used in counselling amongst Christians.

May I, however, make two small comments regarding his criticism of Jay Adams? Firstly, he says that Adams has majored on *nouthetic* ie confrontational counselling to the detriment of *paracletos* ie comfort and compassion counselling. Dare I suggest that Gareth Crossley has missed the whole point of why Adams wrote his many books. Most competent pastors will be able to handle the many traumatic problems that can afflict their flock, such as bereavement, illness, loss of job or living accommodation etc. These are problems that can come upon anyone at any time. They will produce temporary depression, fear, stress and anxiety when they first face a situation that is not of their doing. This is where "comfort" counselling is required, and to infer that Adams would enter the situation with hob-nailed boots demanding a change of attitude immediately is unwarranted. Adams assumes that any pastor would handle the situation with care.

Where there is a crying need for clear advice is when a pastor is confronted by a church member who is acting in a strange fashion, is in deep depression or highly stressed for a long period, ie they are not behaving as one might expect a reasonable sensible or mature person should behave. Here is where they will tend to feel "out of their depth" and be tempted to refer them to a professional psychiatrist - Christian or not. It is *this* gap in knowledge that Adams filled so effectively with his emphasis on "rebuking" those who fail to behave maturely. To put it simply, we are responsible for how we react to situations. One person behaves correctly and in a Christian way. Another reacts incorrectly, and thereby sins against himself and God. I do not feel that "comforting" that person will actually solve the problem in the long term - it will reappear perhaps years later in another guise. Surely he needs to be confronted with his wrong reaction and encouraged to train himself so that he reacts rightly next time the same situation arises.

I can emphasise this difference between problems coming from outside and those from inside by using the very verse that Gareth quotes to support his view that Adams is wrong, 2 Cor 1: 3-4.

The word twice used here for "tribulation" and "troubles" is *thlipsis*. Examination of this word in Vines shows that it is predominantly used for

*external* problems that come upon us, being the main word used for the Great Tribulation of end time. As I have said, this is precisely where “comforting” of the flock is needed, for they are not responsible for what is happening to them. If their reaction to the problems is wrong, however, then “admonition” is called for - in the gentlest of ways of course, but still aiming to change their behaviour. In this very brief consideration, I would hope that I have been able to overcome his one criticism of Adams. If I have succeeded, then what prevents pastors from following his guidelines as far as they reasonably can?

Secondly, if Crabbe and Adams are criticised, where then should a minister turn to when he is confronted with a member behaving in a strange way? Gareth gives a list of the desirable qualities possessed by a counsellor, but these are hardly adequate to deal with a particularly difficult set of behaviour patterns - guidance is badly needed, and this is what Adams provided.

May I particularly recommend his book *MORE THAN REDEMPTION* which gives the theological background to his counselling methods and is a feast of subjects for sermons.

Yours sincerely,

**Malcolm Bowden**

*Bromley Common*

## **Reply to Malcolm Bowden**

I am pleased to have this opportunity to reply to Malcolm Bowden’s letter and hope that I shall address his comments with the same generosity of spirit with which he clearly writes.

Malcolm raises three issues in relation to Jay E Adams. Firstly he claims that I have misrepresented Adams when I say that he ‘highlights admonition to the detriment of comfort and compassion’ (*FOUNDATIONS*, 1992, 29, p 18). In my reading of nine of Adams’ books I have seen no indication that Adams assumes that any pastor will be able to handle the more common pastoral problems effectively and that he is therefore concentrating on the neglected area of “rebuking” those who fail to behave maturely. I hope Malcolm is right but I fear it is Malcolm’s assumption rather than Adams’. In my opinion Adams fails to point out that *nouthetic* counselling, although essential, is only **one part** of Christian pastoral counselling.

Having said this, Adams is undoubtedly worthy of our attention. We owe him a debt of gratitude for championing, in our day, the cause of the true pastoral ministry based on the application of biblical principles and truths. My warning was only against his over emphasis on *nouthetic* counselling. Even in the book which Malcolm recommends, Adams speaks of *nouthetic* counselling as ‘the principal and the fullest biblical word for counselling’ (p ix).

Secondly, I did not suggest that ‘confronting’ should be replaced by ‘comforting’. Adams has done a great service in calling pastors back to this neglected feature of God-honouring counsel; that we should challenge sinful selfish behaviour. Much of what Adams writes is extremely helpful and instructive in relating the Scriptures to problems of living. I have no hesitation in recommending his writings provided that his emphasis upon *nouthetic*

counselling is recognised as an over-emphasis. That words related to 'comfort' occur in the New Testament twelve times more frequently than words related to 'confront' might give ground to consider that a disproportionate emphasis on confronting and rebuking is inappropriate. Let each presenting problem be met by a fitting response.

The last point which Malcolm raises is the most important issue facing pastors today. 'Where should a minister turn?' In agreement with Adams I would answer, not to Freud, Rogers, Ellis, or Skinner, nor indeed to Crabb, but to the Scripture, and men like Calvin, Luther, Baxter, Owen, Edwards, Fairbairn and Bridges. The Puritans were not only great preachers they were great pastors too. They knew how to apply the Word of God to the multifarious problems of life. They preached about practical issues. They constantly applied the Word of God to the daily experiences of believers. They wrote extensively about spiritual depression (all depression is basically 'spiritual'. See W Bridge, *A LIFTING UP FOR THE DOWNCAST*, Banner of Truth), about marriage and family life (see Baxter's *PRACTICAL WORKS* Vol 1, Soli Deo Gloria Publications). There are helpful books about pastoral theology (W G T Shedd, *HOMILETICS AND PASTORAL THEOLOGY*, Banner of Truth, pp 279-355), pastoral work in general (Bridges, *THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY*, Banner of Truth, pp 344-383) and visiting and pastoral counselling (Baxter's *THE REFORMED PASTOR*, Banner of Truth).

A good book to begin with is Peter Lewis', *THE GENIUS OF PURITANISM* (Carey Publications) and the section on *The Puritans as Pastors* (pp 63-136). Peter's references will lead to numerous sources of sound counselling on a multitude of pastoral issues.

Even with a good grasp of pastoral care and counselling from the classic theologians of the past, one vital ingredient remains to be added to the development of the minister's skills in pastoral counselling; he needs to talk over practical pastoral counselling issues with fellow ministers. Though godly able ministers in the UK are relatively few, nevertheless they have between them a wealth of pastoral experience and expertise. The inexperienced minister should 'tap into' this source of learning by finding an able minister and treating him as a mentor (How many ministers were helped in understanding and unravelling difficult pastoral problems by the wise counselling of the late Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones?).

Small groups of ministers should meet to thrash out pastoral problems. There are some excellent ministers' fraternals which seek to address the real practical pastoral issues of the day but there is a need for pastoral workshops where case studies can be discussed and the scriptures applied. In this way ministers will regain confidence in their ability to give pastoral care and counsel. Such experiences would prove mutually edifying. Most professionals see the need for in-service training and the constant development of skills and insights - why not ministers? They are the ones whom God has called to be competent to counsel!

**Gareth Crossley**  
Wolverhampton

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## Book Reviews

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### **The Church & Its Unity**

*When Christians Disagree Series*

Alan F Gibson, Editor

IVP, 1992, 255pp, £7.95

This courageous and painstaking venture employs eight main writers who address some of the principal issues which are encountered when evangelical churches seek greater unity. The contributors work in pairs, each writing a major chapter, with an additional piece by way of response to their partner's chapter.

The introduction affirms that, "This book is an exercise in respectful confrontation." This proves to be substantially true. Most contributors have sought objectivity in their exegesis of controverted passages of Scripture and theological principles, and genuinely attempt to understand the alternative view they do not hold. This is surely an essential prerequisite for the success of the commendable project. However, this high standard proves to be unattainable throughout, and some shots are fired, not in self defence!

We are assured of the evangelical credentials of all the authors. However, this does not provide a simple *Sola Scriptura* approach. Questions of institutional loyalty in some cases, and of contemporary gifts of the Spirit in others, entangle themselves.

**The first main section of the book addresses church membership as viewed by the national and gathered churches.** David Holloway and Derek Prime view the matter from their respective positions inside, and independent of, the national church in

Britain. Holloway attempts to be reassuring about the role of the state in the national church by distinguishing recognition (by the state) from interference (by the state), and co-operation from legislation, and what the state may wish to give from what the church should be willing to receive. The attempt to support the church/state union from the nation of Israel in the Old Testament fails to address the temporary nature of the theocracy. Referring to the New Testament church, the assertion that some *nominal* believers existed in it is obviously true; however, it is another matter for the Church of England to normalise and even promote this. On the practice of baptism, Holloway concludes that minimal requirements and a most elementary faith were called for by the Apostles. But this may be to read the New Testament through twentieth-century eyes and miss how radical a thing it was then to 'simply' confess Christ and be baptised. Infant baptism is well defended (though not well enough for Prime) from Scripture and Patristic history. Indiscriminate infant baptism is pronounced to be 'wrong'. Holloway thinks that the standards of the Anglican Alternative Service Book (ASB) if properly implemented are a sound safeguard here. The congregations of the Church of England are termed 'church-type churches' while independent congregations are termed 'sect-type churches'. Holloway is troubled by the proliferation of the latter with little conception of history or

tradition. This may sometimes be the case, but there are so many exceptions to this generalisation to prove that there is nothing in independence *per se* to make it so. In fact, it is notable that some independent congregations are very well instructed in tradition and history.

Derek Prime relates his early personal history which began in the national church until his decision not to enter its ministry. References to baptismal regeneration in the Anglican service book were a major factor. The ASB fails to make any significant reform at this point. He states his position regarding the nature of the church and individual membership of it by gathering the biblical data under four headings. 1 The early church was a fellowship of believers. 2 The early church was a fellowship of believers who professed their faith through baptism. 3 Believer's baptism and church membership were synonymous in the early church and N T period. 4 The N T description of members of a local church demand and take for granted the existence and profession of personal faith in Christ. This is an attractively simple position based on thorough and conscientious use of Scripture. To this position is added the affirmation - 'There is a total absence of any command to baptise infants in the N T.' But, is it so simple? The practice of withdrawing the covenant sign from children which in O T times they received also lacks any explicit command. And an even more troublesome silence concerns the age at which a credible profession of faith may be made by a child and received by the church.

Much of the discussion between Holloway and Prime concerns

*nominalism* in the visible church. Prime wants to eliminate it as far as is humanly possible, because it has no place in the N T doctrine of the church. Holloway has to live with it in the national church and seeks to put the best construction on it. But sympathise as we may with the desire to include those who may have some 'seed' of faith without showing much evidence of it, in the hope that they will eventually make good, the case is flimsy and probably flawed because nominalism so seriously obscures the evidences of regeneration.

**The second main section addresses whether churches should exist independently or in a connectional denomination,** Eryl Davies supporting the former, and Harry Uprichard the latter. Davies calls for an assessment of all forms of church government as something which our submission to Scripture and the Headship of Christ demands. A foremost principle for him is that the local church is never regarded as incomplete. There is a sufficiency of rule in a partnership of local elders and members, which are two co-operating dimensions of church government in mutually sensitive balance. The uniqueness of the local church as "the specific location of Christ's rule by his Word and Spirit," has been seriously obscured by the plethora of para-church organisations which have claimed Christian loyalties and resources and drawn them away for the local church.

An excessive independence is recognised as Davies argues that local churches are not only independent but also interrelated and *interdependent*. John Owen on 'mutual communion' is quoted favourably. The council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) is

viewed as having a consultative and advisory role only. Prof J Murray's view that it is 'a pattern of consultation and adjudication' is rejected.

Harry Uprichard introduces the view that a particular church is part of a connectional government much wider than one congregation. Writing from a Presbyterian background he questions the biblical basis for the idea that the authority of eldership is delegated from the church meeting. He brings to bear on the local church emphasis of independency an emphasis on the universal church in which the rule of elders expresses 'a continuity of Christ's rule over the entire church'. Explaining and supporting the 'regulative principle', he adds to it a 'developing principle', ie "a maturing progression of form and order in the church within the N T itself." Paul's teaching especially "goes beyond particularity and locality and embraces universality." General evidence for connectional government is found in (i) the unified nature of the congregation of Israel in the OT (ii) the unified nature of teaching, practical support, fellowship and mission in the church of the NT. In particular, Uprichard regards the Acts 15 council of Jerusalem as fundamental to the connectionalist position because it exercised 'authoritative jurisdiction'.

These two authors give to the book its high point by the thoroughness of their treatment, the spirit in which they write, and respect for each other's position. Here is an exemplary exercise in mutual understanding without agreeing.

**The third main section deals with the doctrinal purity of the church** as it affects an evangelical church within a doctrinally mixed denomination, and as it affects a separated evangelical church in its relationship to the former. Gordon Kuhrt writes from within the Church of England and Graham Harrison from independency.

Kuhrt begins by affirming that all Christians in any place are the church in that place. They should not be divided. No separation should occur from the existing church in any place. The present-day evangelical practice of 'starting new churches' ignores the fact that "the Apostles urged reform and correction in the strongest terms, but never advised Christians to separate into new churches". In defending this position, the worst features of independency are enumerated; eg excessive individualism and a tendency for separatists to sub-divide even further, thus robbing the church of visible catholicity, etc. The writer's position is also rationalised by the formulation of several distinctions, eg the formal approval of serious error by a church is distinguished from the presence of some erroneous individuals in a church. The legitimate scholarly activity of asking questions is distinguished from explicit denials. A further distinction is drawn between confused understanding and unbelief in the individual.

The present reviewer finds Mr Kuhrt's thesis too theoretical and too little realistic. Here is ecclesiastical generosity taken so far as to become dangerous laxity. No awareness is shown of the commonest situation experienced by fair-minded and

restrained evangelicals, of being wholly unable to worship or find meaningful fellowship in a local church because of multiple offences to the evangelical conscience. The fact that most Anglican clergy and bishops consistently behave as opponents of the gospel is not addressed.

Graham Harrison endeavours to define the gospel because it is the gospel which determines the nature of the church, and that ecclesiology - national, local and personal is a consequence of understanding the gospel. The church is founded upon specific gospel propositions. This leads to the definite nature of the Christian church. It consists of 'saints' set apart to God, and uniting in a common allegiance to the gospel. The state of the church today is very far from this, and all evangelicals are agreed about this fact. But there is no consensus about how to proceed. Harrison commends courteous and persuasive debate, but also believes that there comes a point when the 'crunch question' must be faced - can those who deny the gospel be tolerated in teaching and leadership positions within the church? The church does not consist solely in what its formularies contain, but very substantially in the life, deeds and words of its ministers and members. These can make its official position invalid.

The fourth section of the book concerns charismatic gifts and experiences and whether these can be contained in existing church structures or require a new church order. Michael Cole defends traditional church structures. He is a committed Anglican with some charismatic expe-

rience. Nine points of Anglican excellence are offered to support the claim that the ecclesiastical position of the Church of England is 'the best of all worlds'. He evaluates the several respects in which the renewal movement he represents differs from the Restoration churches. He warmly approves of episcopal church government. Apostleship today is discussed and he concludes that an anglican bishop has "an apostolic role and ministry but not the unique title of apostle". He welcomes prophecy but is careful to say that it has no parity with Scripture. The pastoral care practised by Restoration churches goes beyond biblical parameters and becomes intrusive and heavy. Cole also thinks that Restorationist baptismal practice leads to the re-baptism of many through an unworthy disregard for 'each other's church discipline'. He also considers that the House-church movement rejects 'the testimony of past generations of faithful men and women of God'. He concludes that the way forward for Restoration churches and renewed traditional churches is to avoid the extremes of denominationalism on the one hand and the extremes of non-denominationalism on the other.

David Matthew writes from the position of the Restoration fellowships. Christian unity is primarily organic, in his view, and can only achieve any organisational expression among those who possess and experience the dynamic of the same spiritual life. Any form of organisational unity is based on the pre-requisite of identifying those of whom this is true. A number of evidences are given to guide this process, all of them more or less

subjective. Acceptance of a revealed gospel in terms of Galatians ch 1 is not mentioned. On the matter of baptism, church leaders are urged to take 'a more gutsy approach'. Mr Matthew possibly exemplifies what this means as he proceeds to assert "everything points to total immersion". The baptism on profession of faith of very young children is commended, while infant baptism as such is rejected without courtesy, as all the learning of the Reformation and subsequent eras is sweepingly dismissed. The pastoral theology associated with baptism is dealt with by affirming that all the baptised (by immersion) have to do when attacked by doubts is to say - "I took the plunge. I died with Christ that day, and there can be no going back". The present reviewer regards this as dangerous spiritual counsel, at least for anyone wrongly immersed on the basis of a false profession. Speaking in tongues, it is claimed, opens a deeper level of communion with God. It is recognised that some evangelicals have reservations about baptism in the Spirit as distinct from being born of the Spirit. Such reservation belongs to a 'more cerebral Christianity'. Some evangelicals hold back, it is noted, from a working unity with the sort of church of which David Matthew approves. This culpable reluctance makes unity difficult. All the fault is on one side, and there are several jibes in this chapter at one aspect or another of the practice of traditional evangelical churches. It is the low point of the book.

After all this, Alan Gibson adds a last and sympathetic word in which he identifies four 'crucial watersheds' in the evangelical unity debate. This is

valuable analysis for all who are burdened about national and local unity among those who profess one Lord Jesus Christ and one salvation in him. Finally, the editor offers some practical suggestions for all who cannot rest in doing nothing toward making evangelical unity more workable and more visible.

*Peter Brumby*

North of England Ministry

### **Signs of the Spirit**

*Michael Kinnamori (Ed)*

WCC, Geneva \ Eerdmans 1991

396 pp, pb, £13.95

### **To the Wind of God's Spirit:**

*Compiled by Emilio Castro*

WCC, Geneva, 1990

102 pp, pb, £5.25

### **Acting in Faith:**

*The World Council of Churches since 1975*

*Leon Howell*

WCC, Geneva, 1983

120 pp, pb, £3.95

**SIGNS OF THE SPIRIT** is the official report of the seventh WCC Assembly held in Canberra in February 1991. Following a personal overview and introduction by the editor, readers are immediately directed to the Assembly Theme, 'Come Holy Spirit - Renew the whole Creation' which was the focus of plenary sessions on the Assembly's second day. The next subsection reports on the sub-themes in the Assembly, namely, 'Giver of Life - sustain your creation', 'Spirit of Truth - set us Free', 'Spirit of Unity - Reconcile your People', 'Holy Spirit - Transform and Sanctify us'. Tensions, disagreements and contradictions

appear throughout these two crucial sections with some Orthodox members protesting strongly against the modification of the biblical, church teaching. An example was their opposition to the identifying of the Holy Spirit with 'the spirits' of the world as in the syncretistic and animistic contribution of the Korean female theology professor, Chung Hyun Kyung. In all these sections, there was a failure to wrestle with the biblical teaching concerning the objective and subjective aspects of the Holy Spirit's work.

Section 4 assesses the work done by the WCC in the seven years since the previous Assembly and anticipates the future. The global economic recession, however, has hit the WCC resulting in staff reduction and the discontinuation of some of its activities. Another section deals with statements and appeals on public issues. Interesting reading is found in pp 282-286 expressing evangelical perspectives and observations from Canberra. They regret that evangelicals were under-represented at Canberra and requested that they should be represented in each WCC commission. Twelve practical challenges are then presented which betray an inadequate ecclesiology, a sympathetic and committed attitude towards WCC membership\ involvement and a desire to reflect more on social, political issues. Altogether this is a good reference book if we want to understand what is happening now in ecumenical circles.

**TO THE WIND OF GOD'S SPIRIT** is a companion volume to the foregoing official report and contains ten reflections on the Canberra Theme, all

of which were published in recent issues of the **ECUMENICAL REVIEW**. The book was intended primarily as a theological resource for Canberra assembly delegates.

These ten reflections are startlingly different, written from varied church and theological perspectives and cover a diverse range of subjects. For example, a liturgical Bible study on Acts 2:1-4 under the title, *The Icon of Pentecost*, forms the first reflection which at least is Trinitarian in its ethos although Orthodox in its ecclesiology. *Pneumatology as an Ecumenical Frontier* is another reflection which makes brief observations on 'ecumenical epiphanies' in recent decades like Edinburgh (1910), Lausanne (1927), Vatican II (1962-65) which was 'the most unexpected... no-one was prepared... neither the pope who convened it (John XXIII) nor the pope who saw it through (Paul VI), nor the one now grappling with its long-term consequences (John Paul II)'.

Acknowledging that 'the ecumenical glamour days are dead and gone', he favours an alternative pattern of *Organic* Christian unity 'that is deeply pneumatological and paracletic'. He insists that such organic unity was 'conserved more by shared eucharists than by conformity to rules, formularies and doctrinal speculations'. Jurgen Moltmann's reflection on *The Scope of Renewal in the Spirit* is brief but tackles some key Scripture passages relating to creation within a Trinitarian and eschatological context. In his *Distinguishing Between Spirits*, Eduard Schweizer concludes that what is central in the New Testament is 'there is no doctrine of the Spirit, but rather that the Spirit is NARRATED as an EVENT - AS HAPPENING' (p 47).

Stanley J Samartha's article, *The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths* is predictably open and thoughtful. He claims that the 'question of the Spirit AND people of other faiths is a NEW question that has somewhat aggressively thrust itself on the theological consciousness of the church only in recent years' (p 50). There is hesitation on the part of many to discuss this question, argues Samartha, because they fear both syncretism and relativism. The fears are justified, too, in the reviewer's opinion. However, Samartha is persuaded that any doctrine about the Spirit 'is unlikely to provide a basis to discuss the Spirit's relation to people of other faiths' (p 57); rather, one has to discern the actual working of the Spirit in the lives of people. Such works of the Spirit include freedom, boundlessness, new relationships and new communities. The last three chapters cover important subjects like *Spirit, Reconciliation, Church; Pluralism and Problem of Discernment; Orthodox Reflections on the Assembly Theme*. Altogether it is an important book even though its assumptions and conclusions are often unbiblical.

The third book, **ACTING IN FAITH**, is a more popular book outlining the main history of the WCC since 1975. It is informative, at times illuminating, and a useful resource for catching up on recent WCC history and developments.

### **The Trojan Horse in the Temple**

*The Hidden Agenda of the Ecumenical Movement*, Alan Morrison  
Rushworth, 1993, 54pp, £1.95

The basic position and fears underlying this book are shared by the BEC, namely, ecumenism is closely allied to liberal theology, and moving inevitably towards syncretism, universalism, and Rome. However, the book goes further: 'Behind all the idealistic talk of ecumenical unity lies the dark reality of another universal movement - a mighty alliance of demonic power in the form of the many occult and secular organisations of "world brotherhood", posing as angels of light and servants of righteousness, which has made the political work of the United Nations and the ecumenical activity of the world wide professing church a major focus of its secret endeavour' (p 44).

The book is very readable and provides basic historical details relating to the origins and development of ecumenism. WCC's involvement in dialogue and the significant shift in thought after Visser't Hooft's retirement in 1966 is accurately highlighted as well as the extension of the term 'ecumenical' to the entire human race rather than just different denominations within Christendom. Vatican II's influence is duly noted and consequent Roman Catholic involvement in ecumenism. I have no disagreement with the basic message of the book although I would have expressed some of the points and problems differently. Many folk will find help in its pages and it is sufficiently brief to be passed around church members and leaders.

### **The Glory of Christ**

*Peter Lewis*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1992,  
504 pp, £9.99

This is a lengthy work, replete with enough quotes to make Ph D students envious, with thirty six pages of footnotes and indices. However, the book is most readable and, at times, enjoyable.

The general structure of the work follows a kind of *Cross-Roads* Christology. By Part Two, called *The Divine Explanation*, the writer has turned left from the Jesus before us into matters of pre-existence. He then moves to the right side of the junction to look at the worshipped Jesus. By Part Four the author has returned to the central position of the Cross. Parts Five and Six take the reader forward into the Resurrection and Second Coming.

Within this structure there are different theological approaches. In chapters 8, 16 and 17 Lewis adopts a commentary cum expository style which is, if a surprise, not inappropriate. A systematic approach is evident in the overall structure. Attempts at Biblical theology are also present in the examination of the Cross in the Old and New Testaments. However, these varied approaches are a weakness as well as a change. It leaves a sense of confusion in the mind of the reader. Where does it all lead? Is this book meant to encourage worship? Who is Lewis writing for? The intellectual? Preacher? Theological student? Or the man in the street?

In the *Preface*, Lewis asserts boldly, 'This is a book of theology written for everybody. It is written by a pastor who believes that 'theology' and 'everybody' go together...'. Although these statements sound generous yet the book itself is fuel against such opinions. Those who would soundly

argue that the area of theology is a matter for "the academy" would feel confirmed in their fortress opinions after reading it. Like all who attempt to be all things to everybody it ends up giving little to all. Although the truth is available to all, it is not available without hard work, as this large volume of simple theology shows. Peter Lewis is to be admired for the amount of work revealed here despite his busy ministry.

There are many quotations, often of five or six lines. In the first section there are several quotes from Doctors Carson and France. The weakness, however, is not in the number of quotes or their length, although the reader may wish to hear more from the author himself, but in the origin of some quotes which are also used without criticism. If this book is written for those without theological training then there is a danger in it. Such readers would be accepting comments from persons like C F D Moule, J Dunn, C S Lewis, J V Taylor, M Hengel, J Jeremias, O Cullmann, J H Newman etc without warning alongside recognised evangelical scholars. These thoughts then gain an acceptability through being employed without qualification in lay preaching. A sad neglect was minimal quotations from either the Patristics or from the Puritan writers apart from John Owen.

The sermonic element of the book is discernible in the structure of some chapters, together with some useful epigrammatic definitions; for example: "The Word is all that God is, yet, although part of the Godhead," p 104. In this covenant context his 'I am who I am' really means, 'All that I am, I am for you', p 83. In defining the

term *harpagmos* in Phil 2:6 he says, "It may be a somewhat unsuitable comparison but our common English idiom, 'to have an ace up one's sleeve' might illuminate the point", p 232. He is certainly a preacher but this is not a book of sermons.

Lewis addresses succinctly throughout the book the issue of the *uniqueness* of the Lord Jesus and also definitively states his views on the issue of Hell in chapter thirty three, which is to be welcomed in a work which may gain a popular readership. There is no evidence of anything but an orthodox view.

Part One adequately covers **The Divine Revelation**. The coverage of the title "The Son of Man" is especially well presented including the view of Christ's coming in Mark 14:62 as that of enthronement rather than parousia. The six page chapter on "The Only Revealer of the Father" seems a little short but if treated as an introduction to "The 'I am' sayings of Jesus" it is adequate.

**The Divine Explanation** title of Part Two concentrates on the aspects of Pre-existence and Incarnations. In **The Significance of the Virgin Birth** it would have been helpful to have the same amount of reasoned argument as the Resurrection received. The section is again full of useful material, particularly for preachers.

Part Three: **Jesus Confessed and Adored** contains the theology of Paul essentially and examines various titles used by him: Messiah, Lord, Son of God, Last Adam, One Mediator. It also includes an exposition of Phil 2:5-11 under the title of **The Condescension of Christ**. Col 1:15-20

is covered in the same way with the title **The Cosmic Christ**.

Part Four is really more **Soteriology** than Christology, covering such areas as: the Cross itself, Redemption, Sanctification, Justification, Adoption. There is no unhappy over-emphasis on the human; the idea of a mystical Christianity without any effect on the life-style is firmly dismissed.

**Christ the Exalted Lord** forms Part Five. Here there are some edifying re-iterations of Christian doctrine. Having myself heard the writer speak on the High Priesthood of Christ it is obvious that this is one of his areas of interest. Here the book almost fulfils its title and a sense of the glory of Christ appears.

Part Six deals adequately with **The Last Things**. It concludes with a chapter on "Jesus and the World Religions Today". This seems out of place with all the other material in this section. Perhaps the book needs a section seven - **The Glory of Christ Today**. In this section he could have added comments on the views of various liberals and a clear statement of the battle lines in this theology for "everybody".

Lewis has made a valiant attempt to write a clear theological work but he does not completely succeed, largely because of this book's multi-purpose nature. Perhaps it has a helpful role as an introductory book for theological students. One strength of the book is that it will be helpful to the busy preacher. On all levels, however, it has been stimulating for the reviewer.  
*Rev Robert Pickles BD, Birmingham Bible Institute*

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## EDITORIAL POLICY

1. To articulate that theology characteristic of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.
2. To discuss any theological issues which reflect the diverse views on matters not essential to salvation held within the BEC constituency.
3. To appraise and report on contemporary trends in theology, particularly those which represent departure from consistent evangelicalism.
4. To stimulate interest in contemporary theological matters among BEC churches by the way in which these topics are handled and by indicating their relevance to pastoral ministry.
5. To keep our constituency informed about the contents of new books and journals, as a means of encouraging their stewardship of time and money.

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