

FOUNDATIONS

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Exploring Christianity
Transforming Worship
Celtic Spirituality

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FOUNDATIONS

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

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Editor's Notes

When I was approached about the possibility of becoming editor of *Foundations* I could think of many reasons why I should decline the offer. However there was one reason that weighed heavily enough to tilt the balance in favour of acceptance and that was my conviction that theology matters to pastors and churches. I believe passionately that as evangelicals we need to take theology seriously if we are to remain faithful to Christ and to make an impact on our culture. I hope that in a small way that *Foundations* will help pastors and churches to this end. My aim is not that the journal be a repository of scholarly articles that will be of little immediate interest to many. Such articles are important and necessary, but there are a number of a good journals in which they can appear. My aim is to produce a journal twice a year that will help busy pastors and other church leaders to think theologically about their ministries, churches and the wider Christian world. I want *Foundations* to become the most stimulating, informative, exciting and even enjoyable theological journal on the market. And I make no apology for the last of those adjectives; for theology should be nothing if not enjoyable. Theology is one of the ways in which we can glorify God by enjoying him.

But if my vision for *Foundations* is to be fulfilled I will need a lot of help. Happily I am building on the excellent work of my predecessor Eryl Davies. I have always looked forward to receiving *Foundations* and never thought that one day I would be in the position of having to come up with the goods. I am beginning to appreciate the headaches Eryl must have had as deadlines loomed. If *Foundations* is to work it will require several things from its readers. First, it will require that people write articles. I can commission some things, but I would love to have enough manuscripts arriving that would give me the luxury of having to select the best ones for publication. We need pastors who are thinking and writing on crucial theological subjects. Please do not misunderstand me; I am not looking for fully developed Don Carsons or Sinclair Fergusons – though we need people like them and there may be some real potential out there. Your efforts may be more modest, but nevertheless may be of benefit to others. You may also know of work that someone has done, perhaps a paper given in a fraternal or at a conference. Please tell me or get the person to send his paper to me. One of the primary purposes of *Foundations* is to get pastors doing theology by providing them with an outlet for publication. Second, *Foundations* needs more subscribers and generally to be better known. Tell people about it. Give your pastor a subscription for his birthday (you won't get one for better value at the price). Why not get your church to give subscriptions to all her missionaries? The more readers we have the greater good we can do. Third, pray for me and the others involved in this work.

It has been an encouragement to begin working with the new editorial board whose names you will find inside the front cover but I am very conscious of my shortcomings as editor. I need great wisdom, discernment and sound judgement. The times in which we live are very exciting, but also very confusing ones to live in theologically. With limited resources we need to strike the right note and not make too many mistakes. Without the assistance of the Holy Spirit the work is in vain. So, in your prayers for

the BEC and the wider church, remember *Foundations*, that the Lord will use this journal for the good of his kingdom in our land and beyond.

I have been reading a book recently that has stimulated my thinking in the light of my new responsibilities. It is the two volume work *Princeton Seminary* by David Calhoun (Banner of Truth, 1994). This is far more than an institutional history; it is an account of a great work of God, of a group of remarkable men, of a sound and vigorous theology and of a spirituality that we know too little of today. Chris Bennett takes up one aspect in his article on page 3. I highly recommend them to anyone who wants a stimulating and heart-warming read. Personally I could not put them down. But the thing that struck me about the first one, is the way the old Princeton theologians sought to keep together sound learning and vital piety. Many of us know of Princeton because of the theological giants it produced – Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, AA Hodge, BB Warfield, and Gresham Machen among others. What is forgotten is the vital Calvinistic evangelical piety that went with it. The early leaders, especially Alexander, knew revival in the older Edwardsian sense of the word. For them theology was not a matter of cold abstractions, but of life-changing, culture-changing truths. These men knew both the Scriptures and the power of God. Sadly, even orthodox Princeton seemed to let go the close connection between sound learning and vital piety and I believe that this had a detrimental effect on American evangelicalism in the 20th century.

Today sound learning and vital piety are not two things we tend to associate together. With few exceptions our colleges are not producing and our pulpits are not filled with learned men of God. Some have great learning, but where is the power, the fire, the life? Others have commendable zeal and enthusiasm, but the teaching is superficial and leaves the sheep hungry. Where are the men, university taught or self-taught, like Calvin, or Edwards, or Carey, or Chalmers, or Spurgeon? Where are the men like those Baptist pastors who “held the rope” for William Carey – John Sutcliff, Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, Samuel Pearce? These were men who were busy pastors and aggressive evangelists who were also first-rate theologians. Frankly today there are not many men like these. We have the strange situation in which we have more learned books than ever (can any generation have had as many good commentaries as we have?) and a great deal of activity and spiritual excitement and yet our churches are weak and our impact limited. Do we not need to recover what the older divines called “vital godliness”? Theology must never be an end in itself; it must always serve the church as it has always done at its best. Calvin wrote his *Institutes* to promote the Christian life. Augustine, Owen and Edwards did their theology for the same reason, as do our contemporaries such as Packer, Ferguson, Carson, Piper, Grudem and Boice. Sadly all these men are working mainly in North America. I hope that *Foundations* can help to nurture some theologians in Britain who will strive to keep sound learning and vital piety in tandem.

What of future issues? In the autumn we are planning an issue devoted mainly to the theme of “Word and Spirit”. It seems to me that this is a much misunderstood subject today and requires some theological exploration. Then next spring we are planning an issue on the theological skills required by ordinary pastors for doing their job. There will also be reviews on new books and other items of interest.

For God so loved the World

by Christopher Bennett

The universalistic side of Calvinistic soteriology, especially as taught by the theologians of old Princeton

My theme is not only a matter of fascinating theology but it is also highly relevant to our evangelism. Indeed it is likely that the greater success in evangelism that certain forms of Arminianism have enjoyed, in contrast with Calvinism of late, stems in part from the failure of some Calvinists to believe the universalistic side of their soteriology.

One might get the impression these days that Arminians believe that God loves everyone and Christ died for everyone and the Holy Spirit calls everyone through the gospel, whereas Calvinists believe that God loves the elect, and Christ died only for them, and only they are called. Perhaps on the matter of calling and “the free offer of the gospel” there would be some recognition of a universal offer, though the direct involvement of the Spirit in this would not be made much of. The recent publication by the Banner of Truth Trust of the second volume of the history of Princeton Seminary, coupled with my acquisition of vol. 2 of BB Warfield’s *Selected Shorter Writings*, has brought home to me more than previously how people like Charles Hodge, AA Hodge and Warfield conceived of Calvinism, and also how right they must be.

Let us start with a taste of the universalistic side of salvation, from the pens of Princeton theologians. AA Hodge says that Christ’s death is not only of infinite intrinsic value in the eyes of the law, but is also applicable to the exact legal relations of every lost sinner in the world. “In this sense, if you please, Christ did make the salvation of all men indifferently possible, *a parte Dei*.”¹ Warfield says, “It has been, is, and ever will be, the glory of Calvinism that it does not oppose to the one-sided universalism of Arminianism an equally one-sided particularism; but knows how to do full justice to all the elements of the gospel revelation, and how to combine a true particularism and a true universalism in harmonious relations.”² Earlier in the article³ he makes it clear that he believes that God loves all mankind, that he has given his Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world and that he is ready to bestow saving grace on all who seek it. And Charles Hodge says,

...Augustinians do not deny that Christ died for all men. What they deny is that He died equally, and with the same design, for all men. He died for all, that He might arrest the immediate execution of the penalty of the law upon the whole of our apostate race; that He might secure for men the innumerable blessings attending their state on earth, which, in one important sense, is a state of probation; and that He might lay the foundation for the offer of pardon and reconciliation with God, on condition of faith and repentance.⁴

The love of God

To come now to particulars, first of all, these men are saying that God loves the elect in a special way, with sovereign determination to save, and yet there is a genuine

love of God for all and a desire for all to be saved. Warfield clearly teaches this in the quotation above, and Charles Hodge says it in his sermon on John 3:16 in *Princeton Sermons*.⁵

The Biblical foundation for this is in Ezek. 18:32 and 33:11, in Ps. 145:9, and in Jesus telling us to be like our Father in heaven and to love our enemies. These are some of the clearest and most undeniable statements of it in Scripture. Once we have accepted it, we see it everywhere – and why not in 1 Tim. 2:4? Certainly we see the truth again when Jesus wept over Jerusalem – remembering that he *is* the image of the invisible God.

The way of explaining the meaning of this love for all, which does not go over into a determination to save is in terms of God's love for his creatures (in a way analogous to human *emotional* love), which is modified in what it *does* by other considerations, such as his love for his own name and his determination to glorify his own justice and power: see Rom. 9:21-2. RL Dabney's article, "God's indiscriminate proposals of mercy, as related to his power, wisdom and sincerity" in vol. 1 of his *Discussions*, though somewhat over-philosophical and speculative, is highly recommended for further reading on this. At one point he sums up much of the burden of his article by saying

...God does have compassion for the reprobate, but not express volition to save them, because his infinite wisdom regulates his whole will and guides and harmonizes (not suppresses) all its active principles.⁶

In case exception is taken to the idea of some kind of emotions in the heart of God, it may be worth pointing out – since I am trying to show how old Princeton agreed with CH Spurgeon in walking the knife-edge between Arminianism and various forms of overly high Calvinism – that Warfield disagreed with the idea of the impassibility of God, at least with some forms of it. In his sermon on Phil. 2:5-8 he says,

Men tell us that God is, by the very necessity of His nature, incapable of passion, incapable of being moved by inducements from without; that He dwells in holy calm and unchangeable blessedness, untouched by human sufferings or human sorrows for ever, ... Let us bless our God that it is not true. God can feel; God does love.⁷

So the idea of God having affections and longing for the salvation of some he does not elect to save is not meaningless, because his love is not just a matter of determining good and doing it but also of something genuinely analogous to human emotion. This is not the same as saying that he is moved emotionally by our plight *without* any prior decision on his part to allow himself to be moved by us, or without himself actually planning the very events that will move him – that would be to deny his transcendent glory and is no doubt one of the concerns that drives some people to favour the idea, mistaken in my view, of impassibility.

In summary then, when God considers an individual sinner, he pities and loves and desires their salvation. However, his plan takes in other considerations, and so his electing love alights on some and not on all. There is a particularistic side *and* a universalistic side. Time and again the true Biblical view of things includes and combines what two opposing groups of Bible-believing Christians think: one group only accepts one side, the other only accepts the other. The great advantage of believing the universalistic side is that we end up feeling that God loves all the non-Christians

around and we have liberty to say it to them if and when we think it will help them to consider or believe the gospel. By not believing this, some Calvinists have often been outdone by Arminians in evangelistic enterprise, and we have only had ourselves to blame!

The work of Christ

Secondly, there is a universalistic side to the atoning work of Christ. Yes, he died for the elect, for the sheep, and his death saves us. But he is also “the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world”, John 1:29; and “he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”, 1 John 2:2. For centuries some Calvinists have no doubt been feeling uncomfortable with verses like these; but there is no need to. Christ’s death is an infinitely valuable and powerful atonement for mankind. It was designed to save the elect but it is sufficiently mighty and suitable an event to save everyone. Even John Owen says, “It was, then, the purpose and intention of God that his Son should offer a sacrifice of infinite worth, value, and dignity, sufficient in itself for the redeeming of all and every man, if it pleased the Lord to employ it to that purpose;”⁸ And the Canons of Dort say that the death of the Son of God is “abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.”⁹

How can this be? Because it is not a financial sort of transaction – the Biblical concept of sin as a debt and of Christ paying our debts is a metaphor, not a literal description of what was happening on the cross. We get much nearer the heart of the atonement in the judicial concepts of Scripture. Christ *was* literally satisfying God’s justice with regard to our sins; he was metaphorically paying our debts. Who Christ was suffering for is not a matter of history, of exactly what happened at the cross, but a matter of God’s intention in sending him to suffer a legal equivalent of what we would have had to suffer. AA Hodge says, “If the work itself, therefore, be viewed separately from the intention with which it was undertaken, it plainly stands indifferently related to the case of each and every man that ever lived and sinned. It is not a pecuniary solution of debt, which, *ipso facto*, liberates upon the mere payment of the money. ... The relations of the Atonement as impersonal and general or as personal and definite do not spring from considerations of the degree, duration or kind of suffering or acts of vicarious obedience which Christ rendered, but solely from the purpose he had in rendering them.”¹⁰

Therefore we can say, when speaking to non-Christians “Christ died for you” or “for your sins”. This is not preacher’s licence, it is simply restating Biblical truth without adding the qualifications of an overly tidy and actually one-sided, mildly unbiblical theology. There *is* a universalistic side to Christ’s atoning work: let us not hide it.

The Spirit’s call

Thirdly, the Spirit calls the elect through the gospel, who are savingly brought into union with Christ by repentance and faith. But the Spirit also in some real way calls everyone who hears the message. We are accustomed to refer to this as “the free offer of the gospel” – and very precious it is to many in the modern Reformed movement.

The important thing to recognise here is that the word of command and of gracious offer in Scripture – for example in Rev. 22:17; Mat. 11:28-30; John 6:37; Isa. 55:1ff;

2 Cor. 5:20; and Acts 17:30 – is not a dead word, a mere letter, something God spoke long ago and is now merely words on a page that the Spirit *may* take up and use to speak to people now. That is mysticism or Quakerism or Barthianism or something as bad. Jesus said, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and are life”, John 6:63. The word of God is living and active. If we believe that Scripture is God’s word, then it is God speaking, the Spirit is involved *now*, whenever the word goes forth. JI Packer summarises John Owen’s teaching on the external testimony of the Spirit in the word by saying, “The grounds, then, on which we have faith in Scripture as the word of God are the Spirit’s external witness to its divine origin, which is given in and with it constantly;” “Scripture through the covenanted action of the Holy Spirit, constantly ‘shines’, in the sense of giving spiritual illumination and insight as to who and what one is in the sight of God, and who and what Jesus Christ is, both in himself and in relation to one’s own self, and finally, in the broadest and most inclusive sense, how one should live.”¹¹ So God himself is saying to *all* who read it, all who hear it, all to whom it is expounded, that they must come and submit to Jesus Christ, that God will wipe all their sins away, that the past will be forgotten and the Spirit and eternal life be given. This is the objective voice and call of God.

For the notion that the Spirit works in some way in or upon those who are unsaved and even non-elect, AA Hodge refers readers to Acts 7:51 and Heb. 10:29.¹² The Lord Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit and ministering in his power, had direct dealings during his time in this world with multitudes who were not elect; there is no reason to think the Spirit does not touch and have some kind of dealings with many non-elect people to the end of the world, including especially dealings of a kind and loving nature, commending Christ, showing people their sins and need, summoning people to submit to God. And I have not even mentioned “common grace”, or the traditional Reformed understanding of Heb. 6:4-8, or the parable of the sower, all of which point to the Spirit doing things in some who are never brought to new birth by him.

We can therefore be bold and positive with people: we *know* that God is speaking to them, and we know what he is saying to them. We know he is telling them to repent and to trust Christ, and that he is offering life and pardon. And in our dealings with people we do not have to fret and fuss too much over whether some positive response of theirs is the work of the Spirit or not: it no doubt is, and only time will tell whether he is bringing them to new birth or not. It is *time* that will tell, not excessively close grilling and an investigation of the details of their experience.

We can be bold also because we know that the Spirit is offering Christ and new life in him to all, not just to those who have experienced a certain carefully defined sort of conviction of sin. We can see that in the appeal to those “who are weary and burdened” in Mat. 11:28 the Lord is not saying that those who do not perceive themselves to be weary cannot come; he is just using the fact that some *do* feel weary. The invitation is to all who want what he is offering (see Rev. 22:17); in other words it is completely open.

Conclusion

Now why do we not always find it easy to believe both the particularistic and universalistic sides of Calvinistic soteriology? The main reason must be that we cannot see exactly how these two aspects are congruous. Often we prefer to have a system of

truth in our minds in which we *can* see how everything fits together, even if some of it does not fit very well with Scripture! In other words we prefer to be consistent with ourselves and the rest of our thinking than to be consistent with Scripture.

Now if there were things about believing the two sides of Calvinistic theology, as outlined above, that were inherently irrational, then it may be fair enough to think, “We must have misunderstood Scripture, for God would not want us to believe what is irrational. He is a rational God.” That is right; we are meant to use our minds in interpreting Scripture. There is a sense in which God loves all and Christ died for all. It is difficult, however, for us to put our finger absolutely on the what that sense is. But this is not irrationality, it is mystery. And why should we not live with some mystery? We ought positively to expect this, if the Bible is true, for it is about God who is infinite, and about his wonderful ways of salvation which are past finding out.

The question then is: will we be rationalistic, trusting our own minds and systems. Or will we be humble, Biblical Christians, who think, who use their minds, but who are also ready at a number of points to say, “I do not understand this, but I accept it because I know God understands it and this is what he says”? If we do the latter in this area of the universalistic side of soteriology, I respectfully suggest that we would be better, when it comes to evangelistic enterprise, to be more like an Arminian than an overly high Calvinist.

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- ¹ AA Hodge, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Guardian Press reprint of 1867 ed.), p. 357, and see previous 2 pages).
- ² BB Warfield, “The 1903 Revision of the Confession of Faith” reprinted in *Selected Shorter Writings* vol. 2, (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company reprint, 1973), p. 402.
- ³ Ibid., p. 377.
- ⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977 reprint), 2:558 (in British edition – in ch. 8, sec. 2).
- ⁵ Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1958 reprint of 1879 ed.), pp.16-18.
- ⁶ RL Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1967 reprint of 1890 edition), p. 309. See also Iain Murray’s book, *Spurgeon and Hyper-Calvinism* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth) and Calvin’s comment on Ezek. 18:32.
- ⁷ BB Warfield, *The Saviour of the World* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth reprint), p. 261.
- ⁸ *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust reprint), 10:295.
- ⁹ Second Head of Doctrine, in *The Canons of Dort* (Christian Reformed Church transl., 1962), article 3.
- ¹⁰ AA Hodge, *The Atonement*, p. 369.
- ¹¹ JI Packer, *Among God’s Giants* (Eastbourne, Kingsway, 1991), pp. 122 and 119.
- ¹² AA Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1972 reprint of 1879 ed.), p. 449.

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I Was There

Three personal Reflections on the 1996 National Assembly of Evangelicals

Are evangelicals merely one wing of the Church?

John Edmonds

The 11th-13th November 1996 saw over three thousand Christians, mostly delegates from churches committed to the Evangelical Alliance's statement of faith, gathering together in conference to "set an agenda for our church as it goes into the new millennium". One tangible result of their efforts was the production of "The Bournemouth Declaration", two sides of A4 setting out an "Evangelical Agenda" which was accepted overwhelmingly by the delegates on the final day. The agenda has three main headings: "Christ, Scripture and Unity"; "Church and Mission"; and "Church and Society". It is a document worth studying by anyone who wants to understand EA's current position.

I was encouraged by the central place given to the Cross, the Bible, and Evangelism throughout the Assembly. The worship was largely contemporary, but place was given to older hymns, times of silence for reflection, small group as well as platform-led public prayers and public Bible reading.

The Assembly began well with a meeting which gave pride of place to preaching. If this was agenda-setting for a conference which would set an agenda it was good planning. Steve Gaukroger, a Baptist minister from the Home Counties, preached from John 3:16. His preaching was faithful to the text of scripture and heartwarming. He drew our attention to God's heart of love for a lost world, a unique Saviour, the indispensability, unrepeatability and centrality of the atonement, the lostness of the lost and the priority of evangelism.

The first day ended on a high note with the contribution of Joni Eareckson Tada. Her message was full of scripture, honed in the fires of experience and affliction. Here was no triumphalism, but pure theodicy. Her theme; God's love for us, and our love for him come what may; the Christian life a love relationship with the Saviour. Not for Joni the flights of mystical fantasy, but experience rooted in devotion to the word of God in scripture.

The evening meeting on the second day set before us the opportunities for evangelism opening up as a result of greater European integration. It was refreshing to hear Christian leaders speaking about the God-given opportunities presented by a barrier-free Europe. Stanko Jambrek, General Secretary of the Protestant Evangelical Council of Croatia, told us about God's faithfulness to the tiny minority of evangelical Christians in his country through times of trial and persecution and the freedom that has come in recent years during which time there has been a definite move of the Holy Spirit leading to the planting of new churches and the conversion of hundreds of people.

I have given a brief snapshot of some of the main sessions to give some reasons for my overall encouragement but I must now refer to **two matters of concern**.

The main speaker in the seminar on the Bible was Alister McGrath. His paper was a reworking of material from his book *A Passion for Truth*. He said much that was helpful about the absolute authority of scripture, the way that submission to scripture sets us free from the tyranny of worldly/contemporary philosophy and the sufficiency of scripture for Christian belief and behaviour. That said, as in his book, he insisted on drawing a distinction between scripture and revelation, saying that “we must not identify the text of scripture itself with revelation. Scripture is a channel through which God’s revelation is encountered”. Derek Tidball, principal of the London Bible College, responding to Dr McGrath, also argued that “we must make a distinction between scripture and revelation... If we don’t we will make the mistake of identifying the very words of scripture with the revelation itself.” During the discussion period it became clear that many delegates, including some leading evangelical theologians and church leaders, were unhappy with the views expressed from the platform. It was encouraging to discover that the Bournemouth Declaration issued on the last day read “we recognise scripture as God’s word written, the definitive, normative and sufficient revelation of God’s truth.”

The main speaker in the seminar “Where Evangelicals Differ” was Robert Amess, a Baptist minister from Richmond and EA Executive and Council member. During the course of his paper, which included some very practical and helpful suggestions for dealing with differences of opinion and breaks of fellowship, I understood him to say that evangelicals needed to realise that they were just part of the church with a distinctive emphasis and contribution to make. His comment was picked up with enthusiasm by a number of contributors to the discussion time who spoke with passion about ecumenical projects, joint evangelism and prayer meetings with Roman Catholics and so on. This session set me thinking and reflecting. Throughout the Assembly evangelicals had been regarded as a wing of the church – possibly, probably, heirs to the most authentic expression of the faith, but still only fellow travellers. This was reinforced by a careful reading of the “1846 Practical Resolutions” which were reaffirmed at the Assembly. These resolutions “are as important to our evangelical identity as our Basis of Faith”, runs the introductory material. The resolutions make reference to three groups of Christians. Firstly there are the members of the Alliance (resolutions 1-4) who are urged to unity and love. Secondly there are those who “seek to know and serve Christ as Saviour and Lord” who will not wish to be members of the Alliance. “Such persons are not to be regarded as being out of Christian fellowship” (resolution 5), which I take to be a reference to bodies such as the BEC and other evangelicals not in the Alliance. Thirdly under resolution 6; “We urge all Christian leaders of Trinitarian churches to promote peace, unity and fellowship within the body of Christ.” Which I take to mean that the Evangelical Alliance regards all Trinitarian churches as being authentically Christian, part of the body of Christ on earth, making evangelicals just one wing of that church. As the Assembly drew to a close I kept asking myself a question. Am I happy for evangelicals to be described merely as a sub-set of the church?

How significant are these concerns in the overall scheme of things? Are they a reason to separate from the Alliance and churches within it? Or are they legitimate

issues for debate and discussion to be pursued from within? Taking the Assembly as a whole, I am happy to say “I was there”, but I shall watch developments with concerned interest.

Rev. John Edmonds is minister of Grove Hill Evangelical Church, Woodford

What do evangelicals believe about the Bible

Gary Benfold

The previous National Assembly of Evangelicals was held in 1966 and ended in controversy when Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, at the request of the Evangelical Alliance council, urged evangelicals to reconsider the implications of the doctrine of the church. John Stott, at the request of nobody in particular, urged them to ignore him. Readers of *Foundations* are undoubtedly familiar with the events of that Assembly; though the Evangelical Alliance, apparently, is still not. Joel Edwards (UK Director of EA) wrote in the Programme Booklet “The last National Assembly of Evangelicals in 1966 went tragically wrong, when disagreement over forming *an alternative evangelical denomination* led to a split” (emphasis mine). The results of the 1966 Assembly were very great indeed; two kinds of evangelicalism emerged with one branch (represented by the BEC and others) arguing that evangelicalism is the gospel itself and the other branch – finding shape and force at Keele the following year – seeming to believe that evangelicals were only one wing of the church and pledging itself to get more involved in denominations and structures. In view of the controversy which began then, it was perhaps rather brave of the Evangelical Alliance to call another Assembly, even if they did need to wait thirty years. But call one they did, and it met for three days at the Bournemouth International Centre in November of 1996.

There were some good points; I will never forget Joni Eareckson Tada speaking so movingly from her own experience on our attitudes to others. Joni is the greatest miracle I have ever seen: a woman of such grace and faith that the Lord shines from her. She is surely one of the greatest Christian heroines of our time. Steve Gaukroger preached very warmly and helpfully on the first day from John 3:16, and Roy Clements’ ministry from Matthew 22:29 (“You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God”) was very powerful indeed; I sensed a seriousness and a sober spirit after he had preached which suggested much of what he had said had gone home. But the worship leader for that session, whether deliberately or not, took us straight into the kind of singing which undermined the effect completely.

In spite of this though, I am sorry to say that my lasting impressions of the conference are negative, for various reasons. Where, O where, did the idea come from that Christianity is *fun*? I don’t mean joyous, I mean fun verging on funny. For the most part there was very little of a serious spirit about the main gatherings; I’m not sure we worshipped much, we just sang a lot.

Then too, some serious issues were on the agenda, and were treated seriously enough by the speakers; and yet, their serious treatment was often disappointing. Because the seminars were run concurrently I obviously cannot comment on all of them; but the one I attended on Scripture’s authority was very worrying indeed. None

of the three speakers were real inerrantists. The main paper was given by Alister McGrath, with responses from Derek Tidball and Judith Rossall. Evangelicalism has no solid ground to stand on unless the Scriptures are infallible and inerrant. While McGrath quoted Packer helpfully here it was hard to be sure that he agreed with what Packer meant, not just with what he said. McGrath's recent article in *Evangelicals Now*, where he speaks of rescuing the doctrine of Scripture from Rationalism, again affirms Packer's words but goes on to say about the position of Hodge and Warfield, "I respect that position, although I have misgivings about certain specific aspects of it", suggests that he may not. The third speaker clearly did not. Judith Rossall, had the distinction of being the most clear and forthright. She did not believe in inerrancy (although Packer's definition seemed to be a surprise to her) and felt that we needed to face up to the reality of errors in Scripture. As I say, at least it had the benefit of being clear! But evangelicalism has gone down a long way when the principal of London Bible College (Derek Tidball) can say publicly that we need to avoid the mistake of equating the words of Scripture with the revelation of God. In its context this sounded suspiciously like Barthianism to me; and apparently it did to others also. Dr Steve Brady from Lansdowne Baptist Church in Bournemouth challenged Dr Tidball at just this point and was told, "I sign an anti-Barthian clause every year". Be that as it may; were I a Trustee of LBC – or even contemplating one of my church members studying there – I would want to know rather more precisely what Tidball meant. This issue needs to be tackled and I hope that someone with more theological acumen and clout than I may take it up speedily.

Even more serious, though, was the whole approach of the Assembly. I hope I am not caricaturing it when I say the approach was: "Here we are; we are the evangelicals. Now – what do we believe? Let us form a statement that we can all agree on". Such an approach allows anyone who wants (for whatever reason) to call himself an evangelical to have a voice in shaping what the word means. But the proper way – surely – is to seek an agreement about what the Bible says in certain vital areas and let *that* stand as a definition of evangelical; then those who cannot accept it are inevitably excluded. That seems to be the problem; EA is deliberately an inclusivist organisation, which seems to be very gracious of them. But it is that very inclusivism which inevitably excludes many who cannot bear a fudge.

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What role should the Church have in our unity?

Alan Gibson

Where *Evangelicals Differ* was the title of a well-attended seminar at the NAE when the main presenter was my friend Robert Amess, pastor of Duke Street Baptist Church, Richmond. His warm and irenic manner reflected his genuine concern that differences should be faced with integrity about biblical principles and sensitivity in the face of diversity.

At the risk of highlighting yet another evangelical difference, however, I believe that the speaker threw the baby out with the bathwater!

In his presentation Robert Amess surprised me by beginning with the New Testament teaching concerning the Church, ignoring altogether the Old Testament material relating to God's covenant with Israel. [Is it a genuine evangelical methodology to begin any doctrinal survey, however brief, with only the NT material?] He properly deduced that the NT establishes the basic unity of the Church and that "multiplicity of belief is a denial of every tenet that is taught and implied in scripture".

His analysis of the present problem of "a fractured Church" is that evangelicals have taken refuge in the "transcendent" and "hidden" character of the Church. They have failed to deal with the problem of a Church that is both visible and also divided, suggesting that only in heaven will its unity become apparent. Content to interact on a pragmatic basis, too many evangelicals treat the unity of the Church only as a local church discipline. Now the Bible takes the universal dimension of the Church seriously but, Robert Amess insisted, evangelicals are ignoring it. Which is precisely what he then proceeded to do!

A helpful procedure from that point on would have been to take up the significance of the Universal Church concept for divided evangelicalism. Is there a biblical precedent for the use of the word *ekklesia* to denote a denomination? Does the common belief of the Church provide a pattern for local church relationships today? What constitutes a proper church? Is it a valid deduction from the Bible that a local church can hold evangelical doctrines and yet belong to a denomination which does not require that same belief of all its congregations? Which doctrines are non-negotiable and on which doctrines can we validly allow a diversity of interpretation? In which category does the doctrine of the Church come?

None of these lines, however, was followed by this presentation. Instead it was assumed that the relationships across denominational boundaries made possible by the Evangelical Alliance were already in place and that all we need to do is to ensure that we keep in contact with each other and behave with courtesy. While it was assumed that all evangelicals somehow belong to the Universal Church there was no consideration of the fact that other people also claim to be members but deny the biblical doctrine of salvation. There is a major evangelical difference about how these people are to be regarded but that crucial issue was not addressed. The "baby" of the Church was alive in the analysis of the problem but it had been fatally thrown out with the "bathwater" of supposed transcendence by the time we reached the solution.

Now all this is not merely an academic question. Evangelicals who try to relate to other bible-believing Christians outside their own denomination while seeking at the same time to work with non-evangelicals in their own denomination face difficulties of their own making. They have divided loyalties. Which is to take precedence and when? They have an image problem. Is the gospel they preach from the pulpit the same as that they proclaim from their notice board? They have to take refuge in pragmatism. "Well, it seems to work as well as any other option, doesn't it?"

It was always expecting too much for the 1966 NAE to be well spoken of in the 1996 event and no one did. Yet Dr Lloyd Jones' plea was for the significance of the Church as the guardian of the gospel. While local evangelical churches remain separated among different denominations they are inevitably weakened. He contended that our short-term co-operation in evangelical movements only to return to mixed churches for long-term commitment is not a biblical pattern of priorities. It is the

doctrine of the Universal Church which urges that. And it is this same doctrine which is relegated to insignificance in the generation unaware of 1966.

One important difference between the Evangelical Alliance and the British Evangelical Council is the place given to the Church. Although local churches may belong to the EA, so also may individual Christians, societies, agencies and para-church bodies. Although an attempt is made to reflect the denominational scope of its churches' membership, the EA Council remains a self-appointed body. The EA is essentially a movement, not a church body. By contrast the BEC is a council of churches, only churches may belong to it and its executive members are appointed by their churches.

Support for this position arose recently from an unexpected quarter. Earlier this year an American journal reviewed *Here We Stand*, a collection of essays from the Association of Confessing Evangelicals, a body some in the UK are now viewing as a possible model for co-operation between non-charismatic, serious-minded evangelicals.

The Achilles heel of evangelicalism is its very nature as a movement and not a church – defined by the pragmatic means of grace of mailing lists, personal networks and self-appointed committees as opposed to a rightly ordered ecclesiastical communion made visible by the Reformation “marks” of the Word, sacrament and discipline. Evangelicals ought to consider fully the contention that Christians cannot effectively engage the realities of the modern world without, or apart from, a real church. The Reformers would surely agree with that (Robert W Patterson, *Christianity Today*, 6 January 1997, p. 52).

Evangelical relationships are again under discussion, as they ought always to be. Some today, however, are proposing that personal initiatives and para-church umbrellas are inherently superior to church-based solutions. Whatever be the future shape of essentially evangelical co-operation should not one formative element in it be the Bible doctrine of the Universal Church?

Rev. Alan Gibson BD, General Secretary, British Evangelical Council.

Christian evangelism does not consist merely in a man going about the world saying, “Look at me, what a wonderful experience I have, how happy I am, what wonderful Christian virtues I exhibit; you can all be as good and as happy as I am if you will just make a complete surrender of your wills in obedience to what I say.” ... Men are not saved by the exhibition of our glorious Christian virtues; they are not saved by the contagion of our experiences ... Nay, we must preach to them the Lord Jesus Christ; for it is only through the gospel which sets him forth that they can be saved. If you want health for your souls, and if you want to be the instruments of bringing health to others, do not turn your gaze forever within, as though you could find Christ there. Nay, turn your gaze away from your own miserable experiences, away from your own sin, to the Lord Jesus Christ as he is offered in the gospel.

J Gresham Machen, *Education, Christianity and the State*, 1987

“All things to all men...”

Jonathan Skinner

Those of us in the more reformed tradition often excuse our lack of evangelistic effectiveness by hiding in the concept of the sovereignty of God. A high belief in the God's sovereignty, if we are not careful, can make us passive and uncreative in the task of proclaiming the Gospel. This should not be so but it often the case. God has made us responsible beings and, with the Bible to set our principles, we need to be as imaginative as possible in communicating our faith to people within our culture.

The fact is that there is a lot of ineffective work going on. Hours of work are being employed but the yield is remarkably low. There is a need to re-examine the Scriptures and analyse our culture to see how the never changing Gospel can most effectively be communicated within the changing culture of our day. This necessitates a strong grasp of both the Word and the world and we need to apply the Word to the world in the most appropriate way. Our evangelism should always be culturally sensitive and often it needs to be cross-cultural.

Is there a way forward?

The guiding principle may possibly be found in 1 Corinthians 9:22 which states, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” We need to think laterally and creatively to find ways or channels which we can use to communicate the Gospel effectively. We need bridges to make points of contact. There must be many valid ways forward here but what is now described is one of the roads our local church went down. Perhaps it will at least stimulate creative thought.

Our line of thinking went as follows: we need some event, some meeting, some structure in which to declare the Good News. If we separate it from the main meetings then we can be as radical as we like and offend few. We need to base the event around something more culturally acceptable for modern and post-modern folk in British society than a church service. There are two institutions in contemporary Britain which are accepted, and within which many folk feel comfortable, these are the Pub and the Evening Class. Perhaps we can build a culturally sensitive context for communication using these as models. We call this event *Exploring Christianity*.

Context

Various courses are run on the same evening. We start with coffee in our coffee bar, which has a pub-like atmosphere and then split up for the various courses. The teaching sessions last about one hour. After these we join together again in the coffee bar and folk stay for as long as they wish.

This *period of social interaction* in the coffee bar is not seen as something secondary to the teaching sessions, it is viewed as a fundamental component of the overall strategy. There are several reasons for this. *First*, however informal and relaxed one tries to make the teaching sessions there remains a *gap between the ‘clients’ and the leader*. During the coffee bar sessions, many *barriers can begin to be broken down and relationships can be built*. This means that the group members become more

relaxed and are willing to be more open and ask the questions that are really a problem to them. Much one-to-one counselling and discipleship can then occur along with an improvement in the small group sessions. *Second, the relationships between the folk attending the whole programme begins to develop and a sense of “belonging” and “community” is the result.* This is crucial as one of the benefits of becoming a believer is entering into a new family, the church. But this step is often a problem due to the *culture gap* between where folk are coming from and “evangelical church culture”. In effect we may be producing a *halfway house*.

On hand there is a *team of about ten “staff”* who are responsible for personal evangelism, discipleship and the teaching of the courses. Alongside these there are two in the *“hospitality team”* who run the coffee bar.

The Courses

Check it Out is the directly evangelistic part of the overall *Exploring Christianity* programme. As *Check it Out* is quite intellectually demanding, we provide a sister course called *Just Looking* which is a simpler presentation of the gospel. Those who complete one of these may then attend *Laying Foundations*, a twelve week basic discipleship course. After this we have *Looking at Jesus*, which is a year long small group study of Luke’s Gospel. Alongside these there is *Hitch-hiker’s Guide to the Bible*, which is an introduction and overview of the Old Testament. We are also at present developing a course on basic bible doctrines and themes.

Definition

Check it Out is a six week course which is designed to communicate to unchurched people what the core of the Christian faith is, and to persuade them that it is true and requires a response from them.

Basic Principles

Behind the details of *Check it Out* are some basic principles:

1. *Biblical Christianity is true.* By “biblical Christianity” we mean the historical , orthodox, Evangelical Faith. By “true” we mean objectively true in actual reality rather than merely subjectively or personally “true” for an individual. In other words that there is real religious truth and that it is possible to know it.

2. *Even though the truth itself never changes, it must be thoughtfully communicated and applied to a given culture in an appropriate way.* The cultural context and world view of the recipient must be considered in the process of communication. In other words it must be targeted.

The book of Acts gives some interesting examples of this approach. Paul’s starting point in communicating the gospel varies according to the background of his hearers. When he is evangelising those who have the Scriptures he starts with his Bible. The Scriptures become his database from which he reasons. For example when speaking in Thessalonica, “As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead” (Acts 17:2,3). Later in the same chapter he uses the same methodology with those attached to the synagogue in Berea (Acts 17:11,12). But his approach is radically different when speaking to pagans. His starting point is different when talking to those without a Bible than when talking to those with a Bible.

Later in the same chapter he comes to Athens where he first finds a synagogue and reasons from the Scriptures as before. But then he moves out into the larger pagan population. His initial response is not to reason from the Scriptures with them but to approach them in a different way. Firstly, he takes care to understand where they were coming from (Acts 17:23). Having done this, he then proceeds to reason with them on the basis of three areas which all human beings have in common, whatever their religious views. These three areas are our *shared world*, our *shared humanity* and our *shared history* (Acts 17:24-32). He whets their appetite and prepares the ground by looking at the order of the world around us, the ultimate needs and desires of the human heart and the history of the Christ Event. The account in Athens is only a summary but it is strongly implied that he then moved into scriptural themes (Acts 17:30,31). This gives us a pattern for communicating to people who have no confidence whatever in the Bible. *When the Bible is denied, we can still talk.*

3. *The truth is not just declared but reasoning and persuasion are used.* It is true that we have to proclaim the gospel but that does not mean that people need not be persuaded. As folk are confronted with the Christian message they often have problems. These should not be pushed away with a comment such as “just believe” or “they don’t matter”, as such questions do matter. If the gospel is not true then it is no gospel! People need to be convinced of its veracity, or their faith is not true faith and, furthermore, they will have no confidence in sharing themselves, what deep down they feel may be false. So, for evangelistic and pastoral reasons, sincere questions need to be answered. Francis Schaeffer writes, “Christianity is truth, and we must give honest answers to honest questions. Christianity is truth, truth that God has told us, and if it is true it can answer questions.”¹

The temptation is to split man into spiritual and secular areas of life. The secular deals with truth but the spiritual domain is not concerned with truth as such. It is beyond an “earthly” level. However, this is not so. Truth affects the whole of man including the spiritual. In other words, the intellect is important in validating, seeking and confirming a religious belief.

We are not Christians primarily because the gospel works nor because it has changed our lives. Neither are we believers primarily because we have seen it change other people’s lives or because we have had some experience of God. We are primarily Christians because it is *true*. Many other things “work” or change lives or give experience but if they are not based on truth they are worthless. They are short term gains but that is all.

Faith must be in something or someone real, that is in an objective reality. Faith is not grasping the air nor is it blind. No, the basis of the Christian faith is that it is *true*. Now, because it is true it works; because it is true it truly changes lives and because it is true it can give valid experience.

Due to this emphasis on truth it is hardly surprising that the New Testament is so full of evidence, hard historical evidence. People need to be convinced of the truth. For example, John wrote his Gospel detailing carefully the miracles that Jesus performed in real space-time history, so that people should believe that Jesus is the Christ.² In other words he tells them why they should believe. John puts it like this, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son

of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30,31). John and the other writers try to convince folk that what they say is true; they amass arguments and reasons. They do not just state nor simply proclaim but rather demonstrate that they are telling the truth.³

In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul writes that, “We *demolish arguments* and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.” In Philippians, Paul talks about *defending and confirming* the gospel (Phil. 1:7).

In Peter’s first letter he writes “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an *answer* to everyone who asks you to give a *reason* for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). Note that an answer is to be given (*apologia*) that is a defence and not just a statement, and that a reason or account (*logos*) is given of the faith and why it is believed. A declaration of the gospel is not merely a clear statement of truth but an active defence which is reasonable and logical. In being logical it uses the reasoning faculty.⁴

In Acts 13, Paul argues and urges from the scriptures the truths about Christ, he does not just state them. In verse 43, the word translated *urged* (*peitho*) in the NIV means “to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, to persuade, bringing about a change of mind by reason or moral consideration.”⁵

The word is used again in Acts 19:8: “Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, *arguing persuasively* about the kingdom of God”. Again it is used in 17:4, but this time in a passive sense, that is “were persuaded”. Paul is doing two things in his evangelism, one is proclaiming and the other is persuading, defending or reasoning. “As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days he *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures, *explaining and proving* that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am *proclaiming* to you is the Christ,’ he said. Some of the Jews were *persuaded* and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women”.

In Athens when working with Jews and Greeks Paul employed reason, “He *reasoned* in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the market place day by day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:17).

In Acts 26 Paul gives his defence before Festus and Agrippa. When he raises the objective fact of Christ having risen from the dead, Festus interrupts and says, “You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane”. Paul replies that he is not insane but that, “What I am saying is *true and reasonable*”. In other words it is really true, objectively true and factually true. It is not just true in Paul’s head but it is true in reality. What is more, it is reasonable, that is it makes sense, it is logical.

4. *People are given adequate opportunity to interact, discuss and argue.* When the words used for evangelistic activity in Acts are studied one must conclude that the task was carried out in a way which not only declares the truth but also reasons, disputes, applies persuasion, prevails upon, convinces, gives an active defence or answer to questions.⁶ True communication must engage the mind and this normally involves the recipient expressing themselves with words, as they get their mind around the concepts. Passivity on the part of the hearers needs to be avoided, their minds must be actively engaged.

5. *The primary means of communication is verbal.* God is a being who speaks, and we are created in his image. God speaks to us and we speak to each other. We are made

to be relational beings who have their highest form of communication through words. God has communicated to us through the written word which speaks of the living Word. Christian communication is fundamentally word centred, it is verbal. But this does not necessarily imply nor necessitate merely a straight talk. The listener does not need to be passive but can be drawn in to participate and be involved.

Various media can be used to communicate our verbal message: speaking, discussion, poetry, written material, audio tapes, video tapes, interactive computer software etc. Non-verbal media can be used to *reinforce* the message, such as music and visual images.

6. *The course is not the end but the beginning.* We are commanded not so much to make converts as to make disciples. Due to this “*Check it Out*” is only the beginning. After this there is a twelve week module called “*Laying Foundations*” which is a basic discipleship course.

7. *Prayer is vital.* There is a fundamental belief and principle that it is only through reliance on the Lord that we can achieve anything. Although God is sovereign, he calls us to pray and only as we align our wills with his in prayer and ask according to his will, will we see any significant fruit. In practice, we have a team of forty “prayer warriors” whom we ask to pray daily for the church’s work of evangelism. They are supplied with a prayer letter about every six weeks. We need our equivalents of Moses on the hilltop, while we Joshuas fight in the valley (Ex. 17:8-16).

The Argument

There are many different ways of presenting the gospel. We are not claiming that this is the only way to do it, only that with people today it seems to be an effective approach. And more importantly, each step of the procedure can be sustained in principle as a biblical way of reasoning with unbelievers. The argument is as follows:

*There are many things in our lives that stimulate us to think about deeper issues and ultimate questions,*⁷ for example, personal crisis and tragedy, feelings of guilt and shame, a lack of purpose and meaning, sickness, aging and death. The questions raised include, Who am I? What am I here for? How should I live my life? Can I change? Can I get rid of my feelings of guilt? What happens after death? Is there a God? Are there answers to these questions? Is it possible to know the answers to these questions?

*People are very cynical about Christianity and at some point they will raise the issue of proof,*⁸ so it is better to raise it first. We often use the word “proof” in a way which suggests that the issue is absolutely certain, the conclusion is clear to any person of intelligence. The trouble is, while that may be the case in some areas it is not so in others.

For example, in the field of mathematics, statements may be said to be non-negotiable or certain. There is an absolute quality attached to the nature of mathematics, two plus two always equals four. In the area of science things are not quite so certain, scientists may do many experiments, advance theories and even state laws but at the end of the day history teaches us that their conclusions are often wrong. Economics or politics employ an even more fuzzy use of the word “proof”, one has only to watch a debate on the television to see that! When we get into the area of ultimate questions and religion we have to be very careful what we mean by “proof” and this may not be the best word to use in the context of religion.

The concept of “proof” in the area of religion assumes that we are totally rational creatures, that we can think with clarity on the issue and can come to definitive conclusions. But are we totally rational? In principle, there must be some issues in the universe that are just too great for the human mind to weigh all the evidence neatly. Since we only have a few litres of brain, then some things must be beyond us! We are finite beings.

Not only are we limited, but we are also biased. It has been proposed that generally we do not think in logical, straight lines but rather that we hold a generalised picture or framework into which we fit a new piece of evidence.⁹ It is not just that we might be influenced by the views we already hold, we are also biased in that consciously or subconsciously we can think through the implications of accepting another perspective. We may not like those implications.¹⁰

So how can we approach the problem? What are going to be our agreed set of “game rules” as we discuss whether Christianity is true or not? When we make most of the big decisions in our life we do not actually use pure logic nor do we use scientific experimentation. Think for example about finding a partner and getting married. We do not sift through a load of photographs and character profiles and then after several interviews and a trial period use the approach of Sherlock Holmes to detect the right one! Rather we begin to build up a picture of the person as we experience them day by day. This experience is not confined to our thinking capacities but uses the whole of our beings. If you like, our approach is “holistic”. Many different factors come together.

When we come to look at the really big questions of life and death and religion it is the same. Many different factors come together and need our consideration. We need to ask ourselves whether the overall weight of these pointers is sufficient to change our minds.

So how can we go about answering the ultimate questions? If we look at the world around us it seems to point to something beyond itself.¹¹ The fact of the universe raises the question of how it was caused. And the complexity and apparent design of our world appears to indicate a designer. Brutal, ignorant, blind chance would be an unlikely cause of our sophisticated world. Furthermore, could chance randomly throw up such a wonderful thing as personality? Human beings are persons, we love, hate, relate, choose, desire, talk, understand and are self-aware etc. Can we be the result of a biochemical lottery? Then we are morally aware, we seem to have a comprehension of good and evil although often twisted and even perverse. Where could such an awareness have come from? Possibly a comprehension of law comes from a lawgiver. On top of this, by far the majority of people have a religious awareness and very few disbelieve in “God” totally. This is true even in cultures where indoctrination to atheism has lasted for a generation. All these factors point to there possibly being something, or perhaps someone, out there.¹²

However, much more, is needed. Such factors *stimulate the interest in the right direction, but something more concrete is needed. The next thing we need to look at is history. It does not matter what religious view or perspective a person holds, we all share the same history.*¹³ Luke’s Gospel is history.

Luke’s reliability as an historian is unquestionable. Sir William Ramsay is regarded as one of the greatest archæologists ever to have lived. He was a student in the German historical school of the mid-19th century. As a result, he believed that the book of Acts

was a product of the mid-second century AD. This would mean that it was written a long time after the events and therefore cannot be considered accurate in what it relates. He was firmly convinced of this belief.

In his research into the archaeology of Asia Minor he needed to consider the writings of Luke. As a result he was forced into a complete reversal of his beliefs due to the overwhelming evidence uncovered in his research. He spoke of this when he said: "I may fairly claim to have entered on this investigation without prejudice in favour of the conclusion which I shall now seek to justify to the reader. On the contrary, I began with a mind unfavourable to it... It did not then lie in the line of my life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself brought into contact with the book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually born upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvellous truth. In fact beginning with a fixed idea that the work was essentially a second century composition, and never relying on its evidence as trustworthy for first century conditions, I gradually came to find it a useful ally in some obscure and difficult investigations."¹⁴

Concerning Luke's ability as a historian, Ramsay concluded after thirty years of study that "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy... *this author should be placed alongside the very greatest of historians*". Ramsay adds: "Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of his trustworthiness".¹⁵

If Luke can be trusted at every point we can test him, is it too much to accept his testimony when we cannot? This author appears to write with care and integrity, what then does he say about the historical Jesus?

*When we look at the historical Jesus we find that he makes certain claims.*¹⁶ Here is someone who says that they can forgive sins and who accepts worship. Here is a person in history who claims titles which imply that he is divine; here is the one who claimed to be the Son of Man and the Son of God.

*So it is history that Jesus existed and that he made these claims, but what credentials does he have to make them?*¹⁷ Luke also describes many supernatural things which Jesus did, phenomena which give authority and validity to his claims. Jesus healed the lame, cured the sick, had power over nature and brought the dead back to life. More than that *he rose from the dead himself*¹⁸ and was seen to have power even over this "grim reaper". The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is very extensive. A former Chief Justice of England, Lord Darling, said, 'In its favour as living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.'

Another credential which we have to come to terms with is that there are many predictive prophecies in the Old Testament which Jesus fulfilled exactly. Chance could not account for this.¹⁹

Now, if these credentials validate Jesus' claim to be the Son of God and the only way to the Father then we come face to face with the most significant event of history. Here is God breaking into our world. The trouble is how do we interpret this event? What does the life and death of Jesus mean? What we need is some document or handbook that will explain it to us. So far we have seen that Luke's Gospel in particular is accurate history, it is a trustworthy historical document. But that is all we have claimed for it. What we find now is that the historical Jesus revealed to us in this

document points to the whole Bible as being more than history. *Jesus points to the Bible as being the Word of God.*

There are three primary reasons we can give for the Bible being accepted as the Word of God.

First, Jesus claims it to be the Word of God. The way he quotes the Old Testament when in dispute with the Jewish Leaders infers that he accepts it as authoritative (Luke 6:3-5; 19:46; 20:17-19; 37-40). In regards to the New Testament, Jesus trained up a group of Apostles to carry on his teaching. Furthermore, he promises that the Holy Spirit would make them witnesses to him throughout the world (Matthew 28:16-20), and would bring his teaching to remembrance (John 14:26), as well as teach them new truth (John 16:12f.). This would be done by the writing of the New Testament.

Second, the Bible claims to be the Word of God itself. The writers claim that they are writing God's words and not merely their own (e.g. Micah 8:2; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21).

Third, its very uniqueness implies a claim to be the Word of God. The Bible is unique in its effect on individuals; its fulfilled prophecy, its continuity of theme; its circulation; its number of translations; its survival through time; in its content; its influence of other literature and its effect on society.

If we accept this we now have a document which can interpret the coming, dying, rising and ascending of Jesus. *We now have something which can communicate to us the content of the Christian faith.*

The Bible communicates that we are estranged from God due to our *rebellion* (Romans 1:18-2:16). However, it also shows us God's *rescue plan* (Romans 3:21-28) and how we should *respond* (Acts 2:38; 16:31) to it. It gives us the bad news about ourselves, but then shows us the good news in Jesus Christ, the only way to the Father (John 14:6).

Our experience

Having run this course for some years now, we have found it has been used of the Lord to help people come to faith on a regular basis. We have also found it to be very useful for new believers who although they have come to faith have little understanding of the basis of that faith. Furthermore, it has a definite role in training believers to be able to "give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

References

- ¹ Francis Schaeffer, *Two Contents, Two Realities: The Complete Works Of Francis Schaeffer*, 3 volumes (Crossway, 1982), vol. 3, book 4, p. 412)
- ² See Leon Morris, *Jesus Is The Christ: Studies In The Theology Of John*, (Leicester, IVP, 1989).
- ³ See also for example the prologue of Luke (1:1-4) in the use of investigation and evidence and Matthew's first chapter for convincing Jews from the Scriptures.
- ⁴ The root for the Greek words answer and defence is *log*, from which we get our word logic. The epistemological position taken here is not rationalism. It is right to say that the faith is rational but not that it is rationalistic. Rationalism starts with man and reasons to construct a complete world view. It makes at least two false assumptions: first, that we are capable of such reasoning, although our thinking is biased and part of our fallen nature; second, that we have the information available for such an enterprise without revelation. But both we and our

source of data are limited. To reach correct conclusions we need not only an external source of revelation but also a work of the Holy Spirit. However, even though we are fallen, we are created to think and our ability to reason should be employed. This must be done in dependence upon God, for although men can give an external gospel call, a response relies on God's effectual calling by his Spirit.

- ⁵ WE Vine, *Expository Dictionary Of Bible Words*, (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1981) p. 179.
- ⁶ *Dialegomai*, to reason or dispute with others (Acts 17:2&17; 18:4,19; 19:8&9; 24:25); *peitho*, signifies to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, to persuade, bringing about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations. It can also mean to be persuaded or convinced (Acts 13:43; 17:4; 18:8; 26:28 & 28); *sophrosune*, denotes soundness of mind or sound judgment translated soberness, good sense, sober truth and reasonable (Acts 26:25); *aletheia*, means true or fact in an objective sense, unconcealed and manifest, i.e. not just an emotion of being "true for me" (Acts 26:25); *apologia*, a verbal defence or answer (Acts 22:1; 1 Peter 3:15). See Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, for more details.
- ⁷ This approach is used in Scripture in passages like the Book of Ecclesiastes; Acts 17:22-23; Rom. 2:14-16.
- ⁸ Thomas is an example of this: John 20:24-31 as are the Bereans: Acts 17:10-12. To ask questions about proof can be good in that the person may be sincerely seeking to find out what is true, but it can also be a sinful smokescreen once they have sufficient evidence but are not willing to believe and change their lives.
- ⁹ See Del Ratzsch, *The Philosophy Of Science: The Natural Sciences In Christian Perspective*, (Leicester, IVP, 1986).
- ¹⁰ Behind this comment is the doctrine of human depravity, where every part of our fallen nature is tainted and twisted by the results of the fall.
- ¹¹ The Scriptures use this approach in passages like Acts 17:24-28; Rom. 1:18-20; Psalm 19:1-6.
- ¹² These are pointers, they merely set the scene for God's personal revelation in Jesus Christ and his written revelation in the Scriptures. We must never stop here, we only begin here. Christ must be the centre of our evangelistic and apologetic endeavour. Evidence in the world around us and within our own humanity cannot make us Christians, but it can make us hungry for something beyond this world. It can whet the appetite but not satisfy it.
- ¹³ Evangelists in Scripture use this approach in passages like Acts 7:1-53. Here Stephen uses real history to make his point.
- ¹⁴ Quoted in Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Vol. 1, p. 71 (San Bernadino, Here's Life Publishers, 1972), originally quoted from Ramsay's book, *St Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1962).
- ¹⁵ McDowell, p. 71.
- ¹⁶ E.g.: Luke 4:38-44; 5:17-26; 9:18-27; 22:66-23:1
- ¹⁷ E.g. Luke 4:38-44; 7:11-17; 24:1-12; 36-49. This evidence is referred to in Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost Acts 2:22.
- ¹⁸ Peter uses the resurrection as evidence in his Pentecost Sermon: Acts 2:29-32 and then before the Sanhedrin, Acts 3:15.
- ¹⁹ The Apostles throughout the NT appealed to two particular areas of the life of Jesus of Nazareth to establish his being God's supernatural messenger or Messiah. One was the resurrection and the other was fulfilled messianic prophecy. Rom. 1:1-4; Acts 2:23-36; 3:18 & 22-25; 10:43; 17:2 & 3; 1 Cor. 15:3 & 4 etc.

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The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

A challenging examination of present day evangelicalism and an excellent reaffirmation of foundational Biblical doctrines and principles. It was affirmed by 80 theologians and church leaders after a four-day summit in Cambridge, Massachusetts on 20 April 1996. The place and date were chosen to mark the 350th anniversary of the 1646 Cambridge Platform, the first confessional statement in the New World which embraced the Westminster Confession and a congregational church order.

Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the Spirit of Christ. As evangelicals, we call ourselves to repent of this sin and to recover the historic Christian faith.

In the course of history words change. In our day this has happened to the word “evangelical.” In the past it served as a bond of unity between Christians from a wide diversity of church traditions. Historic evangelicalism was confessional. It embraced the essential truths of Christianity as those were defined by the great ecumenical councils of the church. In addition, evangelicals also shared a common heritage in the “solos” of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation.

Today the light of the Reformation has been significantly dimmed. The consequence is that the word “evangelical” has become so inclusive as to have lost its meaning. We face the peril of losing the unity it has taken centuries to achieve. Because of this crisis and because of our love of Christ, his gospel and his church, we endeavour to assert anew our commitment to the central truths of the Reformation and of historic evangelicalism. These truths we affirm not because of their role in our traditions, but because we believe that they are central to the Bible.

I. Sola Scriptura: the erosion of authority

Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church’s life, but the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is guided, far too often, by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the beat of the entertainment world often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God. Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of the music. As biblical authority has been abandoned in practice, as its truths have faded from Christian consciousness, and as its doctrines have lost their saliency, the church has been increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction.

Rather than adapting Christian faith to satisfy the felt needs of consumers, we must proclaim the law as the only measure of true righteousness and the gospel as the only announcement of saving truth. Biblical truth is indispensable to the church’s understanding, nurture and discipline.

Scripture must take us beyond our perceived needs to our real needs and liberate us from seeing ourselves through the seductive images, clichés, promises, and priorities of mass culture. It is only in the light of God’s truth that we understand ourselves aright

and see God's provision for our need. The Bible, therefore, must be taught and preached in the church. Sermons must be expositions of the Bible and its teachings, not expressions of the preachers opinions or the ideas of the age. We must settle for nothing less than what God has given.

The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture we would never have known of God's grace in Christ. The biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience, is the test of truth.

Thesis One: Sola Scriptura

We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behaviour must be measured. We deny that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian's conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.

II. Solus Christus: the erosion of Christ-centred faith

As evangelical faith becomes secularised, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values, permissive individualism, and a substitution of wholeness for holiness, recovery for repentance, intuition for truth, feeling for belief, chance for providence, and immediate gratification for enduring hope. Christ and his cross have moved from the centre of our vision.

Thesis Two: Solus Christus

We reaffirm that our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of the historical Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father.

We deny that the gospel is preached if Christ's substitutionary work is not declared and faith in Christ and his work is not solicited.

III. Sola Gratia: the erosion of the gospel

Unwarranted confidence in human ability is a product of fallen human nature. This false confidence now fills the evangelical world; from the self-esteem gospel, to the health and wealth gospel, from those who have transformed the gospel into a product to be sold and sinners into consumers who want to buy, to others who treat Christian faith as being true simply because it works. This silences the doctrine of justification regardless of the official commitments of our churches.

God's grace in Christ is not merely necessary but is the sole efficient cause of salvation. We confess that human beings are born spiritually dead and are incapable even of cooperating with regenerating grace.

Thesis Three: Sola Gratia

We reaffirm that in salvation we are rescued from God's wrath by his grace alone. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ by releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

We deny that salvation is in any sense a human work. Human methods, techniques or strategies by themselves cannot accomplish this transformation. Faith is not produced by our unregenerated human nature.

IV. Sola Fide: the erosion of the chief article

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This is the article by which the church stands or falls. Today this article is often ignored, distorted or sometimes even denied by leaders, scholars and pastors who claim to be evangelical. Although fallen human nature has always recoiled from recognising its need for Christ's imputed righteousness, modernity greatly fuels the fires of this discontent with the biblical Gospel. We have allowed this discontent to dictate the nature of our ministry and what it is we are preaching.

Many in the church growth movement believe that sociological understanding of those in the pew is as important to the success of the gospel as is the biblical truth which is proclaimed. As a result, theological convictions are frequently divorced from the work of the ministry. The marketing orientation in many churches takes this even further, erasing the distinction between the biblical Word and the world, robbing Christ's cross of its offense, and reducing Christian faith to the principles and methods which bring success to secular corporations.

While the theology of the cross may be believed, these movements are actually emptying it of its meaning. There is no gospel except that of Christ's substitution in our place whereby God imputed to him our sin and imputed to us his righteousness. Because he bore our judgment, we now walk in his grace as those who are forever pardoned, accepted and adopted as God's children. There is no basis for our acceptance before God except in Christ's saving work, not in our patriotism, churchly devotion or moral decency. The gospel declares what God has done for us in Christ. It is not about what we can do to reach him.

Thesis Four: Sola Fide

We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect justice.

We deny that justification rests on any merit to be found in us, or upon the grounds of an infusion of Christ's righteousness in us, or that an institution claiming to be a church that denies or condemns sola fide can be recognised as a legitimate church.

V. Soli Deo Gloria: the erosion of God-centred worship

Wherever in the church biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: our interests have displaced God's and we are doing his work in our way. The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. As a result, God, Christ and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us.

God does not exist to satisfy human ambitions, cravings, the appetite for consumption, or our own private spiritual interests. We must focus on God in our worship, rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship; we are not. Our concern must be for God's kingdom, not our own empires, popularity or success.

Thesis Five: Soli Deo Gloria

We reaffirm that because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, it is for God's glory and that we must glorify him always. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God and for his glory alone. We deny that we can properly glorify God if our worship is confused with entertainment, if we neglect either Law or Gospel in our preaching, or if self-improvement, self-esteem or self-fulfilment are allowed to become alternatives to the gospel.

VI. Call to repentance and reformation

The faithfulness of the evangelical church in the past contrasts sharply with its unfaithfulness in the present. Earlier in this century, evangelical churches sustained a remarkable missionary endeavour, and built many religious institutions to serve the cause of biblical truth and Christ's kingdom. That was a time when Christian behaviour and expectations were markedly different from those in the culture. Today they often are not. The evangelical world today is losing its biblical fidelity, moral compass and missionary zeal.

We repent of our worldliness. We have been influenced by the "gospels" of our secular culture, which are no gospels. We have weakened the church by our own lack of serious repentance, our blindness to the sins in ourselves which we see so clearly in others, and our inexcusable failure adequately to tell others about God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

We also earnestly call back erring professing evangelicals who have deviated from God's Word in the matters discussed in this Declaration. This includes those who declare that there is hope of eternal life apart from explicit faith in Jesus Christ, who claim that those who reject Christ in this life will be annihilated rather than endure the just judgment of God through eternal suffering, or who claim that evangelicals and Roman Catholics are one in Jesus Christ even where the biblical doctrine of justification is not believed.

The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals asks all Christians to give consideration to implementing this Declaration in the church's worship, ministry, policies, life and evangelism. For Christ's sake. Amen.

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Dr John Armstrong, Rev. Alistair Begg, Dr James M Boice, Dr W Robert Godfrey, Dr John D Hannah, Dr Michael S Horton, Mrs Rosemary Jensen, Dr R Albert Mohler Jr, Dr Robert M Norris, Dr RC Sproul, Dr G Edward Veith, Dr David Wells, Dr Luder Whitlock, Dr JAO Preus, III.

Transforming Worship

Peter Leithart

It is a fundamental truth of Scripture that we become like whatever or whomever we worship. When Israel worshipped the gods of the nations, she became like the nations – bloodthirsty, oppressive, full of deceit and violence (cf. Jeremiah 7). Romans 1 confirms this principle by showing how idolaters are delivered over to sexual deviations and eventually to social and moral chaos. The same dynamic is at work today. Muslims worship Allah, a power rather than a person, and their politics reflects this commitment. Western humanists worship man, with the result that every degrading whim of the human heart is honoured and exalted and disseminated through the organs of mass media. Along these lines, Psalm 115:4-8 throws brilliant light on Old Covenant history and the significance of Jesus’ ministry. After describing idols as figures that have every organ of sense but no sense, the Psalmist writes, “Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them.” By worshipping idols, human beings become speechless, blind, deaf, unfeeling, and crippled – but then these are precisely the afflictions that Jesus, in the Gospels, came to heal!

It is equally a fundamental truth of Scripture that we are *how* we worship. The kind of worship the church engages in shapes the kind of community she becomes and forms the character of individuals who make up the community. This was one of the great insights of the Reformation, for the Reformers were not contesting outright idolatry but wrong worship of the true God. They were struggling not about *who* was worshipped, for all agreed on that question; they gave their lives to a struggle about *how* Christians are to worship.

Worship, the Reformers insisted, had to be pure in order to be pleasing to God, and by “pure” worship they meant, first, worship that conformed to Scripture and, second, worship that arose from a genuine devotion to the Lord. The Reformers, on both of these crucial points, were absolutely right. There is no place in Christian worship for prayers addressed to Mary or to saints, and no place for veneration of icons, statues, altars, or bread and wine. The Eucharist is not a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, and it was a travesty of the gospel for the medieval church to withhold the bread and wine of the Supper from the people of God. Worship should not be conducted in an unknown language, and biblical instruction is an essential part of worship. The Reformers quite appropriately directed much of their attention to perversions of biblical worship, so much so that the Swiss Reformation at least was as much about iconoclasm as about justification by faith.

I could write an entire article in the vein of the preceding paragraph, denouncing the errors of Rome and Constantinople or the excesses of charismatics, and perhaps many readers would heartily concur. To do that, however, would neither edify nor challenge; for, whatever might pass for teaching in the academy, biblical teaching is invariably *confrontational* (cf. Mat. 5:21-48). Preaching to the choir does not produce saints, only fanatically self-righteous choristers. So, in this article, I assume that all my readers agree with the Reformers on the issues I have raised above. And yet, surprisingly, I still

have more to say – surprising because much evangelical thinking about worship begins and ends with the question of purity, so that evangelical worship is defined almost completely in opposition to medieval Roman Catholicism. Evangelical worship is defined by what we *do not* allow in worship. Of course, we need to expose error, but once we have rejected unbiblical elements in worship, most of what needs to be said about worship remains to be said. It is not enough to purge worship of impurities; a house-cleaning, essential as it is, does not make a home. Even demons find a well-swept house inviting.

There are thus two points here. First, I want my observations to hit close to home. In this case, the home I want to hit close to is my own, for my main target is non-Anglican evangelicalism, which is, ecclesiastically, where I live. Second, I am not satisfied with discussing what we are to avoid but want to concentrate my attention on investigating what we are to *do* in worship.

What is worship?

I begin with the fundamental question, what is worship? And I begin with this initial answer, *worship is an act not an attitude*. The vocabulary of worship in the Bible emphasises this, for the biblical words are all active, with literal meanings like “bow down” and “serve”. One of the Hebrew words used for worship is *abad* (“serve,” Exodus 3:12), and, significantly, this word is not just used for the service that we perform in worship but more generally for “labour.” Hence, Adam was placed in the garden in order to *abad* the garden, to dress, care for, and cultivate it (Gen. 2:15). When this same word is used for worship, it implies that worship is labour or work. Indeed, historically, worship has been described as the chief *work* of the church.

This point is confirmed when we look at the descriptions of worship in the Bible. There we find worshippers involved in the activity of worship. When an Israelite worshipper brought an animal for sacrifice to the tabernacle or temple, he did not simply give the animal to the priest and sit back and watch. Rather, the worshipper had to lay hands on the animal, probably confessing his sins or giving praise to God in doing so, and then had to kill the animal. Only at that moment, with the manipulation of blood, did the priest become actively involved. Up to that point, it was the Israelite worshipper who was doing all the work (cf. Leviticus 1-7). In the New Testament the same point holds. Descriptions of worship in Acts show Christians praying, singing, breaking bread together. In the heavenly service of Revelation, the elders and the creatures bow down before the Lamb who sits upon the throne (Revelation 4-5). As the Lord’s Prayer says, we hope for God’s will to be done on earth as in heaven, and this must at least mean that we want our worship to be like the worship of cherubim and seraphim.

This fundamental point must be stressed for a couple of reasons. For non-conformist evangelicals, worship is more often associated with an attitude of mind than an action. We tend to think that New Testament “spiritual” worship means “mental” worship, worship that takes place, primarily at least, in our hearts and minds. In some traditions, “spiritual” worship means sitting in silent contemplation, and even evangelicals outside these traditions look with some admiration at the pure spirituality of quietist worship. The Bible, however, presents a different picture. Spiritual worship is worship through the Holy Spirit poured out upon us and, when the Spirit comes, he

makes an enormous racket: a rushing mighty wind, flames of fire, tongues loosed in praise and edification (Acts 2). On this point at least, the Toronto Blessing is closer to Scripture than the Quakers.

It is essential to emphasise, in season and out, that going through a series of actions when our hearts are far from the Lord is abominable to him. But this was also true in the Old Testament and there the Lord gave detailed directions about how people were to act in worship and acted swiftly against those who sinned (Lev. 10:1-7; 1 Sam. 2). To say that a right heart is essential to genuine worship does mean that a right heart is *all* that is essential.

God made us as physical beings and that, the Lord himself declared, is a good thing. It is so good for us to have bodies that we will have bodies forever. There is no biblical reason whatsoever for being ashamed of having a body, for thinking that our bodiliness is somehow a detriment to communion with God, or for feeling that, to be close to God, we have to shed our bodies or at least pretend they are not there. Less bodily worship is not more pleasing to God than more bodily worship and Paul says that our true spiritual worship involves offering our bodies (Rom. 6; 12:1-2). In fact, it is perfectly impossible for us to worship without using our bodies. Even if we sit and contemplate, we are still using our brains to do so, and if we sing, we are using our tongues and jaws and vocal chords and lungs. What reason do we have for stopping short of using the rest of our bodies in worship? Why are we willing to offer the Lord “brain worship” and “tongue worship” but hesitant to offer “hand worship” or “feet worship”? Why don’t we clap our hands (Ps. 47:1)? Why don’t we bend our knees to do homage before our Lord and Maker? Why don’t we lift our hands, especially in view of the fact that lifting up hands is virtually synonymous with prayer? (cf. 1 Tim. 2:8). What does it say about us that we offer only certain parts of our bodies to the Lord?

Evangelicals tend to talk about “bowing the knees of our hearts” or “lifting up hearts”. There is biblical warrant for such expressions but there is at least as much biblical warrant for acting out these attitudes in our bodies. Because of the way God made us, bodily posture is inseparable from the “posture” of our minds and hearts. If we were to meet the Queen and refused to go through the customary gestures of respect, it would show something about us – either that we are ignorant Americans who haven’t a clue what to do around real royalty or that we do not have any respect for the Queen. In Scripture, God’s people fall on their faces in fear when they come into God’s presence (e.g., Rev. 1:17). If we come before the Lord in worship and refuse to bow in his presence, refuse to bend the knee as a sign of our humility before him, and refuse to stand at attention when his word is read, what does that say about our respect for him? Does it perhaps say that we really do not think he is with us?

There is a pastoral concern here as well. Exclusive emphasis on “inner attitude” and “worship with the mind” is intensely demanding, requiring enormous mental discipline. Add to this the fact that many are easily distracted anyway. Given this difficulty, and given the fact that worship is virtually defined as “mental activity,” we feel guilty when we are distracted and our minds wander. If worship is an internal attitude, then a distracted worshipper is a contradiction in terms. If we find our minds drifting during a worship service, we chastise ourselves for our lack of spirituality. The problem, as I see it, is as much in the form of worship as in our sloth, though one should never discount the latter factor. If we worshipped with our bodies, distraction would not be

nearly so much of a problem. We could lose ourselves in worship in the way we lose ourselves – I say it with all reverence – in a game of football or in a dance or in some deeply intriguing hobby. We would be less self-conscious, less focused on forcing ourselves to be attentive, and correspondingly more open to being conscious of God's presence.

The lively, physical worship of the charismatic churches is a salutary correction of evangelical worship in this regard, since charismatics definitely offer their bodies to God in worship. Charismatic worship has a more ambiguous legacy in another respect, for worship is not merely an act but an *act of the whole congregation*. On the one hand, charismatic churches, following the model of 1 Cor. 14, tend to emphasise that each member of the church contributes to worship but, on the other hand, charismatic worship can degenerate into a radically individualistic activity, with each member closed off in his private ecstasy, each doing what is right in his own eyes.

Can we find forms of worship that encourage participation of the whole people but avoid falling into liturgical anarchism? Here, the Reformers have much to teach. One of the great, and often ignored, contributions of the Reformation was to return worship to the people. Somehow, many Protestants have got the idea that prayer books, with written prayers, responsive readings, creeds and the like are Roman Catholic and medieval. Nothing could be further from the truth. Prayer books were a product of the Reformation and they were written so that the congregation could participate fully in the act of worship. In the early church worship was an act of the whole church but during the medieval period the participation of the laity was reduced to a minimum. The Mass was conducted in Latin which, in the main, only the clergy understood. The priest stood with his back to the congregation throughout the celebration of the Eucharist, and the words, even if they could be understood, could barely be heard. In general, a layman in the high middle ages received communion only once or a few times a year – exploding the myth that frequent communion is medieval and Roman Catholic. Beyond that, the church member was less worshipper than spectator, watching the priest do his thing and especially watching the priest raise the host for him to adore. The vast majority of masses during the high middle ages were performed privately by a few priests, without any laymen even spectating.

The Reformers set out to change that and strove to return to a biblical pattern of worship, involving the whole congregation. In the Bible, the worship was in a language that could be understood and, when the readings were in an unknown language, it was translated and explained. In Nehemiah we find the whole people standing together, bowing down as "one man" and lifting up their hands in unison (Neh. 8:5-6). The feasts of the Old Testament and the Supper in the New were meals for the whole church, every baptised member.

I can only reflect on limited experience in England but the following observations have been confirmed by friends of wider experience. Nearly every non-Anglican evangelical church I have worshipped in uses a form more akin to medieval Catholic worship than to Reformation worship. True, worship is conducted in the vernacular and when the Supper is served it is served to every communing member. In other ways, however, much of evangelical worship is pure medievalism, with active clergy and passive congregation. The congregation does not bow or raise its hands; the people never pray audibly, rarely if ever saying the Lord's Prayer; the congregation frequently

does not say a creed; there are no responsive readings of the Psalms or corporate readings of other portions of Scripture. On most Sundays, the congregation watches, listens, and the only active participation is singing a few hymns. Apart from singing, the only voice that is heard is the minister's. By contrast, Calvin wanted to include sung creeds and the Lord's prayer, included at least a reading of the Ten Commandments, and supported weekly celebration of the Supper. The typical evangelical service is *not* Reformation worship; it is in important respects closer to the medieval abuses that the Reformers spent themselves to change. Reforming worship demands an end to the clericalisation of evangelical worship and a new emphasis on congregational participation.

In a broad sense, all of the Christian life is worship, a self-offering to God, but the worship of the Lord's Day is a specific kind of act, an *act of the church by which God renews his covenant with her*. The church is the people of God, bound to him by the bond of friendship and love which the Bible calls covenant. But the church is a covenant people full of sinners. Every week individually and corporately we fall short of the kind of people we are supposed to be, and so, once a week in a public, formal, visible way, God gathers us to renew covenant with us.

There are several key moments or stages in covenant renewals. First, God calls us and gathers us, by issuing an invitation and command through his minister. The call to worship is an important part of worship because it means that gathering together is not just a bright idea cooked up by the church leaders. On the contrary, the Lord himself calls us to gather and commands us to assemble in his presence to renew covenant with him, from which we can conclude that it is a serious sin to neglect worship. If you were invited by the Queen or the Prime Minister to a state dinner, but refused to come because of a minor inconvenience, it would be a great insult. What is the fate of those who refuse the invitation of the King of kings?

As soon as we are in God's presence, we realise, as Isaiah did, that we are unclean sinners who need to be cleansed and forgiven, and so the first thing we do after gathering is to confess our sins. The Lord promises that if we confess our sins he will forgive and cleanse us (1 John 1:9). Confession should be an act of the whole church and this, to my thinking, is best carried out by written prayers of confession, said in unison by the whole body of the church. At least, the minister should pray a confession at the beginning of the service. When we have confessed our sins, we crave assurance that the Lord has heard and will forgive, and so the minister, acting in God's name, announces that we are forgiven, by repeating an appropriate promise from Scripture.

Forgiveness, however, is not the end of the Christian life, nor the end of worship. Living in covenant with God is not merely a matter of having our sins forgiven but is all about how we live as a forgiven people. So, the next moment in the worship service is the Word, including reading, corporate recitation of portions of Scripture, as well as preaching. In various ways we assent to the word we have heard. We say "Amen" to the reading, indicating not only that we believe it but that we will live by it; we offer ourselves to God when we offer our tithes and offerings, which means that presenting offerings is an act of worship that is best included in the worship service; and we offer ourselves to God in praise.

Having cleansed and instructed us, the Lord invites us to share a meal at his table. The Supper is the seal of the covenant, the assurance that our confession has been

heard, our sins forgiven, our Amen accepted, and that God has renewed covenant with a sinful people. In the Bible, covenants are often made when two people are at enmity with one another. The common meal is the seal of the covenant because it shows that former enemies have become friends, partners at the table, sharing the same bread. If worship is covenant renewal, then there is no reason not to celebrate the covenant meal every time we gather for worship. Biblically, it is virtually unthinkable to make a covenant without a meal. To those who think that weekly celebration of the Supper will demean and diminish it, I can only assert, having served for a number of years in a church that practised weekly communion, that it is simply not true. And if we really believed that infrequency makes the heart grow fonder, we would not have weekly sermons, and pastors would instruct new husbands to kiss their wives “at least quarterly.”

The covenant is renewed; we have confessed our faults; God has instructed us; he has sealed the covenant by offering us the bread of heaven and a feast of wine. But we cannot stay forever. Worship is the chief work of the church but it is not the only work. We serve God in worship on the Lord’s day, and then the Lord sends us into the world to serve him in our various callings. So, the last act of the covenant renewal is a dismissal. The word “Mass” has come into disrepute because of its associations with false Roman Catholic teaching about the nature of the Eucharist, but in its origins the word “Mass” is a perfectly good word to describe worship. It comes from the final words of the Latin Mass – *Ita, missa es* – and it means “You are sent out.” When we call the worship service a “mass” we are saying that the whole point of the service is to lead up to this final moment. Renewal of the covenant that prepares us to depart from the place of worship to the world of labour.

What difference does it make?

Earlier I noted that the Hebrew word *abad* is used both for worship and for labour. The same connection is found in the English words “cult” and “culture.” This points to the fact that the kind of worship we engage in will shape the kind of culture we have. This is not the primary purpose of worship. Worship is primarily for the honour and glory of our Lord. Yet, worship also has effects on the people who worship, so that it is fair to ask what specific difference it would make if the church were to adopt the forms of worship I have outlined above: communal participation in prayer, singing or reciting of creeds and the Ten Commandments, corporate readings of Scripture, weekly celebration of the Supper, all set within the order of covenant renewal.

Answering this question in a complete way is literally impossible. Our interactions with other human beings are too complex to comprehend. Who can tell in detail what effect a slight shift in the tone of voice, the wrong word, an ill-considered gesture can have on our relations with one another? What parent can know what long-term effect a harsh answer will have on the character and soul of his child? And if our relations with other creatures and the effects of those relations are so complex, how can we hope to explain fully our relations with the Creator? And, if what I have said so far is biblical, then we should do it, whether or not we know what the consequences will be. For these reasons, only the beginnings of an answer to the question can be offered here, all offered on the assumption that there will always be more to say on this subject.

So, what difference does our “cult,” our worship, make in the way we live together,

in our “cultural” life? One of the fundamental realities of culture is language. We can distinguish national cultures on the basis of the language they speak and, even within the same grammatical language, what we call “subcultures” are defined by differences in language. The military, for example, is a subculture with its own dialect. There are significant differences between American and British English, in vocabulary, vocal intonations, accent, spelling. As Christians, we want our language, the way we speak and think about the world, to be based on the Bible. We want to learn to speak “Christianly.” If the Christian “cult” is supposed to have some effect on culture, it should produce people who, as one writer has said, “talk funny.” From this perspective, *worship is language class*.

This has some implications for what happens in worship. One of the bugbears of evangelical thinking on worship is “dry rote”, opposition to which is a primary reason why many reject “ritualistic” worship as sub-Christian. I am of the opinion that we need a great deal *more* “dry rote” in worship. If Christian cult is supposed to form culture, and if language is a fundamental dimension of culture, then Christian worship should affect the language that we use. And it does. But if we are to learn to speak “Christian” with any fluency, we need more than instruction. One cannot learn a language well by listening to the teacher. You have to practice the language, repeating the same things over and over again until it becomes second nature. The traditional way of teaching Latin – *amo, amas, amat* and so on – is, despite all modern innovations, still the best way to do it. The same is true if we want to speak Bible. We need to be drilled. We need “dry rote”.

Practically, this means that worship should include the corporate reading of Scripture, corporate prayers drawn from Scripture, and corporate recitation of creeds that are based on Scripture. Especially, it means corporate reading, singing and chanting of the Psalms. For centuries, Psalms was the prayer book of the church, and monks at least chanted through the entire Psalter each week. Among English evangelicals, the Psalms are today virtually unknown in public worship, and our worship and prayer life is profoundly impoverished as a result. If we want to learn the language of prayer, if we want to have ready biblical ways of expressing our griefs, our afflictions, our exultations and triumphs, we need to be drilled – not merely instructed – in the language of the Psalms.

Another fundamental element of culture is *story*. Cultures are defined by the stories they share, the memories they keep alive. In Deuteronomy, Moses constantly exhorts the people to remember what the Lord had done in Egypt, not to encourage nostalgia but to motivate God’s people for action in the present. By recalling the mighty works of God in Egypt, Israel would be bold to enter the land and expect the Lord to perform similar wonders against the Canaanites. Israel was defined as a people by the stories they remembered and told, stories of Passover and Exodus, and these stories gave shape to their future as well. The same is true for culture generally. If Christian cult is intended to form culture, then it must involve remembrance of the story that defines who we are. From this perspective, *worship is history class*.

Of course, this implies reading and teaching and preaching the gospel and the whole of biblical history. Learning the Christian story also means being drilled in the Christian story as we are in Christian language. Again, the story becomes part of us, and we become part of it, as we recite it. Practically, this can be done by using creeds

in worship, some of which, the Apostles' and the Nicene for example, are just summaries of Christian history. If we want a biblical view of history to form us as we minister in the world, one way to start is by making these creeds our own.

Finally, culture is in large part a matter of common patterns of interaction among people. One culture differs from another in their greeting gestures, in the ways they express companionship or contempt for one another, and so on. I am told that it is quite normal for heterosexual men in Africa to hold hands in public, but such a gesture of affection would have an entirely different significance in San Francisco or Cambridge or certain parts of London. These differences are not just a matter of etiquette, for manners and morals are inseparably connected. If Christian cult forms culture, it should shape the way we conduct ourselves toward one another. From this perspective, *worship is training in the virtues of Christian community.*

I have in mind here particularly the Lord's Supper. At the Supper, the church shows publicly, in a ritual form, the kind of people we are, and by celebrating the Supper, we are reminded of our calling and constantly challenged to live up to it. A number of aspects of the Supper are relevant here. First, the Supper is a communal meal, not an individual affair. As we share the meal, we are continually reminded that we are not alone; rather, our communion with the Father through Jesus Christ also involves communion with others. A church that celebrates the Supper will challenge the extreme individualism that dominates our culture. Second, the Supper is also a memorial of Jesus' self-sacrificial death. As we share in this meal, we are being constantly reminded not only of what Jesus has accomplished but also of our duty to follow his example of humility. The Supper thus forms a church that opposes our culture's intoxication with self-fulfilment. Third, the Supper is a meal in which we commune with our heavenly Lord through the Spirit. That we commune with him through the physical elements of bread and wine has been a problem for some Christians, but it highlights the goodness of the creation, and points to the fact that the whole creation is designed to be used as a means of fellowship with him. A church trained by the Supper will be a church living constantly – whether we eat or drink or whatever we do – practising the presence of God.

Conclusion

Worldliness is the great threat to the contemporary church, all the more dangerous for being so often unrecognised. Worldliness has invaded the church's worship, sometimes reducing it to showmanship and entertainment. In the face of these threats to biblical worship it will not do simply to reassert the forms of traditional evangelical worship, for, as I have argued, evangelical worship is in many ways inconsistent with the patterns of worship we find in Scripture. Instead, evangelical worship must itself be reformed according to the Word of God, and this reformation will help evangelical churches become the force for cultural transformation they are called to be.

For: we become like what we worship and we are shaped by how we worship.

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Denying Omniscience

Paul Helm

A review article considering how the divine attributes are redefined in two recent books by evangelicals.

The Openness of God

Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger, IVP (US) / Paternoster, 202 pages, 1994, £9.99.

Is God Helpless?

Peter Cotterell, Triangle, 96 pages, 1996, £5.99

In the debate between Arminians and Calvinists about divine sovereignty the key assumption held in common by both parties is that God is omniscient, and what has been debated is whether such omniscience is compatible with human freedom. Arminians have usually held that it is compatible only with libertarian freedom, and so have denied predestination, Calvinists have usually held that it is compatible with some form of determinism, or have appealed to divine incomprehensibility.

The key assumption of each of these books is that God is not omniscient, and in particular that he does not know everything about what is future to us, and future to him too, for it is part of the conception of an “open” God that God is in time. The reason why God does not know everything about the future is that such knowledge would be inconsistent with free human action; he either cannot know, or in the interests of preserving freedom he has chosen not to know. Because the divine attributes are so interconnected, to deny divine omniscience is to deny divine omnipotence, since God cannot control what he is ignorant of, and to deny divine changelessness. Omnipotence becomes the power of God to deal with any situation that arises, immutability his complete trustworthiness. “God has rivals, and has to struggle with them” (*The Openness of God* p. 114).

Any reader of the Bible must be struck by two sorts of language about God to be found there. There is the language that states that God does not and cannot change, that he is from everlasting to everlasting, that he works all things after the counsel of his own will, that nothing is hidden from him but that he knows the end from the beginning. The Bible enforces such language with metaphor and simile; the Lord is a potter, a rock, he has a piercing eye, he sits in the heavens. Let us call this the non-reactive language. Then there is language that is altogether more human-like; the Lord comes down to his people, he remembers them, he changes his mind, and then changes his mind again. He acts in response to prayer, and so on. He is sad and angry and joyful and jealous. Let us call this the reactive language.

The Bible interpreter, and whoever wishes to draw his Christian theology from the Bible, has a decision to make at this point. Which type of language has priority; which controls which? Because God cannot be both reactive and non-reactive. The mainstream

classical tradition of Christian theology has been that the reactive language is controlled by the non-reactive; the non-reactive is metaphorical or analogical language, not to be taken literally. Or, as John Calvin put the point, the Lord, in using such language (the language of repentance about himself, say) accommodates himself to human cognitive capacities, lisping like a nurse.

But there is nothing in logic to stop the biblical interpreter claiming that the reactive language of the Bible should control the non-reactive, and this is (in a measure) what the authors of *The Openness of God* do. But it is a difficult task to carry this programme through consistently, and the end result is not very plausible or attractive. For the end result is a concept of God which is wholly anthropomorphic and anthropopathic; a God with a human shape, and with a cognitive and affective life like ours; ignorant and unstable. Wisely, however, the authors of *The Openness of God* do not opt for total anthropomorphism about God.

The reactive language about God is admirably surveyed in Chapter 1 of *The Openness of God*, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective". But unfortunately, its author, Richard Rice, does not survey all the evidence but, by an incomplete enumeration, suggests that all the biblical evidence about God is reactive in character. It is unsatisfactory to appeal to the "spirit of the biblical message" or "the broad sweep of biblical testimony", (p. 15) for there is no such thing. Unfortunately, Professor Rice does not tell us how he would interpret those biblical passages, such as Romans 9, or Ephesians 2, which express the divine sovereignty in unmistakable terms, except that he revealingly says that God experiences frustration when his predestining purposes fail (p. 56). And it is unfair to try to hijack the idea of the love of God in favour of his own account of the divine open-ness. He notes that the view he rejects has the "apparent support of many biblical passages." Why does he not subject these passages to careful analysis? Nor, in writing about God's open-ness, does he explain how all the other divine attributes are derived from divine love (p. 21).

The chapter on the history of debate on the concept of God in the Christian Church has many wise and valuable things to say, but the impression that it gives, that the tradition of emphasising non-reactive language about God has been in an unholy alliance with Greek philosophy, while the authors of *The Openness of God* have escaped this "virus" (p. 9) , is quite misleading. There is no such thing as a worked-out doctrine of God which can avoid philosophy, and particularly metaphysics, and philosophy and in particular metaphysics began with the Greeks, who (no doubt unknowingly) have set the agenda of all subsequent discussion. The only question for the Christian theologian is which metaphysical concepts do justice to those divine realities communicated to us in Scripture. Christian theologians can no more avoid the influence of metaphysics than they can jump out of their skins.

On the "open" conception of God, once he has created a universe in which there are creatures possessing free will, then he must await the unfolding of events. This for these authors is a positive point about their view. God is primarily a God of love, and love involves being sensitive and responsive, and God wishes above all things to enter into loving personal relations with his free creatures; this is the paramount value. Only occasionally does he steer the ship of the universe by intervening to prevent the consequences of human free actions; more typically, he reacts to human actions as we human beings react to the actions of our fellows. As a consequence he experiences frustration, sorrow and anger, as well as pleasure and joy.

In many ways the most important chapter of the book is that on **systematic theology** by Clark Pinnock, which contains some surprising judgements. For example, the claim (once more) that the traditional stress on the divine sovereignty is Greek in origin. Calvinists in particular will be surprised to learn that the church has throughout history overstressed such sovereignty (p. 105). Because the triune God is a trinity of interpersonal, loving relationships, God has chosen to create a world of such relationship among his free creatures (p. 108). But the analogy is flawed. The relations that exist between the persons of the trinity are necessarily what they are. If a little Greek philosophy may be pardoned, these relationships are essential to God's being who he is. The Son cannot but exist as the Son of the Father, and likewise with the other persons of the trinity. God the Holy Spirit does not choose to love the Father and the Son, he does so necessarily. But unlike these intertrinitarian relations, the existence of the universe is the result of the voluntary creative activity of God; the universe and all that it contains might not have been. God establishes relations with his creatures, relations which might not have been, with creatures who might not have been.

It is also a serious mistake to suppose that classical Christian theism claims that God monopolises power (p. 113). He is the source of all creaturely power, but the powers of creatures are really theirs, and are distinct from his. The wicked men who crucified Jesus were the cause of his death, even though he was crucified by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. In fact one of the sadder aspects of the book is that ignorance is displayed of the positions being attacked. For example, it is not recognised that those who hold that God ordains whatever comes to pass nevertheless make a distinction between what God causes and what he permits. The fall does not show that God does not exercise total control over all events, only that in his inscrutable purposes he decreed to permit the fall. William Hasker says that the central idea of Calvinism is quite simple: "everything that happens, with no exceptions, is efficaciously determined by God in accordance with his eternal decrees" (p. 141). But this is simply false. To say that everything is decreed by God, as Calvinists do, is not to say that everything is efficaciously determined by God. Fruitful debate can only occur when each side represents the other position accurately and fairly.

Furthermore, Hasker excoriates the Calvinist for having recourse to the distinction between the secret and the revealed will of God, not noticing that his own position requires a similar distinction, that between what God wants, and what free agents actually bring about. In the case of the distinction between the secret and the revealed will, it is the secret will of God that prevails; in the case of the distinction between what God wants, and what people choose to do, it is what people choose to do that usually prevails; and so God is angry or frustrated when they choose in a way that is at odds with his intention for them, or relieved and pleased when they do not.

Nor are the full implications of the "openness" position always noticed. For example, Clark Pinnock says that the immutability of God means that we can always rely upon God to be faithful to his promises. But if the promises of God involve people, then God cannot know beforehand whether or not those people will cooperate with him, nor does he know whether or not a person will rely on his promises until he does so, or fails to do so (p. 117). And it is no way to do Christian theology to say that the open view of God stresses the qualities of "generosity, sensitivity and vulnerability more than power and control" (p. 125). One cannot imagine greater generosity than the sovereign grace of God in Christ,

nor a greater vulnerability and sensitivity than that shown in the offering up of the God-man on the Cross of shame. But these are a different kind of generosity and vulnerability than those that depend for their exercise on the free cooperation of fallible and sinful human beings, a cooperation that might be withdrawn at any time.

Incidentally, there is something profoundly wrong about the theological approach of Pinnock, which attempts to develop theology in terms of the provision of models of God. For this suggests that all our talk of God is primarily a human construction. The classical view is that it is the reality of God, revealed in nature and Scripture, which controls our language about him, not the other way round. To suppose otherwise is, among other things, to deny the clarity of Scripture in those matters that it reveals.

Finally, let us follow the lead of the last chapter of the book and look at the **implications** of this openness view in two areas, one, petitionary prayer, which the authors make a good deal of, the other, an example of a general problem that they do not appear to have noticed at all. Biologists tell us that each human being is the product of one sperm and one ovum (except in the rare case of identical twins) and that no individual could have been that individual and been the product of another sperm and/or another ovum. Let us suppose that at least some acts of human sexual intercourse are free acts in the sense explained by the "open" theology, and that one such act is Jim's and Jane's. Then it follows that the only control that God has over which precise individuals are born is that he can prevent particular sperms and ova of Jim and Jane meeting, or he can bring it about that they meet. What he cannot do is bring it about that any of the sperm of a different father, Peter, meet with any ovum of Jane's. So the range of possible people is fixed by the range of sperm and ova produced by couples engaging in freely chosen sexual intercourse and God cannot foreknow any such acts. So God cannot foreknow which human beings will exist. He does not have control over which people inhabit planet Earth.

Petitionary prayer on the "open" theology view is prayer that really changes God. This may appear to be a real gain. God changes in response to our freely offered petitions. However, God cannot answer, say, prayer for the conversion of another; in fact God will never, or rarely, answer any prayer that will trespass on the freedom of his creatures, including the freedom of the one who prays. So the gain is not as great as may appear, for prayer can have no efficacy in situations where human free acts are involved.

Peter Cotterell, recently retired from the Principalship of London Bible College, has written a book of a different character, but one with the same doctrinal outlook (*Is God Helpless?*). It consists of racily written, short chapters on the problem of evil, in which the author avers that God is not omnipotent and never causes evil. The book gives evidence of being hastily written, having misspelt names and misprinted book titles, and some other mistakes which affect the sense. More important, there is also evidence of hasty thinking. For the author believes that to try to analyse the problem of evil using careful argument shows a corrupt mind (p. 3), but apparently that not to attempt to analyse the problem at all does not. I was reminded of what GK Chesterton said, that "man has no alternative, except between being influenced by thought that has been thought out and being influenced by thought that has not been thought out".

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

R M Jones

Mysticism is a term usually related to an emphasis experience of union with “God”. It has numerous other connotations of course, but that is generally the crux. Recent studies have tended to veer towards discriminating between differing “mysticisms” and away from lumping them all together in an amorphous mass as “Mysticism”. And this is only right and proper.

The reactionary response amongst some evangelicals against all “Mysticism” as such, because other religions have an unacceptable concept of union with God, is just as if we repudiated “belief” because those other religions also have “beliefs”. Awakened discrimination in this, as in every other field, must be more enlightening. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones recommended the reading of the works of Tauler “and certain others of these so-called mystics of the time, who even in the darkness of that era were burning and shining lights” (*Joy Unspeakable*). And his own preaching, in the continued emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the sense of the presence of God, can only be counted as a phenomenon in the tradition of great mystics such as Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux. “He was clearly mystical and yet we must grant he was evangelical,” he said of the latter. But he warned against mysticism centred on subjectivism, mysticism that is neglectful of the authority of scripture and weak on the doctrine of sin (*Fellowship with God*).

In the history of Welsh mysticism there are three distinct periods: the Medieval “visionary” period, followed by the main bulk of Welsh mysticism which is Calvinist and scriptural, and then thirdly the humanist, romantic and subjective mysticism of recent times. This present essay is a review of the work of just one of the most interesting of the Calvinist mystics, a young woman who died, twenty-nine years of age, in a remote Welsh farmhouse soon after childbirth, and whose work was only conserved “accidentally” by the providential memory of an illiterate maidservant who had heard her mistress singing around the farm.

The term “mysticism” is of course pretty flabby. It has been used inevitably and consistently throughout this century in referring to Ann Griffiths’ work, just as it has about various people and faiths far removed from Biblical Christianity. Mysticism, although not new, is one of the fads of our times. We may relate some of the recent attention given to it to the Eastern cults that have filtered into Europe and America together with hippies and the drug-scene: it possess a plausible appeal of escape and otherworldly impreciseness that tickles the palate of an uprooted generation. But it is also found in the established denominations, inheritors of the organisations set up in a more spiritual era. In them, at the beginning of this century, it seemed to take the form of what I would call “romantic mysticism”; and sometimes at the present day – amongst the neo-liberals of various shades of opinion – it approximates more to the longing for the pseudo-psychological or pseudo-spiritual experience that one associates with gurus,

hypnotists, the occult, the charismatic movement in a variety of religions and Tillichian attempts to penetrate to the ground of all being.

We know, of course, that there is also what one may certainly term mysticism clearly evident in the historic Biblical faith. Amongst those who cling with fervour to the gospel and to the truths precisely revealed in scripture and in the Lord Jesus Christ himself there are those – I would say very many thousands – who have truly known and still know something that has elements in it of an experience that could be described as mystic, or as Calvin expressed it *unio mystica* (a mystical union).

What I would like to consider, as a main theme, is what exactly defines truly Biblical mysticism? What is the difference between that which takes the name Mysticism in other religions (or even amongst atheists and agnostics) and this experience often considered as mysticism amongst those who are obviously deeply orthodox and profoundly God-loving Christians?

Instead, however, of following this theme generally and perhaps abstractly, I think it would be well for us to sharpen our perspective by relating our considerations to one particular Christian, a great Welsh hymn-writer of the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. One who never knew the word mystic, although almost ubiquitously described as such, and would never have considered herself anything more – nor less – than a poor, broken and unworthy, though rejoicing, Christian. And yet one who seems to possess strange and wonderful attributes, namely Ann Griffiths. A farmgirl from Montgomeryshire, unknown outside a restricted circle of friends, a composer of hymns who never published and as far as we know never even wrote down more than one stanza, together with a few amazing letters. An unconscious mystic. Differing in this from Morgan Llwyd or Islwyn (two other Calvinist Welsh mystics), one who never came in contact with recognised mystics of repute. And perhaps, for those reasons, a more genuine mystic, indeed, the most genuine and certainly the most fascinating mystic in Welsh history.

Before considering what distinguishes her mysticism from the other mysticisms one could mention, let me just outline some of the main points in her brief but astounding life on this earth.

She was born, the fourth of five children, in 1776 in the north of the former county of Montgomeryshire, in a tiny farm house near Llanfihangel-yng-Ngwynfa, a place not very distant from Llanfyllin. People from outside Wales sometimes reckon that she must have been rather isolated from intellectual and theological ferment, having been brought up so far from London and Oxford and such places. But Bala was within easy riding distance, and she was a regular visitor there; and Bala under the influence of Thomas Charles, one of the most incisive and energetic intellects in European theology in those days, was known as a centre of religious thought and activity that drew regularly on such giants as Thomas Jones of Denbigh and John Elias. Here the Dolwar Family would buy books, some of them classics of the faith, discuss doctrine, and hear some of the most inspired preaching of their day in Europe. From such a vantage-point some of the so-called centres such as Paris and Rome might well have seemed themselves isolated, and certainly in need of Welsh missionary activity.

In 1796 her previously carefree and lackadaisical existence was stopped in its tracks by the preaching of the Rev. Benjamin Jones of Pwllheli. The work of grace had begun: her life was changed. She became more and more assiduous in her church-going, more

fervent and feeling in her devotions. Although she had not yet gained the upper hand over her prejudices against the Calvinistic Methodists, there was now no peace for her – she was driven more and more to seek out the truth. Eventually, the work was completed under the preaching of Ishmael Jones of Llandinam, – what I suspect was not so much the sealing by the Holy Ghost as a clarification of what had already happened; and the account of her journey home from such meetings mentions her rolling on the road as the depth of her spiritual condition was revealed to her.

Within the immediate neighbourhood of Ann Griffiths' home there lived men of great theological and intellectual calibre, such as John Davies, who played not an unimportant part in the spiritual and cultural history of Tahiti, and John Hughes, a solid and perceptive theologian who published numerous books. There is no doubt that in Ann's frequent spiritual discussions with John Hughes in particular, both his and her understanding of the historic and classic Protestant faith was sharpened. But for everyone involved with Methodism in that area, Calvinism was much more than a clear and comprehensive outline of the biblical doctrines: it was a dynamic and experiential faith that demanded the whole personality. Perhaps what strikes one today with the Calvinistic Methodism of the century 1736-1836 is the sense of utter fullness that was enjoyed by Christians at that time. Ann Griffith sang (I translate):

Pilgrim, weak from stress of tempests,
Look before thee; raise thy sight
Where the Lamb makes intercession
In His flowing robes of white.
Faithfulness – His golden girdle;
At His hem the bells proclaim
Full forgiveness for the sinner
Through the atonement of the Lamb.

When thou walkest through the waters
To thy ankles in His love,
Think what fathoms without measure
Flow for thee through heaven above;
Though the resurrected children
Swim the tide where others sank,
Lake Bethesda's mighty substance
Has no bottom and no bank.

Oh, the depths of His salvation,
Godliness in mystery,
Nature's form of mortal manhood
Has enclosed eternity.
He's the Person who accepted
Awful wrath on Calvary:
Justice cried, – "He has accomplished
Thine atonement: set Him free."

Blissful day of rest eternal
From my labour will be sure,
In a sea of endless wonders -
No horizon and no shore;
Finding an abundant entrance
To the Triune God's abode:
Seas to swim yet never compass
God as man, and man as God.

Those acquainted with the diction of the mystics will recognise in a phrase such as "Seas to swim yet never compass" a kindred spirit. Her work is full of paradox, as often one finds in the mystical tradition. She lives "to see the Unseen"; her Saviour "gave strength to the arms of his executioners / who nailed him there on the cross"; angels were amazed to see the Giver of being and the broad Sustainer and Sovereign of all things, in a manger in swaddling-clothes with no place to lay his head"; and again "the creation there moving in Him, / He dead in the grave."

In an indiscriminating condemnation of all mysticism, *Faith Misguided*, 1988, Professor AL Johnson raises the logical law of noncontradiction as a means of refuting paradoxes. But just as Calvin had no difficulty, within an eternal dimension, of taking the sovereignty of God together with the full responsibility of man, or the sinful

Creator as the author of all things together with the existence of sin, so Ann Griffiths' seeming contradictions have to be taken in a context that can accept one drop of water plus one drop of water still making one.

I believe that Ann composed her hymns as part of her own personal devotions. She had been nurtured in a very literary background, in a home and an area thoroughly immersed in the traditions of Welsh verse, and in a mode of verse-composition that I suspect was basically oral. That is to say, I believe that, although she herself was completely literate, she inherited an attitude and a craftsmanship in her literary activity which prompted her to versify mentally without the added chore of recording her work in writing. She was absolutely bereft of earthly ambitions: the only real audience intended for her devotional effusions was the Three-in-One God. She would sing her verses in delight as she went about her menial tasks, at the milking, sewing and knitting in the house, working in the fields, cleaning. The maid at the farm, Ruth Evans, an unlettered though intelligent young woman, would join in with her mistress, picking up these verses as they were sung.

Ann died in 1805, leaving behind in her own hand one letter and one stanza of a hymn that she had included in that letter. Nothing more survived, at least in writing, although her profound spirituality had bequeathed an indelible impression to all who had known her. A few months before her death, what I would consider "the marriage of the century" took place. Certainly no-one at the time looking at the marriage of Ann Griffiths' theological mentor, John Hughes of Pontrobert, an extremely awkward and ugly hulk of a man with Ruth Evans, that non-entity of a maidservant from Dolwar Fach, would have thought of their wedding in those terms. One day, however, soon after, one can imagine Ruth Hughes going about her work, maybe preparing dinner and thinking back about old times with her mistress, remembering Ann's death and what she had said about it before it came; and then quietly perhaps, not to disturb her husband unduly, she would break into song. I translate:

If I *must* ford through the river
One there is will break the flood,
Jesus, my high-priest will hold me
And protect me with His blood;
In His lap I'll call out "Conquest"
Over death, hell, world and grave,
Endless life with no more sinning,
Glorious in the arms that save.

It is sweetness to remember
That decree of Three in One,
Ever gaze upon the person
Who took on Him the form of man;

In fulfilling the conditions
Dying sorrow struck His soul:
Now a myriad myriad voices
Joyfully this song extol.

We shall live where tribulation
Cannot live, nor death be found,
When with sorrow terminated
We shall sing about His wound;
Swimming in life's pristine river,
Endless peace of holy Three,
Underneath the cloudless radiance
Of that precious Calvary...

Then one can imagine what must have happened. "What in the world is that you're singing, Ruth?" asked John Hughes.

"It's just one of Ann's hymns."

"But that's wonderful. Wonderful!...Swimming in the pristine river of life...Sing it again, Ruth; for God's good sake, sing it again."

And so, she did. And after singing it a number of times, John Hughes asked her, “Did Ann compose anything else? Do you remember any other hymns that she made?”

“Why yes? How does that other one go? – Oh for the faith to ponder...”

Gradually she recalled some eighteen complete hymns together with twelve individual or separate stanzas that may have been brief and complete expressions of devotion in verse, let us say some thirty hymns in all. John Hughes meticulously noted them down, and they were eventually published as were her letters. Ruth has been called “the most literate illiterate woman in Welsh history”. Through her, Ann Griffiths’ name, and some of her literary products, have been preserved for all posterity.

More and more appears in English about Ann. Hitherto the main proponents of Ann Griffiths in English have been High Church Englishmen and a Catholic Irish priest. Recently some of her hymns have been beautifully translated by the present Bishop of Monmouth. The latest study of her work by the Roman Catholic, Joseph P Clancy was published last year in the journal *Literature and Theology*. One of the most astute workers in the field is the Rev. Dr AM Allchin, a canon of Canterbury, – a most sensitive scholar, and an Englishman with a generous and very fine understanding of the Welsh language and culture. His work, coming as it does from a rich background of knowledge of the Eastern Orthodox Church, has been a refreshing contribution to the appreciation of Ann Griffiths’ compositions. Perhaps the stimulation he offers may someday encourage an English or an Anglo-Welsh evangelical to take up a further study of Ann’s work from within the Calvinist and evangelical tradition itself.

The bi-centenary in 1976 of Ann Griffiths’ birth saw a plethora of celebration from a wide spectrum of individuals, much less learned than Canon Allchin. Women’s libbers counted her as one of their bold fore-runners. Slack Laodicean liberals seized hold of her so-called mysticism in order to indulge in vague and subjective raptures about some sort of ground of non-being. And sensual aesthetes considered how apt her enjoyment of the Song of Solomon was in this enlightened age of permissiveness.

In view of such a fragmentation of approaches to one who everyone would agree, – even if they would agree regretfully, – was certainly an evangelical and a Calvinist hymn-writer, perhaps a brief consideration now from an evangelical and Calvinist viewpoint would not be entirely amiss, even if it may sound a bit odd.

First of all, it is important to grasp the combination of truth *and* beauty in Ann’s hymns: she sings doctrine; the teaching of the Holy Spirit is precise but personalised in her work, sometimes hovering on the edge of traditional formulæ but never losing sight of the lovely person of Christ and His redeeming action:

Oh for the faith to ponder
With angels from on high
The pattern of salvation –
Its holy mystery.
A person whose two natures
Are undivided one
In unconfused proportion
The ever-perfect Son.

My soul, see how becoming
Appears the Lord our God;
Venture your life upon Him
And cast on Him your load:
He’s man to feel the pity
Of every earthly woe,
He’s God to conquer Satan –
That worldly, fleshly foe.

I long each day that passes
To flee the battle strife,
My selfishness to conquer
And give to Him my life.
Invited to God's table
Now sit with Him I must,
Although it were sufficient
To love Him from the dust.

Although the swelling tempest
Would cast me overboard,
True wisdom is my pilot,
His name is mighty Lord;
Although the flood of evil
Breaks on me foul and dark,
The journey's end is steadfast -
God is Himself the ark. (translation)

Here we have inspired contemplation of the Deity, complete self-surrender, but the identity of God is "unconfused": there is no undifferentiated absorption. And this is where we come to define the *truth* of Christian mysticism.

One of Ann Griffiths' great terms was "object". Just as Morgan Llwyd emphasised the "outer" Bible, so too Ann had no doubt that her experience was objective as well as subjective.

However private the knowledge of Christ was for her and her neighbours, they knew they shared it with thousands of other believers. The Calvinist Welsh mystics such as William Williams of Pantycelyn and Islwyn would have resisted any suggestion that their experience was merely emotive rather than cognitive.

Understandable apprehension about using such terms as "union" with God, brought on by inhibitions about mysticism, may lead reformed evangelicals to abandon some more of the high ground to charismatics, as they have already done in the matter of praise. The abandonment of key sectors of the Christian life, as early twentieth century evangelicals did with God's sovereignty over social sanctification, can arise out of an unbridled negativity towards the dangers ever present in doctrine. Once again Martyn Lloyd-Jones' experiential emphasis is salutary, for instance in his sermons on Rom. 8:1,2,9-11; and Eph. 2:4-7, where he points to this important doctrine of experiential union referring to Romans 6, 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 5, as well as to the end of Gal. 2 (See too *The Life of Peace, Studies in Philippians 3 and 4*, 1990, pp. 70-72). One aspect of this union, says Lloyd-Jones "we may call *mystical* or *vital*."

The emphasis on scripture in Ann Griffiths' work is the final arbiter of propositional truth accepted by the evangelical. But in such zeal, he/she must not presume (as does Arthur L. Johnston, *Faith Misguided*, 1988) that there is no other way of gaining knowledge of God. Scripture mentions the creation and the conscience; and although these are checkable with Scripture, Calvin and the Puritans were not dismissive of their significance.

Johnston also tends to be negative in his attitude to "union" with God and, once the general position against all mysticisms is taken, the danger is to forego some of the great doctrines of the faith. "Many mystics," he says, "come to see the goal of the spiritual life to be this union – not salvation and Christian maturity." Well, Ann Griffiths considered honouring and glorifying God as full maturity; salvation was only the beginning of the Christian life, leading on to union and glorification.

To be continued in the next issue.

Professor Emeritus RM Jones MA, PhD, DLitt, FBA was formerly head of the Welsh Department, University of Wales, Aberystwyth

Book Reviews

The Great Exchange

Philip H Eveson

Day One Publications, 1996, 227pp, £7.99

Day One and the FIEC have again hit the bulls-eye of an issue crucial to maintaining the faith once for all delivered to the saints (See also *Only One Way* by Hywel Jones and other books in the FIEC *Facing the Issues* series). It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the topic indicated by its sub-title, "justification by faith alone in the light of recent thought". The book itself combines spiritual insight, relevance, accessibility and a considerable degree of scholarship.

Philip Eveson writes for the thinking Christian not just the specialist or minister, yet does so from a well-informed acquaintance with scholarly opinion and with a fair amount of interaction with it, especially in the footnotes. If you want to know *where* Tom Wright, Alistair McGrath, Krister Stendahl, James Dunn and E P Sanders say their various pieces (much of it with a tendency to rewrite the heart of Protestant theology), you can find out here.

The book is in four clear sections, one on the Biblical evidence and teaching, the second on the relationship between Protestant and Roman Catholic views, especially recent RC teaching and evangelical interaction with it, the third on the current scholarly revision and the final section on how and why it is so important to get justification right.

Eveson's position is essentially that although Sanders, Wright et al may have discovered a bit more of the *corporate* dimension and implications of being a

Christian than our Western Protestant forefathers, the current revision is wrong: to be justified is not to be vindicated as a member of the covenant people but to be counted righteous before a holy God and his righteous law. It is fundamentally forensic and judicial, as Luther understood.

One of the great services this book performs is to show in a gracious and rational way that a number of prominent evangelicals are foolishly behaving as though the RC church should now be treated as a gospel-teaching church, whereas in fact her position has not changed an iota on the central matter of justification since the Reformation period. Eveson quotes extensively from the new RC catechism. This is necessary because something very subtle is going on: much of the *language* of grace is being used, and a number of perfectly good gospel statements are being made by various representatives of the RC church, and yet on closer inspection justification by faith *alone* is being studiously avoided. Thus people are still being taught to trust themselves and the church. Sad to say, even Alistair McGrath wants to widen our working definition of justification in such a way as to blur the distinction between the Protestant and RC teachings of it. He is also tending to take an anti-propositional, existential view of truth, which would make it easier to ignore old battles.

The other great thing achieved by the book is to present clearly and to refute thoroughly the effect of modern Pauline studies on the doctrine of justification by faith. A number of scholars, especially since the publication of E P Sanders' book *Paul And Palestinian Judaism* in 1977, including some so-called evangelicals,

have been teaching that the Jews of the first century and the people Paul was concerned about when he wrote Galatians were not legalists, they were “covenantal nomists”. They obeyed God’s law in the context of his gracious covenant, trusting him not their works but regarded their keeping of the Mosaic law as the way of *staying* in the covenant and of showing their national distinctiveness as his people. It is the Jews’ idolatry of national privilege that Paul is worried about; trying to merit salvation and having a guilt-ridden conscience are just preoccupations of Western culture. To be “righteous” according to Wright is not a matter of having Christ’s righteousness imputed to us, after our sins have been imputed to him, but it is a matter of our having covenant membership.

From almost every quarter imaginable Eveson demonstrates the falsity and danger of this teaching. He shows that people in early Judaism *were* often legalistic and that Paul’s contrast between faith and works demands a more comprehensive exclusion of all obedience from having a part in our justification than Wright wants. From Luke 18 he shows that people were convicted of sin and guilt before the 16th century and that this teaching cannot make sense of the cross and Christ’s work as described in the NT for it ignores God as our righteous Judge. The whole thing is too relational rather than judicial, given the essential justice of God.

This then is a very timely book, real “must reading” for ministers and all thinking Christians. It is so because of the vital importance of the topic, the subtlety of the attack upon it, and the rational, heart-felt and encouraging way the truth is put across.

Christopher Bennett, MA

God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul

Gordon D Fee

Hendrickson, 1994, 967pp, £29.99

This significant book is divided into two major parts, with a smaller section of some 38 pages preceding them. This section consists of an Introduction and a chapter on Paul’s usage of the Greek word *pneuma* and its cognates.

The main section of the book, Part I Analysis, comprises detailed exegesis, in assumed chronological order, of every reference and allusion to the Holy Spirit in the Pauline corpus, beginning with the Thessalonian Epistles (Fee holds to the late date for Galatians) and concluding with the Pastorals. This is a rich seam of material for pastors to dig in, and in future all who care about their exegesis will want to turn to this section “to see what Fee says,” though obviously not all will agree with every one of his conclusions. For example, it is a minor point but, if a flea may be permitted to disagree with an elephant, the present reviewer remains unconvinced by Fee’s argument that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is “neither original to this letter nor authentic to Paul” (p. 272f). There is, however, a massive amount of learning here with many passages illuminated by Fee’s insightful comments.

Part II Synthesis, draws together Fee’s conclusions and consists of five chapters. Chapter 12 deals with the Spirit as “Eschatological Fulfilment.” This chapter covers a variety of themes, some of which are only vaguely related, but are conveniently gathered under this heading. For example, metaphors for the Spirit, such as down payment, first-fruits and seal, resurrection, promise and fulfilment, covenant, Torah, flesh and Spirit, etc.

Chapter 13 discusses the Spirit as “God’s Personal presence.” Here the personality and deity of the Spirit, his relationship to Christ and the Trinity are discussed. Chapter 14 characterises the third person of the Trinity as “The Soteriological Spirit,” which involves his role in the proclamation and hearing of the gospel, revelation, conversion, water baptism, Spirit baptism and prayer. In chapter 15 the church is discussed in its relation to the Holy Spirit under the title of “The Spirit and the People of God”, which includes a section on worship and another on the charismata. The final chapter draws the whole together with the heading, “The Relevance of Pauline Pneumatology.”

Gordon Fee writes as “a New Testament scholar who is also a Pentecostal both by confession and by experience” (p. 10). Yet he does not hold that the normal Christian experience includes a second work (baptism) of the Holy Spirit. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 he writes: “Some have argued for ‘Spirit baptism,’ by which they mean a separate and distinguishable experience from conversion. But this has against it both Pauline usage (he does not elsewhere use this term or clearly refer to such a second experience) and the emphasis in this context, which is not on a special experience in the Spirit beyond conversion, but on their common reception of the Spirit.” (p. 180f).

Fee sees the Holy Spirit as the one common denominator and essential in true Christian conversion. So he writes, “Paul understood Christian conversion to begin with the Spirit-empowered proclamation, which by the same Spirit found its lodging in the heart of the hearer so as to bring conviction – of sin...as well as of the truth of the gospel” (p. 849). And again, “...the Spirit is thus both the cause and the effect of faith” (p. 853). He does not rule out,

however, further experiences of the Holy Spirit, for “there are further, ongoing appropriations of the Spirit’s empowering” (p. 864), and “[f]or Paul life in the Spirit begins at conversion; at the same time that experience is both dynamic and renewable” (p. 864).

Surprisingly, Fee does not see 2 Corinthians 12:12 as indicating that signs and wonders were the indicators of true apostleship (see his discussion on pp. 354ff), and so is able to write later that “not only does he not point to miracles as grounds for accepting either his gospel or his ministry, but on the contrary he rejected such criteria as authenticating ministry of any kind” (p. 888). This is in line with his Pentecostal persuasion that miracles may be expected today, and may be given by God through any member of the congregation (p. 355). Hence he argues persuasively for the continuation of the charismata, but not in any undiscerning and thoughtless sense. He has criticisms for both modern charismatics and anti-charismatics. For that reason both could learn from this book. So, for example, he writes: “Those who believe in God as Creator and Sustainer, but who balk at the miraculous both past and present, have created positions for themselves which are difficult to sustain theologically and quite removed from the biblical perspective” (p. 888).

Though Fee emphasises the role of the Spirit in salvation he remains firmly Christocentric. For him the centre in Paul’s theology is probably best distilled in a phrase like “salvation in Christ”. But although the Spirit is not central, he is “near the centre” (p. 801).

His thesis is summed up accurately in the title. He believes that the Holy Spirit as “God’s empowering presence” is urgently needed in all churches today. Consequently he writes: “The plea of this

study...is not that of a restorationist, as if we really could restore "the primitive church," whatever that means and whatever that would look like. Rather, it is a plea for the recapturing of the Pauline perspective of the Christian life as essentially the life of the Spirit, dynamically experienced and eschatologically oriented – but *fully integrated into the life of the church*" (p. 901). He then suggests that this "recapturing" has two dimensions to it:

"First, rather than 'tearing down these barns and building different ones,' which all too often has been the history of Spirit movements, especially of the 'restorationist' type, let us have the Spirit bring life into our present institutions, theologies, and liturgies...Second, a genuine recapturing of the Pauline perspective will not isolate the Spirit in such a way that 'Spiritual gifts' and 'Spirit phenomena' take pride of place in the church, resulting in churches which are either 'charismatic' or otherwise. Rather, a genuine recapturing of the Pauline perspective will cause the church to be vitally Trinitarian, not only in its theology, but in its life and Spirituality as well. This will mean not the exaltation of the Spirit, but the exaltation of God; and it will mean not focus on the Spirit as such, but on the Son, crucified and risen, Saviour and Lord of all" (p. 901f).

Unfortunately Dr Fee does not venture further in telling us how this may be accomplished.

The book has a useful appendix on the Pauline antecedents in the Old Testament and Inter-Testamental periods, a select bibliography (covering fifteen pages!), and indexes of subjects, modern authors, and ancient sources.

Here We Stand

Eds. JM Boice and BE Sasse, Baker 1996, 208pp., £7.65

This book contains the papers given at the first meeting of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. There are eight chapters by different authors diagnosing the plight of American evangelicalism and prescribing what has to be done. The authors accuse American evangelicals of selling out wholesale to a narcissistic, self-centred, entertainment saturated culture but it does not take too much readjustment to see how their message can apply in the United Kingdom.

Two things struck me about this book. The first is how in calling evangelicals out of captivity to post-modern culture these writers are calling them to a Calvinistic Reformation and it does raise an interesting issue. What do we mean when we speak of evangelicalism? If we are Calvinists, as many of us are, is our definition broad enough to embrace Arminians and other with whom we have profound disagreements? And if our definition is broad enough is it strong enough to be the basis for the life and culture-transforming movement that Boice and others envisage?

The other thing about this book is its lack of anything substantial about the church. The strength and weakness of evangelicalism is that it is a movement and not a church and it misses what to the writers of the New Testament and most of our spiritual forebears was a central concern. The BEC has sought to redress this weakness, but sadly most evangelicals in the UK do not see any ecclesiastical significance to their evangelicalism, except on a congregational level.

Rev. Stanley Jebb BA BD ThD

The Editor

EDITORIAL POLICY

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