

Editor's Notes

There is something of a controversial tone to this issue. The first two articles touch on the sad but necessary controversy over the doctrine of penal substitution. Dan Strange's article puts the controversy in its wider theological context and Ian Shaw's on Methodism reminds us that it wasn't only nasty Calvinists who have held to this doctrine. Michael Plant reminds us how any controversy should be conducted. It is sad when evangelicals engage in controversy with a bad spirit and without trying to understand what their opponents are saying. Incidentally Dan Strange's article was originally delivered as the Evangelical Library Lecture for 2005. I commend this admirable institution in London to readers as a rich resource of theological literature. The Library has been undergoing extensive renovations and recently the attractive, comfortable and well-equipped Bob Sheehan Research Room was opened. An annual bursary is available for anyone wanting to use the library for serious research.

It happens that the books I want to mention in these notes touch on two areas of controversy among evangelicals. I do not intend to sound a contentious note or to unnecessarily offend anyone, but there are some matters that divide us and from time to time they will be touched upon.

The first relates to the area of public worship. In recent years the pressure of the charismatic movement has eased, but how or even if Christians worship when they gather continues to be debated. This is especially a matter of contention between conservative and Reformed evangelicals. Some have questioned whether what Christians do together in their meetings is properly called worship when biblical expressions for worship are examined. This has always struck me as something of a sterile argument with antagonists on both sides claiming too much for their position. Those who say that Christians don't come together to worship in any special sense collapse all of worship into the Christian life. That the whole of life is worship is undeniably biblical and something perhaps that those on the other side of the

argument don't emphasise enough. But this position seems to me to be rather pedantic in its refusal to see meetings of Christians as worship. What else is collectively praise, prayer, preaching, the Lord's Supper and fellowship if not worship? Some of those who hold this position seem to be reacting against the excesses of the charismatics and the influence of Anglo-Catholicism within Anglicanism. Practically, this seems to me to lead to rather desiccated meetings where preaching becomes a lecture and there is little expectation of the felt presence and power of God. However those on the other side sometimes seem to claim too much. They give the impression that public worship is more important than how Christians worship in the whole of life. Often books advocating this position begin by saying that worship is the most important thing a person can do. That is of course true, but that doesn't mean that what Christians do when they meet is itself the most important thing. As part of the worship of a Christian it is along with the rest of his or her life. What makes the service special and rightly called worship is its purpose of expressing the corporate worship of God's people. Anyone reading the Bible can see that such public worship is hugely important in the purposes of God.

All of which brings me to the books I want to mention. In *Created for Worship* Noel Due,¹ formerly of the Highland Theological College, gives us a masterly survey of God's unfolding revelation of his purpose for us to worship him. Beginning with creation in Genesis and ending with the consummation in the new heaven and earth in Revelation Due lucidly expounds key passages relating to worship with great exegetical and theological insight. I found him particularly good in dealing with Abraham and the letter to the Hebrews. There are some passages left out that could have merited discussion, but overall this is a superb survey. Throughout Due does justice to both all-life and public worship. Here is a book that helps us to recapture a vision of the big picture of worship.

The authority of the Bible in relation to public worship is another controversy among Reformed evangelicals.

Traditionally Anglicans and Lutherans have been pitted against Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists, but more recently there has been disagreement within the Reformed camp. *The Worship of God*² is a collection of papers delivered at a conference on the subject at Greenville Seminary in South Carolina. In two chapters Terry Johnson expounds the regulatory principle from John 4:23-24. He does a good job although I think he makes the text fit the principle rather than the other way round. As usual Robert Godfrey is excellent on Calvin and on the psalms and contemporary worship. There are also two chapters arguing the case for and against exclusive psalmody. There is much I find I agree with the authors, but as so often in a book of this nature they claim too much. There must be something like a regulative principle for public worship. The classic Anglican/Lutheran position that what is not forbidden is permitted is too broad. Worship like everything else must be regulated by the word of God positively as well as negatively. But its more traditional defenders, such as the contributors to this book, claim too much for it. Most of the chapters lead one to think that the application of the principle is straightforward, but then a number of qualifications are made. They seem to argue for a fairly standard form of historic Reformed service as the most biblical, but I wonder if that can be sustained. Forget about drama and dance, what place do more participatory congregational prayer or interviewing a visiting missionary have in a service or having a time for questions and discussion after a sermon? Although I think his formulation and application of the regulative principle is too strict, Johnson is right to say that it is our theology that must shape our public worship. Sadly that all too often is not the case even in some Reformed churches. A lot more work needs to be done on this issue. Very different in tone and content is *Discerning the Spirits*³ by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. and Sue A. Rozeboom. This is the fruit of the labours of a working group sponsored by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship at Calvin College in Michigan. Plantinga and Rozeboom try

to rise above the worship wars raging in American churches by commending wisdom as a way to determine how churches should worship. To some extent this seems like a cop out and the authors are too generously eclectic in what they would accept in public worship. Nevertheless the book is full of wisdom and merits attention. For example, one of the criteria by which to judge worship is if it nurtures godly people. While a bit too liturgical for my tastes, Plantinga and Rozeboom want worship to have biblical and theological integrity that in the end allies them with many of the concerns in the previous book. Their proposal is what they call 'narrative worship', that is, worship that in whatever form it takes tells the biblical story of creation, fall, redemption and consummation. Certainly some of the services in free churches, whether classical or contemporary, could do with reflecting the story of redemption in the way they are ordered.

On this whole subject JC Ryle's little booklet *Worship*⁴ is a reminder of some of the key principles of Protestant worship. Ryle wrote of course for an earlier time but what he says needs to be heard in our context today.

Turning to another area of controversy I would like to mention several books dealing with the subject of Christian Zionism. Since the founding of the State of Israel Christian Zionism has gained prominence particularly in the United States, but it has roots back into the 19th century in Britain. In fact as Stephen Sizer points out in *Christian Zionism*⁵ the first Zionists were British evangelicals who did much to create and encourage British foreign policy in this direction. Very ably Sizer examines the historical roots of the more extreme forms of Christian Zionism in the dispensationalism that emerged from the teaching of Edward Irving, JN Darby and others. Particularly important was the way Darby's teaching was transplanted to America where it has grown into an enormous movement. He also examines the key theological emphases of Christian Zionism and their political significance for today. Sizer is very critical of the movement and highlights its hyper-literalistic approach

to interpreting the Bible in the light of historical developments, and the notion of two covenants for Jews and Gentiles that some of its proponents teach. In places Sizer could be more nuanced in his understanding of premillennialism and less intemperate in his language, but overall this is a most helpful work. Timothy Weber covers similar territory in *On the Road to Armageddon*⁶ but with less theological insight. While beginning in Britain his overview deals mainly with the United States and is valuable for that reason. In Britain we are bemused by the dispensationalism of so many American evangelicals and this book helps us to understand the phenomenon. Both these books tell us why this subject matters, but it is Gary Burge in *Whose Land? Whose People?*⁷ who helps us to see its impact on the lives of people. Burge is a professor at Wheaton College who began to have doubts about the line being fed to him and other evangelicals visiting Israel. He came to see the plight of the Palestinians, especially Palestinian Christians, and appreciate the injustice they have suffered. The book is a very readable exercise that weaves together historical analysis, biblical reflections and the experiences of Palestinians and Jews. If the book has a fault it is that Burge should have given more space to the suffering and fears of Israelis today, but I suspect that he sees the need to redress the imbalance that is common in America. Burge doesn't challenge some of the assumptions of the more extreme forms of dispensationalism as effectively as Sizer does, but he leaves us with the human dimension of what is happening in Israel and the occupied territories today. For me the remarkable thing is that many evangelical Christians seem to have so little concern for fellow believers who are Arab. As Christians we must be concerned for the well-being of the Jewish people. But our prayer must be that Jews come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah and join with Gentile believers in the new covenant as one people of God. It seems to me that on some of the wilder shores of dispensationalism it is the gospel that is being forgotten, especially when the evangelisation of Jews is neglected or even discouraged, bizarre doctrines taught such as a

second chance for conversion after the rapture and hope is lost in an obsession with earthly territory and historical events. On the historical roots of dispensationalism it is worth reading *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1880*.⁸ Particularly interesting are two chapters on JN Darby. One on his 'eschatological mysticism' illuminates the spiritual motivation behind his theological innovations and possible influence of Roman Catholicism. Did you know that he was attracted to Catholicism as a young man? The last chapter deals with the premillennialism of Andrew Bonar and its Scottish context.

In his fine book *The Old Evangelicalism*⁹ Iain Murray warns ministers against 'the danger of becoming engulfed in all kinds of controversies'. He does so in an excellent chapter on the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness. He has in mind relatively minor controversies such as those mentioned above and his warning needs to be heeded. However there are some issues that sadly are necessarily controversial and challenges to the historic Protestant doctrine of justification is one of them. This book is a collection of addresses and lectures on key issues relating to the evangelical faith. Murray deals with preaching for conversions, Spurgeon on conversion, the doctrine of the cross, John Wesley and the assurance of salvation as well as imputed righteousness. Every minister, church officer and thoughtful member will find this book helpful and salutary reading. A desire to see some of the concerns of the older evangelicalism recovered is not nostalgia but a desire to retain the heart of the gospel. I always look forward to reading a new book by Murray because he always reminds us of what really matters for the church of Christ. This book made me look again at my preaching and priorities in ministry.

The Puritans are part of the lineage of the older evangelicalism and in *The Devoted Life*¹⁰ we are invited to read some of the key ones and their writings. Each chapter is by an authority on a particular Puritan who introduces us to his subject and then expounds one of his key works. All the contributions are of a high quality and include

References

bibliographies. Inevitably in a book like this some authors are omitted, but overall this is an excellent way into Puritan writings. However as an introduction JI Packer's *Among God's Giants* (published in the USA as *Quest for Godliness*) is still at the front of the field.

Finally I want to mention one book that puts flesh on the older evangelicalism and that is *John E Marshall – Life and Writings*.⁴¹ The death of John Marshall in 2003 deprived us of one of the Reformed evangelical world's larger than life characters. John J Murray's biography and the collection of writings by John Marshall in this book is a testimony to a faithful godly ministry. Outside the Reformed evangelical constituency John may not have been well-known, but his ministry is exemplary of single-minded and faithfully persevering devotion to the cause of Christ. Many who heard John's last address at the Banner of Truth conference speak of the deep impression it made on them. His text was 1 Samuel 17:42-47 and it is included in this volume. I urge you to read it. Several things stand out that ministers of the gospel need to take to heart: the reminder that suffering is part of ministry; the mercy of God in Christ to sinners who deserve judgment; the need to fulfil our ministry in the place God has put us; the account we must render to God for the conduct of our ministries; and the sheer sufficiency of God's grace and mercy to us in Christ. Like Paul, John had a deep and well-informed understanding of the godless culture in which he lived, but also like Paul he had unbounding and unashamed confidence in the power of the gospel. May we have that same confidence as we continue to preach the gospel today.

1. Noel Due, *Created for Worship – from Genesis to Revelation to You* (Fearn, Rosshire: Christian Focus 2005), ISBN 1-84550-026-1.
2. Joseph Pipa and others, *The Worship of God – Reformed Concepts of Biblical Worship* (Fearn, Rosshire: Christian Focus 2005), ISBN 1-84550-055-5.
3. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. and Sue A. Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits – A Guide to thinking about worship today* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans 2003) ISBN0-8028-3999-1.
4. JC Ryle, *Worship* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth 2005), ISBN 0-85151-906-7.
5. Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism – Road Map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: IVP 2004), ISBN -1-84474-050-1.
6. Timothy Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon – how evangelicals became Israel's best friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker 2004), ISBN 0-8010-2577-X.
7. Gary M Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? – What Christians are not being told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press 2003), ISBN 0-8298-1545-7.
8. Crawford Gribben and Timothy CF Stunt, eds, *Prisoners of Hope? Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland 1800-1880* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press 2004), ISBN 1-84227-224-1.
9. Iain H Murray, *The Old Evangelicalism – old truths for a new awakening* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth 2005), ISBN 0-85151-901-6.
10. Kelly M Kapic and Randall C Gleason, *The Devoted Life – an invitation to the Puritan classics* (Leicester: IVP 2004), ISBN 0-8308-2794-3.
11. *John E Marshall, Life and Writings* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth 2005), ISBN 0-85151-902-4.

Additional Note: Issue 53 of Foundations included an article by Leonardo De Chirico which sought to question whether evangelicals were approaching the subject of bioethics in the most biblical manner. Whatever the implications of this brief paper, Affinity wishes to re-affirm its stance on life issues. The following is an extract from a previously published policy statement:

We believe that it is God who gives life. Because all human beings are made in the image of God, all human life has intrinsic dignity and value. Therefore we seek to uphold and promote the utmost respect for all human life, from fertilisation until natural death. Consequently we are opposed to the deliberate taking of innocent human life, at any of its stages.