

# REFORMATION ATION TODAY'78



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*The following is reproduced from an Israeli newspaper*

## FOR FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE IN ISRAEL

We, the undersigned, wish to protest against the campaign of libel, intimidation and harassment that has recently been waged against members of our faith in various parts of the country.

The 'anti-mission law' and the defamatory misrepresentations F3 mentioned in the Explanatory Matter of that law, the reasons for the law as given by certain circles in the Knesset, the press and in pamphlets distributed to the public have now combined to create an atmosphere that clearly threatens the liberty of individual citizens to believe according to their conscience and to express their faith freely, without fear or limitation beyond the dictates of morality.

Police interrogations, the distribution of defamatory pamphlets calling for the exercise of violence (giving the names and addresses of the candidates for such violence), harassment by telephone, threats, pressure brought to bear upon employers, friends and family are all 45 methods most appropriate to the kind of regimes against which the democratic State of Israel rises in protest and from which it disassociates itself most firmly; and yet many of us have experienced such at the initiative of radical orthodox Jewish groups in recent years.

### **We declare:**

1. Such methods will not avail. We shall not desist from believing according to the dictates of our consciences and our understanding of Holy Scripture, nor shall we desist from expressing our faith by every moral, legal and honest means at our disposal. We shall not be put off by threats of ruffians or by abuse of legal State authority.

2. The libelous charges made against us are more true of those who have made them than they are of us. We do not know of one proven incident in which Christian Evangelical circles offered material benefits with a view to obtaining a change of religion or religious opinion. At the same time, we know of many cases in which economic, social and psychological pressure was used by Rabbinic Jewish circles in order to obtain a change in the religion or religious opinion of others.

All members of the Jewish Christian community in Israel are loyal citizens of the State. The percentage of those among us who serve in the armed forces in general, and in combat units specifically, is far larger than that of those who accuse us of encouraging refusal to serve in the army—a crass and wicked accusation made without the slightest factual grounds, by precisely those who themselves encourage refusal (of girls) to serve in the armed forces.

The freedom of all citizens of Israel is contingent on the liberty of any one citizen. We call on the enlightened public of this country to rise to the defence of all its citizens to believe according to their conscience and to express their faith freely. Support our efforts for freedom of religion and opinion. Sign the petition below and send it to us. Write to the press, to the Minister of Police and the Interior, to the Minister of Religious Affairs, and to your party's representative in the Knesset. Let's all assure ourselves of a truly democratic Israel.

**A group of Israeli Jewish Christians P.O.B. 75, Rishon Lezion, Tel. 03-990717.**

**Dear Mr. Prime Minister,**

**We, the undersigned, request you to assure true freedom of religion in Israel.** We request that you bring an end to the campaign of libel and harassment, directed against members of the Christian Evangelical faith, to the discontinuation of the use of police interrogations to intimidate, and a stop to illegal activities of the Hever Hape'ilim (the Anti-Missionary League).

Signed (Name, address, etc.) .....



# Editorial

*John Bunyan*

MUCH OF THIS ISSUE IS DEVOTED TO THE MEMORY OF JOHN BUNYAN WHO was born 350 years ago. The photos illustrating places of interest today relative to Bunyan were taken by Victor Sylvester. He is working with pastor Colin Richards in preparing a 40 page book with the title *In the steps of John Bunyan*. This work full of illustrations is to be published by Carey Publications and is designed to introduce newcomers to the illustrious preacher. The descriptive sections will reveal the central Gospel truths which motivated Bunyan in his ministry and writing.

## *The Centrality of the Church in the work of the Gospel*

From one of our subscribers, Mike Grimshaw, who is happy for his letter to be quoted,

I particularly appreciated the second part of Baruch Maoz's article on 'The Centrality of the Church', a subject which is close to my own heart and dealt with, I felt, in a way both sensibly tactful and seeking to put things back on a more scriptural and God-glorifying basis. May I suggest that if you have not already thought of doing so, you reproduce copies of this article in toto and send them to all the major Christian organisations, asking them if they would be prepared to hand over the running of their respective concerns to a local church, should one be found which was prepared to shoulder the responsibility.

The sentiment expressed is appreciated. Such a work would require diplomacy of a superlative kind. It would also require manpower of an order that we do not have. The best solution is for our readers to place the articles in places which will be effective. The two articles which appeared in issues 42 and 43 have been brought together and will form the first chapter in the book *Local Church Practice*. The page proofs are being corrected and the book extending to 192 pages is well on the way. The suggestion made to distribute the magazine more widely raises issues which we would like to share with our readers.

## *Finance and manpower*

*Reformation Today* is a magazine of a local church and is therefore restricted in the sphere of how much can be done. Since the commencement in January 1970 the magazine has been produced by the church. Extra finance needed for a journal of this size has come from gifts. Typical of this support is the help given by an ex-member of the church now living in an oriental land who sends £10.00 per year. It is this kind of help that has enabled us to keep up a high standard. We are feeling the pressure economically more than ever before because of increased printing costs and simply make it known to our readers who may prefer that we keep to the present number of pages rather than diminish the size and thereby

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Cover picture. *Elstow, the place of John Bunyan's early life, is a little village just over a mile to the south of Bedford. The restored half-timbered cottages shown in the picture give an idea of the environment which nurtured the immortal dreamer.*

decrease the effectiveness of the magazine in promoting the convictions mutually cherished. We are happy to share the audited accounts with any of our supporters.

Churches of similar outlook have adopted *Reformation Today* which increases our sense of care and responsibility. For instance a recently planted church in Australia has just increased the regular order from 25 to 31 copies plus a separate individual purchase of 100 miscellaneous copies for promotional purposes.

#### *The Keston College Centre*

The Keston College Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism, Heathfield Road, Keston, Kent, provides invaluable factual information by which Christians are enabled to pray intelligently for the persecuted. The leader of the work, Michael Bordeaux, has just lost his wife through cancer. He has two children aged eleven and fourteen. The Keston Centre has a dozen full-time workers and many who help part-time. The work is deserving of financial support. Invaluable information is made available whereby help can be afforded to those who suffer. For instance we can have up to date reliable knowledge of fellow Baptists who are serving sentences at this time. There are 47 known to us. Among them is Georgi Vins, who has survived serious illness. He is about to complete his five year prison sentence before serving five years in exile.

The extent to which the Soviet authorities are sensitive about criticism is reflected in the barbaric sentence of seven years 'strict regime' in a labour camp and five years internal exile to follow of 53 year old Dr. Yuri Orlov, the human rights campaigner. His strictly human rights campaign was interpreted as 'anti-Soviet agitation' upon which pretext he was sentenced.

#### *The Trinity Ministerial Academy, New Jersey*

Bob Letham is soon to join Al Martin featured on the right, with Don Garlington (centre) and Bob Fisher (left) to be involved in 'The Academy', to equip men for the ministry. Brothers Garlington and Fisher both

*(continued on inside back cover)*





# Reviews

## COLLECTED WRITINGS OF JOHN MURRAY, VOLUME TWO

Select Lectures in Systematic Theology

417 pp. Super cloth. £4.50. Banner of Truth.

This second volume of Professor John Murray's collected writings contains his lecture material on a wide, but not comprehensive, variety of theological *loci*, the vast majority of which was hitherto unpublished. It is not a substitute *Systematic Theology*. Murray himself appears to have been very selective about the material he prepared for publication. Consequently, in the editor's words, we are left with 'an inevitable unevenness in the presentation'. For instance, there is nothing on Scripture (on which several articles were included in the rather lightweight first volume) or on the doctrine of God. Even on those topics which are present there is a strong impression of discontinuity. This is really a volume of fragments. That, in itself, should be no deterrent to the potential reader. It would be worth selling an entire library of lesser works in order to obtain it. The contents are topics to which the Professor devoted the greater part of his effort and they contain the harvest of his mature thought. Especially is it gratifying that the articles *Common grace* and *Definitive sanctification* are now, by republication, accessible to a wider public. The latter article contains some of his most significant contributions. He argues that sanctification is not only progressive, life-long and continuous, but has also been affected decisively and once-for-all in believers' identification with Christ in his death and resurrection, finding its realisation right at the inception of their Christian career. (A radical breach with sin has occurred in your life whether your wife thinks so or not!). Together with his commentary on Romans, this article may well be his most enduring work.

Prof. Murray's well-known call for the recasting of covenant theology is mirrored in his unhappiness with the covenant of works terminology, as is seen in the section *The Adamic administration*. Baptists will benefit from the chapters on *The sacraments* and *The Lord's Supper*. Too often in Baptist circles there has been a disparaging of the sacraments with the result that they are regarded quite frequently as little more than empty appendages rather than as means of grace.

Inevitably, there are points at which the reader may disagree with the author. Occasionally he is a little careless. In the section *The assurance of faith* he writes of 'an obvious distinction between assurance or conviction and the direct or primary act of faith', adding that 'the distinction is too obvious to need any elaborate defence' (p. 264). Well, he may have seen the difference with crystalline clarity but others (e.g. Calvin, *Institutes* 3,2,7) did not regard it as 'obvious' and in fact identified saving faith and assurance! Again, his case against independency in *The government of the church* (pp. 343-344) savours of special pleading. Nor does one expect many Baptists to be persuaded by the chapter on *Baptism*! In fact, as in his book 'Christian Baptism' Murray's objections to immersion are surprisingly flimsy.

The concluding section on the last things is valuable. The sober caution with which Murray marshals his material is a useful corrective to the undue dogmatism which is often voiced. However, one misses the necessary perspective provided by such as Vos and Ridderbos, who have indicated that the heart of theology is eschatology; God's fulfilment of the promised redemption in the death and resurrection of Christ, the inauguration of the final age with its anticipated consummation at Christ's return. This perspective has not yet been assimilated by systematic theology in any

(continued on inside back cover)

*Previous articles on this subject have been presented in this order, 1. The nature of eldership, 2. The responsibility of elders, 3. How to recognise and ordain an elder, 4. Elders, deacons, and women-workers.*

# The Authority of Elders

BEFORE GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THIS MATTER AN APOLOGY IS REQUIRED FOR a few who may be impatient. When any neglected but essential subject is rediscovered there is likely to be a hue and cry about it. This has been the case with church government. Some have said that the matter is being overstressed and others maintain it is being distorted. In my view there is little cause for complaint. In travelling at home and abroad my impression has been a happy one. I have observed that in many churches there has been a transition to a plurality of elders with little difficulty. Of course there have been exceptions in which much difficulty has been experienced. In retrospect the fault has never been with the biblical pattern but because of human frailty. Let us not forget that even the apostles had their casualties. To seize on cases of misadventure and make raucous noises about it in the Christian Press is immature and unhelpful because it overlooks the fact that this biblical pattern has been long established and continues to function admirably in places too numerous to count.

We do well however to keep the subject in proper perspective. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul appeals for proportion and uses as his illustration the human body. All the parts have a different function and most function in harmony and unity. Eldership is but one function in the body. Also the authority wielded by elders is not authoritarianism to be vaunted or paraded but something which is inherent and hidden.

When it comes to the function of eldership, we might use the illustration of a modern racing car. The elders can be likened to the cylinders. Modern racing cars are admired for their streamlined proportions and if any part seems to predominate for size it is the body as a whole with the large tyres which are necessary to keep the whole on the road. The whole car is important and the whole membership of a church is important. The whole has to function well to keep smoothly on the road. We want to see the beauty of Christ in the whole body as the whole body is united in one spirit of harmony, unity and love. As far as oversight is concerned the elders are not there to draw attention to themselves but work inside the body to keep the whole moving along as effectively as possible. The driver is the Lord, the elders and deacons are engine parts and the whole body in momentum is the church.



Objects which generate power or control power can become dangerous. Religion itself if misused can be dangerous. The Gospel if distorted can do harm. An eldership which goes wrong can be harmful. But where the biblical procedures are prayerfully and carefully followed there is far more by way of inbuilt precaution against things going wrong in an eldership than in a one-man oversight. In a plurality of elders if one elder gets spiritually sick the others are there to help him recover. If one is prostrated for a time by the burdens laid upon him the others can lighten those burdens and help him through. Within an eldership extreme ideas are tempered, harsh judgments moderated and doctrinal imbalances corrected. If one elder shows prejudice toward, or personal dislike for any person, in or outside the church, the others can correct that and insist on fair play and justice. If one elder is in a fierce mood over some offender that offender has others to whom he can appeal.

The aspect of authority is the most difficult part of the overall subject of eldership. This is not only because of the universal dislike of discipline which characterises the whole fallen human race and which dislike remains in Christians very much even after years of experience, but because the matter does require analysis.

When it comes to literature I have found nothing which analyses the nature of the authority of elders. *Jus Divinum*, a detailed and comprehensive thesis by John de Witt helpfully documents the discussions of the Westminster Assembly about church government. It is helpful but much of that debate concerned problems of inter-church relationships. Before turning to the subject proper we will look in general at government in general.

### *The necessity of government in all spheres of life*

The necessity of rule or government is universally recognised. An army must have officers. Ships must have captains. Tribes must have chiefs. Civilised nations must have parliaments or cabinets. Firms must have bosses, and even beehives and anthrills have order. By mutual agreement and consent to common wisdom, (albeit with different degrees of reluctance!) authority of a thousand different kinds is conceded to by majorities and duly submitted to among all nations of mankind.

The Scriptures teach that God has sovereignly ordained authority to be exercised in three areas of government. The three spheres are those of the home, the state and the church: domestic, civil and ecclesiastical.

Now government means nothing unless it commends itself to the conscience as being right and true and unless it can be enforced and upheld. In the ordination of authority in the three spheres God has provided a practical means of enforcement as well as the assurance that an account will be given by every creature with regard to his or her obedience to authority represented in each of these spheres.

It will be useful to look at these issues briefly as this will also help us appreciate the enforcement of ecclesiastical discipline when we come to it. God has ordained that the father is head and ruler of his household. His wife and children are required to submit to him. In the case of disobedient children the father exercises his authority by way of personality and where necessity requires it, by the rod. The situation in the case of an unruly wife is a very difficult one as rule has in that case to be enforced by gentle moral persuasion alone. The weight of appeal must lie in reference to God's Word and will. If this fails the unruly wife risks the destruction of her marriage relationship and ultimately of her own soul by incurring the displeasure of God.

The case of civil government is much more complex inasmuch as it is so far reaching in its implications. God has ordained that civil governments administrate in the encouragement of good and discouragement of evil and in the ordering of society as a whole. The ultimate discipline in the church is excommunication while the ultimate sentence in the civil realm is the death penalty (Gen. 9:6). This is what Paul means when he says that the State does not bear the sword in vain (Rom. 13:4). In failing to uphold this principle by giving preference to their own wisdom, rather than the authority of God, civil governments are wielding the sword in vain. By not employing it against terrorist murderers who murder with impunity, governments are being held to ransom. Law and authority are being defied and undermined. The confidence of the people is being destroyed and increasing numbers of innocent bystanders slaughtered. Those who have been found guilty of murders are sent to prison only to await release on the demand of their accomplices who kidnap leaders whom they threaten to kill unless their will is done. The recent murder of ex-prime minister of Italy, Aldo Moro, reminds us of this. Lawlessness results where there is failure to uphold justice. Because the authority of the State is so very powerful, reaching even to the exercise of capital punishment, the greatest care is required to administer justice fairly with the central principles of Romans 13:1-4 in mind. Civil law is applied here on earth with different degrees of imperfection but everything will be assessed at the final tribunal of the Great Judgment Day.

Now in contrast to civil government in which the law is upheld by a police force, militia, magistrates, as well as a tremendous organisation of central and local government officialdom to oversee civil affairs, from the hospital where we may be born, to the grave where we may be buried, the church is endowed with but one office of authority: the eldership.

With Hebrews 13:17 principally before us as a guide, but supported by other references as shown, we can get down to a precise description of the nature of that rule or authority which is exercised by elders.

*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they*



*watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

1. It is a definite authority vested not in the congregation but in officers  
duly called and ordained  
*obey them*—submit to *them*
2. It is the rule of Christ being ambassadorial  
*as they that must give account* (for)  
*to the chief shepherd they must give account* (1 Pet. 5:4)
3. It is a churchly or ecclesiastical rule  
*they ordained elders in every church* (Acts 14:23)
4. It is spiritual in character  
*they watch for your souls*
5. It is pastoral in character  
*they watch over the flock* (Acts 20:28)
6. It is moral in character  
*an account will be rendered*  
*for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ* (2 Cor. 5:10 N.I.V.).
7. It is momentous in character  
*with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

**1** *It is a definite authority vested not in the congregation but in those duly called and ordained*  
*‘obey them’—‘submit to them’*

The word *peithomai* (obey) signifies obedience upon being persuaded. The teaching and instruction of Scripture results in a challenge. If the elders show a church member from Scripture that his life falls short of the profession he makes and that the Gospel is being brought into disrepute by his behaviour, then that member ought to obey the exhortations of his elders. He should amend his ways.

On the basis of Galatians 6:1, ‘Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness: consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted,’ it could be argued on a moral basis that the principle of obedience can apply to all church members. That is true, but more is involved in the case of rule inasmuch as a specific authority applies in the case of elders which has a weight and power in it which do not apply among the individual members.

Furthermore we observe that the word *upekete* (submit yourselves) respects rule in the sense that it likewise implies two definite and distinct parties, the rulers and the ruled. The rule does not belong to the congregation as a whole. The rule in a family does not belong to the whole family of boys, girls and toddlers—all!—but to the father. The Bible says that

citizens are to obey their magistrates not each other. The ruled are to submit to the rulers in all that is consistent with the moral law of God (Rom. 13:1-4).

There are some who detest this idea of authority and oppose it. They express the objection that this reasoning as it respects the church divides it into two classes—the rulers and the ruled. The answer to that objection is that it is not a question of division but of diversity of function.

In reply to that objection it should be pointed out that the separation is not into classes. The New Testament never permits fragmentation of the body. It always points to diversity of function in the body. Romans 12:4-8 refers to the differences—some lead as elders. Likewise 1 Corinthians 12:28 tells us that in the New Testament Church there existed a variety of gifts, offices and functions. Some were administrators (governors or elders) some were helps (deacons). Some were apostles. The fact that the apostles possessed a unique and extraordinary authority in no way severed them from the body of which they formed a part and which they served. Peter declared that basically he was an elder with all the other elders (1 Pet. 1:5) and all elders are basically members of the same body of Christ, different only inasmuch as they have a function in which office and authority are necessary. As all the members pursue the fulfilment of their functions, so elders are exhorted to fulfil theirs with diligence (Rom. 12:8). The responsibilities which belong to elders have been described elsewhere. One of these responsibilities is rule which requires obedience and submission. That means if an eldership decision is made to discipline a member guilty of persisting in a sinful course then that is no ordinary decision. It is an authoritative one not to be derided or fought against. If a decision is made to restore a repentant person who has been debarred from church privileges and the communion table then that is no decision to be trifled with or cavilled about.

As in other spheres such as the home, or employment or military training the ordained source of authority requires respect and obedience. So in the church that form of government which God has ordained requires obedience and submission. This does not preclude questions, discussions and explanations which wise elders will encourage. The authority represented is an authority of persuasion by the Word of God. Malcontents, rebels and rabble-rousers are unwelcome in all societies and in some places are put down in no uncertain manner. Discipline in the church is not by force of arms but is by spiritual and moral persuasion as we will go on to see.

The word 'ordain' has been referred to in our heading. Since it has been expounded in some detail in a previous article we will not enter into the implications here except to say that whatever form an ordination service takes it does form a public and formal recognition of authority by the congregation and submission to it.



## 2 *It is the rule of Christ being ambassadorial* 'as they that must give account' (for) to the chief shepherd they must *give account* (1 Pet. 5:4).

One day Abraham and Sarah were visited by three messengers or ambassadors from another world. They were angels with physical powers because they had dinner with Abraham. One of them was more than an angel. He was the Lord. The same Lord who was manifested by incarnation at Bethlehem came then by theophany (the ability to assume temporary human physical form). How or by what name these visitors were introduced we do not know. Abraham instinctively knew that one was the Lord and addressed him as such (Gen.18:23).

The picture is an apt one. It can be used to illustrate the function of eldership. Elders visit in the name of the Lord. Very often they visit together. In their work they are accompanied by a third who is really the Lord of the flock. The elders are merely his servants or undershepherds. Nevertheless they are not to be despised, for in the area of teaching and oversight they are ambassadors in a special sense and have the authority of such.

An ambassador acts and speaks not only on behalf of but also in the place of the sovereign from whom he has received his commission. It is his duty to proclaim faithfully and precisely the message entrusted to him by his sovereign. Accordingly there is a real sense in which the voice of the ambassador may be said to be the voice of the sovereign he represents (see Philip Hughes on 2 Cor. 5:20 in his commentary on 2 Corinthians).

All believers fulfil the role of ambassadors when they plead truly and faithfully with unbelievers to be reconciled to God. Their words will be assessed in the day of judgment and count against those who may have rejected the ambassadors (Luke 10:11). The voice of the ambassador will be assessed as though it had been the voice of Christ. 'He that heareth you heareth me: and he that despiseth you despiseth me' (Luke 10:16).

In precisely the same way elders are invested with ambassadorial authority in the sphere of teaching and oversight. Just as believers can be remiss and unfaithful in their duty to witness to the Gospel so elders can fall short of what they ought to be, but this does not nullify the authority they possess when they wield it correctly and justly. When elders plead for consistent Christian living or for harmony and unity in the church their ambassadorial authority is to be heeded. Most elders are very reluctant to apply discipline. They apply it only when there is no alternative. When they do act their decisions should be respected for they act ambassadorially in the sphere of rule to which they have been recognised and appointed. It is Christ who is to be seen and he is to be looked to and trusted to use his own discipline to restore the offenders and to heal the harm done to his body. Discipline is to be regarded as remedial and the elders as the gentle servants of Christ in application of the remedy.

That the elders act in the name of Christ and with his authority is seen in the fact that they watch over souls with a sense of responsibility to the chief shepherd to whom they must give account and from whom they will receive a reward if they perform their work faithfully (1 Pet. 5:4). The watching or pastoring is going on now but the full and final account will be rendered in the future. *Apodosontes* which means 'rendering' translated 'must give account' K.J.V. or in the N.A.S.B. 'will give an account', is a future participle.

### **3** *It is an ecclesiastical authority* they ordained elders *in every church* (Acts 14:23)

The word ecclesiastical is derived from the Greek word *ekklesia* which is translated 'church'. *Ekklesia* broken down means 'out of, called'. A church consists of those called out of the world and set apart to be saints, that is to be holy, or to be separate to God. Sainthood is not an attainment. It is a *state* into which God calls men. The state of being set apart thereafter to be prepared for God is essentially corporate. It is something we share together. 'We are no longer strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God' (Eph. 2:19).

For this new citizenship or family, God, as we have seen, has provided leadership and government. It is a rule vested in specific men who have been ordained to the office of eldership within a specific local church. The rule does not belong to one of these men only with the others as mere participants who just act as rubber stamps. It is a rule shared by them equally as they pray together and take counsel together. Ecclesiastes 4:12 reminds us of the wisdom and power of several able minds and spirits working in unity to solve difficult problems: 'if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart' (N.A.S.B.). The absence of suitable and gifted men may sometimes require rule by single elders but the ideal is always a plurality. The authority wielded by these men is ecclesiastical inasmuch as they have been recognised by the gathered church they represent. The authority wielded by the eldership is ecclesiastical or churchly because the decisions they make are backed by the church which has recognised them and ordained them. In most churches there is always a minority who for a variety of reasons such as inexperience, immaturity, misunderstanding, tradition or ignorance do not agree with decisions that are made. Sometimes a member unaccustomed to church order will become entangled personally with one or more of those who have been disciplined. Despite the fact that he does not have either the ability or the past history before him he may be tempted to think he could have handled the whole thing better himself. This is quite normal and has to be borne patiently by the elders and the membership.

Being ecclesiastical in nature the authority wielded by elders is confined to the local church alone. Where spheres of authority overlap there can



be confusion. For instance an elder may upon request give advice about maintaining discipline in the home but it is not his responsibility to administer that discipline. For instance in the case of homes where the absence of a father may lead to disorder a manly pastor may be tempted to enter in and apply the rod to the seats of those who would benefit much therefrom (Prov. 22:15). It is better however for him to patiently teach right principles and leave the administration of family government to the relatives involved.

Because the rule of elders is confined to the church much care must be taken with regard to authority wielded in the civil sphere. When a pastor exercises a dual role, exercising power in the civil realm, or becoming involved in political campaigning it can be very confusing for everyone. Northern Ireland could furnish examples to illustrate this point.

Christians are forbidden to go to civil law to settle their disputes (1 Cor. 6:1, 7). The civil court is not equipped to understand spiritual motives and spiritual responsibilities within the body of Christ. If a difference cannot be resolved privately the eldership should be asked to judge the matter or to convene and supervise a meeting of those believers who best understand the intricacies of the case. In this way a swift and satisfactory agreement should be the aim. Large amounts of money have been lost and much harm done when believers have ignored the importance of the authority Christ has vested in eldership and preferred to submit themselves or their differences to the civil and secular courts. Could not the current scandalous Underground Evangelism versus Mission to the Communist World lawsuit have been quietly settled in the church circle?

Finally it should be observed that elders exercise authority only in the church of which they form a part. They have no power to rule other churches. The obvious exception to this is where the members of a particular church formally request temporary leadership and oversight from a stronger church until such time as they are in a better position themselves.

The term 'presbyterian' could be used instead of ecclesiastical. The presbytery is another term for eldership. The presbyters are elders. The actual term 'presbyter' simply means a person of mature spiritual experience. It is used interchangeably with the word overseer and is synonymous with it (Titus 1:5-7 and Acts 20:17 and 28). Presbyters or elders were appointed in all the churches (Acts 14:23, Jas. 5:14, Phil. 1:1). One hesitates to use the word presbyterian because of its modern meaning in connection with presbyterian denominations. True to their title the churches within Presbyterian denominations or groups of churches practise eldership. The prevailing tendency however is for the professional minister to dominate, the other elders being little more than nominal in the exercise of authority, and certainly not in parity or equality with the full-time minister.

## 4 *It is spiritual* they watch for your souls

The authority of a father in a home is derived from the Lord by creation. The authority of magistrates is derived from the Lord who rules the nations with a rod of iron. With his rod of iron he will use civil powers to break in pieces evil powers. By a rod of iron he restrains evil-doers thus preserving some degree of order in a fallen and desperately depraved world (Rev. 2:27, 12:5, 1 Tim. 2:2-4).

The authority of elders can only be exercised over spiritual people who have had a spiritual birth and who think spiritually. They alone will submit themselves to a spiritual order which involves spiritual principles and spiritual discernment.

It may be helpful to reflect for a few moments on the meaning of the word 'spiritual' which is much in use but seldom analysed.

Nobody can tell what God thinks except God himself. The Holy Spirit knows the mind of God for he is God with the Father and with the Son. The Holy Spirit reveals the mind of God to men. He teaches believers and indwells them. He reveals to them deep spiritual realities. Those who have the Holy Spirit are called spiritual. They not only understand but appreciate and admire the truths revealed by the Spirit. They understand that their great object in life is spiritual. To know and love God is their great aim. To be conformed to Christ is their ambition. With spiritual advancement in mind they are willing to submit to every practical means ordained by God to accomplish this objective. Voluntarily therefore, and not by force or compulsion, they submit to church membership, church ordinances, church order and church government.

In contrast to this the natural man does not accept the things of the Holy Spirit. He does not believe, appreciate or obey them. Indeed they are foolishness to him. The word *moros* (foolish) used in 1 Corinthians 2:14 means insipid, tasteless, dull. The natural man is not attracted in any way to the spiritual mind of Christ or to spiritual realities. Such are stupid, dull, irrelevant and absurd to him. No natural man is going to submit himself to spiritual rulers who are dealing with all the great spiritual realities of the Bible as they relate in a personal and intimate way to individual believers. Equally, spiritual elders will not attempt to maintain spiritual authority over unspiritual men. That would be an exercise in futility.

We can see then that Christian eldership belongs to a world apart, a world of preparation for the world to come. Eldership presupposes an extensive and expert knowledge and personal experience in things spiritual. The office presupposes spiritual discernment and penetration, a readiness to recognise genuine godliness and a sharpness to appreciate the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness.



Eldership presupposes an ability to apply spiritual principles to every area of life on earth. The essence of anti-spirituality or of worldliness is to live life to the full to the exclusion of God. Worldliness is to live for this world having banned God from it.

Spirituality by contrast is to delight in rendering worship to God and service to him. The more spiritual principles enter in and the more God is present the happier is the spiritual man. For him the prospect of having pastors who will pray for him, care for him and regather him should he begin to stray, is excellent. He would not have it otherwise. He is thankful to God that such a wise provision should be made. Likewise elders themselves are deeply grateful that they are in submission to each other, that they are not alone in their awesome task and that they and their families are subject to a spiritual oversight and guidance through a world beset with dangers.

## **5** *It is pastoral in character they watch over the flock*

The ultimate design of God is the conformity of all his people to the image of Christ. Paul declared his aim to present every man perfect in Christ (Col. 1:28). This process which we call sanctification is essentially corporate. Sanctification does not take place apart from the body of Christ. Paul created his own Greek word to describe what is involved. This word (*sunarmologoumene*), a compound, is translated in English as 'fitly framed together'. All parts of the spiritual building are fitted together perfectly (Eph. 2:21). Paul uses the word 'being fitted together' again in Ephesians 4:16. The concern of the head is for the health of the whole body. When therefore the elders teach, lead and rule they do so with the unity and health of the whole body in mind. Disciplinary action always affects the whole body and is to the advantage of the whole body. We read in Joshua that the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel. It appears that Achan and his family had rebelled by violating an express commandment not to loot, yet they had stolen and dissembled. As a consequence the whole nation suffered a humiliating defeat at Ai. The whole body was affected and the whole body was subjected to self-examination as the search was made, tribe by tribe and family by family. The discipline affected everyone.

Similarly when the apostle insisted on disciplinary action in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:1-7) he explained that 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump' (verse 6). The whole body was involved. In this particular case the whole church at Corinth was brought from a careless attitude to one of repentance and zeal (2 Cor. 7:11).

The nature of the authority wielded in church government has this additional weight behind it, namely, the well being of the whole body. If each person lived for himself only the moral force of correction would have

only that personal consideration to it. The individual could say, 'well be it on my own head, that is the end of the matter.' But 'none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone' (Romans 14:7). When Achan stole he affected the entire body in an adverse way of which he was only one part. Only the application of discipline could restore the whole body in such a way that 'the Lord turned away from the fierceness of his anger' (Joshua 7:26).

It should be remembered then that the authority represented in the eldership is one which represents not only the mind and wisdom of the head, even Christ, but his mind as it pertains to what is best for his whole body, the church.

## **6** *It is moral an account will be rendered*

By moral is meant a conformity to a standard of right behaviour, the performance of which will be judged in due course. The conscience is a potent factor in directing people to a way of life which is acceptable. But more powerful by way of motivation to what is right is the knowledge that an account will have to be rendered to God. The arm of the law is backed by moral authority inasmuch as it represents a call by God to the performance of that which is right. The call of a parent for the obedience of a child is backed by moral authority because it is a call to behaviour which is sanctioned by the law of God. God's law is backed by God's judgment and the great judgment day will bring all motives and actions to light. Included in the great judgment is the trial of believers and elders. Elders will be judged for their work (1 Pet. 5:4, 1 Cor. 3:8-15). Every man's work will be tried. If an elder's work is not performed according to the required rules it will be burned up. He himself will be saved but he will suffer loss (1 Cor. 3:15). Paul says that all believers must be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ. To be made manifest means not just to appear 'but to be laid bare, stripped of every outward facade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one's character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secrets, intimate sins of thought and deed, will be open to the scrutiny of Christ' (Philip Hughes on 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The elders will have to render an account for their work (Heb. 13:17). If recalcitrant members make the work heavy so that it is not a glad work as it ought to be but is done as the Amplified Version correctly translates the phrase in Hebrews 13:17 'with sighing and groaning', then let it be remembered that the authority represented in the eldership is a peculiarly moral one inasmuch as it is the performance of both elders and members as they relate to each other that will be judged.

The purpose of judging believers is not for punishment but for assessment. That which is worthless will be seen as such and that which is meritorious



will be acclaimed by God himself. The servant who has done well will receive his Lord's approval, 'well done, thou good and faithful servant.' He will be set over ten cities.

The effect of individual believers upon the body of which they form a part is particularly in focus when Paul asserts the same truth in Romans 14:12, 'So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.' That statement concludes a section in which the apostle pleads for behaviour within the church which will not cause others to stumble. Especially does he call within the context for the avoidance of legalism, of members judging one another for petty things.

The elders then represent a cause which will be brought to assessment. In that sense their authority has a moral quality of its own special character which will certainly be attested in the day when Christ judges his people.

**7** *It is momentous in character  
with joy, and not with grief,  
for that is unprofitable for you*

The NIV translates the latter clause of Hebrews 13:17, 'Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden for that would be of no advantage to you.' The sense seems to be that while the work is going on now it is either a joy or a burden but it should be remembered that the advantage of a good testimony will be revealed in the day of judgement and that will be an advantage of a momentous character. The sense in the KJV is quite different inasmuch as it infers that the joy or grief is experienced in the judgement day and the profit or loss is then. In other words the 'This they may do' is taken to refer to the account rendering of the future rather than the present work of watching now.

The GNB sometimes referred to as the TEV gives a futile and pathetic rendering (another warning that it is a popular rendering entirely unsuitable for pulpit work). That translation runs, 'If you obey them, they will do their work gladly; if not, they will do it with sadness, and that would be of no help to you.' The idea conveyed is that the issue at stake is merely one of helpfulness or otherwise. How puerile!

Surely the 'this may do' refers to the whole work of watching together with the assessment that is accumulating for which an account will be given. The work done is with joy or with grief. *Stenazontes* means more than grief. It means groaning. Elders know full well the meaning of groaning in their experience. They also know very well what a beautiful, joyful and glorious thing it is when God's people live together in unity and harmony.

We should in no way deprive Hebrews 13:17 of its reference to the future. All joy and groaning now by the elders has a relationship to the future assize or assessment. Will there be groaning then? If the 'this they may

do' refers both to the whole preceding clause and therefore both to the work of watching or oversight now, and the future judgement seat of Christ, there will be groaning then. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 confirms that their judgment will be a fiery one of reward or loss for all concerned. How that matter is reconciled to the perfect bliss and how misconstruction is to be avoided (i.e. the Roman Catholics use that passage to support purgatory) has been explained elsewhere (see chapter 10, the glory of the Church in *Local Church Practice*, Carey).

We see then that we ought to resist the idea that personal relationship to a local church with its government by eldership is a light matter of little consequence. It is a momentous issue because it brings into focus all our responsibilities toward the body of Christ. These responsibilities are not left 'in the air' to be obscure. They involve definite commitments and the elders are appointed not only to preserve a church from disorder or fragmentation but to build up and strengthen (Eph. 4:18). The issues involved are eternal issues. In other words they will be assessed and our place in eternity thereby determined.

The authority of elders can so easily be regarded as weak but in fact it is momentous because these men are Christ's instruments sent to us and set over us with the purpose of a happy eternity in view.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The authority of the elders is not a weak thing of little importance but by its very nature is momentous because it is the authority of Christ who himself will assess our performance and our place in eternity. It is a moral and spiritual authority in a peculiar sense since the laws of heaven are taught and applied. The authority of elders is 'churchly' since it extends to the local church alone. It is pastoral in nature because it discerns the needs of the body as a whole.

The nature of this authority invests the office with grave responsibility which causes both joy and groaning. Therefore, should there be one who lords it over the flock, it shows that person has misunderstood the issues entirely. The nature of this authority shows that members should have a profound respect for it. They are not required in any sense to esteem their elders as infallible but they should weigh very prayerfully and carefully the council, reproof, admonition and correction that is brought to them.



*This story of Bunyan's Life retold here by Pastor Colin Richards of Bedford is to celebrate the 350th Anniversary of Bunyan's birth and the 300th Anniversary of the publication of The Pilgrim's Progress.*

# A biography of Bunyan



THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PRODUCED AN UNUSUAL NUMBER OF OUTSTANDING men of God: John Owen, Richard Baxter, Thomas Goodwin, John Howe, Thomas Manton and John Flavel, to mention but a few, but of all the evangelicals of the seventeenth century, John Bunyan was the most remarkable.

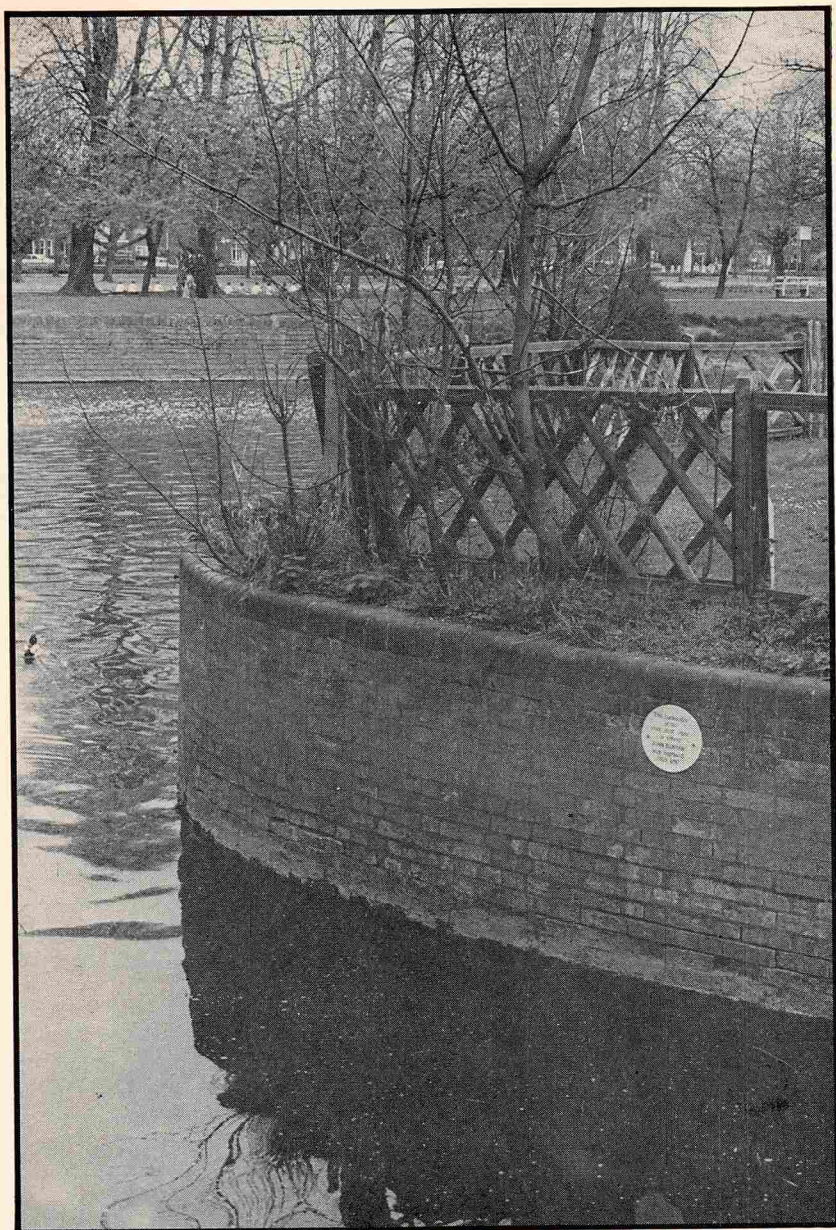
He was born in 1628 in the village of Elstow in a cottage which stood at the extreme eastern end of the parish quite near to the Hamlet of Harrowden. Little is known of his early years except what he wrote himself in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, his spiritual autobiography. The son of a poor tinker, he spent his childhood mending pots and pans and thus learning a trade which eventually was to become his own. He was grateful to his parents for the schooling that he had, for he writes: 'It pleased God to put into their hearts to put me to school to learn both to read and to write.' He attained, he says, 'according to the rate of other poor men's children', implying a very scanty education, and he adds, 'I did soon lose the bit I learnt long before the Lord did his gracious work of conversion upon my soul'. When Bunyan was barely 16 his mother died, and within a month his sister Margaret had left this world. Deprived of a softening influence so important at such an age, it is no wonder that he was guilty of 'wild and wilful ways' and became 'the very ringleader of all the youth'. He had few equals for 'cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy name of God'. Yet Bunyan believed the Lord spoke to him in 'fearful dreams' and 'dreadful visions' of the error of his ways. These impressions soon left him, and his various pleasures 'did quickly cut off the remembrance of them, as if they had never been'.

Three years before Bunyan's birth, Charles I (1625-1649) had ascended the throne. The King and Archbishop Laud pursued reckless policies including a programme of persecution for those who upheld 'Puritan' doctrine and practices. By 1642, England was in the grip of a Civil War. The bloody battles of this conflict between Royalists and Parliamentarians took place from the commencement of the war until 1646. It was in 1644, when Bunyan was 16, that he was called upon to join the Parliamentary Forces at Newport Pagnell some 13 miles north of Bedford. His soldiering days are difficult to piece together. His service lasted until 1647. He tells of his escape from death first from a musket bullet by a fellow soldier taking his place on duty, and then on another occasion through falling into a creek of the sea. Whether this mention of the sea means he was drafted to Ireland in 1645, we do not know. Neither can we be sure that he was ever engaged in active service. During the days at Newport Pagnell he would have heard many a sermon both by Puritan preachers at the Parish Church and by those acting as army Chaplains. He would have been given a Soldier's Pocket Bible first issued in 1643, and a Soldier's Catechism composed for the Parliamentary Army for encouragement and instruction printed in 1644.

In 1647, at the age of 19, Bunyan returned to Elstow and married. He says, 'My mercy was, to light upon a wife whose father was counted godly'. It was a struggle for existence. 'This woman and I . . . came together as poor as poor might be (not having so much household stuff as a dish or spoon betwixt us both) . . . Yet this she had for her part, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*, which her father had left her when he died.' The couple would sit and read these two books in their cottage at Elstow during the long winter evenings. 'These books' he informs us 'did beget with me some desire to religion.' He could now go to Church and 'very devoutly both say and sing as others did, and yet retaining my wicked life'.

The minister at Elstow Parish Church was Christopher Hall, a real 'Vicar of Bray'. He entered his living under Archbishop Laud, retained his position during the Commonwealth and four years after the Restoration of the Monarchy. It was laid down by law at this time that the clergy should read the King Charles' *Book of Sports*, so as to encourage the people to indulge in games on Sunday afternoons. This, Christopher Hall would not do. Bunyan tells us, 'One day amongst all the sermons our Parson made, his subject was, to treat of the Sabbath day, and of the evil of breaking that, either with labour, sports, or otherwise. . . . I went home when the sermon was ended with a great burden on my spirit.' A good dinner awaited him and he says, 'Before I had well dined the trouble began to go off my mind, and my heart returned to its old course.' That same afternoon he went to the stump of the Market Cross on the village green to play tip-cat. In his own words he describes what happened. 'Having struck it (the ball) one blow from the hole, just as I was about to strike it the





*The spot where Bunyan was baptized in the river Ouse is marked with a plaque. Of baptism Bunyan said, 'water baptism is a means of grace, and in it and by it sanctification is forwarded, and remission of sins more cleared and witnessed.'*

second time, a voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell?" At this I was put to an exceeding maze. I looked up to heaven, and it was as if I had with the eyes of my understanding seen the Lord Jesus looking down on me. . . . This conclusion was fastened on my spirit . . . that I had been a great and grievous sinner and that it was now too late for me to look after heaven, for Christ would not forgive me, nor pardon my transgressions.' He was given to serious thought. His heart began to 'sink in despair'. Miserable to sin, miserable not to sin, that was how he felt. Satan suggested he might as well be condemned for many sins as a few. And so he returned to his sport again. 'I found within me' says Bunyan, 'a great desire to take my fill of sin . . . that I might taste the sweetness of it. . . . I went on in sin with great greediness of mind.' For a whole month he was found 'playing the madman'. 'All this while,' he says, 'I knew not Jesus Christ, neither did I leave my sports and plays.'

Soon after this Bunyan became acquainted with a poor man who talked 'pleasantly of the Scriptures, and of the matters of religion' and 'falling into some love and liking to what he said, I betook me to my Bible, and began to take great pleasure in reading'. Ignorant of his heart and the need of a Saviour, he sought outward reformation. If he broke a commandment, he would say sorry, and try better next time. And he says 'I thought I pleased God as well as any man in England'. 'Thus I continued about a year . . . our neighbours did take me to be a very godly man, and a new and religious man . . . and indeed, so it was, though yet I knew not Christ, nor grace, nor faith, nor hope.' He loved bell ringing, but now his visits were to cease. 'I had taken much delight in ringing, but my conscience beginning to be tender, I thought such practice was but vain . . . yet my mind yet hankered.' He would lean against the doorway and watch, but the dread of judgment fell on him and so he kept away. He still enjoyed the village gatherings in the Moot Hall on the green. There he 'footed it well to the music'. 'It was a full year before I could quite leave that' he says—and the result of all this effort to improve himself? 'God' he said, 'cannot choose but now be pleased with me.'

All attempts at self-reformation had led to one result—hopeless failure. But God was at work, and the circumstances of his life were so to change that he was brought face to face with the Gospel. His employment at Elstow could not be enough to support a wife and a child—and a blind child at that—so he sought work in Bedford, a mile or so away. 'Upon a day the good providence of God did cast me to Bedford, to work upon my calling' he informs us 'and in one of the streets of that town, I came where there were three or four women sitting at a door in the sun, and talking about the things of God. . . . I drew near to hear what they said.' This was not prompted to satisfy his curiosity for he says 'I was now a brisk talker also myself in matters of religion . . . I heard but I understood not . . . for they were far above, out of my reach.' They spoke of 'the

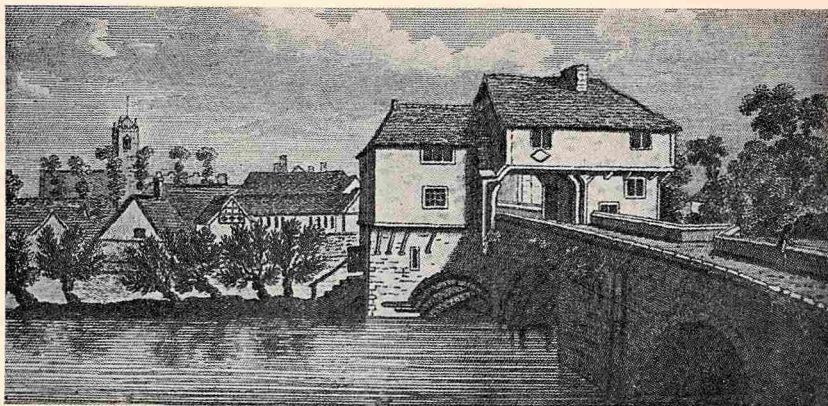


work of God in their hearts', also 'how they were convinced of their miserable state by nature, 'They talked how God had visited their souls with his love in the Lord Jesus' and with what words and promises they had been refreshed, comforted and supported 'against the temptations of the Devil'. They did 'condemn, slight, abhor, their own righteousness, as filthy and insufficient to do them any good . . . my own heart began to shake'. Now he began to mistrust his own vain confidence. 'A poor painted hypocrite' he felt. Bunyan had at last seen himself. He would often make it his business 'to be going again and again into the company of these poor people. . . . For I could not stay away,' he tells us. His mind was now 'so fixed on eternity, and on the things about the Kingdom of heaven that neither pleasures, nor profit, nor persuasion, nor threats, could loosen it, or make it let go its hold'.

The change arrested everyone's attention. Several false sects sought his allegiance, and not being able to discern their rights and wrongs, he gave himself to prayer that God would lead and direct him aright. 'The Bible was precious to me in those days,' he says. He read much and prayed that he might know 'the way to heaven and glory'. Bunyan went through much intense conflict of soul. Unsure as to whether he had faith, he was tempted to perform a miracle by saying to the puddle be dry and to the dry places be puddles. By resorting to earnest prayer, he was delivered from this evil. Then he received a vision, the interpretation which led him to feel himself in a forlorn and sad condition, and yet gave him a hunger to be converted. He was disquieted about election, and as to the possibility that the day of grace might be over. Verses of scripture provided him occasional comfort—but a comfort he soon lost. He longed for Christ to call him. 'Gold!' he said, 'Could it have been gotten for gold, what could I have given for it? Had I had a whole world, it had all gone ten thousand times over for this, that my soul might have been in a converted state.' 'About this time,' he tells us, 'I began to break my mind to those poor people in Bedford, to tell them my condition . . . when they had heard, they told Mr. Gifford of me.'

It is important that we know a little of the life of Mr. John Gifford ('holy' Mr. Gifford, as Bunyan once described him), since he exerted a tremendous influence over the life and ministry of this 'Immortal Dreamer'.

John Gifford held the rank of major in the Royalist Army at the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1648, an attempt was made to win back the country for the King by the Kentish people—and one of the leaders of this uprising was John Gifford. All went well for a time. Several towns and outposts were retrieved from the Parliamentarians. The Royalists gathered strength and marched to London. Just outside Maidstone they came face to face with the Parliamentary Army (famous for the sword in its hand and the high praises of God upon its lips) led by the celebrated General

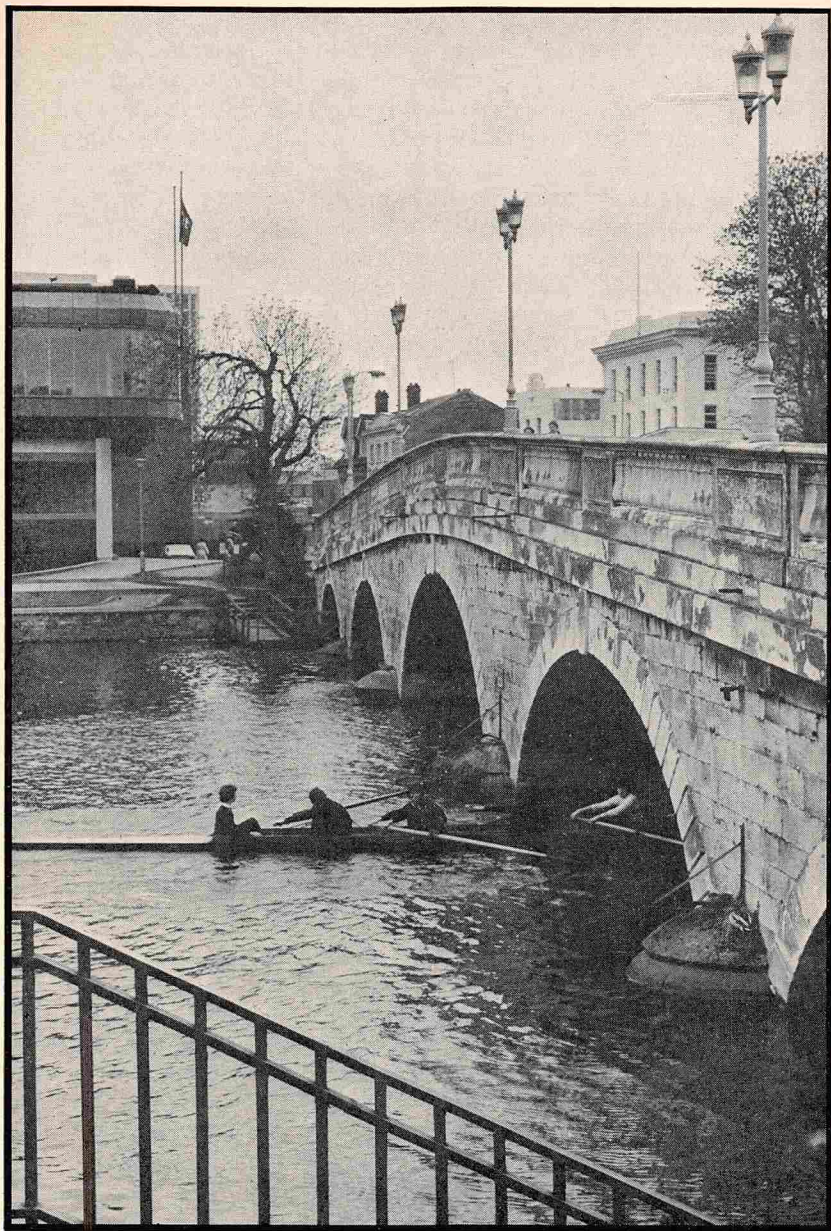


*The Bridge and prison house as it used to be.*

Fairfax. After a little struggle the Royalists were defeated. Gifford and eleven others were sentenced to death. The night before the execution, the prisoners were allowed to receive visitors and Gifford's sister, on reaching the gaol, found the guards asleep and all the prisoners except Gifford stupefied by drink. He escaped and hid in a ditch for three days until the search was called off. Disguised and smuggled to London, he hid until it was safe to move on. Gifford made his way to Bedford and set up business as an apothecary. He was a vile man—gambler, drunkard, and blasphemous. The last sin made him a fierce opponent of a handful of Independent Christians which worshipped in Bedford. One evening Gifford had gambled his last £15 and lost it, and went home in a fearful rage. When he had subdued a little, he picked up a book by Mr. Bolton, rector of Broughton, near Northampton, called *Death, Judgment, Hell and Heaven*. As he read, he saw himself as a sinner, and saw the only refuge for sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ. On becoming a Christian, he immediately sought the little company of Independents. At first they were suspicious of him, but eventually they admitted him to their fellowship. In 1650, after much prayer, they formed themselves into a church, and appointed Gifford as their pastor. In 1653, the church and congregation moved to the Anglican church building called St. John's, when Gifford was offered the Rectorship of St. John's Church by the Board of Triers set up by Oliver Cromwell during the Protectorate. Five years later he died. It is said that Bunyan immortalised him as the Interpreter in his *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Bunyan visited Gifford in 1653 and joined himself to the Church. As a result of Gifford's preaching, Bunyan says he 'received more conviction', he saw the 'inward wretchedness' of his heart. He felt worse and worse.





300 years ago the unrivalled allegory 'The Pilgrim's Progress' was completed in the town gaol situated at the end of the old river bridge. The modern bridge now occupies that site while contemporary architecture impresses its personality upon the scene. The old engraving gives us an idea of what the spot used to be like.

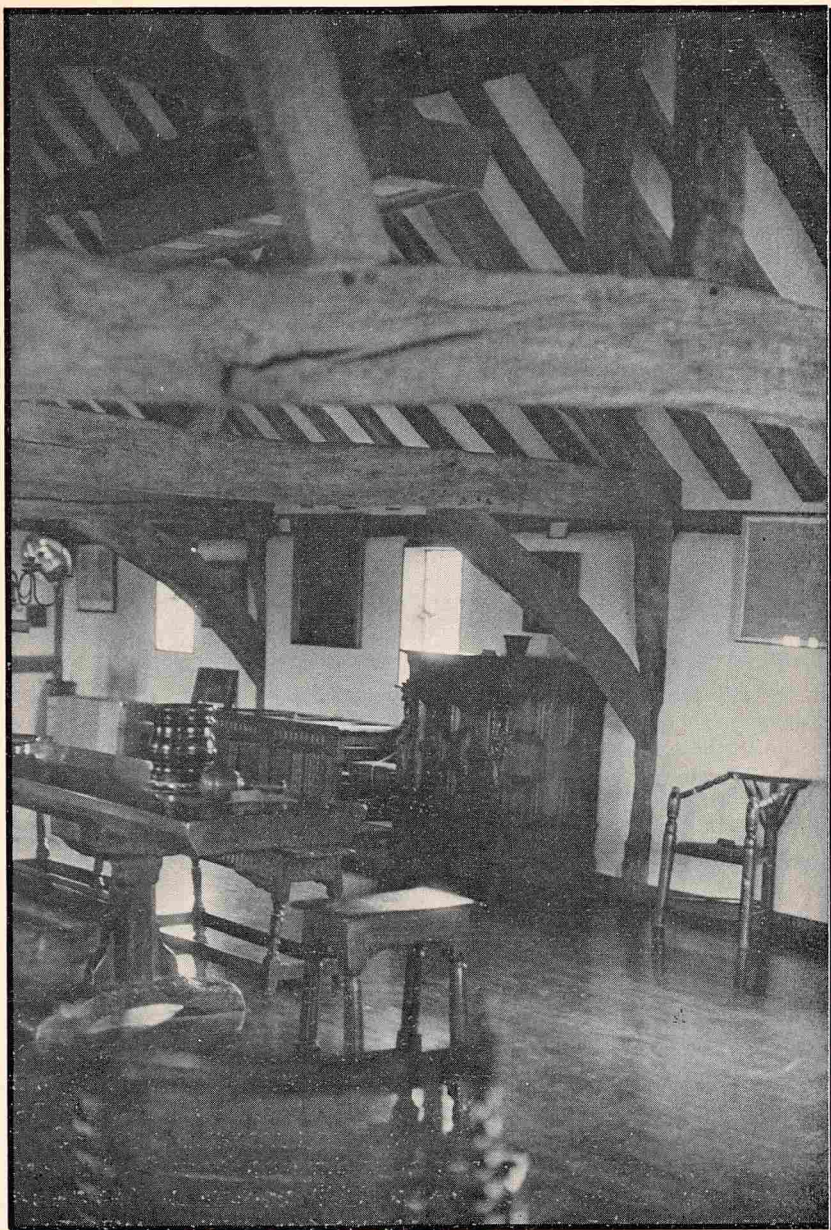
His conscience was so tender he says, 'I could not tell how to speak my words, for fear I should misplace them'. He came to see that he 'wanted a perfect righteousness to present me without fault before God, and this righteousness was nowhere to be found, but in the person of Jesus Christ'. Bunyan eventually received assurance of his sins being forgiven through a sermon by John Gifford on the text in Song of Solomon chapter 4 verse 1. The subject dealt with was the love of Christ. On his way home to Elstow, Bunyan repeated twenty times the words 'Thou art my love'. Each time they waxed warmer and warmer to his heart. 'The words began to make me look up' he says. Then a question came, 'But is it true?' 'At last I began to give place to the word which with power did over and over make the joyful sound with my soul, "Thou art my love, and nothing shall separate thee from my love"'. . . . Now was my heart filled full of comfort and hope, and now I could believe that my sins should be forgiven me.' He had great joy. 'I could not tell how to constrain till I got home. I thought I could have spoken of his love and have told of his mercy to me, even to the very crows that sat upon the ploughed fields.'

Within a month Bunyan 'had lost much of the life and savour' of his new found joy. 'A very great storm came down upon me, twenty times worse than all I had met before,' he says. Doubts as to the fact of God, of Christ, and of the truth of the Scriptures came to him. Bunyan had fallen into the Slough of Despond and was in the grip of Giant Despair. It was hard to shed a tear. He deplored his hard heart. He punctually attended the Church. Yet, he found it irksome to read the Bible and prayer was nigh impossible. The tempter laboured to confound and distract him. In his time of need the word of God was a source of comfort and now a constant means of refreshing and strengthening him. One of his biographers says of him, 'Like his pilgrim, Christian, Bunyan had climbed the hill difficulty, had seen the lions' fierce eyes, and heard their angry roar; but at last he found himself within the Chamber called Peace from whence he could delight his mind with a sight of the Delectable Mountain'.

Bunyan was baptised in 1653 by Mr. Gifford in an inlet of the River Ouse, along Duck Mill Lane. The service was probably held at the dead of night for scorn and persecution was the lot of those who chose to witness their faith in this fashion. Two years later Bunyan moved to Bedford to live nearer the fellowship, of which he was a deacon, and to find more work to support his growing family. It was in the same year that Bunyan's wife died as did his pastor, John Gifford. John Burton succeeded Gifford and ministered to the church from 1655 until his death in 1660.

By this time Bunyan was giving evidence of his gift of preaching and it was not long before he was in great demand over a wide area of country. The spiritual experience through which he had passed had done more to prepare him for his life's work than any academic training could have done. Only by much persuasion could he bring himself to expound the Scriptures. He says 'The which at the first did much dash and abash my





*Anyone travelling by road in England is well-advised to use a detailed road handbook which marks places of interest. It will be seen that Moot Hall (an internal view of which is shown above), is marked adjacent to Elstow. Moot hall was a public hall. Here Bunyan used 'to step it out', which was perhaps the then version of the present day 'rock 'n roll'.*

spirit, yet being still by them desired and entreated, I consented.' It was only in private first, and those who heard clearly perceived that God had called him to the work of the ministry. Believers and unbelievers in the surrounding villages heard him gladly and souls were led to the Saviour through his labours. He was conscious of an urge within him to preach. 'He did find . . . a secret pricking forward thereto.' The snare of self-glorification was a real threat to him, 'For' he adds 'I was most sorely afflicted with the fiery darts of the Devil.' The Church having set him apart for the work of the ministry, he preached not only 'to and amongst them that believed, but also to offer the Gospel to those who had not received the faith thereof. . . .' His influence was unbounded. People 'came in to hear the word by hundreds and from all parts, though upon sundry and divers accounts.' He sought, he says, 'for a word as might lay hold of and awaken the conscience. . . . I preached what I did smartingly feel. . . . Thus I went for the space of two years crying out against men's sins and their fearful state because of them.' 'When I have been preaching,' he says, 'my heart hath often with great earnestness cried to God, that he could make the word effectual to the salvation of the soul.' He studied his sermons, gave due preparation and had notes beside him. He formed the habit of committing his sermons to writing when he had preached them. In 1658 he preached a sermon on Luke chapter 16 verses 9-21. This was published under the title *A few sighs from hell or the groans of a damned soul*, and had probably been delivered from the pulpit of his friend, John Gibbs, minister of Newport Pagnell, who wrote a preface to the book. He was despised and slandered. 'The world rages' he said, 'they stamp and shake their heads, the Lord help me to take all they shall do with patience.' Bunyan came under severe criticism for preaching in Anglican churches. In March 1658 he entered a pulpit in Eaton Socon and admonished the people. An indictment was brought against Bunyan at the Assizes for doing it.

The charges were never published, but the eye of the law was vigilant. Bunyan was a marked man and carefully watched.

1660 was an eventful year. The church lost first its pastor, with the death of John Burton, and then its building. This was the year in which the Monarchy was restored and Charles II (1660-1685) ascended the throne. With the restoration of the Monarchy came the restoration of the Anglican Church as it was before the Civil War. The Act of Uniformity was prepared in 1660 and passed Parliament and became law in 1662. It demanded the complete acceptance of the Anglican Prayer Book in every jot and tittle and as a result almost 2,000 ministers of Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist persuasion resigned their livings. Although this Act did not become law until 1662, non-conformists were harassed from 1660 onwards. On leaving St. John's, the Church met for a time in the home of John Fenn, a 'Hatter' of the High Street. Later, as persecution increased with the passing of the Act of Uniformity, the Corporation Act,



the Five Mile Act, and the Conventicle Acts, their meetings had to be held in secret—in a barn, a stable, a cowshed, or even the open-air, where it was said ‘God did visit their souls’.

In the early autumn of 1660, the Bedfordshire County Magistrate lost no time in sending forth an order, ‘For the public reading of the liturgy of the Church of England.’ Some time afterwards, Francis Wingate, a local magistrate, issued a warrant for Bunyan’s arrest. Bunyan knew he was likely at any moment to be silenced. It was at this period he re-married, obviously conscious of the threat of imprisonment and the needs of his family if such a thing occurred.

On November 12th, 1660, Bunyan made his way to a farmhouse in the hamlet of Lower Samsell, some 13 miles south of Bedford. The congregation was uneasy, but Bunyan would not forsake his path of duty. He prayed, and having announced his text he began expounding John 9, verse 35. The door opened and the meeting was broken up as an officer of the law arrested Bunyan and marched him across the fields to the house of Francis Wingate, a mile or so away at Harlington.

There Bunyan stayed for the night, and the next morning Wingate interrogated him. He was rather surprised to discover that the people listening to Bunyan were ordinary folk and were armed with nothing more lethal than Bibles. After some lengthy arguments, at which Bunyan was never second best, Wingate lost his temper and told Bunyan he was an obstinate fellow and would break the neck of his absurd meetings.\* With this he was marched off to the County Gaol at Bedford.

The County Gaol was on the corner of Silver Street and High Street, opposite the Barley Mow Inn. After seven weeks the Quarter Sessions for the county were held in Bedford at Herne Chapel, which was by the side of the Grammar School. The date was June 1661. The indictment was, ‘That John Bunyan, of the town of Bedford, labourer, being a person of such and such condition hath devilishly and perniciously abstained from coming to Church to hear Divine Service and is a common upholder of several unlawful meetings and conventions, to the great disturbance and distraction of the good subjects of the Kingdom and contrary to the law of our sovereign Lord, the King.’ Bunyan defended himself skilfully but the prejudice and malice of those in authority won the day. In spite of his unanswerable defence, he was found guilty and sentenced to prison for three months, which eventually dragged on into twelve years. He was warned that if after three months in gaol he would not submit to go to Church and leave off preaching, he would be banished from the realm. If he returned after banishment, then he would be ‘stretched by the neck’. After three months no release came. Six months later there seemed some

\*Three grand-daughters of Francis Wingate became members of the Church to which Bunyan belonged and a great grand-daughter became wife to the Rev. S. Saunderson, the second minister in succession to Bunyan.

hope, for the Assizes were to be held in Bedford and Bunyan hoped to get a hearing in open court. His wife, Elizabeth, made her way to the Swan Chambers and gained an audience with the Lord Chief Justice of England, Sir Matthew Hale, sitting with Justices Chester and Twisden. The scene is described very vividly by Bunyan in his *Grace Abounding*. The woman defended her husband from the abuses of Twisden and Chester and pleaded with them that her husband should be called from prison and allowed to state his own case. Hale was sympathetic. But Twisden and Chester overruled him. If ever a woman bettered men in argument and dignity, Elizabeth Bunyan did on this occasion. Bunyan's twelve years stay in prison was by no means easy. Prison life in the seventeenth century was hard to face. If the gaol was not overcrowded and the gaoler sympathetic, life might be relatively comfortable, but often space was crowded beyond endurance, the heat and cold, the filth and disease made conditions almost intolerable and a vindictive gaoler could devise additional refinements of suffering. Death in prison was always a likely possibility and financial ruin inevitable, since often one's personal goods were confiscated. Bunyan found it hard to be separated from his family. He says, 'The parting with my wife and poor children hath often been to me in prison as the pulling of my flesh from the bones—especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer to my heart than all besides.' It was Mary who was sent to the prison to take her father his meal each evening. 'Oh, the thoughts of the hardship. I thought my poor blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces. Poor child! thought I, what sorrow thou must have for thy portion in this world. Thou must be beaten, must beg, must suffer hunger, cold, nakedness and a thousand calamities, though I cannot now endure the wind should blow upon thee.' He says, 'I engaged God to take care of my concernments. . . . I never knew what it was for God to stand by me at all times as I have found him since I came in thither; Jesus Christ has never been so real to me as now.'

Whilst in prison, Bunyan was joined by two members of his Church, John and Samuel Fenn, and also by the rectors of Pertenhall and Cranfield, John Donne and William Wheeler. John Donne having been ejected from his Parish Church, became the pastor of a non-conformist community at Keysoe. He was arrested one night while preaching to his congregation and so he and sixty of his members were brought to Bedford Gaol. There the three ministers in bonds for the Gospel's sake preached in turn to their fellow prisoners. Whilst in prison Bunyan was visited daily by his friends and members of his congregation. It is estimated that twelve books came from his pen during these years, including *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. He was even allowed occasional excursions from prison to preach. Little is known about the last six years of Bunyan's stay in the Bedford County Gaol. He wrote only two books in this period, perhaps an indication that he had to work longer to support his family who were becoming more and more impoverished as the years dragged by. His labour consisted of making boot laces which he would



sell to pedlars or with his blind child he would sit outside the prison gates and dispose of them to passers-by.

In 1672 Charles II signed the Declaration of Religious Indulgence, an Act which suspended all penal law 'in matters ecclesiastical' against non-conformists, and gave them the right to obtain licences to worship publicly in places registered for such purposes. Bunyan, like many of his contemporaries, was released and given freedom to preach the Gospel he longed to proclaim. He was immediately appointed Pastor of his own congregation to serve with John Whiteman and Samuel Fenn, two of the elders who had kept the church together during the years of persecution. A little later a barn and orchard were purchased for their place of meeting. The extent of his influence can be gauged by the fact that when he obtained his own preaching licence he did so for 25 other ministers and in addition licences for 30 buildings in 5 counties. He became affectionately known as 'Bishop Bunyan'.

Much of his time was now spent preaching, and although his influence was extensive, he still had to face opposition. Several books were written against him and an attempt was made to scandalize his name. The story of this—which involved a woman named Agnes Beaumont of Edworth has been re-written in a book published by the Strict Baptist Historical Society entitled *Behind Mr. Bunyan*.

1673 saw the repeal of the Act of Religious Indulgence and the Test Act put in its place. By this piece of legislation non-conformists, in order to qualify for any respectable position, had to receive a certificate from the clergy. Non-conformists were once again in a position of peril. Licences were withdrawn and preaching became illegal. Bunyan expected imprisonment. Three years later he was back in prison. But his stay was short, about six months. He was released in June 1677, due to the influence of that great Puritan, John Owen, who had once been Cromwell's Chaplain. There is some considerable dispute about this period of his life. Was this second period of imprisonment in the County Gaol or the Town Gaol? Did he write *The Pilgrim's Progress* during his first period of imprisonment or second? What *is* clear is that this literary and religious masterpiece was first published on February 8th 1678. It was an immediate success and now, 300 years later, it has been translated into over 200 languages. Bunyan lived ten more years after his release from his second spell of imprisonment and during that time he wrote about forty of the sixty books that came from his pen. Perhaps the best known pieces from this period are *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* and *The Holy War*; the latter considered by some a close second to *The Pilgrim's Progress* for its genius.

With the death of Charles II in 1685, James II (1685-1688) became King. James wanted to re-establish the Catholic faith in this country. Parliament made him hold fast to the Test Act of 1673 which excluded Roman

Catholics from positions of public trust, and called for the King to proclaim against all who dissented from the Church of England.

The days which followed were days of the 'reign of terror' led by that infamous Judge Jeffreys and his bloody Assize. Bunyan again expected any moment to be ordered to prison. In fact he drew up a will making over all his possessions to his wife so that if he was sent to prison his goods could not be confiscated. But he remained free to the end to preach and write. He was always in demand as a preacher. He could command in London a congregation of 1,200 persons at the early hour of 7 o'clock on a working day in the winter time. One Lord's day in London, 3,000 came to hear him. His ministry appealed to the rich and influential as well as those of a humble and meek station in life. John Owen once told Charles II he would willingly exchange all his learning for the tinker's power of touching men's hearts. There were those who would have liked Bunyan to have come to London to live, but he would not leave his people at Bedford.

One morning in August 1688, Bunyan set out for London via Reading in order to settle a quarrel between a father and a son. Successful in his mission, he was caught in a storm but rode on. Drenched to the skin, he eventually reached the home of John Strudwick of Holborn. He was hurried to bed, a sick man. After a few days he was a little better and went to preach at John Gammon's Meeting House in Petticoat Lane. It was his last sermon. His text, John chapter 1 verse 13. When he had finished preaching, it was obvious to all that he was far from well. He had a fever for ten days (pneumonia) and lay dying. Those around him asked what could be done. 'Brothers,' he said, 'I desire nothing more than to be with Christ which is far better.' With outstretched arms he cried, 'Take me for I come to thee.' He was buried in Bunhill Fields, the famous non-conformist burial ground.

No better description of his passing could be given than his own account of the departure of Mr. Valiant-for-Truth in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. 'Then,' said he, 'I am going to my father; and though with great difficulty I am got thither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and my skill to him that can get it. My marks and my scars I carry with me to be a witness that I have fought his battles who will now be my Rewarder. When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the riverside, into which as he went he said, "Death where is thy sting?" and as he went down deeper he said, "Grave, where is thy victory?" So he passed over and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.'



# Bunyan's Biblical beliefs and Bedford today

*Colin Richards tells us what Bunyan believed as he is remembered during this the 350th year since his birth.*

BEDFORD HAS ARRANGED A VARIETY OF meetings this year to commemorate its most famous citizen—the tinker-cum-preacher John Bunyan. A civic service; a visit by Dr. Paisley on behalf of the Trinitarian Bible Society; Dr. Lloyd-Jones speaking on 'The Man and his message'; flower festivals with such themes as Bunyan's early years, Grace Abounding, and the Pilgrim's Progress; lectures by notable scholars including Dr. Christopher Hill who is reputed to be a Marxist; a pop' style cantata; a contemporary drama production called 'Pilgrim' and a commemoration concert with music by Vaughan Williams. Some of these events mercifully have passed, some are yet to come!

One newspaper commented on the disapproval that Bunyan would have shown at the arrangement of some of these meetings if it were only possible for him to speak! Obviously there is still some discernment left in Bedford even if the children of the world appear wiser than the children of light! When Roger Sharrocks of King's College, London, and Christopher Hill of Balliol College, Oxford, spoke at a local college on aspects of Bunyan and his life, both were agreed that this 'Immortal Dreamer' was a Calvinist. Yet it is doubtful whether some of the sponsors of a Ter-Centenary Crusade which is seeking to proclaim Bunyan's message to Bunyan's town are aware of the fact or even know what a Calvinist is.

Much has been said and written about Bunyan as a man, little about his message. What did Bunyan believe

and preach? Unlike many religious writers past and present it is not difficult to discover the content of Bunyan's beliefs. His doctrine pervades the whole of his writings and is clear for all to see. In 1672 he wrote a treatise entitled 'A Confession of my faith and a reason of my practice'. In the first part of this literary work, we have the substance of his christian convictions.

He believed 'that all the holy scriptures are the words of God'. A belief in an infallible and inerrant Bible was the foundation of his creed.

'I believe, that in the Godhead, there are three persons . . . that these three are in nature, essence, and eternity equally one.' He laid great stress on the divine nature of the Lord Jesus Christ and his specific mission to this earth to be the only sacrifice for the sins of men. He writes, 'I believe . . . that the righteousness and redemption, by which we that believe stand just before God, as saved from the curse of the law, is the righteousness and redemption of this child Jesus; the God-Man, the Lord's Christ. It consisteth I say, in his personal fulfilling the law for us, to the utmost requirements of the justice of God.'

Bunyan knew the awful plight of all men because of their guilt and corruption and the only answer to that dilemma. 'I believe . . . that the righteousness that saveth the sinner from the wrath to come is properly, and personally Christ's and ours but as we have union with him; God by grace imparting it to us.'

What did Bunyan mean when he told all men that they were sinners? Does man have any ability to turn to God or to co-operate with God in his salvation? 'I believe, we being sinful creatures in ourselves, that no good thing done by us can procure of God the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But that the imputation thereof is an act of grace; a free gift without our deserving.'

To Bunyan faith was that empty hand that takes the salvation that Christ has freely provided and secured. 'I believe, that this faith, as it respecteth the imputation of this righteousness for justification before God, doth put forth itself, in such acts, as purely respecteth the offer of a gift. It receiveth, accepteth of, embraceth, or trusteth to it.'

Why do some men believe and others not? Bunyan had no doubts as to the answer. 'I believe that faith . . . is not to be found with any but those in whom the Spirit of God by mighty power doth work it. . . . I believe that this faith is effectively wrought in none, but those which before the world were appointed unto glory.'

Did this man believe in election then? Listen to him again. 'I believe that election is free and permanent being founded in grace and the unchangeable will of God. . . . I believe that the decree, the choice, or election was before the foundation of the world, and so before the elect themselves had being in themselves.'

An election upon foreseen faith was no answer for Bunyan to dispel the difficulties of this particular doctrine. 'I believe, that the decree of election is so far off from making works in us foreseen, the grounds or cause of the choice; that it containeth in the bowels of it, not only the persons, but the graces that accompany their salvation.' God's grace in the salvation of men, to Bunyan, was invincible. 'I believe,

that there is not an impediment attending the election of God, that can hinder their conversion and eternal salvation.' In his preaching he wanted his hearers to know their utter helplessness to turn to God and the absolute sovereignty of God to save them. 'I believe, that to effectual calling, the Holy Ghost must accompany the word of the Gospel, and that with mighty power: I mean that calling, which of God is made to be the fruit of electing love . . . otherwise men will not, cannot, hear and turn . . . men by nature are not only dead in sins but enemies in their minds, by reason of wicked works.'

His view of election did not hinder his passionate concern for the lost. 'I believe . . . that election doth not forestall or prevent the means, which are of God appointed to bring us to Christ, to grace and glory, but rather he putteth a necessity upon their use and effect thereof because they are chosen to be brought to heaven that way: that is, by the faith of Jesus Christ, which is the end of effectual calling.'

Bunyan preached with great earnestness to the lost that he might have them saved. He had no difficulty in presenting the full and free Gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ. He writes: 'that the offer of this righteousness (Christ's imputed righteousness) as tendered in the Gospel, is to be received by faith,' or again, 'For by the word that calleth us is Jesus Christ held forth to us and offered to be our righteousness.'

He did not believe that election deterred assurance. 'I believe that no man can know his election but by his calling.' Later, when dealing with the effects of calling: 1. Faith; 2. Hope; 3. Repentance; under the title Hope he writes: ' . . . Whoso staggereth at the certainty of his calling, cannot comfortably hope for share in eternal life.'



His Gospel was a Gospel to all without distinction dependent on God to save whom he would. 'Effectual calling is like that word of Christ that raised Lazarus from the dead; a word that was attended with an arm that was omnipotent. "Lazarus come forth." It was a word to the dead, but not only so, it was a word for the dead; a word that raised him from the dead; a word that outwent all opposition; and that brought him forth of the grave; though bound hand and foot therein.' The world to come found a large place in Bunyan's teaching. 'I believe, he (Jesus) shall come again in glory and sit in judgment on all flesh . . . I believe that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust'. . . . 'I believe that those who die impenitent, shall be tormented with the devil and his angels, and shall be cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.'

Heaven received equal attention. 'I believe that when he comes, his saints shall have a reward of grace, for the work and labour of love they showed to his name and the world.'

Bunyan ought to be a source of embarrassment to the majority of people who are seeking to remember the life and work of this remarkable Christian. Many have paid tribute to his literary genius without paying close attention to his Biblical convictions. This is to divorce a man's art from himself. It is true that a man's art may be greater than himself (or of course less). And this is particularly true of a preacher who experiences unusual anointings of the Spirit of God for the discharge of his labours. But to insist on no vital connection between art and the artist is sheer nonsense. To admire the genius of Bunyan's best known work 'The Pilgrim's Progress from this world to that which is to come' and to see Christian, the chief character of this allegory, as a self-portrait

of the author and then to reject the Gospel that made the man and his book is blatantly inconsistent.

During June a service and floral tribute was held at the Bunyan statue conducted by the Bishop of St. Albans. This man would find it hard to contend for that conviction so ably summarised in a title of a book written by Bunyan 'Justification by an imputed righteousness; or no way to heaven but by Jesus Christ.' Earlier this year a lecture was given on 'Bunyan's significance today' in which another Anglican argued that Bunyan spoke to us as 'a prisoner of conscience' like Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Steve Biko. All men, he contended, go on a pilgrimage and some suffer for their 'faith'.

These men claim to find an identity with Bunyan only in his 'experience' and in so doing are simply following the curve of secular existentialism. This experience is void of content and ultimately inexplicable. For them the line of continuity from the saints of the distant past to the present is one of experience and not of dogma.

Bunyan would never have allowed his experience to be separated from the convictions he derived from the Bible. The statue in Bedford shows Bunyan holding a book in his hand, and written on one side of the statue are words from the *Pilgrim's Progress*: 'the best of books in his hand', a clear reference to the Bible. Now to divorce this prisoner of conscience from the book to which his conscience was totally subjected is to blur the picture of this man. A more fitting tribute would have been to have laid a wreath at the foot of the statue to symbolize the virtual death of the convictions that made Bunyan one of the masters of historic Christianity.

There is no doubt that Bunyan adhered to that system of teaching called 'Calvinism'. One of his lesser known works is entitled 'Reprobation Asser-

ted' in which he deals with the reverse of election: the eternal decree of God to pass by some sinful men and assign them for their sin to eternal damnation. He would have had no sympathy for the easy believism of today, where men can at will decide to let God save them or not. In 'The Acceptable Sacrifice' he wrote: 'Conversion is not the smooth, easy-going process some men think it, otherwise man's heart would never have been compared to fallow ground and God's word to a plough. The fallow ground must be ploughed and ploughed, and even after that soundly harrowed, else there will be but slender harvest.' Bunyan demanded more than a mere profession of Christianity for entrance into the Kingdom of God. In a volume 'The Barren Fig Tree, or the Doom and Downfall of the Fruitless Professor' he says: 'Where is the fruit of this repentance? Where is thy watching, thy fasting, thy praying against the remainder of corruption? Where is thy self-abhorrence, thy blushing before God for the sin that is yet behind? Where is thy tenderness of the name of God and his ways? Where is thy self-denial and contentment? How dost thou show before men the truth of thy turning to God?' Yet Bunyan's 'Calvinism' was in no way extreme. He freely offered Christ to men and all men without distinction. One of his books was based on the text 'Beginning at Jerusalem' (Luke 24:47) and was titled: 'The Jerusalem Sinner Saved: or good news for the vilest of men being an help for despairing souls: showing that Jesus Christ would have mercy in the first place offered to the biggest of sinners.' His doctrinal stance was well balanced so that at times he speaks against those who stand to the right and to the left of historic Christianity. This is seen clearly in his handling of the law of God. He wrote on this matter in a book called: 'Of the law and a

Christian: or the Christian released from the law as it thundereth from Sinai, by faith in Christ, yet we must obey it in love as holy, just, and good.' It must not be forgotten that John Bunyan would have had some misgivings about those who hold to Reformed Baptist convictions. This may have been due to his own fallibility but he did not believe in any form of strict communion (he dealt with this in his book: 'Differences in Judgment about water baptism: no bar to communion.') And although he held to believers' baptism by immersion himself 'I own water baptism to be God's ordinance' he adds 'but I make no idol of it.' By which, he meant, 'I dare not say, no matter whether water baptism be practised or no. But it is not a stone in the foundation of a church, no not respecting order; it is not, to another, a sign of my sonship with God; it is not the door into fellowship with the saints, it is no church ordinance.'

The Church at Bedford of which he was Pastor acted consistently with these convictions. All were received into fellowship who gave evidence of true conversion, whether they were baptized or not. Incidentally the church also refused to transfer members to churches that insisted on baptism by immersion as a prerequisite for membership.

A careful study of this man's life and writings has much to teach both the secular and religious world. This is certainly true of us who claim to be heirs of his doctrine (even if not of all his practices). We are faced with a timely warning. John Bunyan calls us to rediscover Biblical preaching possessed of evangelical fervour. But let us beware lest the concern among us to reform the structure of the local church and inter-church relationships causes us to deviate from his worthy example.



*Some years ago a discerning pastor had reason to visit England for some time during which he had opportunity to hear a number of sermons in a variety of evangelical churches. He declared that not one sermon bore any relevance to the twentieth century. They could all have been copied from sermon books of a hundred, two hundred or three hundred years ago! There was nothing in them to imply, 'This is for you, today, now!' Yet everything in true preaching should convey powerfully the message that this Gospel is the most important and urgent matter for you at this time, now!*

*Rod Badams by no means deals with all the aspects of what makes preaching relevant, but helpfully draws attention to one particular aspect illustrating it with helpful examples.*

## A Context for our Preaching

SOME OF TODAY'S MODERN PURITANS DO WELL IN THEIR EMPHASIS ON SOUND, balanced and biblical preaching. It is also encouraging to observe that in many cases the wholesome content is preached with conviction, passion and earnestness.

Many would say that these twin features were all that is required to ensure faithful preaching. But there is, I believe, a third essential ingredient of Gospel preaching, without which the message will be less effective. This third ingredient is a proper context.

Content and conviction are, or should be, unaltering from generation to generation. But the context is changing all the time. Each new Sunday presents a new context for the Gospel message. Since the previous Sunday, some have died, others have been born, political changes and unexpected events have occurred. The context is always changing.

The function of Gospel preaching is to be the means of God's grace in salvation. Faith comes by hearing and, in order to be heard, the preacher must preach in the context of the everyday life of his hearers. What is filling their minds and hearts today? What are their thoughts and emotions today? What are their needs, known and unknown, today? The preacher needs to consider this, so that the unchanging truth of the Gospel may be applied to his hearers, by way of their uppermost thoughts and concerns.

For instance, is there in your town a major industrial dispute; a shutdown with many redundancies; a sudden calamity involving death, destruction and injury; a breakdown of power supplies; a risk to health; a snowstorm which has cut off all main road links? All these fill the thoughts of men and women, and contribute toward the immediate context for preaching.

The preacher can use all these to remind of and to urge the only real security, a soul anchored at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

However sound the content, and with whatever conviction or eloquence the message is winged on its way to the hearers, it is less likely to affect the hearers if it is off-target, and not in context. The context cannot be borrowed from past centuries, even if inspiration can.

A cricketer may have a fine, expensive, new cricket ball, and a mighty strong bowling arm, but unless he bowls at the wickets, he is unlikely to achieve anything at all.

Preachers in our day who are seeking to be carbon copies of the seventeenth-century Puritans are seriously out of context, though their content may be faultless, and their conviction unquestioned.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is one who pleads for a preacher to be aware of his congregation: 'We must assess our congregations and our people, and we must deal with them as human beings. Remembering that "he who winneth souls is wise" we must take advantage of anything and everything that will bring home the truth of the Gospel to people'.<sup>1</sup>

There is a sense of urgency about this, for opportunities and contexts do not recur. Time moves on to new contexts and new opportunities, but how many times have former ones been missed?

Dr. Lloyd-Jones makes the point that preachers in the eighteenth century used the occurrence of an earthquake in Lisbon in 1751 to 'bring home to people the fleeting nature of life, and to enforce their call to repentance'.<sup>2</sup>

'An earthquake makes people think, as does a tornado, or hurricane; and so they give the preacher an opportunity. . . . There are times when our hearts are tender, and we are more likely to respond. It is the essence of wisdom, it is indeed but common sense, that we should take advantage of all these things,'<sup>3</sup> he adds.

It must be stressed that from start to finish the task is to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not preach earthquakes but Scripture! We are not to be political commentators, nor social revolutionaries, nor welfare champions, but preachers of the Gospel to lost sinners, and of the upbuilding word to the saved. Yet all this must be presented in a relevant context!

We must not assume that the days when the unsaved will attend public worship are gone for ever. We need to keep alive our concern to encourage the people to come to church, and then the Gospel must be preached in their context. This will enliven the preaching and the listening and will shatter the illusion of many that the Christian message is not relevant to today's world.

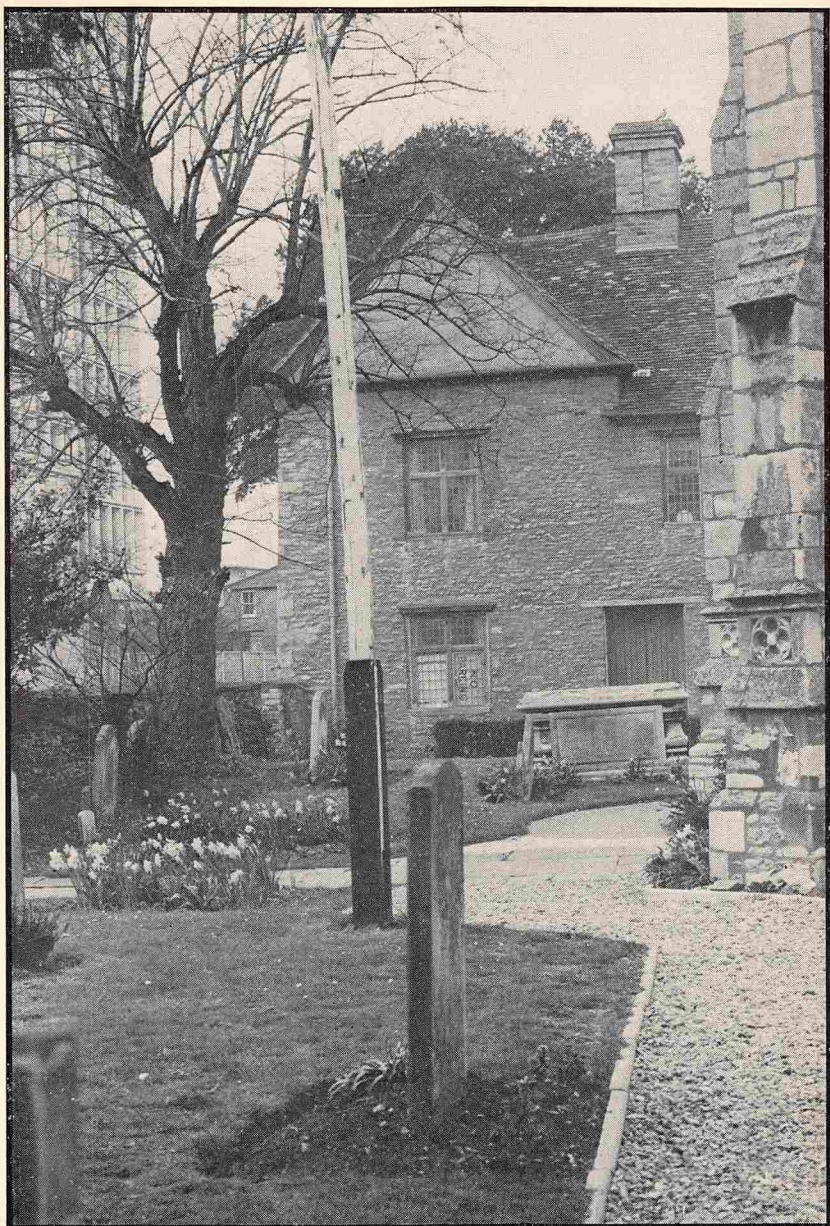
The context for preaching is as wide as the world itself and as close as life itself, but timing is the important factor. We shall look at three subjects.

### **The context of death**

An incident involving a young preacher, John Murcot, at West Kirby, Wirral, in the 1640s, is described by R. C. Richardson in his survey of puritanism in North-West England.

'On one occasion Murcot and a godly neighbour secured the assistance of the constables in dispersing a crowd of revellers at a wake. Only one of this rabble rout dared defy the minister, but Murcot's triumph, in this matter at least, was





*A buttress of St. John's church flanks the photo which features the old rectory where Bunyan met 'holy' Mr. Gifford. It was through Mr. Gifford, a man of unusually interesting character as Colin Richards shows in his article, that Bunyan came to assurance.*

made complete when his remaining opponent fell victim to the plague shortly afterwards and died. The moral was obvious, and Murcot hammered the point home by preaching a sermon on 'The dreadfulness of wrath deserved.'<sup>4</sup>

C. H. Spurgeon was acutely aware of context in his Victorian pulpit. On the Sunday following a mine disaster in which 202 men and boys died, on 16th January, 1862, at Hartley Colliery, Northumberland, Spurgeon entitled his sermon 'A voice from a mine disaster' and preached on Job 14:14. 'If a man die, shall he live again?'<sup>5</sup>

In the sermon, Spurgeon asserts the inevitability of death, the suddenness of its coming, and the blindness of people to the fact of death.

'We fondly persuade ourselves that we are immortal, that though a thousand may fall at our side, and ten thousand at our right hand, yet death shall not come nigh unto us. We flatter ourselves that if we must die, yet the evil day is far hence.'

Since we hold this attitude, Spurgeon adds, 'God in providence is continually filling our path with tombs.'<sup>6</sup>

It must be noted in Spurgeon's case that since he always refused to follow a rigid programme of systematic exposition, he was always free to preach on texts which lent themselves to disasters such as Hartley Colliery.

But those who preach in pre-arranged series must heed the warning of Dr. Lloyd-Jones: 'Though you may have planned out the greatest series of sermons the world has ever known, break into it if there is an earthquake!'<sup>7</sup>

### **The context of dangers and deliverances**

Until the present century, frequent visitations of plagues and diseases were a feature of life in Britain in every generation, and preachers made good use of them to declare the Gospel of Salvation in Jesus Christ, and to exhort believers to a greater godliness, in gratitude for deliverance.

The facts and figures relating to diseases, even in the last century, make appalling reading. For example, between 1870 and 1873, 44,079 people died of smallpox in Great Britain, 10,287 of them in London.<sup>8</sup> These deaths are quite apart from those many thousands who died of typhoid and cholera and other fatal illnesses. By that time public health was some way advanced, so there is little reason to suppose that the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries were not more ravaging still.

It was the chilling horror of some of these epidemics, such as the plagues of the seventeenth century, which gave preachers a burden to preach, and preach, and preach again, day after day while there was time.

It was said of Baxter that he 'preached as though he ne'er should preach again; and like a dying man to dying men'.<sup>9</sup>

Bearing in mind that many of the Gospel preachers of the late seventeenth century had been ejected from their livings in 1662, and had been banned and harassed, imprisoned and buffeted, it is of great note that the plague of London in 1665 was attended by so many preachers.

The biographer of John Owen sums up the involvement of the preachers at this harrowing time.



‘The proscribed preachers emerged from their hiding places, shared the dangers of that dreadful hour, addressed instruction and consolation to the perishing and bereaved, and stood between the living and the dead until the plague was stayed.’<sup>10</sup>

The London plague of 1665 is so famous that we might neglect to realise that there were other plagues in other cities.

In 1631, Christopher Hudson addressed his congregation at Preston after a plague had struck the city.

His sermon, ‘The safety of the godly in the greatest perils’, is one contained in a manuscript book, complete with many crossings-out, which can be seen at Lancashire County Records Office.<sup>11</sup>

With amazing encouragement and hopefulness, Hudson, preaching on the text: ‘Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die,’ appealed for holiness of life to match the preservation of God: ‘This towne of Preston, God has redeemed from the pestilence, and brought from the gates of death, to health and life. In testimony of your . . . thankfulness for your natural life, serve God in the affections and actions of a spiritual life, seeing God has plucked you as brands out of the fire, show yourselves worthy of that mercy by the zealous heat of your affections and the light of your gracious conversations. Let your meditations of that fearful death in this sickness be an occasion of the mortification of your sins. . . . So shall this visitation be the happiest thing that ever came to you in all your lives. . . .’

There are other dangers apart from the threat of disease.

John Flavel’s congregation in Devon was a seafaring one, and many of his sermons particularly reflected this fact.

The dangers were such that it was always possible that the men would go off to sea one day, and perish in a storm.

Flavel warned them to be ready: ‘The hand of the Lord hath gone forth with terror against you; this winter many of your companions are gone down to the bottom. Such a doleful account of shipwrecks from every coast, and such lamentations as have been heard in almost every maritime town, cannot but deeply affect every heart with sorrow and compassion; and hath engaged me in this service for the remnant that is left.

‘As God hath cast my lot among you, so he hath inclined my heart studiously to promote your welfare. I have been, by long observation, convinced, that one principal cause of your miscarriages is the neglect of God in your outsets. Did you pray more, you might expect to prosper better.’<sup>12</sup>

So concerned was Flavel that the sailors went to sea with sermons to meet their spiritual state that he referred to one of his sermons being ‘hastened for your sakes, that it might be ready to wait upon you when you undertake your next voyage’.<sup>13</sup>

Today, we do not suffer from the plague and cholera, and though the seas are just as rough, safety standards, and the seaworthiness of ships are at a higher level. But disasters of similar kinds still befall us. Heart attacks and strokes come without warning, and pick off the strongest of mortals, sometimes in the

prime of life. The headlines describe fires, motorway pile-ups and other disasters. Twentieth-century hazards are just as efficient in pitching otherwise self-sufficient men into eternity, as any of the plagues of yesteryear.

As the hymn-writer observes:

Men die in darkness at your side  
Without a hope to cheer the tomb.

### **The context of national or state occasions**

Occasions political, constitutional and Royal have sometimes fired preachers with fervour, sometimes in contexts of jubilation, and at other times in desperation.

The Gunpowder Plot, in 1605, like the defeat of the Spanish Armada, 1588, caused great jubilation among preachers, many of whom kept the Gunpowder Plot in their sermons for decades after the event.

Charles Herle, vicar of Standish, near Wigan, preached in the House of Commons in 1644 and, referring to the Gunpowder Plot, did not mince his words: 'The same brood of enemies that then dared venture but on an undermining, dare now attempt an open battery. Nor are they without their pioneers too still at work and now busier than ever in digging vaults such as may reach from Oxford, Rome, Hell, to Westminster and there to blow up if possible the better foundations of your Houses—their liberties and privileges.'<sup>14</sup>

Most of the preaching in the Commons, and on the political front generally, was a defence of the Gospel rather than a preaching of it. In the seventeenth century many preachers were energetic in retaining a constitutional Gospel—making the evangelical Gospel the rule of the land. In pursuit of this, Rome was a deadly enemy, and no opportunity was missed to spell this out.

Although the position had changed substantially by Spurgeon's day, Spurgeon also reminded his own hearers of the significance of November 5th, the date not only of the Gunpowder Plot, but of the landing of William of Orange in Torbay in 1688.<sup>15</sup>

It was on the occasion of the Coronation of William and Mary that John Flavel preached at Dartmouth: 'Let England praise the Lord for such a day as this! How many sad years are run out, since it saw the crown upon the heads of a Protestant king and queen at once! Let faithful magistrates rejoice they shall never more be put upon the odious and dangerous drudgery of persecuting good men, under such a government as this.

'Let ministers rejoice, yea, let them rejoice with double joy to others! They shall no more be driven into corners, nor put to silence (a silence as bitter as death) whilst the royal sceptre is swayed by such hands, wherein God has now placed it.'

J. C. Ryle preached on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria, in 1887, in Liverpool Cathedral. This is a most unusual sermon, as in it Ryle quotes even the tonnage figures of cargoes leaving Liverpool docks! He was seeking to demonstrate the prosperity which God had brought to Britain under the reign of Queen Victoria.<sup>16</sup>



Royal occasions in our day cannot honestly take the theme of prosperity, but the occasion of the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 was an opportunity for preachers to present a challenging message. I was privileged to hear a sermon entitled 'God save the King' based on the four references to this phrase in the Scriptures.

Day by day, people are adjusting their thinking to the changing patterns of life, and now and again one or another pauses to question where everything is leading and this is heightened at times of crisis or major disaster. The preacher has many opportunities.

Even if special or momentous events seem not to be happening, there is one event which happens ever year—a new year begins.

Preachers can heed the recommendation of Dr. Lloyd-Jones: 'Here is an opportunity made for you . . . to bring home to all the fleeting character of life in this world, and to remind them that none can afford to sit back as spectators or as critics of preachers and preaching. You can remind them that they are involved in all this, and that you are not addressing them on some theoretical subject, but dealing with the most vital matter of all, and that, whether they like it or not, they are moving on to an inevitable and unavoidable end, and that the Final Judgement is coming. A preacher who does not take advantage of these things is a fool, and is not fit to be in a pulpit.'<sup>17</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Preaching and Preachers*, Hodder & Stoughton. p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 194.

<sup>4</sup> *Puritanism in North-West England*. R. C. Richardson. Manchester University Press. p. 49. Quoting Moses in the Mount, The Life and Death of Mr. John Murcot, written by a friend in several works of John Murcot, 1657. p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Sermons That Have Won Souls*. C. H. Spurgeon. Kelvedon Edition. Marshall Morgan and Scott. p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Preaching and Preachers*. p. 194.

<sup>8</sup> *The Victorian City*. Vol. II. George Rosen. p. 654.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Vol. I, *Works of John Owen*. Biography by the Rev. Andrew Thomson.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. LXXXII.

<sup>11</sup> Lancashire County Records Office, Preston. DP 353.

<sup>12</sup> *Works of John Flavel*. Vol. 5. Six Practical and Suitable Sermons. Epistle Dedicatory.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 208.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Herle. *David's Reserve and Rescue*. November 5th, 1644. Quoted by Richardson.

<sup>15</sup> *Morning and Evening*. C. H. Spurgeon. November 5th. Marshall Morgan and Scott.

<sup>16</sup> *The Upper Room*. J. C. Ryle. Banner of Truth.

<sup>17</sup> *Preaching and Preachers*. p. 193.

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## LIBERAL VIEWS AT L.B.C.!

Leslie C. Allen is the lecturer in Hebrew language and literature at the London Bible College. He is the author of an exposition of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah, published by Eerdmans.

Dr. Allen rejects the position we maintain that Jonah is *prima facie* an historical narrative. He takes the view that the book is a parable. F. F. Bruce says he cannot remember reading such a satisfying treatment of Jonah as Dr. Allen gives! It is not approbation that is called for but alarm.

Some may object to the review on the inside back cover on the grounds that it is not scholarly and does not take into account the merits of the material. Suppose you enter a restaurant and the meat on the plate placed before you is rotten. Would you send the whole plate back to the kitchen or concentrate rather on the peas and potatoes that may, or may not, be edible?

# Pentecostal Indignation!

*The editor replies to his critics*

The Pentecostal magazine *Dedication* gave Walter Chantry a very rough time for his book 'Signs of the Apostles' (Banner 146 pp.). Since 'The Believer's Experience' (Carey 176 pp.) is a positive setting out of spiritual experience as a whole I had hoped to run the Pentecostal gauntlet with fewer stripes on my back than Walter! But it was not to be! I have now received my forty stripes save one. Here are some of them. Eric Lavender is the reviewer.

'Few will deny the possibility of spurious manifestations of psychological and Satanic origin in the Charismatic, Pentecostal and Reformed Churches. No one will deny that there is an obvious need for good, positive, balanced teaching on this vital subject of spiritual experience as it applies to all sections of the Church today. However, it is the agents of the adversary alone who profit when the gifts of the Holy Spirit are held up to such ridicule, when the scriptures are so blatantly contradicted, and when the **millions** of saints who have found their love for God, His Word, and His work deepened by those gifts, are despised as misguided and superficial.'

'The argument Mr. Hulse advances here, and the authors of such remarks quoted above, cannot be lightly dismissed. They come perilously close to slandering the Person and work of God the Holy Spirit, and that is serious indeed!'

'What are the implications of this theory? Surely this means that whole passages of Scripture are rendered meaningless and totally irrelevant to the Church today. If such Scriptures as I Corinthians 12 and 14 with their very specific and detailed instructions on the gifts of the Holy Spirit applied only to the first century saints, how much more of the New Testament truth can be discarded on the same basis? It becomes a field-day for liberals, and takes away the very ground on which evangelicals are contesting the battle for the Bible today.'

We might deal with the three above quoted paragraphs in order. Firstly note that *millions* is printed in bold type as though we might be intimidated by a large

number. Elijah was not intimidated by the 450 prophets of Baal, nor was James Kennedy when interviewed by the same Eric Lavender with the question (which obviously plays on his mind a lot):

*'Has the Charismatic Movement had any impact upon your own Church?'*

We are not involved in the Charismatic Movement, and it has had practically no impingement upon our Church. In many cases the Charismatic Movement has utterly destroyed a number of churches in Fort Lauderdale. I am sure that it also has proved beneficial in other places, I think that that probably should be added. I do not believe that it is of the devil. My position about the Gifts of the Spirit would probably be very similar to that of B. B. Warfield. My personal conviction is that there is nobody in the world speaking in tongues today, in the New Testament, Biblical sense of the word. I know that there are millions of people who think they are.'

The observation may be helpful in that it is not sinful to regard people as wrong or misguided or to think their interpretation superficial. If a person is not aware of the principles of Biblical Theology to which I will refer presently then it is inevitable that there will be shortcomings. This does not mean that we despise that person no more than we would despise John Wesley for being an Arminian. Millions of people believe in infant-baptism. We disagree with them but certainly in no way despise them. Is brother Lavender getting emotional because we do not agree with him?

As expressed in the book I do not despise the personal experiences of believers. Far from it. But I do have the right to disagree with the interpretation put upon those experiences and on their value for the Church today. The stress today is on the gifts of the mouth, that is tongues and prophecies. But now we have the canon of Scripture which is perfect. Any additions therefore are of dubious value. All that we have witnessed in these days is so permeated with human imperfection that very little of value is added. Inspired



exposition and application of Scripture seems always preferable.

Claims for miracles are much more rare. There is so much that is mixed and certainly nothing that has impressed the twentieth century in the way the apostles impressed the first century. We cannot be blamed for refusing to abandon our critical faculties. In our locality we can point to the most appalling personal disasters because people insisted on believing in miracles that were non-existent. The 'cured' ones died and much disillusionment has followed. Our own low key unadvertised modest reliance on the Lord when it has come to healing has been much more satisfactory. As far as charismatic claims are concerned I would suggest the illustration of clay, coal and diamonds. That which is merely human can be likened to clay. That is which is spiritual with human imperfections mixed with it, can be likened to coal and that which is absolutely perfect likened to diamonds. There is much genuine experience which is valuable and helpful but which does not belong to the extraordinary bracket or category. It is like coal which is valuable and not to be despised. The confusion arises when people start claiming that their coal is not coal but diamonds. Where are the diamonds today? Who among the tongue-speakers can switch from perfect Arabic to Hungarian or Chinese? The apostles operated within that category. We today have a great deal of sound but not one diamond! My personal view is that the speech claims are for the most part clay rather than coal. When it comes to miracles we do not have any examples like that of Peter whose very shadow falling upon those afflicted with incurable diseases brought instant and perfect healing.

A miracles crusade has just come to an end in a nearby city. The newspapers, radio and television people were there. But not one miracle was reported in the press. I questioned some involved. To his credit the leader did preach repentance and faith although with some superficialities which would make our more orthodox Pentecostal friends cringe. Miracles were advertised as the daily fare yet the press could not document one! The National Television with the thoroughness of which

it is capable went further than observing just one crusade. They recently made an extensive and detailed examination of both Christian and non-Christian claims for miracles and came to the conclusion that there was absolutely nothing miraculous. Everything could be explained on the basis of psychosomatic workings or psychology.

We come now to Mr. Lavender's second paragraph in which he insinuates that if we decline in all honesty and integrity to call clay or coal, diamonds—then we are sinning against the Holy Spirit! At this point I feel the indignation which Elijah felt when Ahab blamed the drought, not on Israel's sin, but on Elijah for focusing attention on the Baal-worship that caused the drought. In effect Mr. Lavender is saying that unless we agree with him and his discernment we are sinning against God. In other words his discernment of the matter is equal to God's! His view of the issue is of such an order that not to go with it is to go against the Holy Spirit! Well, I am glad to be in the number of men throughout the age like Luther, Bunyan, Whitefield, Edwards and Nettleton, not to mention a host of others, who refused to attribute to the Holy Spirit that which falls far short of the biblical standards set by the same Holy Spirit in Scripture. I am totally unimpressed by the claims made today and while I certainly do not despise my brethren I believe that they have nothing like the theological calibre and stature of those who they would have to anathematize were they with us now and asserting what they believed in their day. They believed quite firmly and uncompromisingly that the extraordinary age of the apostles has ceased.

Now when we come to the third paragraph we see that Mr. Lavender refers to I Corinthians 12-14. I do not deal with that passage in 'The Believer's Experience' but explain the issue which is fundamental to its interpretation, namely Biblical Theology, in the chapter 'The Living Church' part of the book, 'Local Church Practice' at present being printed. I strongly repudiate the insinuation of liberalism and would remind Mr. Lavender that it is the Reformed men who have held the evangelical fort against the liberals. The Pentecostal contribution in this polemical

field of defending the faith against liberal scholars is negligible. I contend that there is nothing liberal whatever in affirming that God does deal with his people in different ways in different epochs. That is the very essence of Biblical Theology. God does not repeat the period of theophany, or the incarnation, or the apostolic era. We move on from there. I Corinthians 12-14 has a peculiar application for the Corinthians who received it as well as a full application for us today. What we have now is better than what the Corinthians had. Some of them were questioning Paul's apostleship. We have more certainty and assurance than they had. Those who think otherwise can splutter as much as they like but I am glad not to have the problem of testing apostolic claims and Scripture revelations all over again. I am glad to have the true Pentecostal fullness of the Holy Spirit applying a completed work of Christ. I am glad that a whole local church is involved in healing and that we can apply James 5: 14, 15 together. It is true that we cannot send to Jerusalem for an apostle who would solve it all in a flash but we do have God's wonderful Word and see that it is better for our sanctification to sort out all our problems

together in the way God has designed for his ongoing Church.

In my book I have not taken the view that baptism of the Holy Spirit terminology always refers to regeneration. I believe wholeheartedly in revival and in a theology of revival in which God breaks out in all kinds of unexpected ways as he always has in genuine revivals. But it is apparent that Mr. Lavender did not get so far in his reading because he is so upset that we do not agree with his basic position.

If he wants church unity with us, which I am sure he does, then he must come to terms with the fact that we do hold the orthodox historical Protestant view about the cessation of the apostolic Charismata. We accept that we have a great deal in common with our Pentecostal friends who are firmly anti-Ecumenical. We fully accept our Pentecostal friends' position and out of respect would not try and pull the roof in on them if they invited us to preach for them, no more than we do when invited to preach in churches where infant baptism is part of church order. In other words we agree to differ with true brotherly respect and without anathemas or despisings.

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## ENCOURAGEMENT FOR HOUSE-TO-HOUSE VISITORS

Our neighbour Kingsley Coomber has been the subject of a triple wonder in the annals of twentieth century house-to-house visiting. Those who engage in such a work know that it is unusual to find people responding immediately to an invitation to attend church. The average for a year by a team of workers about eight strong is about one household coming in to regular attendance per year, or, not more than one response of that magnitude for three to five hundred homes visited. The purpose in visiting is to make contact, to seek openings to present the Gospel, to leave literature and generally to make the work of the churches in the area known. It is very rare for people to fulfil any invitation to attend.

About six months ago Kingsley set out as is his custom. On this occasion he began to visit a council-house estate. The person spoken to at the first house said they would come. The second home responded likewise and so did the third. All three households were present next Sunday morning and have attended regularly ever since. Besides this they have brought in friends and doubled the number they represent. They now request an open air service on that estate. Some have been converted and seek baptism while others show an ever increasing interest. Those who might tend to feel discouraged about the worthwhileness of house-to-house work should reflect on this token for good in 1978!



(Reviews—Continued from page 3)

satisfactory way. Murray did not do so. More remains to be achieved.

The publishers are to be congratulated on giving us this volume.

Even if they were to go bankrupt tomorrow this by itself would have justified their existence. Invaluable for the minister and the student of theology, greatly rewarding for anyone prepared to invest some effort and discipline, this collection of articles can be recommended very strongly.

*Bob Letham, contributor of this review, is soon to take up his responsibilities as a tutor at the Trinity Academy, Essex Fells, New Jersey.*

## THE NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE OLD TESTAMENT

The books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah by Leslie C. Allen, R. K. Harrison, general editor

427 pp. \$9.95. Wm. B. Eerdmans.

The author is lecturer in Hebrew language and Literature at the London Bible College. It is therefore surprising to find that the presuppositions upon which he proceeds are liberal and not evangelical.

The book of Jonah may have nothing whatever to do with a prophet of that name. Indeed, according to the author such a person may have existed and certainly nobody by the name of Jonah was ever swallowed by a big fish. The plant that grew up so quickly and then died as suddenly was no more of a reality than a paw-paw tree in Glasgow today, apart from the imagination of a Glaswegian who has had one over the eight.

Nineveh was never brought to repentance by a man called Jonah because no such man ever preached in Nineveh. If you, dear preacher man, have told your people that Jonah spent three uncomfortable days and nights in the belly of the sea monster you have been telling lies! Jonah did not! It never really happened! It is all a story—a valuable story mind, just like Macbeth. When our Lord says that the men of Nineveh repented under the preaching of Jonah (Matt. 12:41) he was *not* referring to facts at all but rather to a well known parable—a fiction of earlier times!

In contrast to Allen's espousal of modernism we maintain that Jonah was an historical figure (2 Kgs 14:25) and that the book is *prima facie* an historical narrative. We can find no evidence that it is to be interpreted otherwise. The Jews have always accepted Jonah as a living rather than fictitious member of their race. It is the modern band of arrogant, unbelieving liberals who have championed the view that Jonah is a parable.

F. F. Bruce says he cannot remember reading such a satisfying treatment of Jonah as Dr. Allen gives! It is not approbation that is called for but alarm. At this rate other parts of Scripture similar in style, miraculous content, language and atmosphere, such as those biographical sections in 1 and 2 Kings concerning Elijah and Elisha will be relegated to the realm of story or parable. Why not go on from there and say that the Gospels too are delightful stories and parables. That is where this liberal road takes us in the end. Dr. Allen should be summoned to the principal's office and fired forthwith! *editor.*

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(Continued from page 2)

have a M.Div. and Letham a Th.M. from Westminster Seminary.

We are very interested in 'The Academy' because nothing of that kind exists in the U.K. We need something which combines high academic standards, a full time curriculum and which is thoroughly church-based and practical. There is nothing specifically Reformed Baptist in the U.K. Two of the three full-time tutors at the South Wales (Barry) Bible College, recently commended in these pages are paedobaptist. Recently eighty churches of Reformed Baptist conviction met in London and expressed the need for something like 'The Academy' which wholly accords with their theological position. Ten have been asked to proceed further.

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