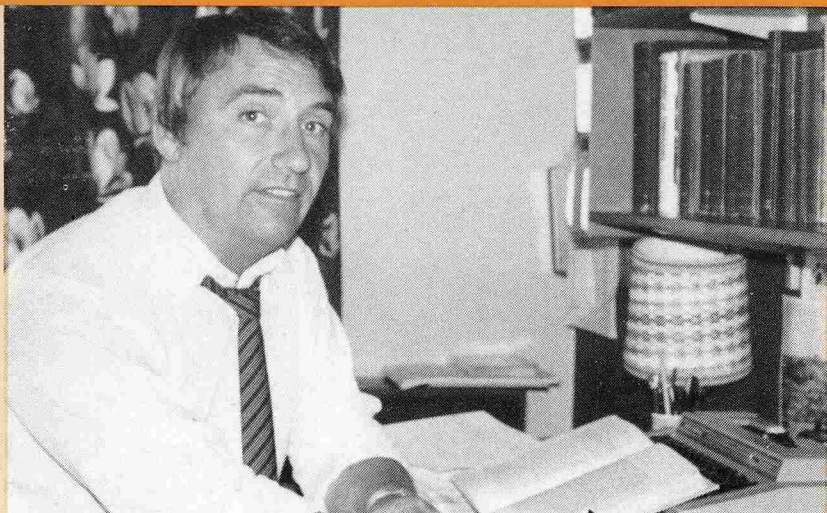


# REFORMATION TODAY'84



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*In 1938 he commenced his ministry at the Tabernacle, Brighton, where he remained until his death in 1957. During the last year of his life he accepted a challenge from the Trustees of Zion Baptist Chapel, Cuckfield, to re-open the building as a place of worship.*

*In 1933 Pastor Ben Warburton became senior editor of the 'Christian's Pathway' magazine, which magazine preceded 'Reformation Today'.*

# Editorial

This is the last issue of the magazine to go out from Haywards Heath under the oversight of Cuckfield Baptist Church. Some of our readers are concerned about the future and we assure them that the Belvidere Road Church, Liverpool, shares the same vision. That church is an independent Baptist Church which is faithful to the doctrines of grace.

In the last issue the front cover and front inside cover were devoted to news of Stuart and Doris Olyott. At the induction service at 4 p.m. on September 1st, Stuart Olyott is to be the preacher. At a smaller meeting in the morning for the members of Cuckfield and Belvidere Road Stanley Hogwood and Kingsley Coomber will bring greetings, and then Iain Murray will speak.

We have enjoyed exceptionally good inter-church relationships with the Free Church at New England Road, Haywards Heath, where Kingsley Coomber has been the pastor since 1974. He and Austin Walker, minister of the Reformed Baptist Church, Crawley, have the responsibility for the leadership of the Whitefield Fraternal in Sussex. The Reformed Baptist Church in Crawley was planted by the Cuckfield Baptist Church in 1971. Recently encouragement has been experienced there, and again we can look back and express thankfulness for complete harmony and unity since 1971.

We have about as many readers abroad as we do in the U.K. and some of our friends abroad will wonder whether I will have the same freedom for an overseas ministry as in the past. Certainly it will be necessary to be 'at home' for at least a year to settle in and learn and adjust. But the Belvidere Road Church is a missionary minded church.

It may be helpful to reflect on this subject as it is of particular interest to our readers abroad.

Ever since I began at Cuckfield an annual balance of 40 Sundays at home, and most of the remaining ones abroad, has been the pattern. The church has always been supportive, having a vision for church planting as well as a recognition of the value of conference work.

Many factors have to come together if work abroad is to be truly advantageous to the advance of the Gospel. The support of the sending church is essential. It is important to stick to a sector which the Lord of the harvest is pleased to open, and build up life-long relationships. Selwyn Morgan of Reading has described to

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Front Cover: *Pastor Kingsley Coomber of New England Road, Haywards Heath — see editorial.*

me how much he values the opportunities he has had to minister in India. I hesitate to describe even in the briefest way my travels when they compare feebly with others. For instance my fellow worker, Bill Clark, has pioneered in what we might call tough countries and travelled many thousands of miles more. We are given by the Chief Shepherd work which suits us and for which we are best equipped.

When it comes to reflection, 1971 stands out in my memory. I remember so well being met by Jim van Zyl at the airport in Port Elizabeth on the eve of the first Evangelical and Reformed Studies Conference. Preparation for this had been going on for several years and a combination of anxiety and anticipation was written all over Jim's face. This multiracial and interdenominational annual gathering has developed and while preparing this I have received a letter from Martin Holdt to say that the largest number ever have attended this year, the ministry of the chief visiting speaker, Sinclair Ferguson, being much appreciated. Since 1965 I have been involved in nine tours of South Africa. On every occasion I have observed the tremendous scope for encouraging ministers who battle to promote the old paths (Jer. 6:16). As for the less privileged communities, I must confess neglect in not placing far more emphasis on sharing with them our advantages, such as our wealth of good literature. The need throughout Africa is vast. It is not easy, as we are required to be wise in the use of expository materials. Straightforward commentaries such as those by Geoffrey Wilson and Stuart Olyott are the kind of books best suited to the needs of Christians in countries like Nigeria.

Often from the pulpit I have prayed for 'the greatest nation on earth' — the U.S.A.! Imagine the consequences of a mighty reformation cum revival in America! What resources and gifts are there! What a menace when misused, and how blessed when Biblically directed! This October I anticipate my twelfth visit to the U.S.A. As on some previous occasions, the tour will include Canada. Especially enjoyed is the opportunity to encourage newly planted Reformed Baptist churches such as the one at St. John, New Brunswick, led by Professor Hugh Flemming. This has been a characteristic along the West Coast where in spite of great difficulties such churches are multiplying.

The same is true of Australia. In 1973 I visited some of these churches, and again in 1978. Another visit to Australia is being planned for 1986. Much prayer and dependence on Divine grace are essential for any projections in the future. It is all a gift. To be able to fellowship with and derive so much knowledge from the experience of others is a most blessed privilege. New Zealand has not been mentioned. On account of their extreme isolation they more than others appreciate visitors. More than others? — When we think of it there are many isolated friends who would love to see more of ministers like Geoff Thomas who recently was able to make a visit to Keith and Priscilla Underhill labouring in Kenya.

*The inseparable union of the two natures of Christ has been admirably stated in the great creeds and confessions of Faith. Steve Dray argues that despite this the Reformed theologians have in general been reluctant to explicitly tackle the idea of the Divine nature suffering and dying on the Cross. He outlines the New Testament evidence for a 'crucified God'. He then explains the complementary truth; that of a man who is glorified in heaven now, interceding for his people. The fact that we have in one person two natures, God and man, is then applied. The idea of God 'crucified' challenges a light view of sin and highlights the immense love of God. The fact of a glorified man in heaven interceding for his people comforts believers. This article thus presents theology in a relevant way with a clear application for the believer's Christian experience.*

*Steve Dray was mindful to give this article to a magazine called Still Reforming which is edited and published by pastor Robin Dowling. His address is, 2A Windsor Road, KEW, TW9 2EL. Three issues of 32 pages each have been published and are available at 60 pence each plus postage. Some articles in Still Reforming are launched there by way of test flight. The above article by Steve Dray we did not think needed a test flight! It was ready and we are thankful for it!*

## Jesus Christ: Crucified God and Glorified Man

### *Introduction*

In a recent article Carl F. Henry says, 'The key intellectual issue of the '80's, as I see it, will still be the persistent problem of authority. It will concern especially the problem of hermeneutics'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, he asserts that high on the agenda of evangelical believers must be the task of giving fresh consideration to the interpretation of Scripture. This need could be illustrated in a number of ways but under consideration here is the way in which Reformed theological activity has tended to use rational and logical procedures in such a way that the balance of Biblical revelation has been distorted. Thus, on rational, rather than exegetical grounds, the sovereignty of God has, sometimes, been set over against human responsibility. Similarly, the influence of neo-Platonism has caused Christians to think far more of the immortality of the soul (an unbiblical idea) than the resurrection of the body. However, it is the conviction of the author of this article that it is in

consideration of the person of our blessed Saviour that the people of God have been most seriously impoverished by illegitimate theological procedures.

### *One Person, Two Natures*

Building upon the confessions of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon the 1689 Confession (following the Westminster and Savoy standards) states:

'The Son of God . . . being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary . . . was made of a woman . . . so that two whole, perfect and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ' (Chapter 8, Section 2).

In this way our forefathers were seeking to articulate the mystery of the incarnation according to the balance of New Testament truth. They did so admirably since,

- i. they rejected all ideas that Jesus was a complex individual made up, or composed of, bits and pieces of a divine and a human nature;
- ii. they rejected the idea that the two natures are a pot pourri or mixture. Both these Christological errors were rejected since they were seen to cut away at the heart of the Church's confession of 'Very God and Very Man' and offered, rather, a super-man or demi-god. Also rejected was the notion
- iii. that the human nature of Jesus was taken up and transformed by his divine nature since it was recognised that this denied the real humanity of the Son of God.

Thus, a mystery was confessed: that in the person of the Son the divine nature of the second person of the Trinity was united with a human nature in the womb of Mary in such a way that the two natures retained their full integrity while being united in the one person.

However, the Confession does not end there. Rather, it was asserted that this union was inseparable so that Christ remains very God and very man.

### *Crucified God?*

It remains, therefore, a strange fact that a statement so unequivocally stated in the Standards has, in practice, been denied as rationalistic considerations have dominated (especially) Reformed Theology in its reflection upon the person of the Lord Jesus. This is especially true in the considerations which have been given to his suffering and death. These facts are all the more surprising when reference is made to the apparently unambiguous testimony of the New Testament.

*Acts 20:28.* In this passage the manuscript evidence is divided, but the

weight of the evidence is in favour of the text adopted both in the King James Version and more recent translations: 'Be shepherds of the church of God (*Theou*) which he . . . bought with his own blood'. The variant reading, which has fairly strong support, replaces *Theou* with *kuriou*. This rendering may reflect early scribal unease with the idea of the blood of God. Alternatively, it may reflect a harmonisation with the Septuagint (LXX) where *ekklesia kuriou* is the standard translation of the Hebrew *edath Yahweh*. Either way, therefore, the weight of the evidence seems to favour the thought that when Jesus died it was as the God-Man, Jehovah-Jesus that he suffered unto death.

*Romans 8:32.* This passage is so familiar to us that we are inclined to overlook the amazing force of the words, '(God) did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all'. In the context the 'giving up' which Paul has in mind is, clearly, that of the suffering and death of the Saviour. It is, therefore, remarkable that the name of Christ used here by Paul is the one which most usually singles out his deity: 'the Son'. This suggests again that Paul is seeking to establish that the second person of the Trinity suffered and died on the Cross.

*1 Corinthians 2:8.* Paul seems to be making the same point in this passage when he speaks of 'the Lord of Glory' being crucified. Thus, however the phrase 'the Lord of Glory' is understood grammatically, Paul is using two words, *kurios* and *doxa*, which are both used in the Old Testament as paraphrases of the divine name. Unless Paul is indulging in an unjustified liberty with language his meaning would not appear able to be expressed more clearly: on the Cross Jehovah-Jesus died.

*Philippians 2:5-11.* When we turn to this great Christological hymn we are

reminded by the apostle of the two natures of the Saviour. He was 'in very nature God' (verse 6) who took the 'very nature of a servant' (verse 7), that is, 'he was made in human likeness'. In those two natures, united in one person, 'he humbled himself and became obedient to death' (verse 8). This latter fact is given especial emphasis by Paul when he seems to add to the hymn he is quoting (a fact established on metrical grounds) the phrase, 'even the death of a cross'. Thus, it is very difficult to escape the conclusion that Paul is, once again, teaching a 'crucified God'.

*1 John 3:16.* The sheer repetition of such sentiments in the apostle Paul would seem to exclude the possibility that he is indulging in hyperbole. Moreover, it is not unlikely that the apostle John makes the same sort of comment in the above mentioned passage. The subject of the verb 'laid down' is not expressed in the original but since throughout the paragraph in which the verse is found the subject is God it would seem that the KJV is correct to render, 'Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us'.

Strangely, however, in the face of all this evidence, and having confessed the indissolubility of the hypostatic union in the Incarnation, Reformed Theology in particular has shrunk from the conclusions reached in the above discussion.<sup>2</sup> Thus it is usually asserted that the divine nature did not suffer and die and those passages which seem to suggest the contrary are, in fact, evidence that the New Testament sometimes speaks of one nature by means of the designation proper to the other. But this desperate remedy is not exegesis but eisegesis<sup>3</sup> since it reads into the text a thought on the basis of other considerations than the text itself. There are, however, two popular reasons for adopting this approach. On the one hand, it is argued that the

impassibility of God renders it impossible for deity to either suffer or die: thus, of necessity, the sufferings of our Saviour must necessarily be those of his human nature alone (impassibility is the inability to suffer). The other argument is a similar one: since God is immortal it is not possible that he should suffer the ultimate consequences of mortality in death.

Were time and space available one would wish to subject the notion of divine impassibility to close scrutiny, especially in the light of the Book of Hosea. Suffice it to say that it seems a violation of the Scriptural message to resolve all statements in the Bible which speak of a feeling God by resort to anthropomorphism.

Moreover, in a faith which calls forth belief in an incarnate God and in Triunity it is strange that theologians have shirked from the conclusion that, in Charles Wesley's words, 'Tis mystery all: the immortal dies'. Indeed, the very confession of incarnation ought to have secured the doctrine of the 'crucified God': that is, that God in the person of his Son, was subject to suffering and death.

#### *Divine Tri-Unity?*

The mystery of the crucifixion is deepened still further when we consider the Cry of Dereliction in Matthew 27:46. Commentators, quite properly, point out that in John 1:1 it is significant that the preposition in the phrase, 'the Word was with God' is *pros* not *sun*. Thus, the words do not simply point to common existence but to eternal intimacy in the perfection of loving fellowship.

In the light of this the full force of Matthew 27:46 may be seen. Though we speak reverently of a mystery on the very edge of divine revelation, the passage would seem to assert that the



imputation of our sins to the Saviour sundered, for a season, the eternal bonds of the Triune God. Thus the amazing horror of the Cross of Christ is seen in all its starkness.

### *Glorified Man?*

Before we proceed to set forward the practical lessons to be drawn from such teaching it is necessary to look at the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus in the light of our discussion so far.

The New Testament Scriptures place great emphasis upon the fact that the resurrection of the Lord was a bodily one in which corruption had taken on incorruption. This is taught, for example, in Luke 24:39, 51 and is applied to the believer in 1 Corinthians 15:20.

However, of greatest significance to the present discussion is the way in which the writer to the Hebrews speaks of the High Priesthood of the Lord Jesus. He reminds us that the call and the efficacy of the work of a High Priest depends upon his humanity: a humanity which he takes into the presence of God and which forms the basis for his mediatorial work (Heb. 5:1f., especially). Having set out these qualifications he states in the Epistle that Jesus, by entering into the heavenlies, has acted as our Great High Priest (4:16).

The teaching of the writer to the Hebrews is thus made plain. We are taught that the ascension of Jesus was necessarily that of the God-Man, Jehovah-Jesus since only as a man is he able to act as the mediator and intercessor for sinful humanity.

### *Consummated Deity?*

Thus, we are able to see that the New Testament emphasises that the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus were, alike, those of the God-

Man: one person in two indissoluble natures. Further, there is just the hint that, in a sense, the perfection of the Triune God was consummated in the ascension of the Lord Jesus and the incorporation of a human nature into the Godhead.

### *The Challenge of a Crucified God*

If the conclusions reached in the discussion above are correct then it follows that there are some very important applications to us as believers.

It establishes in a most vivid way *the exceeding sinfulness of sin*. We are subject to the constant temptation to view our sins less seriously than we ought. It is difficult to do so, however, when we consider the costliness of the Cross to God. The Cross cost the Father who spared not his own Son. This cost, which we so often diminish by appeal to, or assumption of, divine impassibility is seen to be, in reality, greater than any human suffering since that which was lost was greater than any possible human loss. No less than the loss of the eternal intimacy of perfect love in the Godhead was the cost of our redemption.

The Cross also involved great cost to the Son. Not only did he lose the experience of divine intimacy but, as we shall see below, his suffering was rendered the greater by his being united to a human nature.

A parallel application may be made to the one above. The *greatness of the love of God to us* is established by the fact of the crucified God. The full, heart-melting grandeur of the excellency of God's love is seen as we view the crucified God of Calvary. Thus, the Apostle John says, 'Hereby we perceive the love of God because he laid down his life for us' (1 John 3:16). This is secured, alone, when we see the *full* identification of God with sinners in



their condition and needs. Indeed, to the extent that Reformed theology fights shy of the notion of the 'crucified God' so it is impossible for it to give full expression to this intimate identification of God with his people.

At this point it is of considerable importance to observe that the Apostle John makes it very plain that the glory of the Lord Jesus, the most manifest display of divine splendour, is seen as we view (by faith) the Son of God lying limply in death on the Cross of Calvary. This is to be seen especially in chapter 12. Thus, in verse 23 Jesus says, 'The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified'. In the Gospels, 'the hour' is frequently an oblique reference to the Cross and it must be so here since verse 24 proceeds to speak of fruitful death. Verses 32f. may also be understood in such a light: the glory which draws men will be the death of the Lord Jesus.

This staggering fact is testimony to the place where the Father regards his glory as being supremely manifested. It is not in mighty acts of creation or providence, nor in the final consummation of all things at the second coming of the Lord Jesus. It is not in mighty acts of power but in the inexplicable self-emptying of God in the Cross: a self-emptying which sets forth a complete reversal of worldly standards. Philippians 2:5ff. may again be appealed to here. It is in, or because of, Jesus' death that he is 'given a name which is above every name' and it is his Cross which calls forth Paul's statement, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus'.

This is not an accidental identification. On the contrary it is precisely from this point that the spring of New Covenant ethics flows. It is axiomatic to New Testament faith that viewing the Cross in all its glorious horror we are changed into the likeness of the one lying there, manifesting, above all, that self-denying

love which characterised him. This explains the repeated emphasis in New Testament ethical texts on the necessity of humility and selfless love in all believers since their absence asks the question: 'Have you looked at the Cross of Christ?' Thus, New Testament (and, for that matter, Old Testament) Ethics is much more than 'Law', even a Christ-given one. Rather a priority is placed on that disposition borne of meditation upon the Cross which, alone, is able to effect true conformity to the will of God: a conformity which 'law' can never legislate for. In the end, humble love for God, the fruit of a sight of the Cross, is alone able to produce that life which is pleasing to God.

### *The Comfort of a Glorified Man*

Finally, we turn to the lessons faith may build upon when we clearly perceive that Jesus, the glorified God-Man, is in heaven.

The great lesson to be learnt is the absolute sufficiency of Christ as our intercessor and mediator. We need no other mediator than him, someone 'nearer to us' who is able to intercede with greater feeling and understanding on our behalf. Rather, there is one in heaven who was 'made like his brothers in every way' (Heb. 2:17). That one, 'yet retains a . . . fellow feeling for our pains' and is 'not unable to sympathise with our weaknesses' (Michael Bruce and Heb. 4:15).

Thus:

- i. He still bears the 'scars' of misunderstanding, rejection (even by his closest family and friends, above all, by Judas Iscariot), humiliation, weakness and death. Not least he remembers with great vividness the reality and experience of temptation. Thus, in Hebrews 2:18 we are told, 'he himself suffered when he was tempted'.

- ii. These experiences were the more real because his human nature was united with his Deity. This is evident when one recalls that a person who has never been really healthy cannot fully enter into the agonising experience of one suddenly struck down in the midst of a vital life. Thus, we can never experience as Jesus did the depth of suffering that was his. He was the Lord of Life but he was subjected to weakness and death; the Holy God subject to temptation; the Creator subject to the futility of a fallen creation; the Omnipotent One subject to weakness and death and the one who had shared eternal intimacy with the Father misunderstood and rejected at the hands of men!
- iii. This is no less true of his temptations because, 'The power of sympathy lies not in the mere capacity for feeling but in the lessons of experience for, having suffered being tempted, our High Priest is able to succour them that are tempted. Furthermore, the power of sympathy does not depend on the experience of sin, but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity' (Thomas Hewitt).

What comfort and assurance the believer may derive from this! Not only does he have one in Heaven who is all-wise, all-knowing and all powerful but one who *feels* our needs and is always marshalling all those resources for the benefit of his children. No wonder then the confidence of the writer to the Hebrews when he says, 'Let us then approach with confidence the throne of grace, so that we may (as we must) receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need' (4:16).

### Conclusion

As so often with the Apostle Paul theology ends in doxology:

'Here might I stay and sing,  
No story so divine,  
Never was love, dear King,  
Never was grief like Thine.  
This is my friend,  
In Whose sweet praise  
I all my days  
Could gladly spend.'<sup>4</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Century*, vol. 47, no. 35 (November 5, 1980), p. 1,062.

<sup>2</sup> Hypostasis = substance or essential nature of an individual.

<sup>3</sup> Eisegesis is the interpretation of a text by reading into it one's own ideas.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Crossman.

*In his first exposition J. K. Davies, pastor in St. John's Wood (one of the most cosmopolitan and interesting parts of inner London), described the local church in relation to Christ. Here he opens up the theme of the local church in relation to itself.*

# The Life and Being of a Local Church

*J. K. Davies*

The Church belongs to God in a way no other group or organisation of human beings does. It is made up of the redeemed in Christ, the blood-bought, the regenerated by the Spirit, the justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> Its head is Christ and it is under the authority of God and his word. It is led by the Holy Spirit, but exercises an obedient responsibility itself. It is God's Church, the body of Christ and his bride, and it is the temple of the Holy Spirit. To God it owes everything concerning its being and life. These factors mark out the Church as unique (we use a capital C for the Church catholic or universal, and a lower case 'c' for a microcosm of that church catholic, namely a local church).

Although made up of human beings the local church is no mere human organisation. The spiritual dimension is paramount. Those human beings who belong to it are a new creation in Jesus Christ,<sup>2</sup> they have the very Spirit of God resident in them,<sup>3</sup> and are now related to the essentially spiritual realm of the world to come.<sup>4</sup> The Church is created by God alone. He rules it through Christ who is its head, and the church is subject to Christ. A church is 'alive' only as its members are alive (spiritually), although the essence of a church's life comes from Christ through his Spirit. A church, therefore, has a being as Christ's body because of Christ's life which is more than merely the sum of its parts.

The essential and unique spirituality of the church may be seen clearly exposed

in the New Testament description of the church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in each believer<sup>5</sup> and in each church. Charles Hodge in his 'Commentary on 1 Corinthians' emphasises the point in the following way:

This indwelling of the Spirit constitutes each believer, every separate church, and the Church collectively the temple of God. As in the Jewish temple, in its inmost recess, the Shechinah, or glory of God, was constantly present, and conferred on the building its awe-inspiring power, and rendered any profanation of it a direct offence to God; so does the Holy Spirit dwell in the Church. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Both the Apostle Paul, a number of times, and the Apostle Peter, use this description of the Church to teach important things about the unique nature of the Church. (See 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16-17; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Pet. 2:5.) The Church is a spiritual structure and organisation (better: organism) for its life is derived from the presence of Christ by his Spirit. Its activity is to be directed Godward, for it is engaged essentially in the service and worship of God. It is this that particularly distinguishes the Church from every other human organisation — its life is spiritual and its activity is service to God. Its life is also holy. It is to be separated *from* sin and sinful associations<sup>7</sup> and it is to be separated *to* God and his service. The Church is

God's Church and God's temple. As such it is unique.

This truth is further emphasised when we consider who belongs to the Church. As we would expect, those who belong to the church are a rather particular group of people. The following statement of the Evangelical movement of Wales (1966) puts it well:

The Church, whether it is on earth or in heaven, consists of those, and only those, who are 'in Christ'. . . . By this phrase the New Testament means that the bond of faith which ties the Christian to his Lord results in an intimate relationship between the two that is more than formal. . . . In fact, it is vital – and from Christ to the Christian there flows a never-failing stream of gracious love that pardons his sins and renews his nature; while from the Christian to Christ, albeit imperfectly, there issues faith, devotion and obedient service. . . . Consequently, those and only those should be admitted to church membership who, professing faith in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, as Saviour, Lord and God, whose death in their place constitutes the only ground of their salvation, have forsaken their sin and now seek to live a life of holiness by the power of the Holy Spirit. . . . In the New Testament the relationship between the believer and Christ is one of personal experience and communion. Thus it is the duty of the church to examine with charity all candidates for membership, so as to ensure as far as humanly possible that such persons have in fact themselves received the 'new birth', which alone will enable them to make the above profession of faith sincerely. All Church members, therefore, should be Christians in this New Testament sense. . . .<sup>8</sup>

This basic New Testament principle of a regenerate church membership relates directly to the nature of the Church and marks it out as essentially different from other human societies. Evidence of this difference should be obvious in all those making up the Church.

Kenneth H. Good in 'God's Blueprint for a Church' writes:

... evidences of regeneration are to be sought in the lives of those who would become members of the churches. These evidences are to be seen in both the verbal testimony and the actual conduct of the candidates. Where either is lacking, there is sufficient reason to deny membership.<sup>9</sup>

*He describes regeneration as follows:*

Regeneration is an act of God by which those who are dead in trespasses and sins are resurrected in spiritual life. This is entirely an inward and invisible accomplishment. However, this life will be evidenced externally. The thorough change which takes place in those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit may be accurately called conversion.<sup>10</sup>

David Kingdon regards the consistent advocacy of the principle of a regenerate membership as vital. (*Baptist Heritage* paper 1970):

It is vital for the maintenance of spiritual worship, for only regenerated persons can worship God 'in Spirit and in truth'. It is vital for the manifestation of that quality of corporate life which is the most compelling advertisement of the power of the Gospel. It is vital for the discharge of our missionary obligation, for if the line between the church and the world is blurred,

our witness to the world is imperilled.<sup>11</sup>

In the New Testament entrance into the Church was to do with spiritual realities and faith in Jesus Christ. Membership of a church was limited to such as professed faith in Jesus Christ, and all who trusted in Christ as Saviour joined themselves to the church. The concept of 'membership' is no recent innovation. It is revealed in God's word, but has become a matter of controversy in our day as some believe that being joined to the church in a universal sense is all that is necessary for Christian discipleship. On the day of Pentecost the preaching of the Apostle Peter was blessed by God so that 'about three thousand souls were *added* to them' (Acts 2:41). The word 'added' means 'put to' or 'placed beside'. Its use here, in addition to the information given about their conversion, indicates that the 'adding' of the people was not the same as the unseen response of their hearts to the gospel. It is rather the visible act of joining the community following faith in Christ.

After God's judgement had fallen on Ananias and Sapphira, we read that 'none of the rest dared *join* them' (Acts 5:13). Insincere and hypocritical people did not try to attach themselves to the church. But true converts did. The word 'join' used here means 'cement together' or 'unite'. No one has the right to assume that he automatically belongs. There has to be a deliberate act of commitment by the church and the Christian.

After his conversion at Damascus, Paul went to Jerusalem and wanted to 'join (himself to) the disciples' (Acts 9:26 — the same word as in Acts 5:13). The Jerusalem church would not receive him into fellowship until Barnabas supported his application (Acts 9:27-28).

He could have attended the meetings but Paul desired more than that.

There was a clear difference between being a member of the 'congregation' and a member of the 'church'. Luke's mention of the fact that 'the number of *names* was about a hundred and twenty' (Acts 1:15) suggests the possibility that a membership roll of some kind was even then in existence. The church as a 'called-out' people (ekklēsia) is different from the world around. As a special company of identifiable people the church has an 'inside' and an 'outside'.

In 1 Corinthians 5 we see an example of a local church removing from membership an offending member who is guilty of gross sin. He is then considered as one 'outside' the church (vv. 2, 5, 11-13). The church is a holy and disciplined company. It has high standards of life which have to be maintained. R. B. S. Eccles expresses this important principle in this way:

When a person joins a church he does so because he desires to, and not because he is forced against his will. In so doing, he is taking upon himself privileges and responsibilities. These responsibilities include making a full contribution to the life of the church, and living a consistent Christian life at the personal level. Since he has willingly agreed to these, the church is right to act when they are violated.<sup>12</sup>

The church as a disciplined body is thus marked off from the rest of human society. It is made up of Christian disciples, followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, committed to him and to one another. They have a relationship to Christ and to one another which is altogether different from other human relationships (see Luke 14:26-27; John 14:23; 15:12, 17; 21:15; 1 John 3:16, 23).

It is a relationship of love. This is the essence of Christian discipleship — love for Christ and for his people. A society of human beings expressing that love will undoubtedly make a considerable impression on those around them. That love demonstrates the reality of Christ's life and saving power within them: By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35).

But Christian discipleship doesn't happen by magic, it needs a proper basis. God's word is the basis for its life. Its patterns for living and working are derived from God's word and mark it out from all around it. The headship of Christ is exercised through the authoritative word which is interpreted by the Holy Spirit present in the church. Erroll Hulse writes:

The Scriptures form the spring from which all life is derived by the Holy Spirit of God. All directives and all correctives stem from the Word of God. . . . The church is described by Paul as 'the pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15). The value of truth can hardly be over-estimated in a world overrun with error.<sup>13</sup>

By the careful application of biblical teaching to its life a church will develop a pattern of life in which spiritual qualities will have a greater consequence than material ones. Men will be appointed to office by recognising the gifts which Christ has given to his church in those men.<sup>14</sup> Riches (or lack of them), rank and intellectual qualifications will not be the factors uppermost in the church's consideration. Also in determining the pattern of worship, the teaching of Christ in his word will weigh more heavily with a church than will cultural or aesthetic factors. In these ways, and others, the church will display its distinctive life. Worldly pressures

will be resisted and worldly methods will be rejected. When considering how the church lives and what it does, the great question must always be, 'What does the Bible say?'. The world will strive to achieve what pleases man. The church will strive to achieve what pleases God. God's word acts as a regulator of the church's life in every particular. It is a firm foundation which lends to the church a stability and strength which can stand the test of trial and temptation.<sup>15</sup> As a result the church stands in stark contrast to the troubled, unstable and insecure world of today.

The church not only depends on God for its life, it also displays that life to a surrounding world. That life brings a foretaste of the glory of heaven to the activities of earth. Erroll Hulse makes the following important point:

Now I contend that in the everyday humdrum work of the local church there is *a basic and essential glory*. Christ is made sanctification to us (1 Cor. 1:30). He is in the local church just as he was in the burning bush. He is in the worship services, in the sermon preparation, in the prayers, in the visiting, correspondence and daily communication. To belittle the daily round of church work is to overlook the fact that the members of the body of Christ are progressing in sanctification. It is true that activity or service can be superficial but when rightly motivated with God's glory in view the Lord guarantees that not even the giving of one cup of cold water will go without reward (Matt. 10:42).<sup>16</sup>

What is the glory of the church? It is nothing less than the life of Christ in the church. That is seen as the church most nearly conforms to the patterns of life expounded in God's word as the out-working of those titles of the church we have already considered. For our pur-

poses here we shall concentrate on one such title — the 'Body of Christ'. This descriptive title of the church not only expresses the truth of Christ's identification with his people, it also points us to the kind of life the church is to reveal as it works out in practical living the life of Christ within. It points us to the church in unity and in diversity, because each member of the church, as a member of the one body, has a vital part to play in the church's life. The contribution each member makes to the church's life has first been given to that member by the Lord of the church who gives gifts as best suits his purposes and glory.<sup>17</sup> One effect of this is to prevent any member of the church from despising any other member's place or function in the body.<sup>18</sup> Each member has a value and dignity which God gives him.

The emphasis in Romans 12:4-5 is on the unity of the body. It is one, although it has many members. 1 Corinthians 10:17 similarly stresses the unity of the body, which is expressed in eating of one loaf together. 1 Corinthians 11:29 indicates that it is the body of Christ present at the table which can be abused and insulted by unseemly conduct, i.e. the local church.

1 Corinthians 12:12-25 is a passage set in a context which deals with gifts and manifestations of the Spirit in the church, and yet in the midst of such diversity the stress in these verses is on the unity within the body where such gifts are seen. Ephesians 4:4 ('there is one body') and the succeeding verses similarly stress the unity within the body. The unity of a local church as the body of Christ is a most impressive contrast to the fragmented society in which we live. It is a unity in diversity with each member making a vital contribution and having a high value. That also contrasts with our present society which is becoming more and more im-

personal and the individual is steadily losing his value.

The life of any body is revealed by what it does. So a church's life is revealed by what it does, and that life is developed by what it does. Notice how the Lord writes to the churches in Revelation that he knows their *works*, for those works reveal their life.<sup>19</sup> It is often said that activism is no substitute for life. That is true as far as it goes. If, however, a believer does not have things to do to put his faith into practice, his spiritual life will stagnate. James said that 'faith without works is dead' (Jas. 2:20, 26).

We must, therefore, beware lest we overlook the important fact that the church as the body of Christ must live as a body with each part functioning fully within the essential unity. The local church as the body of Christ, a living fellowship with Christ as its head, functioning as he directs, is vital in every generation. But a church which does nothing, does not work, does not function as the Spirit of God directs, is not a body — it is a corpse, it is dead. What we expect to see of a church as the body of Christ is life and work.

A church is not a bunch of individuals who please themselves as to what they do. A church is the body of Christ which lives to please God. So, it is a disciplined fellowship, eager to obey the Lord's direction of its life. No one can justify an individualistic approach to Christian living and service from the New Testament. A local church should be an integrated fellowship, and no sectional interest within the church should be allowed to endanger this essential unity. The individualism which enables a man to please himself without consulting his brothers and sisters in Christ should be viewed with disfavour — it is contrary to being part of a body. The disciplined life of a local church does, in fact, stimulate



individual enterprise and endeavour, rather than stifle it. To be engaged in the Lord's work with the approval and support of the Lord's people is a great encouragement. The believer is not on his own, he has the support and help of his fellows, not least in prayer.

Whilst maintaining the unity of the church we must also emphasise the value of each member. There are no unimportant ones. All are important to the Lord and to the church. The Lord Jesus Christ had to lay down his life for each and every member of his body, and each is of great value to him. It is quite consistent with this truth to find the Apostle Paul declaring in 1 Corinthians 12:14 that 'the body is not one member but many'. He also says that each member, even the apparently insignificant one, has a proper part to play in the life of the church. The Lord, in fact, gives honour where we overlook it.<sup>20</sup> Because the body is one the life of each member affects the whole, and the life of the whole affects the individual member.<sup>21</sup> In Romans 12:5 Paul takes the matter just a little further and speaks of 'members of one another', so closely are we bound up with one another. So, each has a part to play, each has a work to do, for God gives gifts to all, to each one (1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7). If a church ignores this principle it impoverishes itself and rejects God's gifts. The individual Christian suffers too, having no legitimate outlet for his abilities and gifts. It has often meant that unscriptural outlets have been sought to the detriment of the true work of God.

We greatly impoverish the life of the churches by maintaining a pattern of life which rules out the great variety of gifts given by the Spirit of God for today. This is not to advocate some chaotic free-for-all, for the command to do all things decently and in order comes in the context of the church's worship in which participation had a place.<sup>22</sup> Each

member has something to contribute to the life of the church which the Spirit has first given him. There are gifts today which are appropriate for a church in the late 20th century which would have been inappropriate for a 1st century church. There are gifts appropriate for a 1st century church (such as the foundational 'signs of the apostles' — see 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4) which are quite inappropriate today.

But what does a church do to implement the principles above? How are the members to contribute to the well-being of the whole, as the Holy Spirit gives them gifts for service? The New Testament provides the answer to these questions, for it provides a consistent pattern for local church life which caters for the unity of the church and the individuality of the members. The reality and wholeness of the life of the church may be considered in a number of ways, and we shall touch on them much too briefly. (We are unable to deal with the place of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper in this short article as they need fuller treatment.)

The church is no disorganised rabble. The New Testament lays out how the local church is to be organised. It is no one-man-show — each member is to be involved. The church meeting of all the members is an important expression of fellowship and the centre from which all other aspects of organisation spring. Although leadership of the church, as biblical leadership generally, is in many senses a singular thing, and there is a large place in the scriptures given to it, the scriptures also teach that churches are to be led by a body of elders (more than one). This may well be an ideal to be aimed at rather than a practical reality, but shared aspects of leadership in this way mean that the church is using God-given abilities and gifts. But elders are not to do everything. Acts 6 speaks

of assistance given to elders by the appointment of deacons. Deacons are not the board of management of a church. They are appointed to serve the church in relieving the elders of practical matters relating to the church's common life and property. 1 Timothy 3:11 and 5:9-10 speak of particular responsibilities falling on older women in the church as they too assist the elders. But that is not the limit of the work to be organised in the life of the church. There is a tremendous variety of activity which needs organising for the whole church depends on the whole membership — all have a part to play.

Turning our attention for a few moments to the worship of the church again we must emphasise its wholeness. If nothing else a church is a worshipping company with a spiritual dimension to its life. As it meets, for whatever purpose, it has its eyes directed heavenward. It always comes together in the presence of God. If every member is to participate fully in the life of the church, the worship of the church must have a pattern which takes account of every member. Corporate worship is by definition what the body does together. Church worship is worship of the whole church. What the Lord gives to the members of the church for the common good should find some expression within the worshipping activity of the church when it meets together.

A church is also a fellowship. True biblical fellowship has to be worked at and catered for in the programme of the church. It is many sided and is essentially a practical sharing of the things of the Lord. It isn't merely sitting together in the same place at the same time. It is much more than that. Much of what Paul says in Romans 12 has a relevance to the practical outworkings of fellowship between the saints. The supreme expression of fellowship within the church of Paul's day was the Lord's

Supper and the common meal that went with it (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:18-34, especially verse 22; and Acts 20:7). Paul's condemnation of the Corinthians' conduct was because of the lack of love for the church revealed at such a meal (1 Cor. 11:18, 22, 29). Love is the keynote of Christian fellowship and may be expressed in any number of ways to enhance the life of the church. Prayer, visiting one another, encouraging, advising, sharing and so on all fit the categories of fellowship.

Fellowship in service for the church in the world will also mean outreach with the gospel. The great commission is still binding on the church. Each church should have an evangelistic programme, for it is very easy to overlook this matter and assume that things are being done. Every member is involved in this ministry so it should always be before the church for consideration, prayer and planning. Gifts and abilities in the membership should be used to the full in reaching the lost. The missionary vision of the church is to be included here, although we are not able to develop it in this article.

The word of God features prominently in the work of outreach, but it also features equally prominently in the church life within. Teaching it to all the membership and their families, and to others within the orbit of the church's life, requires care and diligence. The church has a clear responsibility to give instruction to all in ways suited to their age and understanding — children and adults. Such teaching is not work for novices — new converts and young teenagers. The whole church is involved in it but it has to appoint wisely only those who are gifted for such work in order that all may be taught properly. All such teaching will be under the direction of the elders of the church whose responsibility it is under God.

*(continued on page 16)*

# The Carey Family Conference

Over 20 churches were represented at the first Carey Family Conference to be held in Leeds. There were fears beforehand that having a holiday conference in a big city would not be propitious. That misgiving was instantly removed when we saw the scope of the Leeds Polytechnic where the grounds are such that you do not know that it is in a city. The sporting facilities are reputedly the second best in the country. The recreational side was truly the best we have ever experienced. Besides the usual swimming gala an athletic competition was organised which was enhanced by being able to use the most up to date track surface. The shot-put was memorable with pastor Jack Jenner coming second to a mighty put by Dave Buxton! Tennis and table tennis were enjoyed. The catering was excellent. Leeds Polytechnic is booked for the same time next year. July 30th to August 3rd.

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## THE LIFE AND BEING OF A LOCAL CHURCH (continued from page 15)

A living church will grow. It will grow in understanding, in spiritual depth, in love, and it will grow in numbers. But growth can have dangers. Obesity is a problem not confined to physical bodies. Churches can grow fat and overweight. Care needs to be exercised that the church uses everything the Lord gives it in a disciplined and God-honouring way. The life and being of the local church requires that we be concerned for a church's spiritual fitness.

### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Peter 2:9-10; Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:25-27; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:11.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:9-11.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:1-4.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London; The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:14-17.

<sup>8</sup> Evangelical Movement of Wales, *The Christian Church — a Biblical Study*, Port Talbot: Evangelical Movement of Wales, 1966, pp. 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth H. Good, *God's Blueprint for a Church*, Des Plaines, Illinois; Regular Baptist Press, 1974, pp. 33-34.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> David Kingdon, *Baptist Heritage in Baptist Heritage and Responsibility*, Mulhouse, France: Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Europe, 1970, pp. 1-6.

<sup>12</sup> R. B. S. Eccles, *Discipline in the Local Church in Local Church Practice*, Haywards Heath, Sussex: Carey Publications, 1978, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Erroll Hulse, *The Ideal Church*, in *Local Church Practice*, pp. 23, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 4:8-16.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 5:24-25.

<sup>16</sup> Erroll Hulse, *The Glory of the Church*, in *Local Church Practice*, p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:14-27.

<sup>19</sup> See Revelation 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15.

<sup>20</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12:23.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. 1 Corinthians 12:26.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:40.

The spiritual unity and edification throughout was superb. The substance of the materials presented is described in paragraphs following.

Addresses given at the Carey Family Conference. Cassettes are available. The cost is as follows: U.K. Hire charge: 60p per month (including postage one way). U.K. Purchase price: £1.85 (including postage). Overseas postage additional. Cheques payable to 'Carey Recording Studios'. 1984 Conference Tapes available from: Mr. S. D. Hogwood, 13 Lucastes Avenue, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 1JE.

By Alun McNabb

*1. The Glory of the Church and the Privilege of belonging to it*

The Church is set forth as structured by divine wisdom. A believer is nothing other than divinely predestined, divinely purchased and divinely indwelt. Excessive individualism has tended to make evangelicals minimize the Church, but this is a far cry from the biblical view. Questions dealt with include, What does the world think of the Church? What does the Church think of itself? What does Christ think of the Church? This last question, answered from the Song of Solomon shows the intense and deep love the Saviour has for his people. How these are mysteries opened up to the elect, not by flesh and blood but by revelation.

*2. The Local Mission Field — How to break down the four-walls mentality*

The Church is often building-centred. Is this because we are fools or cowards, or both? Was Jesus confined to a building? What does Proverbs 1:20-21 teach us about where we should place our pulpits? When we have successfully argued that the pulpit should be in the centre of the building will we then go on to place it from time to time in the centre of the market place? Do we really follow Jesus by staying indoors? How can we succeed in opposing the protests of the flesh? What are the best kind of classes for evangelism? How can I discover what is most suitable to my situation? What should we do about those non-involved Christians who do all they can to divert and discourage us? These and many other questions on evangelism are answered in this message.

*3. Submitting to Authority — the Key to Joy and Peace*

The breakdown in law and order in society has overflowed into the Church. It is shown that God is a God of order in Creation, Redemption, etc. He has planned for order in the Church by the appointment of men to rule. The first responsibility for any eldership is the maintenance of law and order in the Church. From 1 Timothy it is explained that rule is clearly linked with the health of the local Church. Questions answered include: What is 'double honour?', why should the elders be obeyed? (a very important point this), what kind of elders should be obeyed and honoured? what is meant by ruling well — and labouring at the word and doctrine?

#### *4. Society's View of the Church — a Plea for Consistent Gospel Living*

From 1 Thessalonians 1:8, 'The word of the Lord has sounded forth'. It is shown that we must not only hold firm doctrinal position but resist all attempts to undermine it. Society's view of the Church is given by unbelieving Bishops. A telling illustration is given as to why we must not support evangelical crusades where these men are given prominence. Also, does society see a Church that still believes in conversion? A powerful illustration of a recent conversion is described to illustrate the sovereign grace of God. Christians are pleaded with to pray for and long for genuine works of God in conversion. This message concludes with an appeal for godly living from 1 John 2:6.

By Erroll Hulse

##### *1. The centrality of the church in the work of the Gospel*

Isaiah 56:1-8. The latter passage is Messianic in character and anticipates in vivid fashion the chief feature of the Gospel Church, namely the adoption of sons and daughters into a family in which each one has a name and a memorial better than sons and daughters. The love of the Lord's day and the high premium laid on prayer is noteworthy but the main observation is that there is no other body on earth which embraces worship, mutual sanctification, and service, as does the body or church of Christ. All outreach and all missionary endeavour should spring from the local church. The place of Publishing houses, Bible Societies and specialized mission agencies is discussed.

##### *2. Rebellion in the church.*

Numbers 12-14. Surely this is not a reality in the local church? Rebellion among the godly? Who was closer to Moses than his own brother and sister? (Numbers 12). Likewise the twelve spies represented the best men chosen from the nation. Yet ten were the instigators of a terrible rebellion (Numbers 13 and 14). In this sermon rebellion is defined and the difference between lawful protest and rebellion explained. The disease is traced back to the fall and the virile force of rebellion that remains in the sinful nature of believers opened up and exposed.

##### *3. Worship in the church*

1 Corinthians 12-14. The three pronged worldwide error of the Charismatic movement is here outlined and refuted from the very passage which they think supports their position. Public worship is affected in a most radical way if their thesis is correct especially as touching personal participation the nature of which is explained. Even at Corinth in the era of transition it was two or at the most three, but not dozens of contributors all doing their bit. All contribute by way of participation from beginning to end, that is if their minds and affections are taken up with the constituent elements of worship.

#### *4. Problems in the church*

1 and 2 Corinthians. The background provided by Acts 18 was explored to show that a mixture of pagans and converted Jews would result in many problems which would have to be sorted out. The foremost problem was that of unity which Paul places first in his priorities. That churches have problems of every kind is the norm.

#### *5. How to be a good soldier of Christ*

2 Timothy 2:3. The basis upon which every believer enters the Lord's army is explained. The principle of Christian warfare is described — we are to love our enemies, not kill them. Finally to be a good soldier we need to know the strategy of war and how to use our weapons. Ephesians 6:12-18.

By Peter Parkinson

#### *Inter-church relationships — an impossible dream!*

Attention was drawn to the present lack of inter-church fellowship. Too often churches are isolated and suspicious of each other. The outline was, (1) The Biblical principles of inter-church fellowship, (2) The value of, (3) The obstacles to, and (4) The realization of inter-church fellowship. Under point 1 reference was made to the way in which the churches of the New Testament era shared information, and this in spite of the difficulties of communication compared with the present day. Under point 2 the factors of fellowship, financial help, ministerial help and mutual recognition of disciplinary measures were opened up. With regard to (3) — the obstacles, it was brought out that often very petty matters such as jealousy and suspicion mar inter-church relationships which is no honour to Christ. Under (4) the practical aspects of conferences, correspondence, fraternals, sending of members from strong churches to weak churches, and help by way of pulpit supply were addressed. The whole was most needful in today's climate.

By Malcolm MacGregor

#### *The problem of unemployment*

The subject was comprehensively and practically treated. I was so absorbed that I did not take down the main headings. So will you be when you hear the cassette, and on the second hearing you might take down the gist of it.

*This article is for the attention of every churchgoer who occasionally — or not so occasionally — feels boredom, or even impatience, with the preaching which may seem mediocre. The emphasis of what follows is wholly positive and very helpful. It has been taken from a sermon preached by pastor Tom Lyon of Tacoma, Washington State, U.S.A. Pastor Lyon is a good friend and we are grateful to him, suggesting in good humour that this article is likely to bring him world fame! This he will not want, but the point is that he is touching a subject of universal interest among churchgoers — and handling it in a way which takes hold of the imagination.*

## How to profit from mediocre preaching

It is important to encourage the flock on how to profit from mediocre preaching. The subject is to be dealt with in three ways: 1. An apology — why there is mediocrity in most preaching; 2. Some observations which may comfort us when listening to mediocre preaching; 3. Some directions to enable us to profit from mediocre preaching.

A passage which is relevant is appropriate by way of an introduction to what we are going to consider. It is 1 Thessalonians 2:13, *'And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe'.*

It may seem that this article is a defence of mediocrity in preaching. Happily there are examples of good preaching. There are however many examples of mediocre preaching and alas! too many examples of lousy preaching. Mediocre means middling, that which is in the middle. Most preachers would admit to their preaching being mediocre at least some of the time, if not most of the time. It is distressing to think that so dynamic a thing as the word of God should be presented in a mediocre way, and that leads us to our first point.

### *1. An apology for mediocre preaching*

Most people do not realise how difficult preaching is. There are, first of all, difficulties which arise from the text. Sometimes a preacher does not have any idea what it means and none of the commentators help. Some indeed are exasperating because they are abstruse where we want them to be clear. Even Peter had a problem with difficult parts of Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). Not everything in the word of God is equally clear and there are many passages which cannot be preached upon because we do not have enough light. You must first of all understand what the Scripture means before you can declare that meaning with authority and call for and expect a response. The Word of God is not easily interpreted. It takes a good deal of diligence and a balanced sense and experience not to be carried off in a wrong direction which is without relevance or edification.



Secondly, there are difficulties arising from the congregation. Antagonistic groups are the least likely to produce mediocre preaching — they tend to bring out the best in one who is truly called to be a preacher, but if there is a lackadaisical attitude or an obvious prejudice against the preacher, or a laziness — they all ate too much for their Sunday afternoon meal — then this cannot help but have an adverse effect. However, you cannot blame mediocrity completely upon the hearers — mediocrity is bound to set in when you preach to the same people year after year, and all the good illustrations were used up long ago, and the attempts to be fresh and to keep people's attention have become more and more difficult. The visiting preacher has a distinct advantage in coming and preaching, then leaving. Long term acquaintance is a great difficulty but it is also a great privilege and opportunity, something which ought to be the rule rather than the exception.

Thirdly, there are difficulties arising from preaching itself. There can be an inability on the part of the preacher to interpret the response — was there any real profit from the preaching or is there just a general cordiality? The response can be gauged by the number of cassettes ordered, but how can you really know if the Spirit came down upon the Word preached and profited the people? Preaching tends to be mediocre because of these difficulties weighing upon the act of preaching itself.

There is also the impossibility of anticipating freedom, unreservedness of speech. I am unable to define what freedom is exactly but I certainly know when I do not have it! You can prepare, have everything the way you want it and think there is food for thought, the gospel being preached but when you stand up there is nothing. At other times you can be disappointed with your preparation, everything is wrong but God comes down and blesses exceedingly. You cannot judge from your preparation what the outcome will be. In almost every other occupation if you have done your preparation when the time comes you can be certain of the issue but not with preaching. Being prepared helps, but it does not guarantee that there will be any freedom, and when you are always faced with depending on God for freedom, sometimes you have it and sometimes you do not.

Another difficulty arising from preaching itself is the withering schedule. Does anyone have to face deadlines like the mediocre preacher? It is difficult to be fresh, especially when your freedom is so much in doubt and you do not really know what the response of the congregation is. All these things can depress to the point of mediocrity. Not only that, you have to preach sometimes when you do not feel like it at all. It is easy enough not to feel like going to work but get up and go through the routine anyway, but it is very difficult to do that in preaching. There is also a difficulty that arises from enduring your own mediocrity which discourages and leads to further mediocrity.<sup>1</sup>

There are also difficulties arising from the weight of the office. There are two people who will give account for your own soul. You are responsible for your

own soul, and 'they who keep watch over you as men who must give an account' (Heb. 13:17). That is a fearful consideration. Paul felt this also when he wrote 'To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?' (2 Cor. 2:16, 17).

## *2. There are observations which may comfort us when we consider a mediocre ministry*

Firstly, mediocre preaching is most profitable to the best sort of hearers. If you come and you are not a good hearer, the only preaching that is going to move you to some sort of interest is the kind that is the best kind of preaching on earth, then you will find that when mediocre preaching is heard at that meeting, you will not profit at all. There are three kinds of people in the church, the wolves are always howling, the goats are always butting, but the sheep just love everything and they are the kind of people who profit from preaching no matter how mediocre it is. They are there to profit and if the truth is proclaimed, no matter how mediocre the delivery, they will still profit from the preaching. If you go away with nothing, was it the preacher's mediocrity or was it because you did not go with the best sort of ears, ready to hear?

Secondly, mediocre preaching is better than no preaching at all. When Elijah came and told King Ahab that it would not rain until God said so, it was not the lack of rain that was the greatest curse upon Israel, it was the lack of a prophet because until the rain came back Elijah was gone too.

Thirdly, mediocre preaching is that most often owned by God. Many of the sermons preached by men in the great revivals were basically mediocre. If you study them for homiletics, structure, or view them from a point of view of eloquence, they were mediocre. The doctrine is certainly there as it was in Edwards' preaching but in many of his sermons there is nothing original or exciting. It is very interesting to study Whitefield's sermons. If you read what he said there is no unction at all in the cold print. His sermons are flat and childlike. They are so simple as to be uninteresting yet God greatly blessed his preaching. We know from the historical records that his delivery was marvellous and that drew great crowds yet ultimately it was the plain truth of the Gospel that was blessed and which was used to bring about lasting results. M'Cheyne, who preached as though he was dying to have you converted, also preached some exceedingly dull and common sermons but God came down and blessed them. Often it is mediocre preachers that God seems to bless. Why is that so? Paul told us, 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels so that the glory and the exceeding greatness of the power may be seen to belong to God and not to men'.

## *3. Five directions on how to profit from mediocre preaching*

1. Thank God for a pastor who laments his mediocrity. Would you want a pastor who thought he was the best of all and needed no improvement?
2. Be encouraged that his mediocrity whets his appetite and determination to

study and begets tenure. That man is sharpened in his thinking to study even harder so that he may undo this mediocrity which seems to haunt him. The very thing that discourages him pricks him to move on and not to be mediocre on the next occasion. Not only that, but if you had a great preacher he would very soon move on to a bigger church somewhere but a mediocre preacher is likely to stay. If you want him to stay, thank God that although he is mediocre, he preaches the truth all the way along the line, section by section.

3. Esteemed preaching, albeit mediocre preaching, as an ordinance of God and fastidious hearing as an act of worship. There has been the brilliant deduction that the church ought not to be a place where people come to sit in rows and listen obediently to some authoritative figure who stands in front and pontificates to them as to what the Scriptures mean. Some say that rather, we should put all the chairs in a big circle and share and dialogue and give all of our unprepared opinions and then somehow we will come up with the truth by a process of democratic consent. The centrality of preaching is being questioned today but history tells us that if it is lost it will be the end of the Church as we know it. Preaching must be central because it is an ordinance of God. He says, you are to be baptised, you are to observe the Lord's supper and you are to have preaching. That is clear from the word of God. It is by the foolishness of that message preached that God is pleased to save them that believe and also to spare them from being carried about by every wind of doctrine. It is an act of worship if you listen to preaching properly. You should receive it and give your 'Amen' to the truth as it is proclaimed. You should then believe it and act upon it, and bow before the God of truth. Be a careful hearer.

4. Garrison your preacher about with walls and gates of prayer — walls to keep the difficulties away and gates to allow the freedom and blessing to come in.

5. Take stock once again. What constitutes true preaching? Is it eloquence or is it the delivery of truth, however mediocre? You have a right to profit from the preaching of the truth regardless of how monotone the delivery is. We do not need to be entertained or to hear something new to worship God or to profit from preaching. Do not be like the Athenians who stood around either to hear or to tell something new. There are some who enjoy and worship God hearing the old, old story and the Pastor's 18th sermon entitled 'The Gospel simply stated'. Do you get tired of hearing the Gospel simply stated? Reevaluate in your thinking what makes good preaching — is it eloquence, is it an accent, or is it the delivery and proclamation of the truth of God which is our chief soul's delight? Consider these directions. The responsibility, if the truth is being proclaimed, lies with your ears and their preparation. He who is truly hungry does not complain about the garnish on the dish. He is interested as to whether there is substance in the food, the proper vitamins and minerals and the energy supplied to keep oneself alive. The same thing is true of us. If we come chiefly concerned with the garnish on the dish and the way it is presented then we will not profit from the truth as it is delivered as food for our soul. We look to Christ

*(continued at foot of page 28)*

# Book Notices

**Early Christian Fathers to Twentieth Century Christian Unions — recent publications on Church History.** *The following comments constitute notices rather than reviews. For instance Victor Budgen's biography of Hus is deserving of an article let alone a review.*

**Creeds, Councils and Christ**<sup>1</sup> is not, perhaps a title calculated to launch a best-seller. The deliberations of the Early Fathers are not light bed-time reading. However, I found this an exciting book; the contemporary urgency of the issues treated is clearly explained in the introduction. Gerald Bray believes that a sense of doctrine has largely been lost among evangelicals today. In the face of the powerful challenge to orthodox Christianity posed by much modern theology, a study of the early creeds and confessions provides an important historical base for doctrinal understanding. In contrast to many eminent scholars who argue that 'orthodox' Christianity was formulated only by the church fathers, and that the New Testament writers did not propound truths such as the Deity of Christ, Bray demonstrates that the doctrines formulated in the Early Councils (such as that of the Trinity) were solidly grounded in Scripture.

Leaping forward a thousand years into the fourteenth century, **On Fire for God**<sup>2</sup> is a readable and stimulating biography of the Bohemian martyr, John Hus, by Victor Budgen. The author, being not merely a historian but also a pastor, gives a whole chapter of contemporary applications at the end. This is an excellent book.

Once again Lion Publications have excelled themselves, with a volume of church history by a team of historians and other scholars, that is so beautifully presented that it will surely attract even

haters of history. **Christianity in America**<sup>3</sup> is an ambitious title, even though there are only two and a half centuries to cover. Timecharts and maps are an integral part of the text. America exerts a fascination which must have to do with its wealth and power. Jonathan Dimpleby, producer of a current TV series on 'The American Dream', was asked by *The Times* to define that Dream. 'It has a lot to do with the fact that the downtrodden have become the greatest nation on earth — for which no little credit is given to the Almighty', he replied.<sup>4</sup>

The crunch question of course is whether or not America can in any way be regarded as a 'Christian country'. This handbook does not hide the many anomalies — including the most obvious one of the rich dying from too much weight and the poor from malnourishment. It succeeds in communicating the enormous diversity that has made up the 'Christian church' both in the past and today. George Marsden, in a short article, shows that claims about America's Christian origins should be carefully qualified (p. 151). American readers who take umbrage at this may note that Marsden's case is presented at much greater length in one of the many recent books to appear on Calvin and Calvinism.

'American "Christian" Origins: Puritan New England as a case study' by Marsden, is one of the best of the essays in a collection: **John Calvin — His influence in the Western World**.<sup>5</sup> (His basic argument is summarised separately.) Most contributors to this volume trace the influence of Calvinist theology in specific countries. The most interesting essays are those on Calvinism as a cultural force, the transmission of Calvinism in the sixteenth century, Calvin and the Church of England, and the Puritan modification of Calvin's theology, because they do not simply adopt a pedestrian

narrative approach to a given geographical area. (Other essays deal with Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, Canada, Australasia and South Africa.) The epilogue states 'the authors of the various chapters hope that they have presented a clear picture of the influence of Calvin and Calvinism in the Western World' (p. 365). I confess to feeling unsatisfied, for although there are useful insights in some of the essays, there is no general analysis of the influence of Calvinism in the western world as a whole. Perhaps the title was too ambitious, and many questions remain unanswered. What about the contribution of Calvinism to political resistance? Or Calvinism's contribution to democracy? What about an *honest* treatment of the Church/state issue, facing up to the reality of utter intolerance among sixteenth century (and later) Calvinists?

Some of these questions are more satisfyingly dealt with in the fascinating and comprehensive volume **Readings in Calvin's Theology**.<sup>6</sup> Graham's essay on 'Church and Society – The Difficulty of Sheathing Swords' is particularly illuminating. Excellent chapters deal with Calvin's teaching on Scripture, Providence, the Covenant, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Law, the Sacraments, and Eschatology, among others. The editor contributes a relevant study of Calvin's teaching on wealth – showing how his ideas apply to our age of consumerism.

Two other recently produced books on Calvin may interest students of Baptist History. **Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals**<sup>7</sup> is a comprehensive survey of Calvin's attitudes towards, and actions against, the 'Radicals' of the reformation. Those who wish to check up what Calvin had to say himself on the subject now no longer have to learn French. B. W. Farley has translated the **Treatises against the Anabaptists and the Libertines**.<sup>8</sup> Baptists won't take too

kindly to Calvin's rejection of the 'poor fanatics' who 'cite the usage and practice of the apostles' to justify believer's baptism' (p. 48).

From theology to fiction. History can be communicated very successfully by means of historical novels. The stories behind the formulation of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession are told with a certain amount of imaginative licence in a small book which can be read very quickly, but which gives a most vivid picture of evangelical life in the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Having entered into the dramatic uncertainties faced by the believers who first adopted the Catechism, one can appreciate anew the firm affirmation of question number one: 'What is your only comfort in life and death?' 'That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins . . .' (p. 81).

Much less successful as a story is an account of the *Mayflower's* voyage to the New World – **Voyage to Freedom**.<sup>10</sup> This is partly in the nature of the material – a trip from A to B does not provide much in the way of plot. But the characterization is weak; responses are predictable because of the extreme virtue of the majority of the characters. (The publishers, rather hopefully, describe Justice and Prudence as 'typical' children – we must guard against the all too easy error of romanticising previous generations of Christians.) It is my guess that the didactic purpose of the book is not subtly enough disguised to make it appealing to the majority of young people.

Finally, to move on to twentieth century church history. Student work, both in Britain and internationally, has been a very significant aspect of recent Evangelicalism. Evangelical witness in

the Universities and Colleges of Wales is described in **Excuse me, Mr. Davies — Hallelujah!**<sup>11</sup> To read such a book is a refreshing tonic if one is afflicted with cynicism about the use of evangelism and outreach. It will be of particular encouragement and stimulus to any involved with student work. There is a strong, wholehearted stress on the reality of conversion, but more, we see the way in which so many of those who were converted while at College have contributed and continue to contribute significantly to the church. Thus, church 'history' is brought right in to the present day — and this book is a reminder to pray fervently for contemporary efforts in evangelism in the universities and colleges in this country, and abroad.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ*, IVP, pbk. pp. 224, £5.95.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Budgen, *On Fire for God*, Evangelical Press, pbk. pp. 323, £5.95.

<sup>3</sup> D. F. Wells et al, *Christianity in America — A Handbook*, Lion Publications, hbk. pp. 508, £12.95.

<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, July 30th, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> W. Stanford Reid (ed.), *John Calvin — His Influence in the Western World*, Zondervan.

<sup>6</sup> D. K. McKim (ed.), *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, Baker Book House, pbk. pp. 342, \$15.95.

<sup>7</sup> W. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, Erdmans, pbk. pp. 338.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and the Libertines*, translated B. W. Farley, Baker Book House, pbk. pp. 336, \$16.95.

<sup>9</sup> Thea B. Van Halsema, *Three Men came to Heidelberg and Glorious Heretic*, Baker Book House, pbk. pp. 134, \$3.95.

<sup>10</sup> David Gay, *Voyage to Freedom*, Banner of Truth, pbk. pp. 150, £2.45.

<sup>11</sup> Geraint D. Fielder, *Excuse me, Mr. Davies — Hallelujah! Evangelical Student Witness in Wales 1923-1983*, Evangelical Press of Wales/IVP, pbk. pp. 264, £2.95.

One of the most interesting essays in the collection 'John Calvin — His influence in the Western World' (see above) is here considered in greater detail.

**American 'Christian' Origins: Puritan New England as a case study by George M. Marsden.**

This is an incisive critique of the idea that America began with a 'Christian' culture for which Puritanism laid the foundation. New England is an excellent case for study, as the Puritan leaders had liberty to direct the life of the young community as they wanted. Although the culture of New England had some commendable characteristics, he argues that it was basically flawed by their assumption that they were in a position to create a Christian state.

The civil governor of New England, Winthrop, began with the premise that the whole Massachusetts community was Christian. This reflected the common belief of the time. Because the New England settlers regarded themselves as a Christian 'body politic' they deduced that they were an equivalent to Israel in the Old Testament. Winthrop, in the role of Moses leading a new Exodus, promised that if the group arrived safely 'on the other side', this would be a ratification of God's covenant with them. Thus on arrival the death penalty was introduced for idolatry and all other offences for which it was applied in ancient Israel. The State established the Church. The native Americans were treated as the Israelites had treated the Canaanites.

Calvinists today would not accept this interpretation of the covenant; they would probably share Roger Williams' interpretation of the Church as being the *spiritual* fulfilment of Israel rather than the church-state being the *political/religious* fulfilment. Williams argued for a separation of Church and State, and for religious toleration, but in this he was far from typical of the Calvinism of his time.

It has been claimed that the typically American emphasis on 'a higher law' is a direct result of Puritanism. Marsden argues that the eighteenth century political theory with which this is most widely associated rests on the assumption that reason can reveal sufficient

natural law: an assumption foreign to Calvinists who emphasise natural depravity. The author also qualifies the common belief that Puritanism actually contributed to a recognition of depravity in eighteenth century political theory, a recognition that anyway was dispelled by nineteenth century optimism.

Marsden next shows how the influences contributing to democracy are too diverse to claim that this was a Christian development. One complicating factor is that Calvinists in the eighteenth century accepted the prevailing Whig political orthodoxies, because 'they had lost any strong sense that reason for the Christian and non-Christian will often point in different directions' (p. 253). 'When the American Revolution broke out, Calvinist clergy were among the first to identify the principle of the American revolution with divine revelation' (p. 253). In 1777 a preacher informed his congregation that the revolt against the English monarchy was 'the cause of Heaven against Hell' (p. 254). (Does such rhetoric sound strangely familiar in 1984?) The State had become exalted, because of that initial identification of the Church-State with Israel, the people of God. Christianity provided the slogans in the time of the civil war also, as in the Battle Hymn of the Republic — 'His truth goes marching on'. (It has continued to provide slogans for the righteousness of American foreign policy in our own century.)

A more positive Calvinist contribution to American culture may be found in relation to public morality, humanitarian reform, the idea of calling, family life. Even here, the moral fervour which finds militant expression today in the Moral Majority is often far closer to a religion of salvation by morality, than it is to historic Calvinism. The evangelicalism which appears so strong in the USA, with incredible numbers of

people claiming to be 're-born', is also basically non-Calvinist in that it has 'tended to shift the focus in Christianity from God's sovereignty to personal human experience' (p. 256). Most important, modern evangelicalism side-steps the Calvinist/Puritan insistence on a sense of inability (even in a Christian) to please a Holy God; 'the sense of human limitation simply tended to disappear. . . . Ironically by this Calvinistic standard American evangelicalism itself became one of the sources of the destruction of positive Christian influences in America — a fact that evangelical spokespersons themselves so much lament' (p. 257).

In conclusion, Marsden argues that the fact that Christianity had positive influences on early New England is *not* to say that the culture was Christian. He further questions the concept of a 'Christian culture'. Human societies are held together by their cultures; these obviously reflect the tendencies in human nature. Pride is a basic instinct, variously manifested in tribalism, racism, nationalism, or a class system (p. 258). Group interests are what governments are constituted to protect. Materialism, power, and violence are also common, if not universal features of human culture.

Christianity may well contribute more positive tendencies, just as cultures do naturally exhibit other values than the negative ones mentioned. But even when a large number of individuals in a society profess to be Christian, and a society regards itself as 'Christian', there will be a merging of the Christian values and the negative forces which will result in many ambiguities, and lead to the identification of Christianity with a variety of arguably 'non-Christian' positions (e.g. apartheid?). The early Puritans in New England sincerely believed that they had the 'blue-print' for the Kingdom of God on earth.

*(continued on page 28)*



*The following is an extract from volume 1 of 3 volumes with the title **Shepherding God's Flock** by Jay E. Adams, published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.*

## **The pastor and his family**

### *Family Life*

No more critical matter can be considered since it is probably in this area that more pastors and more families suffer than in any other. Nothing can make a man more ineffective than bearing the weight of concern that comes from a bad marital relationship. When he also carries about guilt arising from failure as a parent, the load can become back breaking. Moreover, too many pastors are plagued day by day with family difficulties occasioned by small salaries, high demands upon time and for quality performance, tensions between allegiance to the job and to the home, the tugs of large opportunities and the need to meet regular obligations, and dozens of similar considerations. Unless he can resolve these

matters by getting control of his time and energies, the pastor will be doomed to a life of unnecessary struggle, confusion and despair, centring itself in the family and causing frequent upheavals and heartaches. In no area is it easier for a minister to become discouraged and leave the ministry. Yet, in no area can he have so healthy, meaningful and fruitful a ministry as in becoming an example for his flock of a Christian husband and father. How can he begin to achieve this high calling?

At the outset, the pastor must recognise that he is a husband first, a father second and a pastor third.<sup>1</sup> Only by adopting and firmly adhering to the biblical priorities can the pastor develop the sort of disciplined life necessary to carry on

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### **HOW TO PROFIT FROM MEDIOCRE PREACHING** *(continued from page 23)*

who said, 'My flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed' and if Christ is preached with substance, with doctrine and application, then the preaching is profitable regardless of how mediocre it may have been in its presentation and delivery.

<sup>1</sup> The true story (not apocryphal) is told in Sussex of a tired preacher who actually slowed down to the point where he fell asleep for a couple of minutes during the delivery of his sermon! Perhaps the spirit of slumber was so prevailing that it was a matter of the sleeping preacher bent by exhaustion among a sleeping congregation! I know the chapel well. It had overhead heating radiators which beat down upon the pates of the people with devastating effect! Editor.

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### **NOTICES** *(continued from page 27)*

Central to their enterprise was their claim to be the New Israel. This was partly a result of the 'magisterial' reformers retention of the mediaeval concept of a territorial church. It has led to the common belief that American

society and culture, resting on a Christian foundation, has some sort of integral superiority over other cultures. This paper is a thoughtful and thought-provoking challenge to such a comfortable assumption. S.H.

all three of these vital tasks to which he is called.

To begin with, pastors (and through them congregations) must be brought to the realisation that a good home life is fundamental to a successful pastorate. This is so crucial that the Scriptures not only explicitly say so, but also require it for ordination:

He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?);<sup>2</sup>

Surely by the use of the key word *proistemi* ('manage'), Paul has placed a needed emphasis on the importance of management. The problems of the management of the church are uppermost in his mind as he thinks of the larger tasks of management (planning, organisation, enlistment, training and deployment of personnel, administration and discipline) to which the pastor (as such) is called, nevertheless, even the right to undertake these is predicated upon the ability of the would-be pastor to manage his own household well. For as Paul says, if he can't, surely he will not be able to manage the family of faith. There are at least five reasons why this is so:

1. The principles and skills of management are the same wherever they may be applied.
2. If he has failed with fewer persons, how can he succeed with the increased managerial burdens occasioned by managing a whole congregation?
3. If his own home is poorly managed, this will create intolerable burdens for him that, together with the regular tasks of the pastorate, will destroy his effectiveness as a pastor.
4. If he fails as a manager in his own home, there is no way that he can become the example that so many

members of the flock so desperately need to show them concretely how to manage their homes (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12).

5. If he is allowed to assume the pastorate under such circumstances, he is being encouraged to reverse God's priorities. Instead, he must be exhorted to put first things first. He is in no shape to take on the second task until he has displayed ability in performing well at the first.

The pastor's family is *his* family in several ways:

1. as the husband and father in the home;
2. as a pastoral example to the flock (including the way that he treats members of his own household);
3. as their shepherd (they too are a family of the congregation to whom he must minister).

There is, then, a triple reason for a pastor to spend much time in becoming the best husband and father that he can. He honours God, blesses his family and significantly helps his congregation thereby.

### *Social Life*

#### *Friendships*

Friendships are essential; why do some pastors try to do without them? How desperately we need one another. When he wanted to show how closely he identified with us, Jesus said, 'I have called you friends' (John 15:15). The friend, unlike the servant, has intimate knowledge of what one is doing. This, Jesus observed, is an essential and distinguishing characteristic of true friendship: 'The servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for [note the explanatory and definitive nature of what follows] all that I heard from my Father I have made known to you' (v. 15). The true friend 'sticks closer than a

brother' (Prov. 18:24), 'loves at all times' (Prov. 17:17), and 'lays down his life for his friends' (John 15:13).

The need for such friendship in the ministry is great. There are discouragements, puzzling times; periods of indecision, opportunity (or even doubt) in which one's friends become all-important. Many pastors today would be more effective ministers if they had only cultivated friendships.

Friendships keep the pastor from becoming insular. They tend to give him perspective and balance. Friends, like iron, sharpen him (Prov. 27:17). There is a tendency (which he must resist) for him to find his life becoming more and more circumscribed by committees, work and meetings, so that he may live ninety-nine per cent of his time within a small Christian bubble.<sup>3</sup> Isolation of this sort can hurt not only his own life, but inevitably will have a negative effect upon his ministry as well. Although Paul said that it would be impossible not to associate with unbelievers apart from leaving the world (1 Cor. 5:9-11), from observing the lives that some pastors lead one could only conclude that they are attempting to prove Paul wrong by accomplishing the impossible!

The fellowship of the saints will be proclaimed and promoted most effectively by those ministers who, themselves, are deeply involved in such fellowship. That the apostles both found strength and shared it with others through close involvement seems clear from the many personal references included in their letters (cf. esp. the epistles of Paul and John).

### *Entertaining in the Home*

Pastors must take a leaf from the Saviour's book and learn the importance of Christian fellowship at the table. It was from the context of the passover which he greatly 'desired' to eat with the disciples that the Lord's

supper emerged. It was at dinner parties that (sometimes even in the houses of Pharisees) the Lord gave some of his great speeches and that he witnessed to the lost. Christian ministers may discover the vast possibilities that the fellowship and closeness of the table provides (whether it be at a meal or when only eating a snack).

What is important to understand is that every minister and his wife must be 'given to hospitality' (Tit. 1:8). Occasions, opportunities and needs all summon them to such activities. Hospitality in the Christian community is so important that two New Testament books were written to discuss the subject (2 John and 3 John). Not only will hospitality afford opportunities for witness and for becoming better acquainted with the members of the church, but often the pastor will find that he must take in travelling missionaries, entertain guest speakers, etc. Some ministers (and especially their children) have themselves received the greatest blessings thereby.

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### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Christian Living In the Home*, p. 26 for comment on the biblical support for this generalisation. I am not discussing the basic principles of marriage and family life nor the respective roles of husbands and wives here, since I have gone into some of these matters in *Christian Living in the Home*. Suffice it to say here that all that is true of the Christian husband (father) or wife (mother) is true *par excellence* of the pastor as an example.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy 3:4-5:12. See also Titus 1:6. Before ordination a minister's home life ought to be scrutinised at least as carefully as his doctrinal soundness. Indeed, the two are not disparate. More compromises involving fidelity to biblical doctrine have originated from poor home conditions that at first might be supposed.

<sup>3</sup> The sad paradox is that while contacts become narrowed in this fashion and one would expect them to be deepened thereby, the contrary too often proves to be the case, since the pastor deliberately restrains the deepening process for fear of becoming too friendly to one or two and thus labelled with a charge of favouritism. The notion that a minister may not make friendships of differing sorts within the constituency to whom he ministers must be opposed. A clear gradation of friendships was maintained by the Lord himself. First he chose the twelve; of these he singled out three (Peter, James, John) who, for example, accompanied him to the mount of transfiguration (Mark 9:2) and into the garden (Mark 14:33); and of these three, one: John, the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' (which can mean only one thing: on whom he set his special love). Pastors should be judicious about the choice and exercise of special friendships, must be careful about the nature of information revealed and what the friend does with information. Yet, such carefully cultivated friendships must be encouraged.

*There are literally scores of nations today which stand in desperate need of men like Griffith Jones who saw what was required to be done and in spite of the difficulties and the inevitable critics got on and did it. Of course the needs referred to are different in character. Whole peoples and whole language groups require to be equipped with sound evangelical literature which at the same time is backed by powerful preaching, not divorced from it. Like Samuel of old Griffith Jones was a preacher cum educator. We thank Gwynne Lloyd Williams for this biographical sketch.*

## Griffith Jones 1683-1761

Griffith Jones, the son of John ap Gruffydd and Elinor John was born at Pant yr Efail, Penboyr, Cardiganshire. The date of his birth is unknown, but he was christened on May 1st, 1684. Very few details of his early life have been recorded, even the events surrounding his youthful conversion are largely unknown. He was certainly called to enter the Christian ministry at a fairly early age. A period of study at Carmarthen Grammar School was regarded as sufficient to equip him to enter the ministry of the Anglican Church.

It is something of a cliché to describe Jones as the forerunner of the Methodist revival, yet the description rings true. As a young man Jones was horrified by the spiritual poverty which surrounded him. There was a widespread ignorance of the Gospel, which gave succour to moral depravity. Vast numbers of the clergy were guilty of intellectual apathy as the scepticism of the age made extensive inroads into the church hierarchy. Thus it was in much of Wales that Christianity had little doctrinal content and was all too often sustained by the appeal of those ancient rituals which neither the Reformers nor the Puritans had managed to eradicate.

Griffith Jones was licenced as a deacon in 1708 and became curate in Penrhydd in 1709. People soon flocked in large numbers to hear this fiery young preacher who obviously believed what he preached. In 1716 he became the

rector of Llanddowror. His first love was the preaching of the Word and a local revival attended this work, which took him preaching outside his own parish. This was soon to prove a cause of difficulty for him and he had to face a charge from his bishop of 'intruding himself into the churches of other ministers without their leave'. He was also criticised for his habit of conducting services in the open air, be it outside churches because they were too small, or at sports days and fairs where he was noted for his courage in applying the word.

Griffith Jones responded to these charges by suggesting that the bishop might be more profitably employed in chasing up his lethargic clergy than in trying to silence those who took their work seriously. Sir John Philipps, an influential local figure, used his influence with the bishop to ensure that no disciplinary action be taken against Jones. Philipps had long taken an interest in the young preacher and it was he who had given Jones the living of Llanddowror in 1716. He also provided Jones with a wife in a manner of speaking, for his sister Margaret Philipps married Griffith Jones on 11th February 1720.

As a young man there had been a time when Jones had considered going overseas, possibly to India as a missionary. He had decided however that the spiritual plight of his own neighbourhood was such that he ought to stay in

Wales. After over twenty years in the ministry, Griffith Jones was increasingly concerned that the spiritual darkness around him was as dense as ever. Slowly he became convinced that the people needed to augment what they gleaned from sermons by personal study of the word. This meant that they had to be taught how to read. So at the age of 48, Jones entered an exciting new phase of his work.

From 1713 Jones had been closely involved in the work of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.). This was an Anglican movement, founded by Sir John Phillips among others. Its aim was to produce and distribute Christian literature. It was natural for Jones to turn to the S.P.C.K. for help and they provided him with Bibles for use in his schools. The first school was opened in Llanddowror in the winter of 1731-1732. By 1736 there were four such schools offering free tuition to all.

Using the experience gleaned from these pioneering efforts, Jones soon decided to settle on the idea of circulating schools. A school would be held in any one place for a period of three months. This was considered to be sufficient time for the pupils to be able to spell out the Bible and catechism for themselves. Again learning from earlier experience, Jones ran the schools from September to May, thus keeping clear of the busiest time in the farming year. Few adults or children could be free to attend at any time during the summer.

The idea of itinerant schools had been promulgated by Sir Humphrey Mackworth almost twenty years earlier. What Griffith Jones did was to apply the principle on a scale which eventually became national. The very size of the operation soon became a difficulty in itself, as it became hard to find sufficient capable teachers to open schools. Jones started to run his own teacher training

course at Llanddowror as a means of dealing with the problem.

The circulating schools worked in Welsh or English, whichever was the predominant language of an area. Griffith Jones understood how important it was to reach people in the vernacular. He was deeply critical of those including his own bishop — who could not preach in Welsh. A by-product of this policy was that the Welsh became one of the most literate nations of the day. The schools undoubtedly helped to keep Welsh alive as a language.

The work spread rapidly, especially in Glamorgan and the South-Western counties, but schools were also established in most other parts of Wales. Griffith Jones explained how he would go about establishing a new school. The first necessity was acquiring a suitable building, be it a church, a house or some other place. The public would then be told that a school was to be established and Jones would provide a school-master. This whole process was greatly facilitated if, as often happened, there was a local supporter of some influence. An introductory letter from Jones himself was available to anyone showing an interest in the school. It was presumably read aloud to potential pupils!

During the daytime children were taught, while three or four hours in the evening were given over to adult tuition. Teaching the pupils to read was the aim of the schools. Finances would not stretch to the teaching of writing or of other skills. The Bible and Prayer Book formed the reading material. Griffith Jones impressed upon his teachers that the pupils should be equipped to both read and understand these books. The teachers were therefore responsible for explaining the Scriptures. In evaluating this method of education, it must be remembered that Griffith Jones was not concerned with education for its own sake. His was a

loftier, more glorious aim, namely the spiritual nurture of souls. He crystallised this, 'All should be stirred up to read else they may come to follow their experiences and not the word.'

Estimates of the number of people who profited from the circulating schools vary considerably. The most conservative set of figures available for the years 1737-1761 show that 3,324 schools were held, that 153,835 children were taught and at least 150,000 adults. Thus the circulating schools reached over half the population of Wales at that time. It is little wonder that even secular historians marvel at such an achievement.

It was noted earlier that many regarded Jones as the morning star of the Methodists revival. He was considerably older than the Methodist leaders, he was thirty-one when Whitefield was born. Griffith Jones had a profound influence as a sort of elder statesman on many Welsh Methodists in particular. Daniel Rowland was actually converted while listening to Jones preaching in the open air. Howell Harris was a teacher in the circulating schools for four years from 1737 and often turned to Griffith Jones for spiritual counsel. William Williams was also well known at Llanddowror and married a close friend of Margaret Jones.

Griffith Jones had the same concern for evangelism as the Methodists. He had been a fervent open air preacher for many years before the revival started. The Methodist leaders acknowledged their debt to his pioneering work and held him in great affection. Yet it is sad to record that Methodism soon became a cause of considerable embarrassment for Jones. He was wary of the emotional excesses which were often evident within the movement. Men like Rowland and Williams were eventually to share some of Jones's reservations. It is important to note that he never denounced these features in public, it

was always his style to influence by persuasion if possible.

The Methodist revival threw up large numbers of people who were anxious to study the Bible. Naturally they turned in droves to the Circulating Schools for assistance. This in turn led many Anglicans to claim that the schools were nothing more than Methodist recruiting centres. The fact that the schools were grounding their pupils in the finer details of Anglicanism through the use of the Prayer Book as a reader, was somehow lost on the critics. So it was that Jones decided to act. In 1741 he dismissed several teachers who were involved in Methodist activities and re-emphasised his insistence that all teachers must be Anglican communicants. These efforts totally failed to placate his critics and were a cause of great sadness to many.

Griffith Jones estimated that it cost no more than three shillings (15 pence) to teach a person to read. This was a modest sum, but when translated into national proportions, well beyond his pocket. He had to rely on many generous benefactors, none kinder than Bridget Bevan, wife of Arthur Bevan, M.P. for Carmarthen. It was at her home that Griffith Jones died on April 8th, 1761. Happily the work did not end with his death. Madam Bevan took over the organisation of the schools until her own death some eighteen years later.

There is much to be gleaned from the life of this country clergyman who never lived more than a day's journey from his place of birth. Griffith Jones for all his faults proved to be of inestimable value to his people, because his heart burned with the love of him who first loved us. George Whitefield writing in his Journal for 1739 said of Wales: 'They have many burning and shining lights . . . among whom Mr. Griffith Jones shines in particular.'

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