

REFORM- ATION TODAY'85



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The Carey Conference for ministers, November 1985

The next conference has been booked at High Leighs, Hoddesdon, Herts. November 26th-28th this year. This is the first time for several years that the hazards of January weather are being avoided. The theme is being prepared along the following lines:

Theme — The Reformed Faith

The spiritual background to the formularies of Westminster & the 1689 Conf. The Reformed doctrine of original sin and human responsibility

The Reformed doctrine of worship

A review of the eldership question

PRAYER and SHARING

The Reformed doctrine of sanctification

The Baptists and Covenant Theology

Improving evangelism in our churches
A debate

Building a library — contributions followed by discussion

The Reformed doctrine of assurance

The genius of the Reformed Faith lies in its Biblicism, its wholeness, and the unity of the constituent truths. To appreciate its worth we should know about the spiritual stature of those who conceived it and the formularies which expressed it. The Reformed Faith is strongest where the contemporary evangelical world is weakest. Much work has been done on some of these themes recently. The aim of each speaker will be to break new ground and not repeat old material.

The Carey Family Conference, July 29th-August 3rd, 1985 Leeds Polytechnic

One of the themes is the Person and Work of Christ. The speakers: David Kingdon, Russell Williams, Peter Parkinson and Erroll Hulse. For details write to Andrew Symonds, 2 Mill Hall Cottages, Whitemans Green, Cuckfield, West Sussex RH17 5HX.

One day Carey Conference for ministers

Thursday, May 9th

To be held at Tollington Park Baptist Church, North London

Speakers: Don Garlington, U.S.A., *Creative Theology*

David Kingdon, *Corporate Sanctification*

Dr. Tom Nettles, U.S.A., *Baptists of America and their understanding of the sovereignty-responsibility antinomy*

For details write to John Rubens, 10 Glebe Road, WELWYN, Herts.

Editorial

At our peril we neglect what is described as the experiential side of our faith. The Gospel embraces the mind and affections, the conscience and emotions, the memory and feelings. For most of her history the Church of Christ expressed much of the experiential (experimental) side in the singing of psalms where every kind of spiritual experience is expressed. We have not kept up with the transmission of the psalms into contemporary English and depend mostly on hymns which, however wonderful, are old fashioned in language and more often than not inferior to the quality of the psalms. Of course it is unfair to compare human composition with divine inspiration, but enough has been said to make the point. When we come to the experimental it is not only joy and praise we experience but sorrow and affliction. For these reasons we begin with the article by Jim van Zyl.

Developing Global Vision

Without dispute we are living in a unique time. This, with a vengeance, is the technological age. There is talk about the third industrial revolution. More than ever we are able to view the globe. Through satellites leading nations can spy on each other in detail even to the movement of vehicles. What is happening in Afghanistan, Sudan or Ethiopia can be viewed on our screens. By the use of videos we can have quick recall to information of all kinds. While our readers may not agree with all the sources cited in the article on developing global vision, they will surely agree with, and welcome, the main thrust of the author.

Will you attend the wedding?

Our overseas readers genuinely do not understand the situation in Britain with regard to the Reformed constituency and the Charismatics. They have always and consistently regarded the two positions as incompatible. There are leaders in the U.K. who do not agree, and the review article explains why they do not agree.

Readers Digest Van Til

Some of the terms used in the article by John Campbell may be daunting to those unaccustomed to the subject. Do not be discouraged if it takes time to grasp the issues. They are of foremost importance. The chart is designed to help you.

What are we to say?

Occasionally we receive letters saying that it is wrong to criticise the Charismatic movement. Recently a subscriber threatened to cancel his subscription if we did

Deborah Sim earned a doctorate in pharmacology at Liverpool University. She is now a member of the Sri Serdang Church, Malaysia, where Dr. Poh Boon Sing of Good News Enterprise is pastor (for details see back cover).

so again. The claims made today require a complete change of course for evangelical Christianity. Is it not right that we analyse and assess the claims made and the implications involved? If this movement is of the Spirit why have its prophecies failed time and again? In the Old Testament the penalty for false prophecy was death by stoning! Today at least it should be church discipline. Are we ready to implement church order in this matter? What do you say? What do you think we should do about the prophecies which Victor Budgen documents as having proved to be untrue?

Mr. Gordon Sayer and the Evangelical Library, London

The Evangelical Library, 78A Chiltern Street, London W1M 2HB, reports the great and sad loss of their librarian, Mr. Gordon Sayer, who died after a heart attack on February 10th. The story of the Evangelical Library together with a photo of Mr. Sayer on the front cover appeared in *Reformation Today* No. 25 (May-June 1975). Mr. Sayer has given excellent service to the Library and brought about many improvements including an outstanding modernization to the main reading room and its ancillary services at Chiltern Street.

Mr. Sayer possessed a gentle manner, always welcoming members or visitors, and always ready to search for needed materials. He will be sorely missed. The Evangelical Library provides a unique service and it is with prayerful concern that we await news from the Committee of their plans for the future.

A book of testimonies from the world wars

For some years Don Stephens of Liverpool has been assembling biographical material about Christians whose lives were influenced by experiences in either the First or Second World Wars. Some men and women were converted in these times of conflict; others found comfort in their faith, or passed through experiences which are instructive and inspiring. If there is a reader, or someone known to a reader, whose testimony includes experiences in wartime conditions, our brother would very much like to correspond with him or her. The aim would be to record the story, hopefully for posterity, with the prayer that it may be used for the glory of the Lord. If you feel you can help please write to Don Stephens, 9 Allangate Road, Liverpool L19 9BY, or contact the editor.

Tom Nettles and Associate Editors

During his sabbatical year in Britain, Dr. Tom Nettles of the Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary has inspired us with his knowledge of our Baptist forebears. At the Carey Conference in January he demonstrated once more that the founding fathers of the Southern Baptist Convention were preachers of great calibre and in the same rank as the Puritans in their understanding of sovereign grace and how it is to be preached to sinners. Tom Nettles has agreed to be an associate editor to *Reformation Today*. In cooperation with the Grace Assembly, and as a token of our unity in the truth, there is to be a one day Carey Conference in London on May 9th. The speakers for that day are Tom Nettles and Don Garlington both of America, and David Kingdon.

Afflicted Like Us

Hebrews 4:14-16

by Jim van Zyl

One of the points the writer to the Hebrews makes in 4:14-16, is that no Christian ever passes through fire on *his or her own*. His argument is that the Lord Jesus Christ is profoundly sympathetic with those of his children who suffer because he was afflicted 'just as we are'. What's more he is not just sympathetic, but equally empathetic.

He feels *for* us and *with* us because he felt *like* us.

This can be seen more clearly in the terrible emotional and spiritual experiences that our Lord suffered on the cross, than perhaps anywhere else. We can draw immense comfort from the fact that *some* of these experiences are 'common to all men'. No comparison is allowable between the atoning nature of Christ's suffering and ours. That is unique. Neither can we fail to realise that his suffering was of an intensity and quality totally beyond our comprehension.

It is therefore with extreme reluctance that one draws comparisons and but for the words of Hebrews 4:14-16 'Who has been tempted, tried, afflicted, in every way, just as we are . . .', one would never do so.

Let me spell out what I mean a little more clearly.

Like many Christians:

1. **Jesus could not share his terrible desolation with anyone**

Not with his disciples in Gethsemane; not with his disciples around the cross; not with his own mother; not with his own Father, who temporarily forsook him when he was in his death throes.

Our Lord knew that no one would even remotely understand his feelings and agony and pain, let alone feel with him empathetically.

His anguish, particularly in the words 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' reveals an isolation and a loneliness that all but devastated him.

Up until this moment Christ had never once *sensed a break* in his permanent and ongoing fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is quite clear from John 17.

Now suddenly, terribly, our Lord, hanging on the cross helplessly, and at the mercy of the Roman soldiers and the weather, senses a total breakdown in this triune fellowship that had existed from all eternity. Gone — suddenly and horrifyingly is the communion; mutual love and fellowship; the warmth and affection; the divine friendship between him and the Father and the Spirit.

The cry of desolation went deeper in despair (albeit for only a time), than any man or woman has ever experienced throughout the total history of mankind.

He is made sin for us. He is forsaken of God. He is as it were 'cast out of God's presence, in order to take the full weight of our guilt and punishment'.

Christian in affliction, you are not coming to a Christ who merely shows a little sympathy and understanding. His loneliness and devastation on the cross was infinitely greater than anything you may even now be suffering.

'Yes,' he says, as we come to him in prayer, our hearts breaking, 'I know what it is like to *feel* forsaken, and to *be* forsaken.' And so, from the throne of grace he ministers to us through the Word and also through the Spirit.

2. Jesus knew that his terrible experience was not because of any sin that he had committed

He knew perfectly well that he had never transgressed any of God's laws. Challenging the Jews openly he asked: 'Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?' (John 8:46).

As Charles Wesley expressed it:

'He dies to atone for sins *not his own*;
Your debt he hath paid, and your work he hath done.'

While it is true that we suffer because we are born sinners and sin every day, it is nevertheless also true that a particularly difficult period in a Christian's life may *not* be because of any particular sin committed by him or because of any radical backsliding. And, what's more, in our more sane moments we know this to be true. The experience of Job is a case in point.

But try telling your conscience that! Or fellow Christians (viz: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, Job's friends)! Or, try to duck the fiery arrows of the Great Accuser of the brethren!

Christian in affliction, examine your heart carefully and *wisely* (if necessary see your pastor). Don't allow yourself to be stampeded into acknowledgement of sin or sins that you may never have committed! Neither conclude that your affliction and suffering is because of such 'sins', or lack of faith and surrender.

The Lord Jesus knew that his suffering was for 'sins not his own'. And likewise may our affliction be part and parcel of the sanctifying process of God the Father who is, through the Spirit, transforming us into the image of his dear Son. Job expressly says: 'But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold . . . I have kept to his way without turning aside' (Job 23:10-11).

3. Jesus — like us — knew the pain of perplexity

I do not think it is being irreverent to suggest that our Lord's anguished cry suggests a certain amount of bafflement and even uncertainty on his part. An uncertainty and perplexity about himself, about his relation to the Father, about his calling and work, about his life's task being cut short by crucifixion, about being forsaken by the One Person with whom he had always had the most intimate communion.

Indeed there even seems to be the suggestion of surprise . . . ‘Why? . . . has *this* happened?’

The beginning of this anguish can be traced back to the Garden of Gethsemane experience where, we read, that ‘ . . . being in *anguish*, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as great drops of blood falling to the ground’ (Luke 22:44).

The English word ‘anguish’ comes from the Greek word used in Luke 22, i.e., *agōn*, which has a number of related meanings: ‘a place of contest, a violent struggle, agony, anguish, to be involved in combat’.

About this violent anguish Sinclair Ferguson has the following to say: ‘The expressions which describe his psychological condition suggest that his whole being shuddered at the prospect of what was to take place in his own experience. The language used to describe his Gethsemane experience is of a “confused, restless, half-distracted state, which is produced by physical derangement, or by mental distress, as grief, shame, disappointment” . J. B. Lightfoot, *Philippians*, p. 123. “No wonder,” Luther commented, “No man ever feared death like this man.” ’ (Sinclair Ferguson, *The Christian Life*, p. 163.)

Christian there is no pathway of perplexity that the Saviour has not already trod. Are you baffled? So was he (albeit temporarily). Are you perplexed? So was he. Are you in distress? So was he. Are you filled with great agony about what is happening to you? So was he. He knows what it *feels* like to be crushed and wrenched apart, as it were. Let that comfort you!

4. Jesus unquestionably had to endure the full force of Satan’s hatred and attack when he was at his most vulnerable

He would remind our Lord of the ‘cursedness’ of the cross: ‘Look where you’ve ended up! Why not face the fact that God has truly forsaken you. What kind of a Messiah are you? You have no kingdom and no power. Crushed by the Jews and condemned to die by the Romans. Cut off in your manhood. Deserted by your disciples. You’ve failed-failed-failed!’

Similarly is the Christian attacked when at his most vulnerable. It might be during the loss of a loved one. It might be during a prolonged illness. It might be at a crisis point in a family situation. It might be related to your job or something at school or university. Whatever it is, you know that you are weak and unsteady and vulnerable, almost defenceless one would say, and then the Enemy attacks ruthlessly.

And once again when you come to the Lord Jesus Christ, you do not need to wonder whether he will understand what you are trying to say to him. In other words, you do not adopt the attitude: ‘Please bear with me Lord as I try and explain what’s happening to me,’ as if to suggest that you have to go into these long explanations, because otherwise he might not understand it all!

He not only understands it intellectually, he actually stood and suffered in that same circle of vulnerability and had to confront the Great Enemy just like us.

5. Like many Christians it appears as if our Lord was forsaken at precisely that point in his life when he needed the Father most

Three years earlier there was the comforting voice of the Father at his baptism: 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased' (Matt. 3:17).

Now there is nothing but silence!

It was his custom to rise early to have fellowship with his Father in prayer and loving, mutual fellowship.

Now there is nothing but silence!

He hears nothing from heaven. He feels no inner movement of the Holy Spirit bringing the warmth of assurance. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have apparently forsaken God the Son because he has become sin for us.

God's terrible silence — just when the Son needed him most of all at the climax of his life's work, when the agony was greatest.

Christian, is this not a familiar pattern? Would you not agree that often when we need God the most, he is nowhere to be found! He has forsaken us and left us cringing in pain, or so it seems to us. We turn frantically this way and that way but all we hear is the hollow echo of our own prayers: 'Lord, I need you desperately *now, in this situation*. Lord why do you not answer me?"

In our saner moments we realise of course that God has never forsaken us and has no intention of doing so though the heavens and earth collapse round about us. His commitment to us in the Covenant of Redemption is a permanent one; he will *never* abrogate or cancel it — no matter what we may ever *feel* like. Thank God that our relationship with God bears no relation to what we *feel* like — for then we would be in and out of the Kingdom half-a-dozen times a day! It rests ultimately upon the objective acts of God in Christ on our behalf when he atoned for our sins and clothes us with Christ's righteousness in Justification.

Do you understand now why we have a High Priest who is able to 'sympathise with our weaknesses'? And do you understand now why the writer to the Hebrews encourages us to '... approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need' (Heb. 4:14-16).

Let Horatius Bonar sum it up:

*Jesus, whom angel-hosts adore,
Became a man of griefs for me:
In love, though rich, becoming poor,
That I, through him, enriched might be.*

Call to him for mercy and help; he has already gone before you on the same path of affliction and suffering.

Pete Lowman is the editor of IN TOUCH, the news magazine of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. He suggests ways in which we can stimulate real concern for world evangelisation in our local churches. We are indebted to THE HARVESTER (a 'Brethren monthly), for permission to reprint this material.

Developing Global Vision

A Christian who is not dedicated to world evangelism is living an unbiblical life, and a church that is not dedicated to missionary vision is an unbiblical church.

These might seem strong claims in the light of the casual level of missionary involvement in many of our fellowships! But they are amply backed up by the evidence of the New Testament.

After his resurrection, Christ taught his disciples for forty days. Matthew felt that an adequate summary of this teaching could be contained in three sentences: 'All authority . . . has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples, baptising them . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always . . .' (28:18-20). World mission was not offered to the church as a hobby or as a concern for a few specialists; rather, it was the very heart of Christ's teaching after his resurrection, the context in which *every* true disciple should envisage his life. 'If anyone loves me,' said our Lord, 'he will obey my teaching'; and if we do not obey this fundamental teaching, we do not love our Lord.

Nor is that all. Our triune God's all-loving nature is one of the infinite, active concern for the needy and the lost. And if we do not share that concern, we are showing we are not dominated by the mind of Christ.

'God so loved the world,' in its lostness, 'that he gave' — the one thing dearest to him — so that the lost might not perish. If we are beginning to be marked by the

love of the Father, that same spirit of total caring and self-giving for a lost world must dominate our thinking, planning and lifestyle.

God the Son was sent into the world to pour out his life so that the lost world might know salvation. And he prayed to the Father, 'As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world' (John 17:18). If we are becoming truly 'conformed to the likeness of the Son', then our lives must constitute a mission for the sake of the lost, just as his life did.

And it is for this reason above all that the Holy Spirit was given. 'Again Jesus said . . . "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And *with that* he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" ' (John 20:21-22). 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you,' Jesus told his disciples around the same time; *and the consequence he chose to single out was neither increased prayer nor holiness, nor deepened worship nor knowledge of the Scriptures, but rather worldwide evangelism:* 'and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). Sure enough, when the Holy Spirit swept down upon the church on the day of Pentecost, the immediate consequence was that a crowd 'from every nation under heaven' heard 'the wonders of God' (Acts 2:5-12).

Hence a Christian who does not see his life as a tool to be used (invested) in the evangelisation of the unreached, wherever God may place him, is a disobedient disciple. Valdir Steuernagel of

Brazil is right: 'Either the church is a missionary church, or it is no church at all.'

Ignorance means Uselessness!

Probably a major reason why so many individuals and church fellowships remain ineffective on the sidelines of world evangelism is sheer ignorance. We have never realised (or troubled to find out) the greatness of what God is doing in the world as a whole, nor the immensity of the task that still remains.

Each of us will have to give account to God of the way in which we have discovered and fulfilled the part he has allotted to us in his global mission. But those of us who are active as elders or in other leadership roles — youth leaders, home Bible study leaders, etc. — or, indeed, any of us who are capable of caring for the spiritual welfare of other believers, must seriously consider how to 'provoke them to love and good works', how to assist in developing a wider awareness of world mission.

This begins with our heart-attitudes; it depends on whether in our hearts we are really concerned that our fellowship (or youth group, etc.) should be a training centre and a powerhouse for global evangelism. World vision is an infectious thing; if we are enthusiastic about it, other people will begin, here and there, to share our loving concern. It is also spiritual warfare; one of the devil's most effective ways of hindering the spread of the gospel is to anaesthetise the churches that should be praying, giving, preparing and sending. It is a spiritual battle; we must pray — both individually and with likeminded believers — for our fellowship's missionary vision.

There are many ways a fellowship can develop its missionary vision, but it is important to have a clear conception of what we are trying to achieve. Let us

plan with daring: it is assuredly the will of God that our fellowship should be a powerful source of prayer, and in most cases a source of workers too. Here are a few areas worth considering.

Ways Forward

1. If we are serious about missionary vision, it must have a significant and substantial place in *our church's instruction*, including both the teaching of the biblical basis for the missionary challenge, and education about specific forms of missionary work.

2. Both an *overview* of the worldwide missionary scene, and an *in-depth knowledge* of one or more particular aspects, are needed. 'Know a little of everywhere: know in depth about one people/nation/region/ministry,' urges Ellie Lau of Hong Kong.

3. It may be good to invite a well-informed speaker, once in, say, three years to give a *general survey* of the worldwide state of play: one of the editors of *Echoes of Service*, for example, or of the home-based staff of an agency such as WEC or OM. On the other hand, a member or a team of members of the church could be commissioned to make such a presentation. Research sources are easily available; *Echoes* and the various missionary societies can be contacted for materials that summarise the situation in various countries or regions, and use can be made of Patrick Johnstone's *Operation World* or the 1,000-page *World Christian Encyclopedia* edited by David Barrett. Often missionary concerns seem boring because we have not grasped the breadth and variety of what is going on, and the thrilling scope of what God is doing across the globe — and because we have not seen the big picture into which our local missionary's activities are fitted.

4. Then we must also *select our area of*

in-depth involvement. It may well be good to build on links that already exist: countries in which other church members already have some specific interest. If our church has sent out no missionaries, and until it does, we may want to adopt a worker. All kinds of things can follow. The implications of 'Love your neighbour as yourself' are crucial for our prayer and financial support; this command of Christ means that we will be as careful to ensure that our missionary brother or sister's needs are being met as we are to guarantee our own. That will mean we shall want to know whether he or she is going hungry! — and it will mean too that if love for ourselves motivates our spending the Lord's money on providing for insurance, pensions, our children's education, a home for our retirement, etc., we will be equally concerned that our missionary brother's needs should be cared for too.

There are numerous practical ways of missionary support. Why not send your missionary some interesting magazines? local papers? books? (not just 'spiritual' ones — what about his/her hobbies? sense of humour? — and those of the children?), birthday and Christmas cards? Taped messages are a good way of keeping a link with the whole church family. Don't forget to send *your* prayer needs; they help to build a two-way link in which friendships can be maintained that give real pastoral support to isolated workers abroad. Be imaginative. John Woodhead wrote in a recent issue of IFES's *In Touch* of how much his family appreciated gifts of Marmite!

5. What about arranging a 'twinning' link with a sister fellowship in another culture? This can be done through missionary contacts — or indeed through bodies like the World Evangelical Fellowship. The link can begin as a prayer partnership; the more informa-

tion there is — maps? photographs? postcards? a little history? local newspapers? — the better it will work. Youth group members may like to develop 'pen-friends' in their sister group; members travelling on business may be able to visit the sister group. It may well be that your fellowship will be deeply challenged by the straightforward, realistic faith of believers in another continent, especially if it is in one of those countries experiencing growth far outstripping Britain (although such a link may be better invested in a harder situation) — How could that be facilitated? But there may also be ways in which the British 'twin' can assist. Have the fellowships in your 'twin' country enough money collectively for an adequate magazine ministry, or to publish their own writers rather than relying always on foreign books? Are there leaders who need to be subsidised to spend time somewhere where they can benefit from more in-depth teaching of Scripture? Do currency restrictions hinder money being sent out of the country for literature (as in Nigeria or Guyana), and could you help with gifts of books?

Teaching for Mission

6. There are various ways in which the church's teaching programme can be used to give global and crosscultural vision. For many fellowships, a session on what Muslims or Hindus believe, and how to befriend them for Christ, will be of immediate local relevance. These are topics of which many Christians live in near-total ignorance, even though Muslims are far easier to evangelise in Britain than in (say) Saudi Arabia, and should hence be a strategic priority for our witness! Another important contribution is to invite missionary speakers to minister on non-missionary topics; the illustrations they use in their message will undoubtedly help to broaden their hearers' awareness. And, perhaps most important, the use of speakers who are not 'White Anglo-

Saxons' in our normal teaching programme. Patronising, ignorant, colonialistic attitudes die hard; it is horrifying how many Christians still conceive world mission in terms of the Anglo-Saxon Christian (!?) countries reaching out to the benighted heathen, rather than a genuine partnership of equals between British fellowships and *national-led* fellowships elsewhere (many of which will of course be far more effective than our struggling British congregations). A white audience sitting under the ministry of a speaker from a different cultural background will soon begin to be challenged by perceptions that could not come to it from any other source. 'The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!"' (1 Cor. 12:21).

7. A local or regional *international weekend* is another possibility. It could include: an exposition of the relevant biblical material; a global overview session, an audiovisual (*Echoes* have an impressive presentation, and most other agencies have excellent material); a missionary speaker who will give some idea of the realities, and the pains, of cross-cultural service; an internationally-oriented family film (*Yoneko*, or *Through Gates of Splendour*, or *Peace Child*, for example); an informal Sunday after-meeting where members of an immigrant evangelism team who hail originally from overseas (e.g. staff of OM or *In Contact*), or Christian overseas students can be interviewed about their home country and the triumphs and needs of the church there. And solid times of prayer! One of the important things about such a programme will be to expose fellowship members to the missionaries and overseas Christians present, e.g. by arranging meals with different families, etc.

8. Children's talks! Just as children must be trained from their earliest years to see the world as the arena of the sovereignty of God, rather than slipping

into the agnosticism of their surroundings, so too it is important to convey from the start the awareness that our lives are, above all, a gift from God to be deployed in the mission of reaching the world. Personally, I am really grateful to God for having been trained from my earliest years to think of missionary service as an excellent way of life, as a possibility to be looked forward to. Paul White's *Jungle Doctor* books were placed in my hands early on, and left an ineffaceable impression of the missionary as a praiseworthy figure engaged in something fascinating. And of course children's talks often reach their parents too.

Mission Ubiquitous

9. Every church magazine should contain frequent missionary items, of course. Again, fellowship members can be commissioned to write an article on a country like Nepal; or to interview a missionary: How did you get started in this ministry? What surprised you about the culture in which you work? What were your biggest problems in your first few months? What factors have helped your work bear fruit? What difficulties have you faced? What are your short-term goals, long-term dreams? How can we help? etc.

10. A handful of likeminded believers can set up a *missionary action group*, to pray and generate financial support for a particular worker, region or ministry. An important thing about such groups is that they are disposable; we don't need to struggle to keep them going if they outlive their usefulness, provided our international concern is flowing equally strongly in some other channel. It's astonishing how often we assume that once an activity has been commenced it must continue in the same form right up to the Tribulation! — instead of recognising that it met a need in the past but requires continual reassessment as to whether it still succeeds in doing so. At

the same time, of course, we need to beware when the enemy presents a brief period of difficulty as a permanent collapse.

11. Nevertheless, the strength of the church's missionary vision is not in isolated cells of missionary fanatics, but through a global vision built naturally into *all of the church's activities* and sub-groups. Five-minute missionary spots can be built into youth groups, home Bible studies, prayer meetings — even gospel meetings (they show our faith has breadth!). I remember visiting a fellowship in Manchester where such an item fitted in superbly as a regular item after the notices on Sunday mornings.

In such a situation we can make use of OM's series of prayer cards on unevangelised countries, for a 'country of the week'. Or we can write to a missionary and ask for eight specific prayer needs for eight succeeding 'missionary spots'; we can even suggest a few topics: e.g. health, children's welfare, language/culture problems, outreaches planned, follow-up of converts, special projects, etc., and ask for a quick note on each topic. (A busy missionary may find such a letter easier to answer speedily than something more general.)

12. Another source of meaty prayer items is the *overseas page of a newspaper*! A fellowship member can be given the job of selecting an item from the week's news, relating it to the needs of the church and the gospel in that country, and bringing it briefly before the church in prayer. Then there are various telephone 'hot-lines': urgent and up-to-date prayer needs can be obtained from *Echoes* on Bath (0225) 26217 (the missionaries associated with *Echoes* are still the largest identifiable group of UK Protestant missionaries, so there is plenty of variety); OM's service is on 01-464 0572, to give another example.

13. Collective *missionary giving* is best

planned well in advance and announced with plenty of vision-creating information; so that people giving by covenant can make the necessary arrangements, and so that an intelligent and prayerful interest can be taken in the ministry supported. (And please let us find ways of giving to the national church (as needed), not merely to white expatriate personnel. Admittedly it is a sound missionary principle that the work established 'on the field' should be self-supporting as well as self-governing. But in the present economic recession — which bites far harder in many other countries — there are areas where it is impossible for the national church to fund the ministries (e.g. in literature) that are needed. And it is tragic (and maintains a 'foreign' image) if funds will not come through from abroad unless expatriates are running the work. In most countries there are widely-respected leaders who can confirm the accountability and administration of the money sent. In India, for example, Western donors may ask for the endorsement of a project by the Evangelical Fellowship of India. Missionaries can also give advice.)

14. Every elder and leader can be active in enthusiastic circulation of challenging missionary magazines, and the regular use of a prayer tool such as the *Echoes Daily Prayer Guide*. And books: the great missionary classics — biographies of Hudson Taylor, C. T. Studd, Jim Elliot — are as challenging today as ever, and there are other types of books worth buying to lend: Michael Griffiths' excellent books; Lyall's *New Spring in China*; *The New Face of Evangelicalism* (ed. Padilla) as a guide to some of the concerns of the Third World church; etc.

15. Finally, every elder and leader can encourage participation in *residential internationally-oriented conferences*, such

(continued on page 16)

News for the Sons of Ishmael

'Sixty thousand letters produced five thousand requests for Scriptures, literature and cassettes for the Arab world. Five hundred Arabs have undertaken initial correspondence courses, many progressing to further studies. Arabs in Britain hear the Gospel with appreciation. Students from Muslim lands ask for Bibles. Scriptures in Arabic have been placed in Wolverhampton Public Library, and nearby Christian bookshops stock literature in the language.'

These facts encouraged some 250 supporters of the Arabic Evangelical Centre at the Annual Meeting recently. Uncompromisingly evangelical and independent of denominational adherence the Centre enjoys the help of a growing number of local churches. There are no paid workers, though two Arab friends have given periods of service. It is hoped to employ a salaried Arabic Christian, fulltime, for twelve months in the New Year.

Financially the work has prospered, accommodation and equipment have been supplied, with a vast stock of literature needing frequent replenishment. Personal donations ensure that all administrative costs are pledged, so general giving to the Centre is devoted entirely to reaching the Arab world, postage making the major claim. Through negotiation, it has been agreed with the Post Office that packages in quantity may be sent at a lower rate.

At the above-mentioned meeting Dr. Edward Martin of Bedford spoke of a Prayer Group in his town concerned for Saudi Arabia, the heart of the Muslim world and particularly resistant to the Gospel; but opportunities abound. Life near Mecca encourages a religion that brings no assurance but nurtures dissatisfaction as modern culture intrudes. Students leave their country for study and embracing the Gospel they return to evangelise. Literature can reach people by post. Alarming, many Christians in our own land are unmoved by the need. It is inaccurate to speak of Saudi Arabia rejecting Christ. Ninety-nine percent of the population have never heard the Gospel. Here is the real challenge.

As Guest Speaker, the Rev. Alun McNabb of Priory Road Baptist Church, Dudley, stressed his support for the Centre because it stood on scriptural principles and prospered in biblical simplicity. In an excellent exposition of Mark 4:26-29 he reminded us that the task of the believer is simple – to sow the seed of the Gospel. Germination and growth is the profound aspect and that is the Sovereign work of God. Every believer should sow. The man in the parable was an ordinary farmer. We are ordinary people. Evangelism thrives not on stunts but on taking every opportunity to positively speak of Christ. God causes his Word to germinate bringing life. Note that the farmer went to bed whilst the seed developed. The time was to come when in full harvest he put in the sickle, enthusiastically reaping that which had been sown. Mr. McNabb spoke not only of the excellent work of the Centre in lands overseas, but of the inspiration and fellowship of its testimony in the town.

Prayers, gifts and interest are needed. Get in touch with us if you wish to know more.

Arabic Evangelical Centre, P.O. Box 140 Wolverhampton, W. Midlands WV2 4NP.

A review article on the book Joy Unspeakable by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, being sermons preached on the subject of the Baptism of the Spirit in 1964-65, edited by Christopher Catherwood. Foreword by Peter Lewis.¹

Will You Attend the Wedding?

Our overseas readers, particularly those in North America and Australia, sometimes express concern that *Reformation Today* should not be British-centred. It is our purpose to be international and we will therefore write this article as an explanation for readers abroad.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones certainly needs no introduction. His books are read in all English-speaking countries. What readers overseas may not know is that 'the doctor' has increasingly become the centre of controversy in Britain.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones was minister of Westminster Chapel from 1939 to 1968. He died in 1981.² In his retirement from the pastorate the doctor prepared his expositions on Romans and Ephesians. These were published as a series of hardback volumes by the Banner of Truth. Such was the doctor's reputation that there was no question of correcting his doctrine. It was difficult enough to urge abridgement to reduce the inevitable repetition that comes from any worthy preacher, but to have said that his doctrine on Ephesians 1:13 was wrong, or to have said that the section on Romans 8:15ff. was erroneous, and in some places is story-telling rather than exposition, would have been preposterous. Whereas most literary contributions are severely scrutinised, there was nobody who could correct the doctor. In fraternal I earned the reputation of being chief opposition spokesman when it came to discussion about

the baptism of the Spirit. That was one reason why I did not hesitate to publish Donald MacLeod's detailed review of the doctor's views as expressed in the books on Ephesians and Romans 8.³ Whilst disagreeing with the doctor's views on the subject I did not lose sight of his stature, and in an article in *RT* 62 explained why I believed he was the last of the Puritans. His concept of the awesome nature of the presence of God and public worship best expressed his Puritanism, and what we see in Charismatics who claim him as their own today is diametrically opposite to that.

My chief difference with my close and longstanding friend Iain Murray, of the Banner of Truth, is that he has always believed that the doctor's spiritual stature would be adequate to cover the fact that on paper he was always an old time Pentecostalist. As my colleagues in the ministry will testify I always predicted that as soon as the doctor left this world the Charismatics would capitalise on his Pentecostal views, and all restraints set up by Iain Murray or anybody else, would be about as effective to stop an incoming tide as inflatable children's toys left on a beach. That is precisely what is happening. All the doctor's sermons on tape are in the hands of the Charismatics who have wasted no time in bringing out their own book to add to the Banner of Truth's Pentecostal material in the volume on Romans 8. To say that the doctor did not really mean to be Pentecostal, or that he really means something else, is to think sentimentally not realistically.

The way we have dealt with the subject is correct, that is, we have always insisted that a two tier system cannot be built on Romans 8:15,16 or on Ephesians 1:13 or on the four accounts of the outpouring of the Spirit reported in Acts concerning Jerusalem, Samaria, Caesarea and Ephesus. The doctor

builds his case on these in typical Pentecostal fashion. For instance, he uses the Ephesus Acts 19 passage seven times in his book to do so (pp. 20, 29ff, 43ff, 60, 151, 188 and 268).

In my book *Crisis Experiences*⁴ I show that no post-conversion crisis experience is commanded in the New Testament. As we search, epistle by epistle, we discover not a semblance of this notion. Acts is a book dealing with the transitional period, and there are many events that cannot be repeated. Once we begin insisting on a repetition of events, where will it end? We could end by saying that nobody who has not actually experienced fire and wind is a fully fledged believer. The teaching of the epistles are mandatory for us, not the unique experiences of the apostles.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones in his zeal for revival and his commendable desire to preserve a doctrine of power for preachers tended to put a label of the baptism of the spirit on experiences which in fact were wonderful discoveries of the holiness or beauty of God. He did that in several cases including John Flavel. In *Crisis Experiences* I describe ten different categories of spiritual experience and show that in none of these is there any warrant whatever to tie on the tag, 'This is the baptism of the Spirit'. Indeed, once you have read about the experiences of a handful like Moody and Finney, the bank of story-resources is bankrupt. Those who propound the baptism of the Spirit are often very reluctant to extol their own experiences for the very reason that they are so unconvincing. The New Testament holds up regeneration, repentance, and conversion, and always highlights the transition from darkness to light as *the* mighty event which causes joy among the angels; not a second experience. Indeed, when we abandon the idea of the baptism of the Spirit altogether as a second blessing, then immediately the

ground is cleared for post-conversion experiences of all kinds to be reported as mere experiences, for what they are worth, and not as something which sets up a separate class of supersaints. Experiences, yes! Baptism of the Spirit as the Second Blessing, no!

Now readers may wonder why the title 'Will You Attend the Wedding?' has been used. Peter Lewis in his foreword continues to appeal for the union of the Reformed Movement and the Charismatics. Peter Lewis pleaded for this at the British Evangelical Council meeting in 1981 (see *RT* 60). Supported by Herbert Carson and Bob Horne the editor of *Evangelical Times*, Peter Lewis has continued to do so ever since. Bob Horne and Herbert Carson do not hold to the baptism of the Spirit doctrine but do believe in the continuation of the Charismatic gifts. The *Evangelical Times* is the foremost evangelical monthly newspaper in Britain. Peter Lewis does not hide the fact that the idea of the marriage is not his. It is the doctor's. Peter is correct, because I personally heard the doctor propounding this idea in a sermon, shortly before his decease.

There are three prongs to the Charismatic Movement — the Baptism of the Spirit, the continuation of the extraordinary gifts, and the contemporary style of hotted-up worship. Concerning the continuation of extraordinary gifts the doctor changed his mind on that issue. We illustrate the present position by the chart on the next page.

On Charismatic worship various cautions and reservations would be expressed by those concerned, but to be consistent they must be open-ended on tongues and interpretations, and prophecies.

In his plea for us to attend the wedding of Mr. Reformed and Miss Charismatic, Peter Lewis is still unable to see that the two systems are incompatible. The

	<i>Baptism of the Spirit</i>	<i>Continuation of the extra-ordinary gifts</i>	<i>1 Cor. 12-14 Prescriptive or Descriptive</i>	<i>Charismatic worship</i>
Dr. Lloyd-Jones	YES	YES	Prescriptive	Hostile
Herbert Carson	NO	YES	Prescriptive	Cautious
Bob Horne	NO	YES	Prescriptive	
Peter Lewis	YES	YES	Prescriptive	
Jonathan Edwards	NO	NO	Descriptive	

Reformed doctrines of sanctification, of regeneration and conversion and of worship are all the exact opposite of the two tier Pentecostalism which he proposes.

Christopher Catherwood's introduction to *Joy Unspeakable* implies that because the doctor was a genius we should follow him. Whilst we would in no way deny the unusual talents of the doctor we would certainly agree with his own assessment of himself as not being a theological genius. But he did rate Jonathan Edwards as a theological genius. Edwards admitted that he was poor at pastoral visiting. Theologically he was prodigious, original, linguistically competent and penetrating. He wrote a detailed exegesis on 1 Cor. 13:8-13 which has not been published and which is not included in his book *Charity and its Fruits*. Yale University Press is in the process of publishing 54 volumes of Edwards' works which will include the detailed section on 1 Cor. 13:8-13. Unfortunately each volume costs about £30.00. As far as we know no work has appeared which refutes the decisive work by Douglas Judisch, *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts*, Baker 1978. His exposition of 1 Cor. 13:8-13 is clear and decisive. Stuart Olyott is due to expound 1 Cor. 13:8-13

at the forthcoming Leicester Conference. We have the cassette at Belvidere Road. It is excellent. It is a pity that Stuart Olyott's voice was so little heard when the 1 Cor. 13:8-13 passage was dismissed by many as not providing authoritative material on the cessation of the gifts.

The foreword by the doctor's grandson perpetuates the idea that the Puritans endorsed the doctor's view of 'sealing'. John Owen taught the opposite. While the Puritans did differ on many subjects it is impossible to find a two-tier theology in the Westminster formularies which enshrine their doctrines.

Christopher Catherwood also reveals that the doctor was concerned that Reformed people became dry and arid (p. 12). Even for a senior statesman such judgements are subjective and limited. Even if it is the case, then the remedies are to be found in the superabundance of Scripture. The greatest heroes in Church history did not resort to heterodoxy to remedy dryness. Our great need is to see that all we need experientially is provided in descriptions such as Romans 5:5 and many others.

Will Reformed Christianity in Britain succumb to Pentecostalism? Will the

wedding take place? I do not believe it will. We suffer terribly in Britain from lack of theological training. A minority are careful and painstaking in their study of passages that have divided Christians into different denominations. Many, perhaps most, non-Reformed evangelical churches will succumb to the Charismatic Movement, but precisely because most Reformed ministers have had to work hard and struggle toward the historic Reformed position, I predict that few Reformed pastors will succumb. But it will not be easy for their church members to resist the overtures of those who claim to have popularity and success. Truth is decided by Scripture, not numbers.

I have not attempted a detailed chapter by chapter refutation of the doctrines in the sixteen sermons because the ground has been covered before, with the exception of sermon no. 1 (pp. 15-32), in

which the doctor asserts that the Baptism of the Spirit is not regeneration, because regeneration is not experimental but a secret work (p. 22). He overlooks entirely that *ebaptisthemen* and *epostisthemen* — 'you have been baptised', and 'you have been made to drink' (aorists), are joined and cannot be separated, and that drinking of the Spirit is experiential and you cannot be a Christian without it. Also the baptism described can hardly be severed from its visible portrayal which represents complete once-and-for-all union with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

References

- ¹ Kingsway Publications, 1984, paperback, 282 pages, £5.95.
- ² For a biography and tribute see RT 61.
- ³ See RT 48. See also articles 'Baptism in the Spirit' (RT 65) and 'Can we become Pentecostals?' (RT 60) both by Donald MacLeod.
- ⁴ Carey Publications, 140 pages paperback, 1984.

Developing Global Vision (continued from page 11)

as those of FEBA or OM. Elders can consider how to actively stimulate their young people to attend events where their vision will be stretched. And attendance at regional missionary events, and especially the national London Missionary Meetings, should be built into church life and youth group programmes. Church Growth theorists like Peter Wagner have stressed the importance of periodical involvement in a 'celebration unit', a large gathering of fellow-believers that reminds us that we are not alone, even in our humanistic society; for me, the LMM certainly fulfilled that role of provoking the delighted surprise, 'What a lot of us there are!' Gatherings of this kind

provide a unique range of input, information, challenge and stimulation.

All of these are ways in which we can begin to stimulate a deeper prayerful concern, and a more dedicated stewardship of our time, our possessions and ourselves, in the cause of world mission. But of course we cannot stop there. Any fellowship must judge its missionary effectiveness by its ability to generate workers for God's mission at home and abroad. And indeed, each of us must be continually in a condition of learning discipleship where we are preparing ourselves to serve God more effectively in the next few years, wherever he may choose to place us.

At the Carey Conference for ministers in January Pastor Victor Budgen contributed an exposition on the subject of prophecy. He explained that biblical prophecy must be fulfilled infallibly. God cannot lie. In detail he handled the aspects of supernaturalism and prediction. He showed that in the most stringent manner prophets were to be tested and if found false were to be put to death. Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament it was demonstrated that the nature of prophecy did not change. Prophecy to be such still had to be infallible. Claims for prophecy have to be tested still. Where do modern Charismatics stand in all this? A thorough answer is provided in the material which follows. It is part of a book which is to appear in May, published here with the kind permission of Evangelical Press.

What Are We To Say of Prophecy Today?

When we come to examine the claims made by Charismatics today the first observation to be made is that they simply remove completely the fence marked 'infallibility'. As far as they are concerned no one need fall there! Because this is undoubtedly the central point in the whole discussion we shall draw on a wide variety of Charismatic testimony. The authors of a book chosen by a team of four reviewers in one magazine as the best and most balanced on the whole subject, simply say, 'For although the prophet is the instrument of the Spirit of God he is not infallible, for he is still human and he may err'.¹ 'While prophecy is "revelation", that is, while it makes the mind or will of God clear, it must never be exalted to the level of biblical revelation,' they later add.²

The principal of a Bible College, who has written helpfully on many topics, rhetorically asks, 'But does 1 Corinthians 14 imply this kind of infallible prophecy?'³ His own answer is 'No' to this question as he also refers to prophecy as a 'mixed phenomenon'. He argues thus particularly because of the verse exhorting us to test prophecy. Yet on the same page where he says all these things, he also quotes with approval the definition of an itinerant evangelist who describes prophecy as 'a word in someone's mouth which they have not pre-

pared, an immediate inspired utterance from God'. Are we then in a position when an 'immediate inspired utterance from God' can be a 'mixed phenomenon'?! Where is all this leading us?

Another writer tells us that 'the purity of the prophecy will be proportional to the rent heart'.⁴ A lady writer takes comfort from being told by elder statesmen in the movement that 'when we begin to prophesy there is nearly always a mixture of God's Spirit and our own thinking'.⁵ A leading Methodist Charismatic assumes that when we prophesy 'our brothers will correct in love'.⁶ A man who is described as 'both a sociologist and a theologian' and as 'widely regarded as a modern-day prophet' acknowledging the fact that prophecy in his view is a mixed experience, cites the admission of John Woolman the American Quaker who 'not keeping to the Divine opening' said more than was required of him and went astray.⁷ And from one whose books have been selling quite literally like hot-cakes, we learn that 'A man may be strongly used in the prophetic office, and yet may be completely wrong from time to time'.⁸ He goes on to say that such a person is not a false prophet. This is merely an illustration of the fact that we prophesy 'in part' (1 Cor. 13:19).

A Reformed writer has recently written a book of which one reviewer said 'one

feels that the current debate over the work of the Holy Spirit has been waiting for someone of his pedigree and stature to take up his pen'.⁹ Yet what does this writer say about New Testament prophecy? Simply what all the others say. He feels that 1 Cor. 14:29 shows that 'the potentially universal prophecy of the New Testament was less than infallible and irreformable and might need to be qualified, if not indeed corrected'.¹⁰ He speaks of the derivative, noninfallible, noncanonical prophecy that continues in the church'.¹¹ Yet oddly enough this particular writer is still not too keen to identify what is happening today as 'the New Testament sign gift, now restored'.¹² Because of his acceptance of fallible prophecy it is difficult to see why he hesitates.

A 'Reformed Charismatic', making the point that all prophecy was not canonical states: 'No, the congregation with their elders, etc., were to test the prophecy (1 Thess. 5:19-21) and were to sort out anything that was carnal or human — even anything that was added to it by the (fallible and errant!) prophet himself'.¹³ And one who has written a commentary on 1 Cor. 12-14, with a commendatory foreword by a leading Charismatic spokesman, takes us even further into modernism and unbelief, when he writes: 'The wonderful and yet mysterious thing about prophecy is that the Holy Spirit, in all his perfection, combines with the human spirit in all its imperfection. One consequence of this, in our era and due to our weakness, is the fact that our prophesying is imperfect ("in part" 1 Cor. 15:9). It is also obvious that the value and purity of our prophecy is conditioned by the state of the human channel (cf. Rom. 12:6)'.¹⁴

Dishonouring to God

Not only is the Holy Spirit, the one who is 'the Spirit of truth', credited with falsehood in all this but he who is likewise 'the Spirit of power' (Jn. 16:13 and Rom. 15:19) is charged with powerless-

ness to get the message right. Is God really dependent on the cleanness of the human channel or the extent to which the human heart is rent to get his message right? The insult to a sovereign God in all this must not be lost sight of. (It is particularly strange that people claiming to be 'Reformed' and to believe in God's sovereignty should adopt this view.) In some of the more orthodox writers one can, thank God, detect at least an undercurrent of unease. For example, the principal of the Bible College confesses his worry about the insistence that the prophecy 'must always be delivered in the first person as the direct words of God to the congregation or to an individual'.¹⁵ Another writer warns: 'Beware the "I" prophecies'.¹⁶ Unhappily others are far less inhibited.

A writer who has spoken at many conferences and written several books asserts quite categorically, 'In prophecy God speaks. It is as simple, and profound, and startling as that! What happens in the fellowship is that the word may suddenly be spoken by anyone present, and so variously, a "Thus says the Lord" breaks forth in the fellowship. It is usually in the first person (though not always), such as "I am with you to bless you..." and has the directness of an "I-Thou" encounter.... All of this — to repeat — is quite surprising and startling. Most of us, of course, were familiar with prophetic utterances as recorded in the Bible, and willing to accept it as the Word of God. Isaiah's or Jeremiah's "thus says the Lord..." we were accustomed to, but to hear a Tom or a Mary today, in the twentieth century, speak the same way....'¹⁷ He clearly equates the utterance of Tom and Mary as being on the same level as Isaiah and Jeremiah!

In similar vein, one Pentecostal can also compare his experience with the biblical prophets and declare with reference to

one of his visions that 'I have never in my life ministered with more of the unction of the Holy Spirit . . . than I do here and now with the Spirit of God upon me and I prophesy'.¹⁸ And one of the key figures in the movement, one who has been guilty of leading many into doctrinal compromise, and who has even been nicknamed 'Mr. Pentecost' (it is significant that within the movement a mere man can be given this title) has put together a book called *The Spirit Bade Me Go*. He writes 'It was my privilege to edit and prepare for publication in this form those revelations that I received from Him while ministering in conferences' and he goes on to speak of 'utterances made under the unction of the Spirit'.¹⁹ A man and wife refused a request for a theological interpretation of their song, 'The King is Coming' in these words. (The secretary was replying on their behalf.) 'The song came quickly to them and they do not care to discuss the theology of it. In fact, they feel that to dissect the song would be tampering with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who inspired the song.'²⁰ In all this we are obviously dealing with people who all feel that their words have been directly inspired by God.

Guidelines for Beginners

Others guide the beginner how to start his prophecy. One urges, 'Expect to prophesy. Ask Jesus to edify his Body on earth through you. As you have fellowship with the Lord and with your brothers and sisters in the Lord, you may find thoughts and words of inspiration coming into your mind that you have not heard, and did not compose. If they are according to Scripture, then share them with the church. As with interpretation, you may just receive a few words, and as you start to speak, more may come. You may see a picture in your "mind's eye", and as you start to talk about that picture the words will come.'²¹ 'It may well start through some mental picture coming to

a member during a time of worship and silent adoration,' suggests another, who has written many books for students.²² Acknowledging that prophecy is a mixture he then pleads for loving encouragement to get the beginner started. 'Love will be welcoming towards embryonic prophecy. Love will be forgiving when mistakes are made' and 'If love flows, if mistakes are expected and understood, if the tests outlined above are applied, the dangers inherent in this sensitive gift will be largely avoided, and its real blessings will become a very positive boon to the congregation.'²³ But is it really loving to get someone thinking they are a mouthpiece of God when they are not? After all it does say in 1 Cor. 13:6 that 'love . . . rejoices with the truth'.

A 'prophetess' recounts her own experience. After first mentioning the existence of false prophecy she continues: 'How then can we know if a prophecy is from God or not? Someone might start off with "thus says the Lord" or "the Lord says" (incidentally it is not necessary to start off like this but sometimes it helps the beginner to get going) and it sounds so authoritative as to be beyond contradiction.'²⁴ Being kind, we might call this spiritual kiddology. Being truthful and biblical, we must call it blasphemy. Being a pastor, we must put the heaviest responsibility for this on the editors of the magazine who allowed it to be published and gave it their sanction. This kind of approach can only lead ultimately to much misery, pretence and deviation from scriptural truth.

Evading the Issue of Prediction

In the face of so much confusion, we are constantly being told that others are more balanced and cautious. So they are. They are very cautious in the matter of the supernatural which was our second criteria of true prophecy. Listen to two of the leaders of the movement

on the whole question of prediction in prophecy. 'Prophecy is a message from God, which is not necessarily anything to do with the future: a forthtelling, not primarily a foretelling,' writes one.²⁵ 'True prophecy is *forthtelling*, not *foretelling*,' declares another.²⁶ In this way Agabus and his ilk are safely wrapped in cotton-wool, and few seem to notice that the constant biblical note of supernatural foretelling is quietly relegated to the background.

Another writer is even more coy and canny on this issue of prediction. His words are: 'Here we move on to more controversial ground, and the possibilities of abuse become greater'.²⁷ This could be put quite differently. The conclusion might be that 'the possibilities of exposure become greater'. There is much more likelihood that here and there when the prophecy proves a dud someone with a bit of spiritual gumption is going to see and even say that the emperor has no clothes on. But, we ask, why is it controversial? Is not prediction a vital element in New Testament prophecy? Did not Agabus predict that a famine would take place? Did he not predict the imprisonment of Paul?

Others, at least in their definition of prophecy, are more true to the biblical pictures. Thus a leaflet issued by one charismatic group states, 'This gift is as the gift of old time prophecy — no different. It is still proclamation and prediction. . . . So it has to be admitted that the gift of prophecy is a psychic gift, rightly used, and that prophets have used detailed telepathic and even clairvoyant powers'.²⁸ This group has certainly practised what it preaches. In 1973 many young people in an area around one northern town were frightened when through their ministry a prophecy was given warning of a coming military takeover in England. Soon after this the magazine of the organisation commented on the prophecy as follows,

'Believing as we do that time is limited for freedom of Christian action in our country — and that physical judgement is less than two years away — we desire to use every minute we can to bring others to Christ while we may.'²⁹ Here now is an excerpt from a Prayer Letter issued by the same group in 1975. 'In the January of 1973 a prophecy was given with the Campaign which told of freedom to minister in 1973 and 1974, with the inference that the same freedom would not exist beyond 1974. We linked this at the time with Rev. David Gardner's "A Warning to the Nation" which he reiterated in the February of 1973. It seemed likely then — as indeed it still does — that freedom for everything would be lost to us through a military takeover or occupation of the land. Now that the two years have come and gone we can look back and marvel at the way in which that prophecy has been increasingly implemented, short of military action to date: . . .'³⁰ They then go on to say that inflation and the high price of petrol have inhibited travel and in this way the prophecy has been fulfilled! Enough said?

Tragedies that Ensnare

Speaking candidly of the early days of the Apostolic Movement in Britain, an old experienced Christian writes, 'Domestic tragedies resulted from obedience to certain utterances of the "prophets" in the local assembly. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there is a genuine gift of prophecy . . .'³¹ Is he really experienced enough? When will they ever learn? 'Soulish, carnal prophecies which lack anointing and direction can cause havoc in fellow ships,' warns another.³² How right he is! There is the case recorded (and no doubt many more that are not recorded), of the handsome young widower in the Charismatic movement who was confronted by a lady claiming that the Holy Spirit had revealed in prophecy

that they should marry. When the young man pointed out that another woman had received the same prophecy, the first woman denounced the second as a false prophet!³³ Another has told how, 'Some claiming this gift in one Socialist country told Christians in a neighbouring Socialist country that the Lord had ordered the latter to leave their fatherland because of the persecution that was coming. One can imagine the confusion this message caused.'³⁴

The tragic nature of all this has perhaps been clearly focussed in the recent death of a leading Charismatic. 'God "Healing My Cancer" Canon says,' was a heading in *The Times*. His obituary followed soon after this.³⁵ He was honest enough to record in his final book how various leaders predicted his recovery. 'I don't accept this cancer and I believe that God wants to heal you,' declared one pastor, whilst in what purported to be 'a prophetic word' a Roman Catholic Charismatic announced that the cancer would not lead to death.³⁶ A Reformed writer reviewing the book rightly pointed out that not only were these false prophecies in the light of Deut. 18:20-22 but also properly showed that 'to assure a dying man that he has been healed is to leave him in a turmoil of self-scrutiny and doubt'.³⁷ And yet because of the conditions of 'low visibility' in which much of the modern debate is conducted, the real questions were not asked in this review. One is — what is the standing of the various prophets or prophetesses who did make predictions of this nature? Have they been subject to any disciplinary procedure? And what of the 'gift of discernment'? The sick man had himself written a book of guidelines on the gifts. Why did he not by discernment recognise the false prophets? If one who has written and spoken so often on this theme cannot detect them, then how can Bashful

Betty and Gullible Gus, genuine but very immature Christians of a few months growth show discernment in these matters?

Moreover, one of the saddest and feeblest aspects of the much awaited book by the Reformed writer is what he says under this heading. Here are his words. '... the authenticity of predictions must be tested by watching to see if they are fulfilled (Deut. 18:22). The only effect such predictions should ever have on anyone's conduct is to induce preparedness of mind for the possibility that they will be fulfilled, alongside preparedness for the possibility that they will not'.³⁸ Could you have a better example of sitting on the fence than this? (In actual fact he goes on to mention one prophecy made about his own stay in Vancouver. It was false!) Has this writer never seen young Christians alarmed, distressed, fearful or bewildered when they are 'under' prophecies? Does he think that it is necessary for them to be 'under' prophecies in this way? It is sad that so many seem blithely unaware of the heartache, bewilderment and near-despair that can follow in the wake of such false prophecies. The present writer knows at firsthand of the disturbance and worry caused to some young Christians after the prophecy about the military takeover. To sit on the fence in matters like this is not only pastorally an uncomfortable position, it may ultimately be the last refuge of the coward before he topples off to his own hurt.

The Cutting Edge Vanishes

With regard to genuine prophecies we also noted that these were direct and urgent and there was often the clear note of challenge and judgement. The present author has quite a collection of 'prophecies' and must be selective. They all have the note of the 'promise box' or 'blessed thoughts' calendar and

are, not to mince words, very much in the vein of the oracle at Delphi, or akin to fortune telling. They are so couched that they could hardly be wrong! Or at least some event could be found which would correspond to something within them. Thus a word of prophecy given at a Renewal Conference in Edinburgh begins:

'O my people, I am going to bless this city.

My people, be encouraged tonight; for throughout this city I have my own people. I tell you they are seeking me; even tonight. I have my own people who are seeking me in tears and are longing in their hearts for what I have shown you my people.'³⁹

And then, in the midst of what can only be described as a lot of pseudo-biblical repetitious verbiage, we learn that God is over the city and has called the people to be witnesses in the place and that he is going to move with his Spirit.

A well-known magazine printed a prophecy which was given at a conference assuring us that it was 'of such high calibre and spiritual import we felt it ought to be shared with a wider circle of readers'. The prophecy begins: 'My children, know that I am with you in everything you do. When you feel inadequate and unable to meet the task I have set before you, then look at me and I will supply the needed strength. When you learn to recognise where your strength lies then you will discover the secret of working for me and with me. I am your strength, your joy, your peace, your hope. Without me, nothing you do will ever last eternally. My power working through you will bring to nought the things of time, and establish eternal values within your being.'⁴⁰ It then goes on to say in the familiar way that God's Spirit is going to move with joy. Comments one who has had some

years of experience within the Pentecostal movement, 'This prophecy is typical of any given week by week in Charismatic groups or in Pentecostal churches'. Since he could not recall any nationwide movement of the Spirit in 1973 or since, he feels rightly that it was, despite its seeming pleasantness and sheer inoffensiveness, a 'false' prophecy.⁴¹

We noted the firm judgemental note in Old and New Testament prophecy. Warnings were probably as frequent as promises. Peter predicted the death of Ananias and Sapphira, and Paul the blinding of Elymas. Listen now to five modern proponents. 'The abuse of prophecy is to point the finger to accuse or condemn.'⁴² 'Prophecy should not strike a note of condemnation.'⁴³ 'The Bible consistently teaches that God's people need not fear. That is why I have reservations about teaching or prophecy that imparts fear to God's people.'⁴⁴ 'If in any way it is condemnatory ("there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"), or destructive or does not tie up with other prophecies etc. do not act upon it.'⁴⁵ 'Neither is it likely that either an interpretation or a prophecy which are condemnatory in content are of the Holy Spirit.'⁴⁶ This is probably why so much modern prophecy is little more than turgid waffle. Moreover we learn that after Peter's fulfilled prophecy about Sapphira 'great fear seized the whole church' (Acts 5:11).

By contrast to all this a Dales Bible Week speaker, author of a book on prophecy, and self-styled prophet, asserts strongly that among other things that his role was that of 'spiritual trouble shooter'! He criticises the woolly and nebulous prophecies which abound saying, 'Prophecy is a revelation gift designed to make things clear and therefore specific. "I will bless you saith the Lord" may well be true, but it's not prophecy unless we are also told what

blessing we can expect. Is it to be a £5 note or my aunt getting saved? Such prophecies need another prophecy to explain them.⁴⁷ Yet now listen to one of the more modern books. 'Any attempt to give highly specific instructions to the group, or to individuals in it, under the guise of prophecy should be strenuously discouraged by the leaders of the meetings because of the problems which will almost invariably arise as a result.'⁴⁸ No forecasting of future careers or future marriage partners here!

The 'trouble-shooter' was very specific in a prophecy he gave later to the leadership at the Dales Bible Week. After listeners had learned that the Lord Jesus Christ is really dependent on us for the timing of his second coming, they were then told that, 'the corporate prophetic voice that God is raising up is the greatest thing that God has ever done.'⁴⁹ The mind boggles and the heart sinks. Greater than the incarnation? Greater than the atonement? Greater than the resurrection? One commentator aptly wrote: 'This is the height of delusion and would seem to fall into the category of the false prophets referred to by our Lord in Matthew 24, especially vv. 4,5 and 24-28. They are falsely claiming that his coming is imminent and that they are especially associated with his coming. This is a recurrent feature of sects!'⁵⁰

The Testing of Prophecy

Our fourth comment on prophecy was that it must be tested. Yet we made it clear that true prophecy would always stand the test. If there was any element of falsehood in the prophecy in Old Testament times, the prophet was to be executed. By analogy we would expect church discipline to be exercised on any false prophet today by any church which wholeheartedly adheres to the New Testament. Whether that discipline should be rebuke and warning, suspen-

sion from the Lord's Table or full excommunication should be left to the discretion of the congregation which is aware of the facts. Yet we have already been confronted by the fact that there are innumerable false prophecies. We make bold to say that there are not innumerable acts of discipline — even of the mildest kind!

In the face of the obvious banality and falsity of many prophecies, most Charismatics acknowledging as they do that prophecy is a 'mixed phenomenon', freely admit that prophecy does need sifting. As we have seen, some envisage elders or maturer Christians correcting the aspiring prophet or prophetess. Yet others would bring in at this point their concept of people who are endowed with the gift of discerning spirits. One expresses it like this. '... foreign elements (from the vast realm of the subconscious) can find their way into prophetic utterance and cloud and distort it. One prophecy would be so similar to another as to be indistinguishable — and yet arise from a different spiritual source. In a case such as this, rational "testing" would not suffice. . . . A foreign element in the midst of an inspired prophecy can only be detected charismatically, as one of the hearers is enlightened from above. This too could be called a prophetic gift — a specialised form of the gift to diagnose imperfect prophecy.'⁵¹

There is an obvious question that needs to be put to those who think like this. Is there not a further need of a charismatically gifted person to detect whether the charismatically gifted person who is claiming to sift out the foreign element in the prophecy is truly charismatically gifted or not? What must not be lost sight of in all this is that despite appearances the final authority is no longer in Scripture. The final authority is in whichever charismatically gifted man happens to stand at the

end of the line. The opportunity for Satan to have a field-day is unlimited.

Of course some do attempt to give other tests. In one book the reader is given no less than seven tests to check on whether prophecy is valid.⁵² We look at some of them. One is that the prophet is humble — was Jonah humble when he went to Nineveh? Another is that the church must be edified and built up even though there is a disturbing element in the message. How does the reaction of the church to the news of Paul's imprisonment as announced by Agabus fit in here? As they begin pleading with Paul, he had to say to them, 'Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?' (Acts 21:13). Instant edification all-round in an unfamiliar form? Or did they not know how to apply these tests? Another test is that the prophet does not go on too long — yet in Holy Scripture we are told with reference to two authentic prophets, 'Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much' (literally: 'with much speech'), 'to encourage and strengthen the brothers' (Acts 15:32). Yet another test is that the message must be spoken with love — now, to be sure, love can be defined in many ways, but one wonders how Elymas felt when Paul filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at him and said, 'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun' (Acts 13:9-11). Yet we read that God instantly honoured this strong prophecy and that 'immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand' (Acts 13:11). These tests are mostly manmade, arbitrary, and largely camouflage, for the fact remains that the major biblical test, the infallibility of the message, is

roundly rejected.

What is happening repeatedly is that young Christians (and many older ones), are accepting guidelines on matters like this and failing to recognise that the 'lists' and 'tests' are purely manmade. Having forsaken thorough, careful, biblical interpretation, they are prey to every charlatan. For example, some of the contradictions are so obvious and tragic that none but those who have been led astray could fail to recognise them. Here is the Dales Week speaker, being interviewed in a popular youth magazine and talking about the fact of inspiration. One moment he is stating that 'Physical feelings are a very unreliable guide to a forthcoming prophecy' and in the next breath, in response to a question about the 'anointing' he is asserting, 'Usually it consists of tingles down the spine, a wobbly hand (or knee, if sitting down), and a general feeling of exhilaration.'⁵³ No doubt for some months after this there were a crop of gullible young folk torn between a desire to detect their knees going wobbly or to feel nothing at all! They would do better to read their Bibles more carefully.

'But we still have the test of the infallible word,' they say.⁵⁴ Many chime in here. All prophecy has to be tested by Scripture. It must be rejected if it is unscriptural. If someone forecasts the end of the world some will know that this is contrary to biblical teaching and must reject such a prophecy. If someone predicts that a young Christian should marry an unbeliever, most Christians will reject this because they know that we should not be mismatched. But what if someone predicts that there will be a military takeover in two years. It is all very well saying that the events will prove whether it is right or wrong. For two years some susceptible souls will be 'under' such a prophecy. It is far from harmless, and it cannot immediately be

tested by Scripture. This is true to a degree of many other prophecies. Moreover, how is the toddler in the faith to sort all this out?

Anyone can see the confusion and the conflicting voices. The 'discernment' and assessment of one group is not accepted by another. Suspensions in these realms can be rife. While two authors argue that today the prophet is an 'expository preacher' others would say a resounding 'No' to this and allege that these writers have totally misunderstood the gift of prophecy.⁵⁵ But the two writers were chosen by the team of four reviewers as having written the best book on the subject! Most, realising correctly that in Corinth prophecies came regularly, two or three a week at least, expect this to happen today and go merrily on, blithely ignoring the pile of banal, false, and unfulfilled prophecies, as they gaily anticipate next week's hotch-potch. Some few, realising that this will not do, and that it reflects dishonour on the name of God, accept that prophecy is infallible, and therefore cautiously expect two or three in their lifetime, usually by hearsay, from Korea or Indonesia, with the consolation that those who lived in Covenanting Scotland usually got twice as many in their day. Thus one much quoted modern writer referring to the life of John Welsh (and presumably the prophecies with which he is credited) speaks of 'miracles performed in certain strange and extreme circumstances'.⁵⁶ It all sounds solid, cautious, balanced, reformed (and all the other epithets we usually apply), whereas in actual fact it is simply face-saving and unscriptural. Either prophecy continues regularly or it has ceased.

In many ways the situation is rather like that of the Irish family who were always tumbling around and fighting among themselves. Let a hostile stranger appear in their midst and they would soon present a united front, only to

return to the squabble as soon as the footsteps of the stranger had faded away. It may be that all groups would dismiss my challenge with a cursory, 'Oh, well, he does not believe that prophecy is freshly given to individuals today. He is resisting all the widespread evidence' — Ignoring the fact that many charismatics would declare null and void the prophecies accepted in their own group.

Some argue that if there are large numbers claiming the gift of prophecy, surely the Lord would not permit a spirit of delusion to rest upon so many. The majority must be right. Micaiah stood a lonely figure against the massed ranks of the prophets who had given Ahab an 'encouraging' word. He was sure that it was a 'lying spirit' in the mouth of the false prophets. Others felt equally convinced that the Holy Spirit was on their side. 'Then Zedekiah son of Kenaanah sent up and slapped Micaiah in the face. "Which way did the Spirit of the Lord go when he went from me to speak to you?" he asked' (1 Kings 2:24). Yet, as the account shows, the Holy Spirit was with the one man rather than the crowd. And it was the crowd who actually claimed to have the Holy Spirit. Are we sure that the same thing is not happening today?

Notes

When a book is mentioned for the first time the title will be given in full. After this the book will be referred to by the author's name unless otherwise stated. Q. = 'quoted in'.

¹ Donald Bridge and David Phipps, *Spiritual Gifts and the Church*, I.V.P. 1973, p. 41.

² As above, p. 64.

³ Michael Griffiths, *Cinderella's Betrothal Gifts*, O.M.F., 1979, p. 30.

⁴ Keith Mason, *Some Prophecies... All Prophecy* (pamphlet) p. 2.

⁵ Sylvia Macey, *Dunamis Magazine*, April 1973, p. 4.

⁶ Ross Peart in article entitled 'The Church — A Prophet Making Organisation' in *Sound of Revival Magazine*, Summer 1984, p. 19. The very title of this article reflects a far from biblical theology although it does perhaps tell the truth!

- ⁷ Clifford Hall, *The Day Comes*, Fount Paperbacks, 1982, p. 25. Also see introduction.
- ⁸ Dennis and Rita Bennett, *The Holy Spirit and You*, Coverdale House, 1973, p. 106.
- ⁹ Review by Owen Milton of 'Keep in Step with the Spirit' in *The Evangelical Magazine of Wales*, Aug/Sep 1984, p. 22.
- ¹⁰ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, I.V.P. 1984, p. 215.
- ¹¹ As above p. 216.
- ¹² As above p. 217.
- ¹³ Peter Lewis, *Evangelical Times*, March 1981, p. 17. See also Michael Harper, *Prophecy* (Pamphlet), 1964, p. 11. (Henceforth referred to as 'Harper/Prophecy'.)
- ¹⁴ Arnold Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces a Commentary on 1 Corinthians 12-14*, Hodder, 1973, p. 111.
- ¹⁵ Griffiths p. 51.
- ¹⁶ Ross Peart in *Sound of Revival Magazine*, Summer 1984, p. 18.
- ¹⁷ J. Rodman Williams as quoted in John F. MacArthur, *The Charismatics*, Lamp Press, 1979, pp. 20f.
- ¹⁸ David Wilkerson as quoted in article in magazine of Leeds City Evangelical Church, Nov 1974.
- ¹⁹ David J. du Plessis as quoted in Walter J. Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles*, Banner of Truth, 1976, pp. 24f. Michael Harper tells how a report described him in this way in *As At the Beginning*, Hodder, 1967, p. 54. (Henceforth referred to as 'Harper/Beginning'.) He offers no criticism of this description.
- ²⁰ Bill and Gloria Gaither as quoted in MacArthur, p. 15.
- ²¹ Bennett, p. 110.
- ²² Green in excerpt in *Buzz Magazine*, November 1982, p. 41.
- ²³ As above.
- ²⁴ Sylvia Macey, *Dunamis Magazine*, April 1973, p. 5.
- ²⁵ David Watson, *One in the Spirit*, Hodder, 1973, p. 90.
- ²⁶ Bennett, p. 108.
- ²⁷ Harper *Prophecy*, p. 26.
- ²⁸ Adelaide College lecture sheet. The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. Lecture No. 7, The Gifts of the Spirit, p. 3.
- ²⁹ *Teamwork Magazine*, Aug. 1973, p. 7.
- ³⁰ Prayer Letter No. 78 of the Come Back to God Campaign.
- ³¹ Maynard James, *I Believe in the Holy Ghost*, Oliphants, 1969, p. 114.
- ³² Mason p. 5.
- ³³ The story related in Kilian McDonnell, *Catholic Pentecostalism: Problems in Evaluation*, Dove Publications, is quoted by Alec Taylor in an article 'Prophets in the First and Twentieth Centuries', *Peace and Truth Magazine*, 1979, No. 2, p. 13. I am much indebted to articles by Mr. Taylor.
- ³⁴ Leith Samuel, *Speaking in Tongues*, Christian Literature Crusade (Booklet), p. 14.
- ³⁵ David Watson in *The Times*, 3 October 1983.
- ³⁶ David Watson, *Fear No Evil*, Hodder, 1984, pp. 25 and 87f. See also pp. 50-7, 157f. and 169f.
- ³⁷ Review of the book by H. M. Carson in *Evangelical Times*, July 1984, p. 17.
- ³⁸ Packer, p. 216.
- ³⁹ Edinburgh Youth Outreach, October Prayer Letter, 1974. This was a conference at which Michael Harper spoke.
- ⁴⁰ *Q. Peace and Truth Magazine*, 1979, No. 2, p. 13.
- ⁴¹ As above.
- ⁴² Mason p. 3.
- ⁴³ Ross Peart in *Sound of Revival Magazine*, Summer 1984, p. 18.
- ⁴⁴ Derek Prince in *Revival Magazine*, Sept/Oct 1981, p. 4.
- ⁴⁵ Sylvia Macey in *Dunamis Magazine*, April 1973, p. 5.
- ⁴⁶ W. R. Davies in *Dunamis Magazine*, Oct 1973, p. 12.
- ⁴⁷ David Mansell as interviewed in *Buzz Magazine*, Nov 1982, p. 38.
- ⁴⁸ Bridge and Phypers, p. 64. Compare Bennett p. 107.
- ⁴⁹ David Mansell as quoted by Brian Beevers in an article entitled 'The Restoration Movement' in *Reformation Today Magazine*, Nov/Dec 1984, p. 46. A very long excerpt from the prophecy is given here.
- ⁵⁰ As above p. 48. The criticisms of Brian Beevers are excellent. He has been very helpful in providing information. The stand of the magazine *Reformation Today*, edited by Erroll Hulse, on this issue has been consistent from its inception. Information can be obtained through Erroll Hulse c/o Eurobooks, 361 Aigburth Road, Liverpool L17 0BP.
- ⁵¹ Bittlinger p. 112. For similar views see also J. A. Schep, *Spirit Baptism and Tongue Speaking According to Scripture*. Fountain Trust, 1970, p. 132, and G. W. North, *Spiritual Life and Spiritual Gifts*, Pamphlet, 1978, pp. 53f.
- ⁵² Green in excerpt in *Buzz Magazine*, Nov 1982, p. 41.
- ⁵³ See *Buzz Magazine*, November 1982, p. 39.
- ⁵⁴ See Bridge and Phypers, p. 65, Mason p. 6, and James p. 119.
- ⁵⁵ Bridge and Phypers state this, p. 42. North p. 60 and Harper *Prophecy* p. 8 deny it.
- ⁵⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Supernatural in Medicine*, C.M.F., 1971, pp. 10f.

Pastor John Campbell, of Albany Baptist Church, Western Australia, has recently given two different series of lectures on the Van Til approach to groups in Australia; once related to pastors, and the other to Christian schoolteachers. He is connected with the Christian Community Schools movement in Australia. His church has its own Christian school and retirement village.

The 'Readers Digest' Van Til!

Have you noticed how many books about the Christian Mind and Humanism have recently appeared? Most have something of real value to offer, but many consistent Reformed thinkers rely upon Cornelius Van Til when they need a consistent theological approach. He continually returns the lines of argument to God, making us feel that 'of God, and through him, and to him, are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen' (Rom. 11:36).

There are difficulties in grasping Van Til. His style is not as simple as that of his former students Schaeffer and Carnell. His subject matter is often heavy, and shot through with obscure names, although anyone who perseveres soon discovers refreshing patches of clarity. Recent formulations of the classical, evidentialist approach have challenged his presuppositionalist method, and some have been too ready to ignore him. However, those who grapple with his writings (often without an experienced guide), find a growing conviction that here is something profoundly significant which enriches one's vision of God. I was thrilled to find on a recent visit to Toronto Baptist Seminary in Canada that an encouraging number of pastors in that country treat his contribution with the highest regard.

Van Til has some helpful interpreters, though few are 'purist' in their approach. Jim Halsey's *For a Time Such as This* is the best. Rushdoony has published two critiques of Van Til, and both are helpful, although he has more recently diverted his own interests into the 'Theonomy' field. Thom Notaro has a serviceable work on Van Til and the use of evidence, while William White Jnr's biography, *Van Til: Defender of the Faith*, has interesting background information, but does not provide a careful entry into Van Til's central thought. John Frame's *Van Til: The Theologian* is brilliant and challenging, but not entirely accurate. Douglas Vickers of Amherst University, Massachusetts, has a vital introductory booklet called *Van Til and the Theologian's Theological Stance* (pub. Cross). Professor Vicker's friends have urged him to write more on the subject. Robert Reymond's *Justification of Knowledge* presents a reasonable picture of the essential issues.

This article is undertaken with the aim of encouraging ordinary pastors to come to grips with Van. Til. It will not consist of a systematic summary of his teaching, but of a simple presentation of some of his favourite illustrations. These word

pictures are windows to his thought and show the profound clarity of his mind. They are attractive, though not all equally compelling. Some are unforgettable.

Van Til insists that *our starting point* is crucial. Many theologians and Christian philosophers begin with faith in man's ability to reason himself into a place where he can 'believe in God with integrity'. Van Til consistently exposes this assumed but specious 'ability' of man, pleading after Kuyper that we have ignored the 'noetic effects' of sin. He asserts that we should not copy Descartes' method of 'building bridges outwards from the autonomous self', but instead recognise our derivative nature, both in being and knowing. We are meant to be an 'analogue of God', a 'finite replica' of him who made us in his image.

Van Til says that those who start with man are like *someone who buttons up a jacket* but soon finds that the *first button is in the wrong hole*, so that all the others are consequently misplaced. Similarly, apostate man's reason is like a *misaligned buzzsaw* which wrongly cuts all the planks. This sinful reason will cut its concept of reality according to fallen nature's dictates. Would-be autonomous man is also like a *pretentious builder* who ignores and abandons the exact plans drawn by the Master Architect. He vainly tries to reassign the specific functions of objects for the house, with the result that the building will never materialise unless the Architect steps in. The professor accuses secularists (*et al*) of putting the supernatural dimension *on the mythical bed of Procrustus*, and cutting off embarrassing or unwanted facets of reality that do not fit autonomously determined measurements of sinful man.

In contrast, Van Til says that we must start with the self-attesting Christ of Scripture, not with the evidentialist arguments, for the cosmological argument *presupposes* God, not *proves* him. God is like *the beams undergirding the floor*. We cannot demonstrate their existence in the same way as e.g. furniture on the floorboards, but such beams are *presupposed* because without them the floor would collapse. In fact we need an *Archimedean Point which transcends created reality* in order to have an authoritative and true perspective. Any point *within* creation leads to relativity and imbalance. Van Til distinguishes between proximate starting points and an ultimate starting point (see if you can find *the diving board illustration* in his works).

Furthermore, rebellious man is always confronted by God everywhere in life, even if he is not continuously aware of him. He is like *a man who tries all buttons on a transistor radio but always gets the same message* — he can never entirely turn off God's voice! (Psalm 139). He is also *like a child alone in a home* who vehemently denies that he has parents, and insists that he owns the house and is the sole resident. However, the total witness of the house so plainly declares the opposite (e.g. adult clothes, family photos, documents), that argument seems unnecessary, yet the rebel will persist. Indeed, created reality is like *linoleum that bears an indelible pattern* which will only be defaced when the linoleum itself is destroyed. Man can suppress, but never eradicate, his 'sensus deitatis',

A SUMMARIZING OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY APOLOGETICS TYPES

TYPE	RATIONALISTIC		REVELATIONAL
Theologically	Arminian	Moderate Calvinism	Consistent Calvinism
Philosophically	Categorical Presuppositionalism	Analytical Presuppositionalism	Metaphysical Presuppositionalism
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assumes no system or world view begins only with an epistemology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assumes the Christian world view hypothetically Subjects it to an epistemological verification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepts unquestioningly the Christian world view Rejects all efforts at verification
Apologetically	Starting Point — Man's Reason	Starting Point — Ultimately man's reason	Starting Point — God's revelation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logical — God Synoptic — Man's reason 	
	Common Ground — Epistemological	Common Ground — Epistemological	Common Ground — Metaphysical
Exponents	S. C. Hackett F. J. Sheen	E. J. Carnell B. Ramm G. Clark J. O. Buswell	C. Van Til G. C. Berkouwer H. Dooyeweerd J. M. Spier R. J. Rushdoony

This chart is copied from the book Jerusalem and Athens, edited by E. R. Geehan, and published by Presbyterian and Reformed of the U.S.A. The chart was prepared by Charles M. Horne. Published in 1971 we doubt that the book is in print now.

which is God's greatest internal ally (Rom. 1) in making man aware of his true status.

Sinful man *lives on God's estates but pays no rent*, and uses all his provisions but offers no thanks, despite all the well-placed ownership signs. Scientists unwittingly assume an orderly, theistic creation in their logical methods — 'they live off the borrowed capital of Christian Theism'. (Rushdoony, Schaeffer and Guinness, *et. al.*, have clearly shown this aspect of science.) Non-Christians are '*cattle rustlers*'(!), living off the proceeds of Christian Theism, which alone is capable of providing a true (though not exhaustively detailed) explanation of the Cosmos. 'Facts' are what they are by virtue of God's providence, just as the number 'seventeen' only makes sense within the framework of a numerical sequence.

Even man's capacity to raise intellectual and moral rebellion against God is only possible because of the way God has created him. *Man is like a child slapping its father's face*, but who can only do so because father holds him within reach!

Nor can questing man establish God's existence by evidentialist arguments, just as it is ridiculous for *someone to prove the existence of the sun by using a flashlight!* Such methods deny the true nature of man's knowledge: that it is derivative, dependent on special revelation, partial, analogical, finite, sin-affected and reinterpetive.

In the light of the God-awareness that persists in every person, Van Til warns that we should not accept an apologetic method that makes any concession to apostate man. Fallen man needs to be '*blasted out of his last hiding places*' in his own best interests. He needs *an honest Doctor* who shows love by stating the true medical state of affairs and who offers a surgical remedy, not a pill-happy medico who says 'peace, peace' where there is no peace. By God's Spirit, man, unsure of his identity, needs to have his 'iron mask' wrenched off to see himself before God. *His coloured glasses*, cemented on, need to be replaced by the clear spectacles of Scripture.

Van Til's interpreter, R. J. Rushdoony, makes much of the concept that '*the emperor has no clothes*'! He shows how a consistent apologetic will reveal the philosophical and epistemological nakedness of man, whereas a traditonal apologetic will allow that 'the emperor' is at least wearing *some* item of clothing.

In other areas of theology, Van Til also communicates good insights through word pictures. Consider one in which he emphasises the incomprehensibility of God. (This doctrine does not mean that God can't be truly known, but that he can't be exhaustively known.) This ties in with an analogical view of language, and with the failure of thinkers to comprehend all facets even of general revelation (the cosmos). Time and effort will never achieve such knowledge, nor *a fortiori* will man ever attain to full knowledge of the supreme, unique, Triune God. We depend upon his self-revelation, and we can't even exhaustively comprehend the Bible.

Accordingly, Van Til employs the image of the '*full bucket difficulty*'. This bucket is full, yet more can be added! God is unchanging, yet prayer changes things! God is full of glory (which *excludes* addition) but must be glorified (which demands addition). In this way Van Til indicates how we can live with apparent paradox without having to systematise every datum of theology, history and science. God's incomprehensibility and man's derivative nature and knowledge demand it be so. Behind a compulsion to systematise everything lurks the elusive ideal of *exhausting knowledge*, whereas consistent Reformed thinkers adhere to *principled knowledge*. Christians do not possess all truth, but in the Bible have *the Truth about all Truth*.

In another theological topic, Cornelius Van Til beautifully illustrates how the problem of textual variations in manuscripts does not negate the concept of biblical infallibility. The loss of the autographs does not necessarily create uncertainty, just *as temporary flood waters lapping over a bridge* do not necessarily make the bridge unsafe. We see the side rails, and other cars crossing. We realise that an inch of water only *covers* the surface; it does not *invalidate* it, nor *destroy* it, nor *erode* it. It still carries the same traffic, providing we don't go off the rails!

This distinguished professor (turning 90 in 1985) employs many other attractive illustrations. Read the beginning of *Christian Theistic Ethics* and see how he so clearly uses *the concept of a Pilgrim* as a picture of the study of ethics (e.g. Destination? Road? Attitude?).

I have been blessed over a long period of time with my consistent forays into Van Til, and I hope this small window into his books will encourage pastors to take down those dust-gathering volumes and discover how powerfully Van Til addresses the modern situation. Readers will also appreciate that a pastoral heart accompanies his massive mind.

We conclude with his healthy picture of a childlike trust in God. He has been showing how the Bible presents a unified cosmos:

And if my unity is comprehensive enough to include the efforts of those who reject it, it is large enough even to include that which those who have been set upright by regeneration cannot see. My unity is that of *a child who walks with its father through the woods*. The child is not afraid because its father knows it all and is capable of handling every situation. So I readily grant that there are some 'difficulties' with respect to belief in God and his revelation in nature and Scripture that I cannot solve. In fact there is mystery in every relationship with respect to every fact that faces me, for the reason that all facts have their final explanation in God whose thoughts are higher than my thoughts, and whose ways are higher than my ways. And *it is exactly that sort of God that I need*.

Conferences

The Carey Conference for ministers, January 1985

This conference continued to provide a source of great encouragement, both in the materials presented and the fellowship provided. The substance of the address by Tom Nettles is already in print and held over for the next issue. Part of the material presented by Victor Budgen is included in this issue. The cassettes are available as follows:

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|--|---|
| 01CMC85 – The missionary example of Adoniram Judson – Tom Nettles | 06CMC85 – The Obedience of Faith and the Kingship of Christ in Mission – Don Garlington |
| 02CMC85 – A Healthy use of tribulation – Alun McNabb | 07CMC85 – The mission theology of the founding fathers of the Southern Baptist Convention – Tom Nettles |
| 03CMC85 – The theology of mission in the Old Testament – Peter Misselbrook | 08CMC85 – The doctrine of the eternal punishment – Eryl Davies |
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The Leicester Ministers' Conference

The Leicester Conference is the best attended Ministers' Conference in the U.K. that is apart from denominational conferences. It is supported far more than its American counterpart. The 22nd gathering is due this month, March 25th-28th. The programme is particularly suited for young men. Al Martin is due to speak on sermon preparation and Stuart Olyott on 1 Corinthians 12-14. The latter issue is vital as will be seen from the discussion in the review article 'Will you attend the Wedding?' It is much better to hear a speaker live and be able to question him than listening to the cassettes. The cost of the conference plus the advantage of being able to stock up with Banner books at bargain prices makes Leicester incomparable. It may not be too late if you phone Edinburgh - 031-337 7310.



The high office of Queen Elizabeth demands that Prince Philip walks behind her just as Mr. Thatcher walks behind the Prime Minister. How far should a pastor's wife walk behind her husband? Here Charlotte walks submissively behind Stuart by about five feet! — or does the good humour show that it was only for the camera? Feminism has become a foremost issue in Christendom. In some Presbyterian groups men have been denied entrance to the ministry because of their refusal to agree in principle to women preachers or women elders, that is in the full sense of equality with men. There is no way that we will be able to avoid this controversy in our ranks. We hope to examine the issues in the future.

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