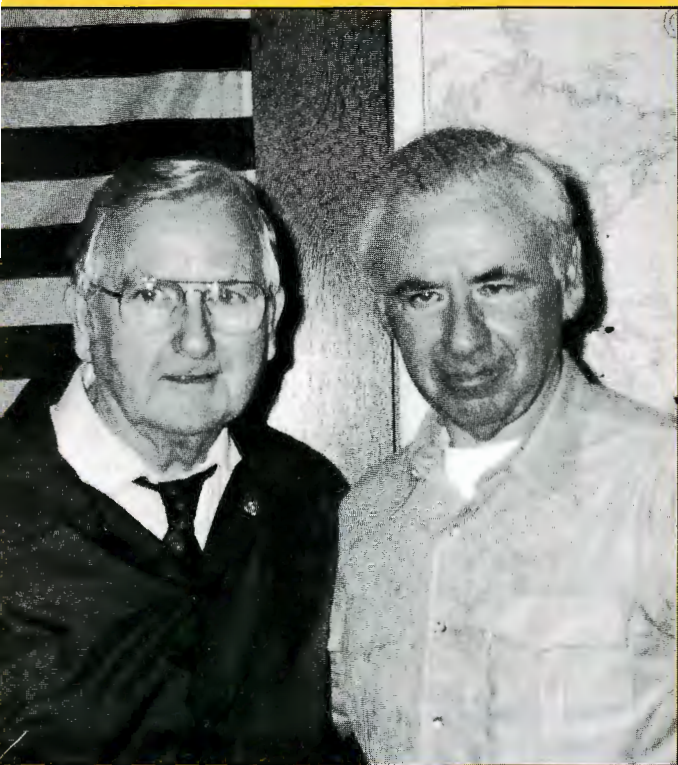
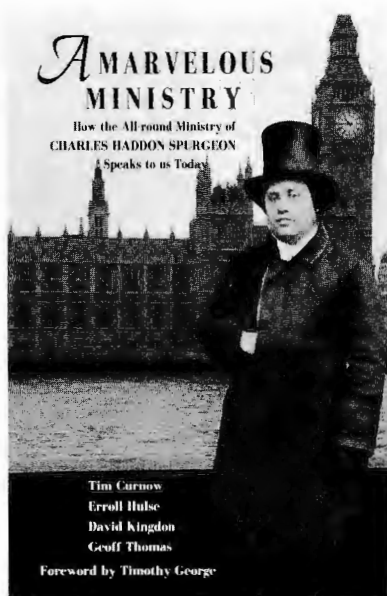

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Editorial

The exposition by Bob Sheehan on special revelation raises the subject of the 'human-ness' of Scripture. 'In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in many ways' (Heb 1:1). The Bible is made up of a rich variety of materials each part complementary to the rest. The Scriptures did not come by God dictating words in the way letters are dictated to a secretary. 2 Peter 1:21 describes the method used, 'Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit'. The expression 'carried along' is helpful as it conveys the idea of the prophets being inspired through and through.

The writing of Scripture involved historical research, logical reasoning, theological knowledge, ethical application, and above all love for Jahweh, all the faculties being under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit. B B Warfield describes this as 'concursive operation'.¹ The Holy Spirit worked confluently in the authors, inspiring and energising them.

The product was not only perfect in itself but perfect in relationship to the complete body. As in creation of the universe so in the creation of the Bible the all-wise omniscient Divine Spirit was in sovereign control. The editing of the wisdom books such as Job, the Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes would have involved conscientious and meticulous hard work. Luke declares that he researched his history. New Testament letters were refined by editing both in the authors' minds and on paper. Truth does not have to come in the form of direct speech out of heaven for it to qualify as special revelation.

The personalities of the prophets employed played an important role. Their humanity is the ink with which the Holy Spirit has recorded the Bible. We respond to and understand the humanity through which the message of divine revelation comes. Several such as Moses, Jeremiah, David, Jonah, Hosea, Ezekiel and Daniel illustrate this point well.

If we take Ezekiel as an example we note that he received exceptional commands to act out visually before his exiled congregation the drama of the siege and fall of Jerusalem. This was in order to impress upon them their culpability in the whole saga of judgment. Thus the Holy Spirit used Ezekiel's

Cover picture: *L R Shelton Jr pastor of Mount Zion Bible Church and on the right Michael Snyder. See article on Chapel Library.*

personality. Ezekiel was passionately concerned in a pastoral caring sense for the sufferers and for the effects of those sufferings on the exiles to whom he ministered. Through his human-ness the message of the Lord came with power. And it is through his human-ness that his writings become alive when we preach from them today.

Perfect Scripture has been distilled through many imperfect and sinful, yet regenerate, men and women. Bob Sheehan draws attention to the fact that the Holy Spirit is able to use even the enemies of God, like Balaam, to prophesy that which is true. That is very exceptional but it illustrates the subject of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures.

What are you reading?

A whole new generation of Christians is emerging. Are these young Christians mostly readers or TV viewers? Is it not the case that increasingly the reading of Christian literature is regarded as the province of pastors, teachers and specialists, but not of the average believer? Spiritual appetite is the key. The soul enriching habit of reading often begins with smaller materials such as the tracts and booklets printed by Chapel Library (see page 17), or through reading biographies. The short biographies reviewed in the article 'Genius and Grace' are readable, instructive and enjoyable. The clinical insights occupy only a small proportion. As I read this book I was thankful for the degree to which medical knowledge has advanced in our world. That is part of God's common grace.

Any third degree separatists reading the review are reminded that it is absurd to think that we endorse the views or doctrines of others in any shape or form simply because we read about or review their religious experiences. We seek to emulate the strengths and avoid the mistakes or eccentricities of former Christians.

Dr John Gerstner

During a month spent in America recently I attended a John Gerstner question time meeting. The procedure is one in which anyone present is able to pass up written questions. One question concerned Reconstruction. Dr Gerstner is not a Reconstructionist but in answering he pointed to the fact that the whole Reformed constituency forms only a small part (he suggested perhaps ten percent) of Evangelicalism world-wide. He appealed therefore for unity. We cannot afford to be dividing over every issue. We can easily hold to and affirm distinctives without damaging fraternal relationships with others and especially with those with whom we have a massive amount in common. He answered that and many other controversial questions in a versatile and refreshing way.

¹ B B Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, P & R, 1948, Page 94ff.

God has Spoken

An Exposition of Special Revelation

Bob Sheehan

We have asserted that 'God is constantly making himself and his will known to man through creation and his religious and moral sense' (A Self-revealing God, Sheehan, RT 127 p6f). This leaves man inexcusable for atheism or agnosticism, but in possession of only a very limited knowledge of God. To know that God exists, is eternal and powerful, is worthy to be worshipped and is concerned with right and wrong is important and foundational. It gives a creature knowledge of his Creator, but falls far short of what a *sinful* creature needs to know about God. To know enough to be rendered inexcusable for the misuse of the knowledge is not to know enough to be delivered from the consequences of that misuse. A general revelation suits creatures but not sinners.

God, having determined to save people for himself from among those who have restrained their knowledge of him and pursued unrighteousness, has provided this additional knowledge. It has not, however, been given as a general revelation to all men but to specific individuals. It has, therefore, been termed 'special revelation'.

This 'special revelation' has been granted in different forms through all ages. During the Old Testament era there were six main modes of revelation and during the New Testament era four. Each mode needs individual consideration.

1. Theophany

The combination of the Greek words 'theos' and 'phanein', meaning 'God' and 'to appear' respectively, define a theophany as an appearance of God. The patriarchs were especially granted theophanies.

The most detailed account of a theophany is in Genesis 18. Moses explains that the LORD appeared to Abraham (v1) and that this appearance occurred with the visit of three 'men' (v2). One of these 'men' speaks as the LORD and makes specific promises to Abraham and Sarah (vv9-15). When they left Abraham walked with them (v16). The LORD continued a conversation with Abraham and then left him (v33). The other two men, now described as 'angels' (19:1) but still appearing to be men (19:5), went on to Sodom.

The fact that God is invisible and incorporeal himself should not make us conclude that a theophany was an hallucination or a vision. The God who created matter can surely take on a material form in order to converse with men.

A temporary incarnation for God should be no problem to those who believe in the incarnation of Christ.

Indeed it is arguable that the scriptural affirmations that no-one has ever seen God other than as he is made known in Christ, that there is no more that man can know of God in this life other than is seen in Christ and that Isaiah's vision of God was a vision of the glory of Christ, indicate that the pre-incarnation appearances of God were appearances of God the Son. The fact that Christ *is* the Word and that the Old Testament prophets spoke according to the Spirit of *Christ* in them also encourages this suggestion, although it should not be affirmed dogmatically as though it were unquestionably true.¹

2. The Angel of the LORD

Closely linked to theophanies and pre-incarnation appearances of Christ is the enigmatic being, the Angel of the LORD. There are over one hundred references to angels in the Old Testament but among these are specific references to one angel called the Angel of the LORD.

This angel is distinguished from other angels because he speaks as God delivering his message in the first person singular and himself promises to fulfil his word. In delivering his message he is described variously as the angel of the LORD and the LORD himself suggesting an identification of the two. Those to whom the angel of the LORD appeared responded to him and worshipped him as God himself. Nor is there any hesitancy on the part of the angel of the LORD in receiving worship that God alone should receive, a hesitancy elsewhere specifically recorded when mere angels are involved.²

It might, however, be objected that the angel spoke in the first person singular and was identified with God so closely only because as an ambassador of God he delivered his message in the place of God. Paul as Christ's ambassador could implore his readers on Christ's behalf.³ There is a truth here, as far as it goes, but no-one would argue that Paul identifies himself with God or is identified by others with God in quite the same way as the angel of the LORD is identified with the LORD.

In addition, we need to note that the LORD is sometimes specifically and explicitly identified with an angel. The parallelism used by Jacob and Malachi require that Jacob's God and his Angel are one. Malachi's prophecy is fulfilled by the LORD who is the Angel of the covenant.⁴ To try and make them two separate beings would be a great misunderstanding of the fundamental nature of parallelism in the writings of the Old Testament.

The same reasoning that suggested the God revealed in theophany would be God the Son is applicable to God's self-revelation in the Angel of the LORD.

3. The Audible Voice

The rarest form of self-revelation used by God in the Old Testament was his voice. At Sinai, when he gave Israel the ten commandments, he adopted no form that they could see but they heard him declare the ten commandments with his voice.⁵ The lack of form was a deliberate discouragement to idolatry.

Moses recognised that to hear the voice of God was a unique and momentous experience, an amazing act of condescension that mortal men should hear the voice of God and live. The effect on the Israelites was to fill them with sheer terror so that they pleaded that God might accept Moses as a mediator through whom God should speak to them.⁶ This pleading was heard and God's self-revelation was mediated through men throughout the remainder of the Old Testament era.

4. Urim and Thummim

One of the means by which Israel sought and obtained guidance from God from the time that a priesthood was established among her was by the use of the Urim and Thummim kept by the High Priest.⁷

If it is correct to interpret the references in the historical books of the Old Testament to 'enquiring of the LORD' as indications of the use of Urim and Thummim then it is evident that positive, negative and non-committal answers could be received.⁸

The terms 'Urim and Thummim' literally mean 'lights' and 'perfections' but neither the significance of these names, nor the manner in which guidance was given, is presently understood. Guesses abound but facts are short.

5. Moses

The importance of Moses in the Old Testament is not likely to be overstated. We have already noted how the Israelites asked that God would speak to them through him. Moses stands as the mediator of the Old Covenant in the same way as our Lord is the mediator of the New Covenant. Law came through Moses; grace and truth through Jesus Christ. Of course, there is a distinction. Moses is God's servant; Jesus is God's Son.⁹

God did use other people, especially the prophets, to reveal his truth in the Old Testament era, but, as Aaron and Miriam found to their cost, when they insisted on equality with Moses because God had also spoken through them, God himself put a distinction between Moses and all other prophets.¹⁰

Whereas God revealed himself and his truth to his prophets in dreams and visions, Moses was given three distinct and distinguishing privileges:

1. God spoke with Moses mouth to mouth.
2. God spoke clearly and not in riddles.
3. Moses saw the form of the LORD.¹¹

The phrase 'mouth to mouth' does not denote some special intimacy between close friends. It is equivalent to 'face to face' and emphasises personal contact as opposed to impersonal contact.¹² God spoke to the prophets in dreams and visions. His message was mediated through those means. To Moses, however, he spoke personally and directly.

The messages conveyed to the prophets are full of symbols, enigmas and puzzles. Anyone in doubt should read Ezekiel! God spoke to Moses, however, clearly in straightforward prose. It was not unusual for the Old Testament prophets to be puzzled by the things they saw and heard,¹³ but Moses was given a clear grasp of the truth.

The prophets' contact with God was mainly through dreams and visions but Moses continued to be granted theophanies. At Sinai the Israelites had heard a voice but seen no form. Moses was granted a voice and a form with which to speak.

Of course it needs to be underlined that to see the form of God in a theophany is not the same as seeing God as he really is. Even at his highest experience of communion with God, Moses could only see his 'back' and not his 'face'. Although Moses had higher privileges of communion with God than anyone else in the Old Testament his experience of God is far below that of our Lord.¹⁴

6. The Prophets

Next to Moses, no group of people was more important as a recipient of revelation than the Old Testament prophets. The titles given to them reveal something of their function.

A prophet could be described as 'a man of God', not simply because he was devoted to the service of God, but because he 'spoke from God'. His prophecy did not originate from his own mind. He was *not* a commentator looking at life and seeking to unravel its mysteries. Peter uses a term which means to 'loosen'

and states that scriptural prophecies were not a product of the prophets' own attempts to untie life's 'knots'. He was not a puzzle-solver but a man with a message that had come from God.¹⁵

Prophets were also described as 'seers' because of their special insight and the fact that they usually received their messages from God by seeing dreams and visions. The messages that came from God were presented by God to their eyes and ears. Even the false prophets understood that they had to claim dreams and visions if their credibility as prophets was to be considered seriously.¹⁶

The term 'prophet' itself alludes to the prophet as a spokesman. When the LORD reassured Moses that he had made him as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron would be Moses' prophet, he explained it to mean that Aaron would speak for Moses as if he were Moses' mouth and Moses would be as God to Aaron putting words in his mouth.¹⁷ The prophet is a person who has words put in his mouth and acts as God's mouth. He speaks God's words as God's mouth. Essential to all prophecy is the idea of God-inspired speech. Prophecy usually occurred in three stages:

1. It originated with God as his message.
2. It was transmitted by God through dreams and visions to the messenger.
3. It was communicated by the prophet to the hearers.

The question might arise as to whether the message changes at any of these stages. Is it corrupted to any degree? Peter asserts that the prophecy originates with God, not the prophet, and that when the prophet speaks he speaks 'from God' and does so 'being carried along by the Holy Spirit'.¹⁸ He speaks not as a free agent but under the Holy Spirit's direction. A person being carried along is in the power of the carrier. He goes where he is taken. The prophet speaks as one under the authority of another.

It might be argued that a true prophet (one whose message is from God and not his own production) might be tempted to change the message and so corrupt it. The case of Balaam demonstrates that this was not possible.

The context shows that Balaam was a very wicked man and would do anything to gain money. The Israelites had no hesitation in executing him for teaching the Midianites how to lead Israel into sin and he is viewed in Scripture as an evil man.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Balaam was a prophet.

Balak, King of Moab, offered Balaam great financial reward if he would curse Israel (Numbers 22-24). There is no doubt that Balaam wanted the reward. He tried in many ways to gain it. However, throughout his dealing with Balak, Balaam insisted that he could only prophesy when the Lord allowed him and he could only say what God put in his mouth.²⁰ To prophesy anything other than

the word of God under inspiration was *impossible*. The integrity of the message was divinely assured.

The close of the Old Testament period of revelation

The revelation that God gave to Israel from the days of the patriarchs through to the restoration from the exile was viewed by the Jews as having ceased with the prophetic ministry of Malachi. So decisive was this cessation that the rabbis expressed it as the departure of the Holy Spirit from Israel.

In the inter-testamental period Jewish writers lamented, 'At this time there is no prince, or prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, or sacrifice'; 'The prophets have fallen asleep.'²¹

A time of great disaster was described in 1 Maccabees as unparalleled, 'since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them'. Both the Jews living in Israel and those cocooned in the Qumran community made temporary decisions until a prophet would come to tell them what to do.²²

The cessation of the ministry of prophets and the expectation of future prophets meant that inter-testamental Judaism could not find the authoritative voice of God in living prophets. However, Malachi had shown Israel her duty. His final words, 'Remember the law of Moses'²³ pointed her to the written word rather than the spoken prophecy and emphasised the need for the understanding and practice of the Law.

During the inter-testamental period the prophets no longer prophesied but the Old Testament Scriptures themselves became Israel's prophets. Between the days of Malachi, the final Jewish prophet, and the days of Elijah, who Malachi prophesied would come and whom our Lord identified as John the Baptist, 'all the Prophets and the Law prophesied'.²⁴ The word of God no longer came through a human voice but in the written word.

7. John the Baptist

Malachi's closing promise that God would send the prophet Elijah before he sent judgment, to bring about a change of heart in the people, was unfulfilled for some 450 years. However, the announcement of the birth of John to his father Zechariah promised that he would fulfil Malachi's prophecy, not as a literal Elijah returned from heaven, but in the spirit and power of Elijah.²⁵

The inter-testamental period, devoid of living prophets, ended when the word of the Lord came to John and he began his preaching ministry. John had no hesitation in denying that he was literally Elijah, a typical literalistic interpreta-

tion of Malachi popular with the Jews. Jesus had no doubt that John was the Elijah Malachi had promised and that his ministry ended the Old Testament era and commenced the Messianic era of the Kingdom of God.²⁶

John's role as 'Elijah' was to be a forerunner, a herald preparing the way for the Lord himself by requiring his hearers to repent in preparation for the arrival of the King, Jesus himself. He had responsibilities similar to those of a best man at a wedding, but was not himself the focus of attention. He had to diminish in the public view as our Lord increased.²⁷

8. The Lord Jesus Christ

The role of the Lord Jesus Christ in special revelation is unique. This uniqueness arises from his Person: who he is. God gave to his Old Testament messengers honoured titles befitting their role. He spoke of 'my servants the prophets' and exalted Moses above those as a servant 'faithful in all his house'. Jesus, however, was no mere servant, nor merely in God's house, but a Son over God's house.²⁸

To his prophets God had revealed himself in dreams and visions, but to Moses in a voice and a form. None of these, however, had ever seen God as he is, but Jesus, God's Son, had come from God to make him known as only a Son could reveal his Father, out of a relationship of unique and intimate knowledge.²⁹

Our Lord's revelation of God was not, however, simply in words but in everything he was. Consequently, he is 'the Word', the message of God to man, the explanation of the Divine mind. He is 'the truth' revealing a message from God in his teaching but also in his character, so that to have seen him is to have seen all that can be known of God in this world.³⁰

All the special revelation of God centres in him. The Old Testament revelation given through the prophets was inspired by the Spirit of *Christ* in them. No dichotomy may be drawn between the 'primitive' ideas of the Old Testament and the more 'enlightened' teaching of Jesus. The message of the prophets was inspired by Jesus. Hence his ability to explain why Moses had to make concessions to human sinfulness in framing the divorce law contrary to the spirit of the creation ordinance of marriage. From this arises his dismissal of the traditional interpretation of the law and the restoration of its true meaning.³¹ The inspirer of the Old Testament revelation is its perfect expositor.

In the same way the revelation given to the apostles is not an addendum to or development of his teaching. We may not set the 'original' teaching of Jesus over against its 'development' by his apostles. Rather, he promised those apostles that the Spirit would guide them into all truth when he took what belonged to *Christ* and made it known to them.³² The truth taught by the Spirit

to the apostles is Christ's truth. The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles spoke the truth of Christ. All special revelation meets in him and is issued by his inspiration with his imprimatur.

9. The Apostles

Christ's apostles had to have four qualifications. Firstly, they were appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Secondly, they had to have the proven ability to do miracles. Thirdly, they had to be witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, and fourthly, they had to be recipients of revelation.³³

We have already seen that the revelation which the apostles received was granted to them by Christ through the Holy Spirit. He entrusted them with *his* truth. The Spirit of God gave the apostles accurate memory of the teaching that Jesus had given on earth and taught them *all* truth. It was 'all truth' because it was all that Jesus wanted them to know which they had not been capable of receiving during his earthly ministry.³⁴

Their responsibility as custodians of the truth was to pass on to others what they had received from the Lord so that their hearers might hold on to those teachings without amendment. As with the Old Testament prophets they were neither creators nor developers of the truth revealed but proclaimers. For this reason their teachings, whether spoken or written, were to be received as from Christ himself. To agree with the apostles was to be in harmony with God. To disagree with the apostles was to be in alienation from God.³⁵

10. The Prophets

Alongside the limited number of New Testament apostles was a larger number of New Testament prophets. Whereas the ministry of John the Baptist marked the inauguration of the Messianic Age during which salvation was accomplished for the Church through the life and death of the Messiah, the exaltation and glorification of the Christ was marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit³⁶ so that the salvation which had been accomplished might be applied.

The Old Testament prophet Joel had prophesied that in the last days, the days of the Messiah, the Spirit of God would be poured out on all people. This Age of the Spirit would culminate in the great and glorious Day of the LORD, which itself should be preceded by immense and universal upheavals. Yet the period between the outpouring of the Spirit and the Day of the LORD would be a day of salvation for those who called on the name of the LORD. This Age of the Spirit would begin with a new era of dreams and visions and prophecies.³⁷

By her perfectionism I mean her obsessive-compulsive personality took the form of a rigid devotion to discipline. By any standard, to work without leave for fifty years qualifies her as a compulsive worker, indeed as addicted to work, a workaholic. Her counsels in such books as *If*, were counsels of perfection. She wanted to be surrounded by people who accepted her standards, which were high and in some instances absolute. The only way she could deal with disagreement was to reject the offender. Instead of seeing disagreement as a difference of opinion, often of minor importance, it would be elevated into a crisis, and spiritual (even demonic) influences would be invoked as the cause. (*A quotation from the biography of Amy Carmichael, one of the biographies in the book Genius and Grace – see page 20*)

The apostle Peter declared that Joel's prophecy was explicitly fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. The essential element of all true prophecy was present – God-inspired speech. The disciples spoke as the Spirit enabled them. On occasions, however, there was an added element. They declared the wonders of God, by the enabling of the Spirit, in unlearned languages.³⁸

Speaking in unlearned languages or 'tongues' was not a mindless activity, a babble of meaningless vocal noises. It was a declaration in an unlearned language of 'mysteries'. The term 'mystery' in the New Testament does not mean a problem difficult to understand. It is a technical term denoting a truth that has been made known by revelation. It was because tongues involved revelation that, when interpreted, they were equivalent to prophecy.³⁹

New Testament prophecy is described as the receiving of revelation and the person who prophesies is referred to as a prophet. The apostles and prophets of the New Testament era are partakers of the same revelation of the mystery of Christ revealed by the Spirit.⁴⁰

What is the difference between an apostle and a prophet in the New Testament? We have seen that an apostle had to have four qualifications. These made them unique witnesses to Christ's resurrection and gave them a 'life-long and church-wide authority over life and doctrine' whereas prophets were simply 'the occasional organs of inspiration'. The man to whom truth was revealed occasionally was expected to be submissive to the men to whom God had revealed *all* truth.⁴¹

Conclusions

In the above ways God revealed himself from the time of creation and then from Moses to Christ, a period of about 1,500 years. However, because it was

special revelation, and not given to all men, it was necessary that a record of that revelation should be made. It is precisely this record that the Holy Scriptures claim to be. Revelation is preserved to us by inscripturation. I will suggest three conclusions:

Firstly, we should admire the sovereignty and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in bringing these different parts into a complete and perfect wholeness, a wholeness which cannot be added to or subtracted from. It is our calling to expound Scripture and not give place to extra contemporary revelations or prophecies in any shape or form.

Secondly, we should observe that while some parts are more important than others, all parts are essential for the unity of Scripture. Diversity and unity must be held in harmony together. All is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16). No part need ever be devalued. For instance we should never be derogatory about Moses. A skilful preacher like Spurgeon preached Christ with equal effectiveness from all parts of the Bible: Judges, Moses, the Psalms or the Prophets.

Thirdly, our subject endorses the importance of Biblical Theology or progressive revelation. Our triune God reveals his attributes throughout. God spoke to our fathers through the prophets at many times and in many ways. We need every part and give thanks for the glory of special revelation.

References

- ¹ Jn 1:18; 14:8-9; 12:39-41; 1:1; 1 Pet 1:11
² Gen 16:10; 22:12; Judg 6:11,12,14,16,18,20;
Gen 16:13-14; Judg 6:24; Rev 22:8-9
³ 2 Cor 5:20
⁴ Gen 48:15-16; Mal 3:1
⁵ Deut 4:12-13,15
⁶ Deut 4:12-20,32-34; 5:22-28
⁷ Ex 28:30; Num 27:21
⁸ 1 Sam 23:9-12; 1 Chr 14:14; 1 Sam 28:6
⁹ Jn 1:17; 2 Cor 3
¹⁰ Num 12:1-8
¹¹ Num 12:8
¹² cf Deut 34:1-10; Jer 32:4; 2 Jn 12; 3 Jn 14
¹³ 1 Pet 1:10-12; Dan 12:8-9
¹⁴ Ex 33:18-23; Jn 1:18
¹⁵ 1 Kings 13:1; 2 Pet 1:20-21
¹⁶ 1 Sam 9:3-9; 2 Sam 15:27; Num 12:6; Jer
23:16-32
¹⁷ Ex 7:1; 4:15-16
¹⁸ 2 Pet 1:20-21
¹⁹ Num 31:18; 2 Pet 2:15-16; Jude 11; Rev 2:14
²⁰ Num 22:13,18,19,38; 23:3,12,26; 24:12-14
²¹ The prayer of Azariah 15; 2 Baruch 85:3
²² Maccabees 9:27; 4:45-46; 14:41; Qumran
Manual of Discipline I 9:11
²³ Mal 4:4
²⁴ Mal 4:5-6; Matt 11:13
²⁵ Mal 4:5-6; Luke 1:17
²⁶ Luke 3:2-3; Jn 1:21; Matt 11:7-15
²⁷ Jn 1:23,29-31; 3:28-30
²⁸ Zech 1:6; Heb 1:1-2; 3:1-6
²⁹ Num 12:6-8; Jn 1:18; Matt 11:27
³⁰ Jn 1:1,14; 14:6-11
³¹ 1 Pet 1:11; Matt 19:3-9; 5:17f
³² Jn 16:12-15
³³ Mk 3:14; Acts 1:24; Gal 1:1; Matt 10:11; 2
Cor 12:12; Acts 1:22; 1 Cor 9:1; Gal 1:11-12;
Eph 3:5
³⁴ Jn 15:26; 16:12-15
³⁵ 1 Cor 11:23,2; 2 Thess 2:15; 2 Tim 1:13; 1 Cor
14:37-38; 1 Jn 4:5-6
³⁶ Acts 2:22-36
³⁷ Joel 2:28-32
³⁸ Acts 2:16-21,4,11
³⁹ 1 Cor 14:3; Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 15:51; Eph 5:32;
1 Cor 14:5
⁴⁰ 1 Cor 14:30-31,37; Eph 3:4-6
⁴¹ Hendriksen, W (1972) *Ephesians*, Banner of
Truth. p196; 1 Cor 14:37-38

Wandering Thoughts in Worship

Derek Thomas

If we are serious about our faith we shall have to engage in reformation in the very way that we worship. This article is based on ideas found in the Puritan Richard Steele's 'A Remedy for Wandering Thoughts in Worship', 264 pages, hardback reprint, Sprinkle Publications, PO Box 1094, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22801, USA, \$11.00. Available in the UK from the Evangelical Book Shop, 15 College Square East, Belfast BT1 6DD, at £4.00.

Martin Luther complained that in his day men approached God ‘ . . . as if he were a shoe clerk’s apprentice’. Things have not changed much, and irreverence during worship still prevails even in our own church. If we are earnest for revival, a change must take place as to the very way we worship. One of my most distressing memories as a preacher was to overhear someone saying that during the service he counted up the numbers on the hymn-board to see if they were significant! If we are to honour God in our worship, we must be prepared to deal severely with wandering thoughts.

One of the things God revealed to his people during their days of captivity in Babylon was this: ‘I know the things that come into your mind’ (Ezek. 11:5). Folk need to remember this as they prepare for and engage in worship. It is not only those around us who may be disturbed by irreverent and idle chatter; God himself hears every word! Our attitude as we gather for worship must be that of Mary: ‘But one thing is needed . . .’ (Luke 10:42).

The reason why we do not worship God as we should is because, as Jeremiah Burroughs once wrote, we ‘do not see God in His glory’. If Joshua fell on his face before God, Isaiah publicly bemoaned his wretchedness, Job abhorred himself, and John fell prostrate as though he were dead, our own response is entirely different. It begins differently! Too often worship is hindered by a lack of preparation. Saturday evenings have gained a social importance that affects our worship on the Lord’s Day. The cure for sleepy heads on Sunday morning is to get to bed earlier on Saturday nights! A diet of late nights watching television is hardly the best way to prepare for meeting with God!

Nor does it end there. Too many arrive at church only to see it as an opportunity for a lengthy chat. Even if the conversation were spiritual, it is probably inappropriate as a means of preparing for worship. It is hardly surprising if the

first hymn is flat if a few seconds before we have been guilty of gossip in the house of God! Nor is arriving consistently late for worship helpful. We would not think of being late for an important business meeting, but worship is often trivialised by slovenly attitudes of this kind.

The Westminster divines in speaking to this very issue made several points on this matter: 'When the congregation is to meet for public worship, the people having before prepared their hearts thereunto . . . the public worship having begun, the people are wholly to attend upon it, forbearing to read anything, except what the minister is then reading or citing; and abstaining much more from all private whisperings, conferences, salutations, or doing reverence to any person present, or coming in; as also from all gazing, sleeping, and other indecent behaviour, which may disturb the minister or people, or hinder themselves or others in the service of God.'

There are several causes as to why we may be troubled by wandering thoughts during worship.

1. A Lack of Preparation

'If you would prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward him . . . you could be steadfast' (Job 11:12,15). Before we stretch out our hands to God we are first of all to prepare our hearts. 'He that keeps not his foot when he goes into the house or service of God,' says the Puritan Richard Steele, 'is very likely to stumble, and to offer but the sacrifice of fools.' Preparation of the heart for worship is like putting on armour, he continues. 'When the heart is well fixed and prepared for the Lord's service, an impertinent thought or suggestion falls on our armour, but when we come unprepared, it meets with our very hearts, and runs away with them' (p72). We are powerless to resist idle thoughts in worship if we make no preparation to resist them beforehand.

2. Lukewarmness

The zealous soul presses toward the mark. He has no time for idle chatter when the King is beckoning an audience. 'The lukewarm hear . . . can pray to God and dress himself at once; he can hear God and talk with men, speak about heaven and contrive about the earth; and in a word, serve God and Mammon at the same time' (p79).

*While you labour, and weep, and pray,
Wandering thoughts will flee away.*

This means we must concentrate on the business in hand while we worship. When prayer is being offered it is wholly inappropriate to be thinking about anything else except the words that are being said. Every temptation to allow other thoughts to overtake us, let alone fall asleep or worse still, look up the next hymn, is dishonouring to God.

3. Worldly-mindedness

‘Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established,’ promises Scripture (Prov 16:3). Muslims, in worshipping a false god, remove their shoes when they enter a place of worship as a sign that the affairs of the world are to be left behind. The same attitude ought to prevail in our own worship. Do as that great statesman — who would lay off his gown, wherein he administered his office, when he went to worship God, and say, ‘Lie there, Lord Cecil;’ implying, he would take none of the cares of his office into the presence of God. So when you go to prayer, reading, or hearing, lay aside the world, and say, ‘Lie there, house; ye fields, lie there; lie there, my cares, till I have done with God.’ So ‘Abraham left his servants and asses below the hill’ (Gen. 22:5), and took up nothing but a holy heart and the materials of his sacrifice with him thither (p92).

4. Lack of love

Another reason why we are unable to concentrate on spiritual things during worship is a lack of love for God. Peter, James and John forgot the world, their fellow disciples and friends when they beheld the transfigured glory of Christ. It ought to be the same with us as we worship God. The sad truth is that we can concentrate on our newspapers and television programmes for hours at a time without a single distracting thought, but when it comes to worship some find it almost impossible to concentrate for more than a few minutes. It is an evidence of our lack of love for the things of God. When worship is our delight and not just our duty, we will engage in it with pleasure: ‘I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise’ (Ps 42:4).

If these are some of the reasons why our worship is too often troubled by wandering thoughts, the role of Satan is undoubtedly the chief cause of our failure to worship God aright.

Satan's Suggestions

Joshua the high priest was not able to go about his worship without the hindrances of Satan (Zech 3:1). Likewise, we will find that when we are about the best of duties, Satan will seek to oppose. Nor is it surprising. For a moment's worship can undo Satan's power, and he will do his utmost to prevent it.

Satan will draw attention to those who are late, or ill at ease, thereby not only distracting one but perhaps twenty others who observe it. He sometimes lies behind such seemingly innocent gestures as turning round to see who has come in, or whispering to someone next to you. He will do anything to prevent us concentrating on God. ‘Satan is not idle when this and that child are restless and unquiet in the family; whereby perhaps all in the family lose the thought which would most profit them. He can create and promote distraction by every pillar

and part of the structure, and every person in the congregation; and can be content that you should read sentences on the walls to hinder and divert your souls from the sentences that drop from the pulpit . . . He is in every pew, at every elbow, throwing in his fireballs, and enticing poor souls to commit folly with him; and when God is treating with the soul about heaven and hell, then comes he and thrusts the world between, or some vanity therein, to break the treaty, and spoil that sacred conference; so that, of all roads, no road is so full of thieves as the road to heaven' (pp 114-115). 'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph 6:12).

It may be objected that it is impossible not to be distracted by wandering thoughts. Paul could say: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Phil 4:13). Who knows what God can help us do if we but ask him for his help? If we made a covenant to arrive five minutes earlier for worship and resolved, after greeting friends in a courteous and friendly manner, to open our Bibles and read some suitable verses and pray for God's blessing on every part of the service we would be the better for it.

Set a watch on the times of prayer that you be not distracted: 'My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from him' (Ps 62:5).

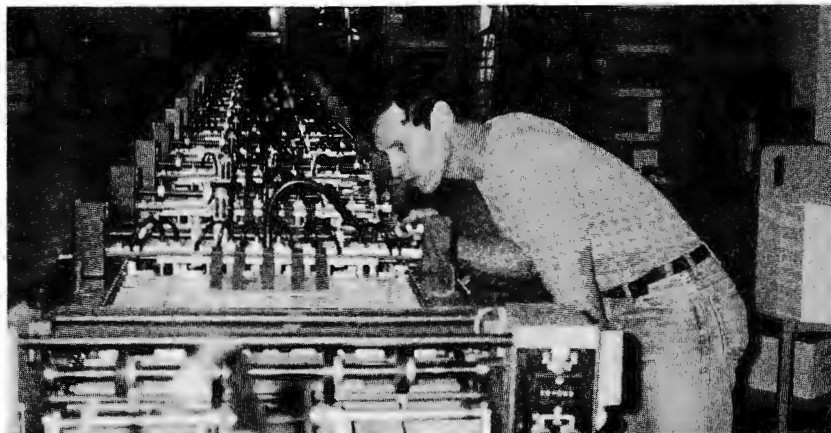
Set a watch on the hearing of God's Word: 'I will stand my watch
And set myself on the rampart,
And watch to see what he will say to me,
And what I will answer when I am reproved' (Hab 2:1).

Set a watch on the singing of God's praise: 'Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!' (Ps 103:1).

Our Lord was not indifferent to the problems we have in worship. He noticed in the garden of Gethsemane how frail his disciples were, unable to pray with him for one hour. 'But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you unexpectedly' (Luke 21:34). The Day of the Lord may arrive and find us wholly unprepared!

Rev Derek Thomas is the minister of Stranmillis Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Belfast, NI and editor of 'The Evangelical Presbyterian'. The above article first appeared in the January 1993 issue of that magazine.

Chapel Library — a unique ministry



Thomas Le Blanc working on a collating machine

Pastor L R Shelton Jr is the spiritual leader and founder of Mt Zion Bible Church Pensacola, Florida. Chapel Library is a ministry of Mt Zion Bible Church. The assembly began in 1978 with only two families. There are now 35 members, all of whom wholeheartedly support the missionary literature outreach of the church. This literature work is an industry of printing and distributing evangelistic and expository tracts and booklets and books.

The printing work began on a very small scale but during the last three or four years has increased to include translation into other languages. To meet the demands of Third World countries paperback titles have been ordered on a wholesale basis.

Large quantities of carefully selected materials are posted to Third World countries and sent out free of charge. Without exception all the literature is within the doctrinal parameters of the 1689 Confession and within the Puritan and Reformed tradition represented by that Confession. Articles that have special contemporary relevance are chosen. Pink and Spurgeon feature prominently but increasingly outstanding contributions by living authors are chosen for their relevancy and usefulness. Most of the printing is in English. However as the 40 page catalogue shows there is a steady increase in materials in Spanish, Portuguese and other languages. Most of the distribution is to African and Latin American countries. When I visited recently a large



Dan Shanks — production manager

parcel of Spanish materials was packed and posted for use in Mexico. All these materials were soon used up through a visit to a seminary and by discerning distribution to Mexican pastors.

Three booklets in Russian have just been printed and two in Romanian.

Chapel Library literature ministry enters 250 prisons in the USA. A tremendous correspondence is maintained with prisoners. Outstanding conversions have taken place through the tracts and booklets, some of which are specially written for those in prison by Billy Morrison himself converted in prison through reading a sermon by Spurgeon. Those outside the USA should examine closely the possibility of prison ministry. In America prison chaplains have mostly been most cooperative. This may not be the case here in the UK.

Recently larger machinery has been installed to produce paperback titles, the first of which was *The Attributes of*

God by A W Pink. The first IFRB publication with the title *Our Baptist Heritage* is lined up for production. This is the first book to be printed simultaneously for three markets:

1. North America
2. The UK and Commonwealth
3. The Third World including large nations like India, the Philippines, Nigeria, Brazil and Mexico.

The title will be marketed in the usual way for markets 1 and 2. All IFRB members will receive a complimentary copy. They will be encouraged to promote the book through the usual retail channels with Chapel Library as publishers setting the conditions of sale.

What about the funding for a well-built extensive factory plus warehouse and offices? And what about pay for about twelve full-time workers? What about the paper and ink supplies and the servicing of the equipment? What about packing materials and the enormous daily postage bill? The work began in prayer and has been sustained by that means until now. Every working day is begun with an hour set apart specifically for prayer. Very evident is the mature, gifted leadership of the pastor, especially so in crisis times which test every work of this kind which challenges the powers of darkness.

Gifts have come from a variety of sources including the most unexpected quarters such as prisons where thousands of parcels have been posted. Some churches have included Chapel Library on their missionary

budgets. After three visits in which I have come to appreciate the dedication and suitability of the individual workers and the high standard of their work I would say that, apart from supporting missionaries on the front lines of the unevangelised parts of the world, there could hardly be a better spiritual investment. We have an extraordinary resource in our inheritance of Reformed literature. This legacy of Reformed exposition and biography is one easily enjoyed with much benefit by the rich countries of the West but little by those who have the greatest need for it.



Pastor Richard Moore sorting out literature in Spanish from Chapel Library

I will not attempt to comment on all the workers, three of whom are featured in the photos, but will refer to Michael Snyder (see front cover) who has an unusual background of working on the Wall Street stock exchange, a background in high powered business which gives him expertise in several areas, but especially as a dynamic driving organisational force in the work. Born of Abraham's stock he became a spiritual child of Abraham in an amazing conversion taking a few moments, the Holy Spirit bringing to his remembrance two words which he had seen, JESUS SAVES.

After trying the charismatic movement he subsequently came to appreciate the Puritan writers, especially Jonathan Edwards. He loves Martin Luther and believes that Luther's extreme and unwise comments about the Jews are unneces-

sarily inflated out of sane proportion.

Readers are encouraged to write to Chapel Library for a catalogue and for their magazine which contains Puritan articles, and reports progress mostly by letters received. A recent issue was devoted to the theme of eternal punishment and 22,000 copies were required to satisfy demand. The Third World represents an ocean of need which can easily drain human resources, but the Lord's resources are infinite. Let us be practical and support Chapel Library generously in a unique ministry.

CHAPEL LIBRARY
2603 West Wright Street,
Pensacola,
FL 32505

Phone (904) 438 6666
Fax (904) 438 0227

Genius and Grace

Genius and Grace

Dr Gaius Davies, Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, 290pp, pbk, £8.99

A review by Brian Beevers

Dr Gaius Davies is a consultant psychiatrist who is a committed Christian with a lifelong interest in Christian biography. He writes in the preface that this book is the fruit of forty years' reading on the theme of 'grace and personality'.

The book gives brief outlines of the life and work of several prominent Christians including Martin Luther, John Bunyan, William Cowper, Lord Shaftesbury, Christina Rossetti, J B Phillips, C S Lewis and others. Hence it is useful as an introductory biography of some famous Christians.

However, the special concern of the author is to look at the personalities of each subject. In doing this his knowledge and experience as a psychiatrist give him some penetrating insights. He is seeking to examine the relation between God's grace and human personality, with all its eccentricities, strengths and failings. This approach is indicated in the subtitle: 'Sketches from a psychiatrist's notebook'. It gives the book a different slant from many other biographies.

The book is also remarkable for the wide range of people who are considered. Mr Davies does not restrict himself to Evangelicals, Reformed or Conservative.

I cannot consider in a review all the biographies included in the book but will choose three as examples and make some general observations. Regarding Martin Luther, Gaius Davies considers that, before his conversion, Luther was suffering from an obsessive-compulsive disorder, which he explains using diagnostic check-lists. He also considers that several other people referred to in his book suffered from this disorder to a certain degree at some stage of their lives – including John Bunyan, J B Phillips and Christina Rossetti. Davies then briefly traces the story of Luther's conversion when he came to understand Romans 1:17 and saw the connection between 'the justice of God is revealed' and 'the just shall live by faith'. He saw that the justice of God here referred to is 'that by which the just live by the gift of God' (p35). Later, he considers Luther's illnesses, examining in particular whether Luther was a manic-depressive. He concludes that Luther did have a cyclothymic personality but that he was never ill in a psychotic way. He also considers, under the heading 'Loving and Hating

Luther', the attitudes of different people, such as John Wesley and John Osborne the playwright, towards Luther.

I would like to point out at this point that Gaius Davies is not trying to explain the Christian experience of these outstanding people of God in purely psychological terms. Rather, he magnifies the grace of God by showing how God's grace can triumph in and through such mental problems and disorders. He quotes from a book by Sir Aubrey Lewis referring to the obsessive-compulsive disorders found in Luther and Bunyan:

But I have not brought in Bunyan and Luther just to provide brief pathographies and still less do I wish to attempt to reformulate their profound and far-ranging religious experience as symptoms of psychiatric illness – such a devaluating transformation serves no purpose. What I want to emphasise is that we have here, in two men of genius, a malady, well known to theologians and psychiatrists alike, which is most painful, whether we view it from the religious or the medical standpoint, which goes with or precedes phases of utter despair, and yet is compatible with a life of the utmost vigour and practical activity (pp65-66, original source not given).

Gaius Davies gives a careful and sensitive study of William Cowper. To quote from his introduction:

Most of us know something written by William Cowper, at least if we are familiar with a hymn-book. Many of us know little of the man. 'God moves in a mysterious way' may be one of his best-known hymns: there are many others, as well as two volumes of verse which made him the most popular poet of his day. He was more of a best-seller than John Betjeman on his day.

Cowper wanted to break the conspiracy of silence about depression, just as Betjeman did about his own melancholy experiences. Cowper was depressed first at the age of twenty-one, and from time to time thereafter for the next ten years. At thirty-one he had his first catastrophic psychotic breakdown; at the time of his recovery from it he became a Christian. He was to have four more depressive illnesses before he died at sixty-eight; in between these times he was often amazingly productive as a letter-writer and poet (pp86-87).

Davies gives an account of Cowper's conversion and his subsequent spiritual progress. He shows how, although he led a very secluded life, Cowper was able to have a wide and fruitful ministry through his poetry and hymns. This was despite or perhaps even because of his repeated depressive breakdowns. Davies

also gives a sensitive treatment of Cowper's relationship with his closest friends, especially Mary Unwin and John Newton.

Finally I would like to refer to Gaius Davies' treatment of the life of Lord Shaftesbury. He gives a graphic account of his unhappy childhood in which neither of his parents showed him any real affection. He owed his early instruction in the Christian faith to a housekeeper, Maria Millis, who died when he was eight.

Following his conversion in his late twenties and his subsequent very happy marriage he then gave the remainder of his life, from his election as an M P in June 1826, until his death in October 1885, to unceasing labour for social reform and improvement. Gaius Davies mentions in particular Shaftesbury's campaign to control the employment of children in factories, mines, chimney-sweeping etc. and his efforts to secure better treatment for the mentally ill.

Shaftesbury had periods of great anxiety and depression, during which he was very unsure of himself. Davies states: 'It seems as certain as it can be that he suffered from what would now be called a bipolar affective disorder, and what used to be called manic-depressive illness' (p120).

He had a very happy marriage and his wife Minny was a great help and support to him. They had ten children, four of whom died before him, which caused him much sorrow. His oldest child Anthony also caused him much grief, as he was lazy and profligate.

Davies shows how greatly Lord Shaftesbury was used by God despite his many weaknesses. As he grew older he became increasingly intolerant and bitter toward those with whom he disagreed on religious matters, especially the Anglo-Catholics. He alienated many who would have been his friends and allies in his fight for social reform. He described himself in his diary as 'a mass of contradictions' (p129) and his diaries give little evidence of his enjoying much of the comfort and joy of the Christian faith. However, he had a burning love and concern for poor and deprived people of his time and he used all his influence and ability to help them.

I hope I have written enough to give the reader a taste of this book. It could well serve as an introduction to reading further biographies of the people concerned. The style of the book is clear and readable. There are bibliographies at the end of each chapter, but quotations within the text are not referenced.

Brian Beevers is an elder of the Leeds Reformed Baptist Church

Thomas Vincent — a courageous pastor

Rev John Vincent of Durham was father of two very well-known Puritan ministers, Thomas and Nathaniel.

Thomas, born in 1634, graduated from Christ's Church College, Oxford in 1654. The advantage of a godly upbringing enabled him to enter the ministry and upon leaving Oxford he became chaplain to the Earl of Leicester. He set himself to learn the Psalms and the New Testament by heart. In this he appears to have had success.

Thomas Vincent suffered ejection in 1662 with many others who refused to compromise. He managed to secure a post in a school which was managed by the famous Puritan Thomas Doolittle.

Two very terrible events were in store for the City of London, the great plague of 1665 and the great fire of 1666.

The great plague brought a crisis of conscience for all ministers. Should they stay to attend those dying of the plague and expose themselves to almost certain death, or should they move to the country?

Thomas Vincent resolved to commit himself to the care of the dying. His friends warned him in the clearest terms of his peril. But he was not shaken in his resolve. With Psalm 91 before him he submitted himself to the Lord. His brothers in the ministry, observing his determination and concluding that he was called of God to that dangerous work, prayed for him. With the utmost zeal he went from house to house ministering instruction and comfort from the Scriptures to the dying and bereaved. Throughout the epidemic he

preached in various churches each Lord's Day. Crowded congregations attended his ministry. Every time he preached there were seals to his ministry.

68,000 died from the plague in London. Seven passed away in the house where Vincent was living. Yet he enjoyed perfect health throughout that time. Thus the promise of Psalm 91:3-7 was fulfilled.

Following that time he ministered to a large congregation until his death in 1679 at the early age of 45. It was observed that his zeal for his work depleted his physical strength. He was triumphant and fearless in death.

Among the writings of Thomas Vincent is a 126 page exposition of the text I Peter 1:8, 'Though you have not seen him, you love him.' This has just been published in a handsome bound volume by Soli Deo Gloria with the title, *The True Christian's Love for the Unseen Christ*.

First the meaning of the text is opened up in about 20 pages followed by 80 pages of heart-searching application. The book concludes with a 27 page exposition of John 14:27, 'He who loves me will be loved of my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.'

The exposition of the text proceeds as follows:

1. Concerning true Christians who love Jesus Christ.
2. Concerning Jesus Christ the object of their love whom they have never seen.
3. Concerning the love they bear to this unseen Christ.



Pastor Drew Garner with the newly built Lexington Boulevard Grace Church in the background – see News

4. Showing that it is the property (character) of true Christians to love Christ.
5. Showing that it is their duty to love him.
6. Showing how they ought to love him.
7. Giving reasons why they love him.

Six features of Christ's Person are presented designed to attract our love for him:

1. His greatness and authority.
2. His holiness and purity.
3. His wisdom and omniscience.
4. His truth and fidelity (faithfulness).
5. His fulness and all-sufficiency.
6. His kindness and mercy.

As further motives to love Christ Vincent suggests that Christ loves us with the freest love, the truest love, the strongest love and the surest love. Here he declares that Christ is present in time of trouble. He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities when we are tempted and sympathises with our sorrows when we are afflicted. He concludes, 'Oh! What love should you have to the Lord Jesus Christ, who loves you with such a true love!'

Part of his conclusion comes as questioning:

'And will you not now love him more dearly and ardently than ever. Will you be persuaded to get off your hearts from earth and earthly things, and get up your hearts to your Lord who is in heaven, and to settle your love there upon him so as never to withdraw from him anymore? Will you love the Lord Jesus much, whom you can never love too much?'

The book has been well edited. Vincent did not in this book get to expounding the rest of the verse which he outlines on page 4. What would he have written concerning 'and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy'? His own testimony seemed to bear out the reality of this verse.

I would urge Don Kistler to be more radical in editing and modernising the Puritans but not changing the sense.

Soli Deo Gloria has set a retail price in America for *The True Christian's Love for the Unseen Christ* of \$15.95. UK readers may obtain the book from John Grier (see front inside cover) at £6.40 plus £1.00 for postage.

The Philippines

Brian and Nocy Ellis have a long record of missionary service sustaining an all round church based ministry in Manila where conditions are often taxing. Recently a burglar broke in and carried off the emergency generator (there are currently 4 to 7 hours of power a day). Their March 1993 newsletter reports that Brian and Nocy are being joined by Fiona Hill, daughter of Pastor Tom Hill of Perth Evangelical Church, to work as a secretary. Also reported is the long awaited publication in the Tagalog language of *The 1689 Confession of Faith*. A Pastors' conference was recently concluded in which pastors Peter Naylor, Noel Espinosa, Martinez, Regencia, Rodillas and Nelmar were the speakers.

Australia

Our agent Ray Levick keeps us informed of news in Australia. He reports a book written by Nader Mikhael, with the title *Slaying in the Spirit — the telling wonder*.

'The author's research clearly demonstrates the similarity between the "slaying in the Spirit" experience and a similar one resulting from hypnosis. He warns that hypnotism and "slaying in the Spirit" are not benign or neutral phenomena, but occult practices in which people deliberately place their minds under the control of another. In his research the author draws extensively from charismatic authors as diverse as Dr John White (psychologist), Francis MacNutt (RC), Dr David Lewis and many others. He uncovers some deeply disturbing facts about the selective reporting and quoting used by

John White to justify his charismatic position.

Mikhael exposes the teaching and practices of John Wimber, Kenneth Hagin and Paul Yonggi Cho as covetous, dishonest and dangerous. Their claims of miraculous healing simply don't stand scrutiny. Dysfunctional ailments frequently return within weeks. He cites some documented instances where mistaken belief in a cure actually led to death, including the tragic Wesley Parker case (p146). In this example, an 11 year old diabetic died because his parents, believing him cured, withheld insulin.'

The book is published by the author and available from Koorong Books, 11 Koorong St, Eastwood, NSW 2122, Australia, 196pp, \$12.95.

USA

Lexington Boulevard Grace Church, Missouri City, Texas

Pastor Drew Garner has served this church, formerly called Bellaire Reformed Baptist Church, for 24 years during which time suitable accommodation has always been a problem. The small church has nevertheless faithfully sought to extend Christ's Kingdom locally and by mission support throughout the world. In 1990 a property was purchased in the centre of a new growing suburb. The building has now been completed and the new work appropriately named to establish it as a truly local church with evangelistic outreach in view while still retaining world-wide vision. Already some have been coming in from the surrounding residential area and it is the prayer of the members that this will increase.



From left to right, Michael Ross of Pilgrim Publications, Drew Garner and Mark McNeil who works with Michael

Pilgrim Publications, Pasadena, Texas

Bob Ross is the founder of the above publishing house which has made available to the Christian world the entire set of Spurgeon's sermons as well as his other writings. The work is situated in Pasadena, Texas and includes a large bookshop. The work is administered by Michael Ross, son of the founder, assisted by Mark McNeil. Preparation is being made for the publication of the full four volumes of the autobiography but in a reduced page size.

London, England

Church planting in Covent Garden, London, UK

On February 27 this year Mike Mellor was welcomed as a church planter in Covent Garden. Michael Toogood, pastor in neighbouring Soho, spoke at the meeting. Immanuel Community Church, Soho which is now established as a Reformed Baptist assembly grew out of a similar London Inreach Project back in 1980.

Now Covent Garden cries out for such a church. About 200 people heard Mike, in dedicating himself to the work, give testimony to the Lord's goodness in delivering him from a life of drunkenness and giving him a burden to reach the lost.

Peter Williams of Bournemouth preached from Isaiah 64 stressing the need to pray earnestly for the LORD to work.

More information about the work of the London Inreach Project is available from Rev James Wood, 107, Grosvenor Gardens, Woodford Green, Essex, IG8 0AR, UK.

Pakistan

Pastor Russell Bridges of The Leeds Reformed Baptist Church stood in for the editor (unable to shake off an infection in time) to join Derek Thomas (see page 13) for a tour of Pakistan.

Objections to Immersion Answered

Part 2 (Part 1 appeared in RT132)

Tom Wells

Objection 3: Burial with Christ is not like water baptism.

One common objection to immersion goes like this: there is no picture of burial in immersion. Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:11-12 do not allude to baptism by immersion as though going into the water were like entering a grave.

We might have skipped over this objection because, when one looks at it, it is not really an objection to immersion but an objection to how Baptists understand these two passages. Baptists may misunderstand these verses completely and still be right about the definition of the word *baptizo*.

Since this is the case I will not spend long on this point. In response, for example, to Johnson who writes that immersion 'has no likeness to the burial of Christ,'¹ I will simply follow Dagg in showing how reasonable this understanding is. On pages 41-42 he writes:

Positive proof of allusion (likeness) must be attended with difficulty; because if it be mere allusion, it is always made without express affirmation . . .

If there is no resemblance between immersion and Christ's burial, the passage before us (Rom 6) contains no allusion. If the resemblance is so slight, that but few persons are able to perceive it, the probability is, that the supposed allusion exists only in the fancy of those who imagine they see it. But if men have generally believed that allusion exists in the passage, the fact goes far to prove that there is resemblance.

Have men generally believed in the existence of the supposed allusion (to immersion)? It is not necessary to examine the writings of authors attached to every different creed, and differing from each other in their views of baptism. Professor Stuart tells us their opinion in few words: 'Most commentators have maintained that buried (Stuart gives the Greek term) has here a necessary reference to the mode of literal baptism, which they say was by immersion . . .'² Now this general agreement of commentators answers the objection which we are considering far more successfully than any efforts of ours . . . The fact that it is seen is the best proof that it exists . . . the best proof that the nature of the case admits.²

Dagg's entire discussion on pages 41-43 is well worth reading.

Let me only add a few instances of this understanding by older commentators that I have at hand.

Here are the words of Daniel Whitby, an Anglican minister, published in 1703:

It being so expressly declared here, and in Col 2:12, that 'we are buried with Christ in baptism', by being buried under water; . . . and this immersion being religiously observed by all Christians for thirteen centuries, and approved by our church (the Anglican Church), and the change of it unto sprinkling, even without any allowance from the Author of this institution, or any license from any council of the church, being that which the Romanist still urgeth to justify his refusal of the cup to the laity, it were to be wished that this custom might again be of general use, and aspersion (sprinkling) only permitted, as of old, in the case of the clinici (those in bed, sick), or in present danger of death.³

In 1685 the Puritan, Matthew Poole, wrote on Romans 6:4 these words:

(Paul) seems to allude to the manner of baptising in those warm Eastern countries, which was to dip or plunge the party baptised, and as it were to bury him for a while under water. See the like phrase, Col 2:12.⁴

William Perkins, a leader among the early Puritans, wrote of the 'baptism' at the Red Sea, 'The Israelites went through the Red Sea (as through a grave) . . .'⁵

But these witnesses are unnecessary. As far as I can find, the position that burial with Christ alludes to baptism by immersion has rarely been challenged before the 19th century.⁶ My resources, of course, are limited and I may be wrong. But here is the testimony of Philip Schaff, considered the finest Church historian in America during the 19th century, who himself practised affusion. No one will suppose that he speaks from anything but the widest knowledge of scriptural commentators when he says:

All commentators of note (except Stuart and Hodge) expressly admit or take it for granted that in this verse (Rom 6:4), especially in (the two Greek words for buried), the ancient prevailing mode of baptism by immersion and emersion is implied. . . .⁷

Schaff goes on to cite writers as far back as John Chrysostom (c 347-407). Dagg's point is confirmed here in the most penetrating way. If there is no allusion to immersion in Romans 6:3-5 and its parallel passage, Colossians 2:11-12, that fact has escaped almost everyone who has written on the subject throughout Church history up until the 19th century.

Objection 4: Ancient writers call affusion baptism.

The oldest witness called in to make this point is the ancient Church manual, the Didache. Its date is uncertain, but scholars would generally agree that it was written by AD 200. Here is the relevant passage:

And concerning baptism, baptise thus: Having first recited all these things, baptise in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in running water. But if thou hast not running water, baptise in other water; and, if thou canst not in cold, in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water thrice upon the head in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁸

Does this passage teach that it is all right to baptise by pouring? Oddly enough, the answer is yes and no. This is not an evasion on my part, as I shall show in a moment.

It is clear that this passage directs us to baptise by pouring, if by baptise we mean to perform the rite of initiation into the Church. By about AD 200 this manual allowed pouring in case no other provision could be made.

But something much more important must be said here. So far as the meaning of the Greek words is concerned, this passage reserves *baptizo* for the immersion first described, and uses another Greek word when pouring is in view. In other words, it does not speak of baptism by pouring, for one would not speak of immersion by pouring. But it allows that the Church will be satisfied, and the candidate considered baptised, if pouring is substituted.

Is such a candidate baptised, according to the Didache? Yes and no. Yes, if by baptised we mean that he has met the conditions of entry to the Church as the author of the Didache understood them. No, if we mean that he has been immersed as the word *baptizo* plainly means in this passage. Every reader will see that unless *baptizo* means to immerse or dip here, there would be no contrast between the first mode and pouring.

Baptizo here refers to mode. The mode is immersion.

Objection 5: Immersion was impossible in several places.

This objection has been made on more than one ground. It has been said that the numbers baptised by John the Baptist and by the twelve on the day of

Pentecost were too great to admit of immersion. It has also been said that insufficient water was available in Jerusalem to immerse 3000 people in one day.

Let's look at these objections one at a time.

It is a pity that space does not allow me fully to quote the most eloquent objector to the numbers baptised by John and others. He has written a little book entitled *William the Baptist* that has had extensive circulation since it first appeared in the 19th century.⁹ But I must give you a sample. The book is a dialogue between a pastor (designated by the letter 'P') and a Baptist named William (designated by 'W'). In the course of 7 evenings' instruction the pastor shows William the error of clinging to immersion as the only proper mode of baptism. On the 5th evening they discuss the impracticality of immersing large numbers of people.

W: I confess that the immersion of those three thousand in one day has sometimes given me some trouble. But I have seen it stated that, from calculations, the thing is possible.

P: Did you ever make the calculation for yourself?

W: No, sir, I never did.

P: Will you make it? I would like to see it.

W: Well, taking all the circumstances into account, I suppose we may give them five hours.

P: That is a good allowance; but give them six.

W: There were twelve apostles, which would give, in all, seventy-two hours. This would assign about forty-two per hour to each apostle, or about ninety seconds for each immersion.

P: This supposes that the water was at hand; that everything was in readiness, and that there was no delay. How does it strike you?

W: I was thinking that three minutes for each immersion would have been speedy work to perform the rite in a becoming manner. But then it would have required more than twelve hours. I do not know how the calculation was made.

P: Let us apply the rule to this case, and judging from circumstantial evidence, on which side does the evidence preponderate?

W: To say nothing of the meaning of the word, or of the significance of the rite, I would have to admit that the theory of immersion finds very little sympathy from circumstantial evidence in those three thousand baptisms in one day.

In the interest of space I will have to stop quoting, but it turns out that the day of Pentecost was only a digression. The pastor and William agree that the numbers who came to John for baptism were overwhelming. But for the sake of argument they limit the number to 10,000 in a six month period, or about 100 immersions per day. The pastor concludes by saying, "It is almost certain that

no man could continue such labours for half a month. It is doubtful if he could endure it for four days.”

It was clear to both the pastor and William that the thing was impossible.

But is it impossible? Let's see.

To begin with, I have had casual acquaintance with one pastor who has baptised more than one hundred people in one day, so I know that it can be done. But let us waive that example, since it may not have been done with as much decorum or instruction as when done by John or others in the New Testament. And he did not do it every day, though he did do it more than once.

But the whole question assumes a fallacy. There is no reason to believe that either John or the apostles immersed all those who came to them. In John 4:1 we learn that Jesus baptised even more disciples than John, according to a report made to the Pharisees. But in the next breath we learn that in fact Jesus' disciples were actually performing the ceremony (4:2).

The solution is apparent then. Did John have disciples? Were they capable of helping him baptise? No doubt the answer is the same in both cases, Yes. That does not, of course, prove that he made use of them, but it disposes of the impossibility. Some of John's disciples became the disciples of Jesus. When they did so, they could have easily been among those who baptised. Why, then, couldn't they have done so when they were disciples of John?

As far as the number is concerned, much the same solution applies to the day of Pentecost. As Dagg points out (p64), most, if not all, of the seventy that Jesus had earlier commissioned (Luke 10:1,17) would have been present at Pentecost. No reason can be found why they might not have helped. In any case, the supposition shows that there is no impossibility here.

A more serious objection, however, is the one that says there would have been no place available to the Christians to baptise so many. Listen to the words of W A Swift on this subject:

It is not unreasonable to believe that at this time of the year there was no water around Jerusalem except the public pools, and who could believe that the enemies of this movement, authorities of Jerusalem, would under any circumstances allow the pools of water to be defiled? The multitudes of the city had to use this water for cooking and drinking.

What Swift says sounds sensible enough, but recent archaeological finds show that the problem does not really exist. The truth is that both an abundant supply of water and a large number of pools (miqva'oth) have now been found in the temple area. Adamthwaite writes:

So far 48 miqveh pools have been discovered in connection with the Temple Mount dating to Herod's Temple. Since Rabbinic rule stipulated running water (lit. 'living water') for the miqveh this entailed need of an extensive water supply. Added to this were the various pools and cisterns either under the Temple platform or on its perimeter, 34 in all, the Israel Pool and the Strouthion Pool being the major ones; then there was a veritable network of subterranean conduits and channels threaded underneath the entire platform . . . Then there were the pools in the Jerusalem area, for example, the Pool of Bethesda at the Northern end of the Temple Mount (John 5:2) . . . plus others, and also water for the daily needs of the populace, such as the Pool of Hezekiah and the Serpent's Pool outside the Western side . . . Herod and his predecessors saw to it that the water supply was abundant. As for the Temple area, it is a wonder it wasn't washed away!

We may smile or not at Adamthwaite's hyperbole in that final sentence, but this much is clear. Water and pools existed in abundance in Jerusalem. No objection to immersion on account of a scarcity of either water or pools can stand in the light of recent evidence. Swift, who wrote before 1960, could not know this, of course, but now it is fair to say that such objections have been met once and for all time.

The two final 'Objections and Answers' will appear in RT134.

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- ¹ John Scott Johnson, *Baptism*, no publisher stated, Collingswood, NJ, nd, p37.
- ² Dagg's reference is to Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Flagg & Gould, Andover, 1832, p252. Stuart himself denied any allusion here to immersion, but Dagg's thesis is unaffected. Where men generally see a likeness, there is likely to be one. That is all the proof that the circumstance admits of.
- ³ Patrick, Lowth, Arnald, Whitby and Lowman, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha*, new edition, James L Gihon, Philadelphia, 1854, vol 4, p553. For another Anglican of the period see Burkitt's commentary on Romans 6:4.
- ⁴ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, Banner of Truth, London, 1963, vol 3, p496.
- ⁵ William Perkins, *The Works of . . .*, Legge, Cambridge, 1618, vol 3, part two, p161. I modernised the spelling in the quotation.
- ⁶ John Owen objected in the 17th century. See *The Works of John Owen*, Banner of Truth, London, 1968, p267f.
- ⁷ In John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, reprinted, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1960, *in loc.*
- ⁸ The passage is in section vii:1-3. I have quoted it from J Stevenson, editor, *A New Eusebius*, SPCK, London, sixth impression, 1974, p126.
- ⁹ James M Chaney, *William the Baptist*, Committee on Publications of the Bible Presbyterian Church, nd on reprint. My subsequent quotation comes from pp 76-78.
- ¹⁰ W A Swift, *Why Baptize by Pouring and Baptize Babies?* Monteagle, Tennessee, twenty-fourth edition, nd, p19. This booklet says it may be obtained at 'any branch of the Methodist Publishing House'.

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