

REFORMATION TODAY



MARCH-APRIL 2001

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Kirk Wellum of Canada and Andrei Valtsev of St Petersburg, Russia, with the Leeds/Bradford airport in the background, at the time of the Carey Conference (see report). Andrei has translated about 14 titles into Russian including Waldron's Exposition of the 1689 Confession.

Carey Family Conference

July 28th to August 4th, 2001

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Front cover: *The Free Grace Baptist Church by the River Lune at Lancaster is typical of many that have grown over the last 20 years or so. The development of the church is described by Phil Arthur who has led the work since 1988. In the article Walking the Old Paths in New Shoes he explains his role in helping to complete the new hymn book PRAISE!*

Editorial

On 7th February my wife Lyn and I returned with from my 40th visit to North America. One of the highlights was the privilege of participation in the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors in Minneapolis. John Piper is the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church. Their building is now too small for the congregation of 2,400, so two services are held each Lord's day morning. 930 attended the annual pastors' conference this year.

The subjects included counselling (David Powlinson, editor of the Journal of Biblical Counselling) and missionary vision (Greg Livingstone). My role was to provide biblical exposition on the subject of the character of our Lord's ministry in pastoral care.

John Piper's biography of Newton was unforgettable. Over the years I have listened to high quality papers read at study conferences but rarely experienced a speaker prepared to preach his paper (i.e. stand back from what he has written and speak extempore to drive home the salient points). Characteristically, John Piper did just that. With power and unction he concentrated on the gentle approach used by Newton when it came to controversy. Newton's language was winsome and healing. His method was one of gentleness and tenderness. Far from being ineffective, the Holy Spirit used Newton to win others to the truth. This is illustrated in the case of

Thomas Scott the minister in the next parish to Newton. Scott was a liberal who hated Calvinism but he was won over by Newton. Piper's 20 page paper is available, see internet:

www.desiringgod.org

PRAISE!

Debate in England continues over a new hymn book called PRAISE! For information visit

<http://www.praise.org.uk>

David Preston has written a definitive defence which answers a wide array of criticisms such as the objection that so many hymns have been omitted which are in *Christian Hymns*. This is available on the above website or can be obtained by sending an A5 size stamped addressed envelope to CAREY CENTRE, ANSTEY ROAD, READING RG1 7JR.

It is a pity that some will be disconcerted by unreasonable negative reaction to PRAISE! The gains in this new book far outweigh negative criticisms. While some deplore changing old words into modern language others love its contemporaneity. Even in conservative Scotland the well known church in Glasgow (The Tron, where Sinclair Ferguson is pastor) love PRAISE! A major gain is to have all the Psalms. It is easy to vilify a hymn book by taking its poorest offerings and damning the whole on that account. A new book inevitably omits some cherished old

hymns. One Reformed church has solved that problem by using PRAISE! in the mornings and *Christian Hymns* at the evening services.

All the Psalms are represented in 173 renderings in PRAISE! For about ten years I worked with David Preston to publish *The Book of Praises* - 70 Psalms for singing today. PRAISE! represents progress and the standard now is better than ever. 4, 8, 112, 113, 119E, 129 come from the modernised *Free Presbyterian Psalm Book*. 37 are from *The Book of Praises*. That Psalms 23, 110 and 46 by David Preston have failed to make it into PRAISE! shows how high the standard is.

The Church by the River Lune

Phil Arthur describes both the story of the Free Grace Baptist Church that nestles by the river Lune at Lancaster and the daughter church at Ulverston some 40 miles away. *Reformation Today* is committed to the development of Reformed Baptist churches at home and abroad. Part of that development is contemporaneity. We cherish our Puritan legacies. In doing so we relate to people TODAY not of yester-year. Both in the story of his own church and in the article *Walking the Old Paths in New Shoes* Phil Arthur shows that changes have been carefully thought through.

Tampering with the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity stands at the heart of our faith. Historically it has been accepted that the Father, Son and Spirit are equal in being, yet different in function. Christ, equal with the Father, also submitted to him. The parallel has often been drawn with the relation between husband and wife: equal as human beings, yet different in function. Evangelical feminists, however, argue that equality and submission are logically incompatible. They have thus been forced to go back and rewrite the traditional doctrine of the Trinity! Some of them now maintain that there is mutual submission within the Trinity, just as some now reject the masculine Trinitarian language used in Scripture. The controversy about evangelical feminism is ignored at our peril. Dr Bruce Ware is the President of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and the Senior Associate Dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He lays out these vital issues in a way that is compelling and clear. (The material was first presented at the *Building Strong Families* Conference, sponsored by The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and Family-Life, held in Dallas, Texas, in March 2000).

For further information about *The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* please contact: CBMW, PO Box 7337, Libertyville, IL 60048, USA or CBMW, 9 Epsom Road, Leamington Spa, CV32 7AR, UK, or visit www.cbmw.org

A Bright Light in Dark Times

Bill James

The time of the Judges was perhaps the bleakest period in the history of God's people. The Israelites did what was right in their own eyes. Extraordinary depths of idolatry and immorality were plumbed. Yet even in those days God was at work. Providentially he intervened in the circumstances of two needy widows. Not only did he provide for their needs, but through them he worked out his purposes of salvation for the nation and ultimately for the world.

It is an encouragement for us to remember that even in the darkest of days God is still unfolding his eternal purposes. We may be discouraged, but we can never despair when we trust in the Lord who is sovereign over all events, and is working out all things according to the counsel of his own will. The book of Ruth reminds us that God can use seemingly hopeless situations and very frail and surprising servants for his own glory.

The Prayer of Faith

The book begins with a family at the point of ruin. In the chaotic period of the Judges Israel was suffering famine (perhaps at the hand of the

Midianites) and well-meaning Elimelech, in the days when everyone did what was right in his own eyes, decided that the best course was to emigrate to Moab to provide for his family there. Tragically, both he and his sons were to die, leaving three widows – Naomi and her two Moabite daughters-in-law.

Now destitute, Naomi packs up her belongings and heads back to the old country of Israel. Humanly speaking she has lost everything. She had left Bethlehem 'full' (Ruth 1:21) – perhaps they were a prosperous family – but returns with nothing. Yet still she retains a faith in God. She acknowledges that her life is still in his hands and she submits to his providence (1:13,21). In referring to God she still uses the covenant name Yhwh. And, hoping beyond hope, she prays that the Lord may yet be gracious in providing for her daughters-in-law in the homes of new husbands (1:8-9).

That prayer is like the despairing cry of a woman throwing a petition out into the ether. 'Don't call me Naomi (pleasant)' she told them, 'call me Mara (bitter) (1:20).' Her faith has been brought to the brink of despair.

Yet even as she suffers still she trusts that just yet maybe the Lord will hear and answer (as Job 13:15).

While Naomi may wonder if the Lord will ever show her goodness again, her despairing prayer proves to be the foundation stone of the book of Ruth. The whole of the remaining account is the story of how that prayer is heard and answered, and brings hope not only to Naomi and Ruth but indeed to the people of God. So often it is when the Lord brings us to the point of despair that he meets with us and gives blessing beyond what we could have dreamed. That is something of a theme in the period of the Judges – it is only when the Israelites are brought to their knees, humanly speaking, that they are driven to seek the Lord and find his blessing. And there is a direct parallel in the life of Hannah. This godly woman had been tested to breaking point by her infertility. Yet as she wept and cried out to the Lord, her prayer led not only to her own fertility but also the gift of Samuel who was to be the means of rescuing Israel from the chaos of the Judges. It is through our weakness that God's strength is made known.

Another glimmer of light in this first chapter is the testimony of Ruth who decides not to return to her family's home, but to go back with Naomi to Israel. This meant renouncing her family and her gods. Humanly speaking her prospects for marriage would be more uncertain in Israel. Yet by faith she goes with her

mother-in-law. Whereas Elimelech emigrated for richer pickings in Moab, Ruth is prepared to leave the certainties of home for the uncertainties of Israel. She has the faith which he lacked. Like Abraham she sets out for a land she does not know (cf 2:11).

We do not know how much Ruth understood about the living God. Yet she knows enough of Naomi and her testimony to take this radical step. Like Rahab the prostitute, she wants to renounce her pagan ways and identify with Israel. And as this account unfolds we discover that she is not disappointed (1Peter 2:6, Phil 3:8).

Both of these women, Naomi and Ruth, are standing both literally and spiritually at a crossroads. Naomi could give up to bitterness and despair, but she clings on in faith and cries out to God. Ruth could give up and go back to Moab, but she goes on to Israel and to God. And through their faith, God will richly bless.

The Providence of God

One of the questions we might ask in studying Ruth is 'Where is God?' Just as Esther does not mention the Lord's name, so in Ruth he only appears in the words of prayers, greetings, and oaths taken in his name. And the Lord makes no direct and spectacular interventions. There are no miracles, no prophets bringing words from God,

no provision for Naomi of a jar of oil which does not run out. When we are discouraged we would love God to act immediately and supernaturally, at once. Yet, like Naomi, we too often forget that God is at work constantly in providence. He is present and active in the everyday events of life.

We see that very clearly in chapter 2 in what seems at the time to be a series of simple and innocent coincidences. The fact that they happened to arrive back in Bethlehem at barley harvest time; Ruth ended up working by chance in the field of Boaz, who arrived while she was there. And by strange coincidence, Boaz was a near relative who was eligible to marry Ruth. See how God is at work behind the scenes! When we say that God is a miraculous God, that He is all powerful and almighty and completely sovereign, we should not forget the miracle of his providence. He is able to order every single event great and small from the falling of a nation to the landing of a sparrow and every tiny detail is worked out according to his perfect purposes.

Through Boaz, God provides for Ruth's practical needs. Not only does he allow her to glean, but join his workers at the table and be sure of his physical protection. His generosity in letting her glean among the sheaves means that she is able to get a large quantity of grain (4 or 5 gallons).

In the first chapter of Ruth, Naomi was so immobilised by grief and

discouragement that she could only testify of her own bitterness. She does not even have the energy to join Ruth gleaning in the fields. But suddenly she can see God at work in remarkable providences. She can rejoice over the abundant provision of grain which Ruth has gathered, and she has hope as she sees how the Lord has brought Ruth and Boaz together.

So now Naomi takes the initiative. We might wonder if she was not too forward at this point, in sending Ruth to the threshing floor at night when the men would be in high spirits after their meal. Ruth's approach to Boaz seems questionable to say the least. But the text does not stand in judgment on Ruth, so nor should we. At any rate Boaz, in line with his godly character, takes it in the right spirit. The suggested imagery is understood. So that when he wakes up in the middle of the night with cold feet (3:9) he understands that Ruth is making a clear proposal of marriage by the imagery of spreading his cloak over her (cf Ezek 16:8).

Boaz praised her 'kindness' (3:10), Hebrew *hesed* – Ruth's loyalty to family and to the covenant in seeking out a kinsman-redeemer to marry. Once again she demonstrates faith and a godly character. And Boaz too is concerned that everything be done according to the Law of God. So he goes to meet with the nearer relative and ensure that the marriage is properly arranged.

Naomi is an example to us in that her faith is kindled by seeing God at work in providence. She does not remain resolutely gloomy, but is ready to look up and to count her blessings. Too often our discouragement can be fuelled by ingratitude, and failure to recognise what God has done for us. But Naomi is ready to recognise that the Lord has not forgotten her. He is still at work – and tokens of his kindness are plain to see. So now she begins to rejoice again (2:20) and to take more active steps of faith.

Pictures of Christ

Ruth learns much of the grace of God from Boaz, who presents a picture of Christ himself. Like the Syro-Phoenician woman in the Gospels Ruth has come timorously to glean as a foreigner 'the scraps which fall from the table'. But she finds her faith rewarded in abundance by a wonderfully generous benefactor. And through godly Boaz she finds that the God of Israel is one who welcomes the alien and the stranger.

She discovers refuge under his wings (2:12) in the same way as Israel did at the beginning (cf Ex 19:4, Deut 32:11-12). Ruth is welcomed by Boaz as 'my daughter' – so in leaving worldly ways behind she finds herself the member of a new family (2 Cor 6:17-18).

Boaz serves as an ambassador of God – expressing God's grace through his

own actions. And we are reminded that the love and grace of God are so often experienced through the practical kindness of his people. Unbelievers may never see a miracle or hear a prophet, but they may see something of God by seeing our testimony, our love, and our welcome to them (1John 4:12). Ruth made her first step of faith through the testimony of Naomi. Now she is enriched by the faithfulness of Boaz.

In the matter of marriage, Boaz once again proves faithful. When he goes to the city gate, the nearer relative refuses to buy Naomi's land and marry Ruth because he realises that it would endanger his own estate. Becoming a kinsman-redeemer involves raising up a son who will then inherit the estate in the name of Ruth's dead husband, so that the family name of Elimelech will be continued in Israel. Boaz is prepared to accept the expensive responsibility which his relative declines. And he becomes a picture of Christ our Redeemer – paying our debts and buying us out of destitution into life and prosperity. To become our Redeemer, Christ also had to become our near-relative, taking human flesh to redeem humankind.

The focus of the book of Ruth switches to Christ himself. The celebrations of 4:14 are central. Now the kinsman-redeemer is identified not as Boaz but as the newborn son. It is on that baby that all their hopes are now fixed. It is that son who will now bear

the family name. It is that son who will provide support for Naomi in her old age. And through that child we are pointed on to the future in the genealogy of 4:18-22 – to the coming David. The baby Obed born in Bethlehem foreshadows the one whose birth we celebrate each Christmas.

This illustrates the principle that all of the heroes and heroines of the Old Testament are foreshadowing fulfilment in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is where the plot of every story in the OT has its final conclusion. Even amidst this rather quaint family scene God is working out his eternal purposes of salvation. Remember that they are living in the days of the Judges – a time which physically and spiritually was chaotic and troubling. There might have been godly people in Israel who were crying out to the Lord, ‘God, where are you? What are you doing?’ There were no miracles here, no acts of power. But quietly and graciously God was still at work to fulfil his eternal purpose.

So it is today in the Christian Church. We long of course for great scenes of revival and dramatic interventions of mighty power. But God’s ordinary way of working is very quiet, and unspectacular. There is a little providence here, a token of his goodness there, one converted, another growing in faith, another increasing in usefulness. There are many things which seem to us to be mere accidents and chance events.

Sometimes blessing comes from surprising quarters (even a Moabite!). But all are being woven together by him for his glory. The work of the gospel is very much like the work of the farmer. Seeds are sown, and grow quietly and unseen in the ground. For so many months we see little or nothing. But God is at work, and will bring the harvest in his time.

The writer of this book of Ruth could look back over the generations and see the wonder of this little history. Now we can look back from the perspective of Christ and see an even greater significance. Remember where we found Naomi back in 1:20. But now look at her celebrating the goodness of God (4:17). Like the bitter waters of Exod 15:25 she has been transformed from ‘Mara’ to ‘Naomi’. Not only has God sustained her through the darkness, but in a strange way if there had been no darkness there would have been no blessing. It was only the darkness which prompted the prayer of desperation of 1:8-9 which has now been answered beyond her wildest dreams. Without that prayer there would have been no marriage in Bethlehem, and no ancestor of David and of Christ. Some threads of God’s tapestry of our lives are very dark, but every thread has its place and every thread has its purpose. We might wish sometimes for easier, happier days. But God knows better than we do. He makes his light shine in the darkness.

The Carey Conference 2001

As with the previous Grace/Carey conferences, Carey 2001 was open to ladies. Two sessions for ladies, on 'Women helping women' and 'Women helping their husbands' were addressed by Sharon James. According to Phil Wells in E.N., March 2001, they were excellent. He says, 'this sort of material is uniquely helpful and absolutely essential for churches today.'

The following report is by Bill Edwards of Jersey, Channel Islands.

The 2001 conference with its emphasis on missions and world-wide appeal was stimulating and encouraging. I have been attending since the early seventies and have always found it a blessing.

The first session was taken by Kirk Wellum of Canada on The constraining love of Christ from Isaiah 42:1-4 & Matthew 22:34-40. He spoke of the problem of ministerial decline, showing that a passionate love for God and Christ is the key to long-term usefulness. We need to think realistically about ourselves, meditate on the beauty of Christ, pray and listen to him as the Word, work hard in the cause of the gospel, and have a zeal for him and his Lordship in the Church.

John Blanchard of Christian Ministries concluded the first day with Meeting the tide of unbelief. He spoke of the Church's declining ability to communicate with the modern generation and spoke of churches being out of touch with the world and individual Christians losing the ability to witness. He developed clearly and powerfully the principal subjects which we share or have in common with those

who do not believe namely, human dignity, human morality and human rationality.

Ray Evans opened Wednesday's session with Contemporary values in worship. His main thrust was that 'We cannot be specific where Scripture is not specific'. We find different elements of worship in various parts of Scripture, but we cannot find any kind of liturgy that is biblical. This of course does not leave it open to use any manner of worship that we desire. What God does not decree we must not invent! Worship must be Trinitarian, according to the Word of God (Exod 20:5) and must be 'in spirit and truth' (John 4:24 – the defining passage). When it comes to disagreement about the pros and cons of contemporary worship he warned against war talk and waffle: poor argumentation, poor logic, misrepresentation, blanket generalisations, specious reasoning, false associations, straw men and emotive appeals for loyalty to a constituency.

Dennis Hustedt spoke to the two distinct yet inter-related subjects of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) and The importance of catechetical instruction. He pressed home the absolute primacy of training pastors and church leaders (a present shortage



Bob and Cathi Selph of the USA



*Dennis and Lyn Hustedt of Durban North,
South Africa*

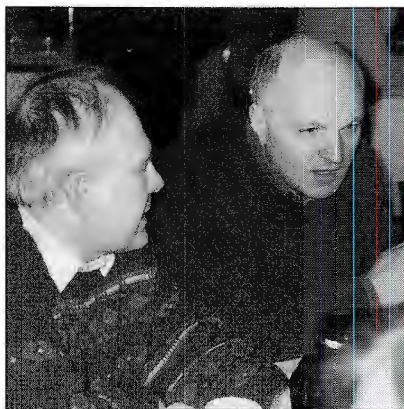
of two million pastors world-wide!) not just in third world situations, but increasingly in our own back yard. Pastor Hustedt then called upon his fellow ministers to catechise their congregations, particularly the young people. There are two great needs in our congregations which are sorely lacking, a 'clothesline of comprehension' of our Bibles (knowing the Bible story-line) and a systematic knowledge of Bible doctrine, which can be realised through catechising. All this, not only for the up-building of the saints, but also that our churches are increasingly the 'seminaries' for reproducing pastors and church leaders.

The afternoon 'prayer and share' session was a blessed time. A wide range of young men and women gave their testimonies describing God's grace towards them. They spoke of the needs of their churches from Estonia to Zambia, from Stornoway to Sicily, from Latvia to the Czech Republic. Some of these young people are in training at the European Missionary Fellowship (EMF) at Welwyn.

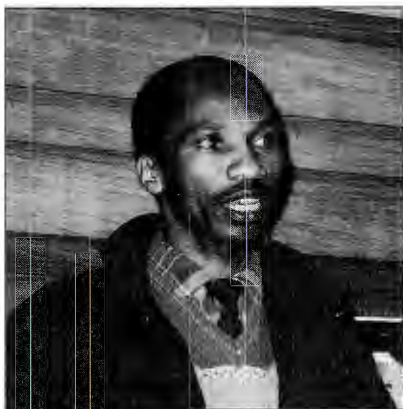
Bob Selph was most challenging on Maintaining the missionary vision. He spoke on the need to make much of the responsibility and identity of the Church. There is an operative union of the Church and the Holy Spirit. The Church has a responsibility to cultivate men to send, and the Church must pray.

On Thursday Kirk again opened with The grace of God and the Christian ministry, from Matthew 20, the parable about the Kingdom of heaven. No one deserves the Kingdom of heaven, only judgment! At the end of the day, no one will deserve anything however long they have laboured compared with others. The deserts of any are only such as God has worked in them. Paul overcame all rivalries by remembering that he was 'the chief of sinners'.

The second session, from David Ellis, a bilingual preacher of wide experience, made a tremendous call to ministers to engage in teaching ministry in developing countries – 'We can be missionaries to missionaries because of our privileged position.' He gave nine



*Mike Coles, pastor at Falmouth, Cornwall
and pastor Gary Brady, editor of
GRACE magazine*



*Daniel Masambuko Kesereka of
Congo Republic*

points on involvement and opportunity, culminating with a quotation from C H Spurgeon, 'We do it because it is worth it – be fervent – keep near the Son.'

At the evening session Pastor Hustedt preached from 2 Timothy 1 and 4. Here, Paul is giving his final instructions to Timothy before his execution. Languishing in a Roman dungeon, Paul remains content. Where does the power come from for Paul to endure? Four points are drawn out from 2 Timothy 1 a clear conscience (v.3); his justification (v.9); his calling (v.11); the power of the Spirit's indwelling (v.14). More application was derived through noting the extraordinary encouragement of Onesiphorus toward Paul (v.16) encouragement that holds eternal consequences. Given that most believers abandoned Paul during his final confinement the question was penetratingly asked of us: 'Would you have visited Paul?' The answer: 'Only if the same power residing in Paul's life also resides in me.'

On Friday, Iain Murray spoke on

Martyn Lloyd-Jones and authority in preaching. Such preaching is attended by God's presence and will hold the attention of the listeners. 'Real power is always when there is a felt weakness.' Preaching is the highest and greatest and most glorious calling. 'If we would be true preachers, we must be certain of what is preached.'

The final session was taken by Bob Selph speaking on, The need of love in mission. He concentrated on, the love of God, the love of Jesus and the love of Paul. We need to love every kind of sinner. Jesus could have 'association without condemnation, penetration without intimidation and separation without alienation'. Paul knew 'the terror of the Lord' and so would 'persuade men'. C H Spurgeon declared, 'We must hear the cries of the lost!' Jonah was shown the need of 'a whole attitude adjustment'.

Bill James fulfilled well the role of chairman for the 'question and answer' session on Thursday afternoon.

Tampering with the Trinity

Part 1

Mainline Feminist Rejection of Masculine Language for the Triune God¹

Prof Bruce A Ware

Introduction

To someone not conversant with contemporary theological writings, it may come as something of a surprise to learn that the historic doctrine of the Trinity is undergoing considerable scrutiny, reassessment, reformulation, and/or defense.² To many, this doctrine, perhaps as much as or more than any other, seems so abstract and unrelated to life that they might wonder just why the interest. What is *here* that would warrant and elicit such concentrated attention? What is at stake in *this doctrine* that would provoke such interest and concern?

To many, what is at stake is simply this: the integrity and reality of the Christian faith itself. Donald Bloesch surprised many in the theological world with the publication in 1985 of his book entitled *The Battle for the Trinity*.³ He charged the feminist rejection of the Bible's own and traditional theology's predominantly masculine language for God as a rejection of the Trinity itself and, as such, the imposition of a different faith (i.e., not the *Christian* faith) onto those quarters of the Church inclined to accept the feminist critique. Such charges and concerns have continued unabated. Consider, for example, the sobering words of Duke University Professor of Systematic Theology, Geoffrey Wainwright:

The signs of our times are that, as in the fourth century, the doctrine of the Trinity occupies a pivotal position. While usually still considering themselves within the Church, and in any case wanting to be loyal to their perception of truth, various thinkers and activists are seeking such revisions of the inherited doctrine of the Trinity that their success might in fact mean its abandonment, or at least such an alteration of its content, status, and function that the whole face of Christianity would be drastically changed. Once more the understanding, and perhaps the

attainment, of salvation is at stake, or certainly the message of the Church and the Church's visible composition.⁴

What are some of these contemporary proposed revisions of the doctrine of the Trinity that would provoke such strong reaction? This series proposes to focus on two dimensions of trinitarian reconstruction, both of which are the result of feminist revisionism. In this article, we will consider the mainline Church rejection of masculine trinitarian language (or any masculine God-language, more generally) that has been occurring for nearly three decades. Whether emasculating God's name leaves us with the God named in the Bible will be explored here, with argumentation offered to support traditional and biblical masculine language for the triune God. The subsequent article will explore a challenge to trinitarian understanding from evangelical feminism. Many contemporary evangelical egalitarians are urging the Church to retain masculine language for God while denying that this masculine language indicates any kind of inner-trinitarian distinction of authority. These arguments will be weighed and support will be offered for the Church's long-standing commitment to the trinitarian persons' full equality of essence and differentiation of persons, the latter of which includes and entails the eternal functional subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the Spirit to both Father and Son. First, then, we address the mainline feminist rejection of masculine language for the triune God.

Central Feminist Arguments for Rejecting Masculine Trinitarian Language

Admittedly a radical representative of the feminist movement, Mary Daly has, nonetheless, captured the heart of the feminist criticism of the Church's biblical and historic adherence to masculine God-language in her claim, "If God is male, the male is god."⁵ While *no* respected theologian of the Church has claimed that God *is male*, the force of Daly's objection is simply that to refer to God with masculine language gives the impression that masculinity is more god-like. By this impression, then, women are held in subservient positions and granted less than their rightful dignity, so it is asserted. The only corrective can be to remove the predominance of masculine God-language from our Scripture, liturgy, and preaching. While some (like Daly herself) have moved to an exclusive use of feminine, earthly, even neo-pagan language for deity, most in the mainline churches who share this fundamental concern call for a balance of masculine and feminine references (e.g., God as Father and Mother) or for a fully gender-neutral language altogether in reference to God (e.g., Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer to replace Father, Son, Holy Spirit).⁶

Only brief attention can be given here to the several lines of argument put forth for inclusive God-language,⁷ and our focus will be particularly on the concern over the traditional masculine trinitarian formulation. First, appeal is made to the metaphorical nature of the Bible's own masculine language for God. All agree that when Scripture calls God 'Father' or 'King', we are not to understand by these that God is literally male. They function metaphorically to speak of fatherly and kingly functions such as provision, protection, and rulership. So, while God literally is provider, protector and ruler, he is metaphorically father and king. This being so, feminists argue that we ought, then, to describe God with feminine metaphors that express some other functions of God more characteristically feminine, such as God as comforter, healer, and sympathiser. So while God is (literally) neither father or mother, the metaphors 'father' and 'mother' are equally appropriate in describing qualities and functions literally true of God. We ought, then, to balance feminine names of God with traditional masculine names to give a more complete view of God, or else we ought to avoid such gender-specific terms altogether if the risk is just too great that people might take these to think God *is* a sexual being. As applied to language for the Trinity, feminist advocates have suggested revised language in both directions. Either we should speak of the first person of the Trinity as Father/Mother and the second, the Child of God,⁸ or we should move to a strictly gender-neutral trinitarian language, such as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Both approaches are advocated within mainline feminism and what both have in common is the avoidance of the dominant masculine language for the triune God due to its being both false and misleading.

Second, when one inquires why both biblical and traditional ecclesial language for God has been predominantly masculine, one immediately realises the intrinsically culturally-conditioned nature of the Bible's and the Church's God-talk. Patriarchal culture in biblical days and throughout the history of the Church has given rise to this predominantly masculine language for God. For feminism, upon realising this reality, it seems both obvious and necessary that we work to revamp our God-talk. We can maintain this predominantly masculine language for God only at the expense of perpetuating the illicit patriarchy that gave rise to it. While most mainline feminists would not agree wholly with Mary Daly, they would adjust her claim to say that if God is seen and spoken of as masculine, what is masculine will be viewed, naturally and unavoidably, as of higher value and authority. Again, then, one of two lines of response is needed: either we must balance traditional masculine usage with appropriate and meaningful feminine language of God, or we should leave behind all gender specific God referencing altogether.

Third, following from the above two items, feminist political and ideological advancement requires that we reject the biblical and traditional dominance of the masculine in regard to God. The true liberation of women, generally, and the cause of women's rights to serve in all levels of Church and denominational leadership, in particular, can never happen when God, our highest authority and only rightful object of worship, is spoken of in masculine terms. Perpetuating the masculinity of God perpetuates the servile nature of the feminine. Since God is above gender, and since he created both genders in his image, then we dare not continue to focus our discussion of God on one gender thus subordinating the other as inferior and subservient.

Responding to the Feminist Case against Masculine Trinitarian Language

Interestingly, many from within mainline churches as well as the majority of evangelical feminists (i.e., egalitarians) from within and without mainline denominations are opposed to this revisionist feminist agenda. For most in this group, while claiming fully to identify with the values and aspirations of Christian feminism, these opponents join evangelical complementarians in claiming boldly that to change the language of the Bible and Church tradition in which God is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is to jeopardise the integrity of Christianity itself and to promote what is truly, in fact, another deity and another faith.⁹ Their argumentation is complex and involved, but we will sketch some of their main concerns.

First, while it is true that the Bible uses masculine metaphorical language for naming God (though God is never literally male), it is also true that the Bible never employs feminine metaphorical language *to name* God. True, God is sometimes said to be or act in ways *like* a mother (or some other feminine image),¹⁰ but never is God called 'Mother' as he is often called 'Father'. Respect for God's self-portrayal in Scripture requires that we respect this distinction. While we have every right (and responsibility) to employ feminine images of God, as is done often in Scripture itself, we are not permitted, by biblical precedence, to go further and to name God in ways he has not named himself. He has named himself 'Father' but not 'Mother'. This stubborn fact of scriptural revelation must itself restrain our talk of God.

Second, one might be tempted to dismiss the above "factual" point by appeal to the inherently patriarchal culture in which our biblical language of God was framed. But appeal to culture shows just how odd and even unique it is that Israel chose to use only masculine (and *not* feminine) language when naming God. The fact is that the most natural route Israel might have taken is to follow

the lead of the nations surrounding her which spoke with regularity and frequency of their deities as feminine.¹¹ That Israel chose not to do this shows her resistance to follow natural and strong cultural pressures, and it indicates that she conceived of the true God, the God of Israel, as distinct from these false deities.

In defending her assertion that 'the Bible's language for God is masculine, a unique revelation of God in the world', Elizabeth Achtemeier continues:

The basic reason for that designation of God is that the God of the Bible will not let himself be identified with his creation, and therefore human beings are to worship not the creation but the Creator. . . . It is precisely the introduction of female language for God that opens the door to such identification of God with the world, however.¹²

Whether one follows Achtemeier here fully or not,¹³ what is clear is that Scripture never names God as 'Mother' or with any other feminine ascription, and this stands clearly against the prevailing practice of the cultures surrounding Israel and the early Church.

Third, while Scripture surely does reflect the various cultural and historical settings in which it was written, the God of the Bible is presented, ultimately, by self-revelation or self-disclosure. The Bible's language of God, then, must be received with respect and gratitude as the divinely ordained conveyer of the truth God himself intended his people to know about him. To alter biblical language of God is to deny and reject God's self-disclosure in the terms which he chose and which he used in making himself known to us. Clearly, at the pinnacle of this self-disclosure of God stands the revelation of Jesus the Christ who became flesh that we might know in visible, physical form what God is like (John 1:14-18). And here, with shocking regularity, Jesus refers to God in a manner scandalous to his Jewish listeners, as none other than 'Father'. That Jesus is the *Son* sent by the *Father* is so deeply and widely reflective of God's self-revelation in and through the incarnation, that to alter this language is to suggest, even if only implicitly, that one speak instead of a different deity. Divine self-revelation, then, requires the glad retention of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Fourth, one last caution will be mentioned. For revisionist feminism, it may be granted that biblical language speaks of the triune God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But, these revisionists continue, those same Scriptures also employ the language of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. May we not use in the Church this other biblical language of God and by so doing both honour God's

self-revelation and avoid the illicit equation of God with masculinity that the traditional masculine language risks? While the terms 'Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer' are biblical terms for God, they cannot function as substitutes for the persons of the Godhead named with 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. There are at least three reasons why this substitution is unacceptable.

First, one risks a modalistic understanding of God when he is first Creator, and then changes to the next historical phase of Redeemer, and likewise then to Sustainer. The phases and aspects of activity can easily be seen as historical modes of the manifestation of the one God, as has been advocated by Sabellius and other modalists.

Second, this substitution implies that the world is eternal, not temporally finite, and that God's redemptive work is necessary, not free. The Church's affirmation of God as 'Father, Son, Spirit' is a claim, not merely of his economic manifestation as the Father of the incarnate Son in the power of the Spirit (though this is true, in part), but also of the immanent Trinity who is *eternally* Father, Son and Spirit. The Father, then, is the *eternal* Father of the Son; the Son is the *eternal* Son of the Father. Now, if we substitute 'Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer' as names for these *eternal* realities, it requires that we see God as eternal Creator, implying an eternal creation, and eternal Redeemer, implying necessary redemption. It is clear that while 'Father, Son, Spirit' work well as names of the immanent and economic trinitarian Persons, 'Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer' are merely economic and functional designations. As such, they simply cannot substitute for the language of Scripture and Church tradition of the eternal God who is in Himself (i.e., immanently and eternally) and in relation to creation (i.e., economically) Father, Son, and Spirit.

Third, the personal names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit simply do not reduce to the supposed functional substitutes of Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.¹⁴ Is the Father and the Father alone the Creator? Is the Son alone the Redeemer? Is the Spirit alone the Sustainer? Biblical teaching instructs us that each of these activities is accomplished by all three divine persons working together. Yes, the Father creates, but he does so through the power of his Word (John 1:3) who acts as implementer of his creative design (Col 1:16). The Spirit, likewise, energises the formation of the creative work of the Father through the Son (Gen 1:2). Redemption, likewise, is destroyed altogether if the work of redemption is reduced to that of the second person of the Trinity. Biblically, redemption only occurs as the Father sends the Son into the world to receive the wrath of the Father against him for our sin (2 Cor 5:21). And, of course, the Son accomplishes this work only by the power of the Spirit who rests on

him and empowers him to go to the cross (Heb 9:14) and raises him from the dead (Rom 8:11). And likewise with sustaining and sanctifying, it is the work of the Father (1 Thess 5:23-24) and the Son (Eph 5:25-27) and the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18) to preserve believers and move them toward the holiness of life and character designed for them from all eternity (Eph 1:4). One realises that the substitution of ‘Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,’ for ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,’ not only fails as a functional equivalent of the traditional and biblical trinitarian formula, but worse, if followed it would result in such major theological distortions that the faith that would result would bear only a superficial resemblance to the faith of true biblical and Christian religion. In the words of Geoffrey Wainwright, “Consideration of creation, redemption, and sanctification shows that an account of them that is true to the biblical narrative will also imply and depend on the trinitarian communion and cooperation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹⁵

Conclusion

Clearly, what is at stake in the mainline feminist revision of trinitarian language is viewed by many, in mainline and evangelical circles, as nothing short of the substitution of another faith for the Christian faith. Christian people must consider seriously whether their faith (i.e., the truly historic and biblical ‘Christian faith’) can abide when the God of that faith is no longer the one true and eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As many critics of this mainline proposal are attempting to make clear, supposed substitutes for these traditional and biblical names of the trinitarian persons are clearly not simply different names for the same realities; the substitute names invoke, instead, a substitute deity.

May God enable us to be faithful to him. May he give us wisdom and strength to uphold the revelation he has given us of the divine reality, of which we could have no understanding apart from his free and gracious self-disclosure. May we avoid the presumption and unavoidable idolatry of discarding that self-disclosed revelation to substitute for it a language of our better liking, bringing with it an imposter god of our better liking. And all this calls us to pray that God would so move in our hearts that we truly would love the God who is. May we love and worship the *true God* who eternally is *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. May chafing give way to cherishing, resistance to repentance, and avoidance to adoration – all to the praise of God the Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, in the power of his eternal Holy Spirit.

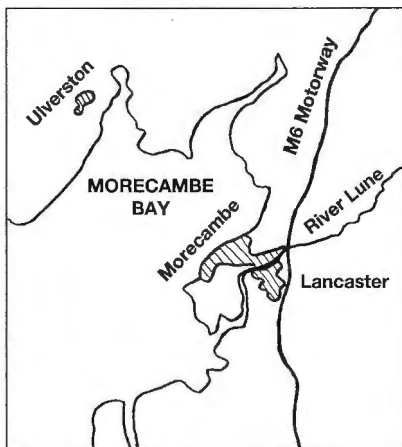
Endnotes

- 1 This and the subsequent article appearing here in *Reformation Today* were first delivered as a paper, "Tampering With the Trinity: Does the Son Submit to His Father?" at the *Building Strong Families* conference, Dallas, Texas, March 20-22, co-sponsored by Family Life and The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. An expanded and edited version of these two articles will appear as part of a forthcoming chapter, "The Doctrine of the Trinity", in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, edited by Douglas S Huffman and Eric L Johnson (Zondervan).
- 2 Consider a sampling of recently published works, and notice the variety of theological perspectives and interests represented among their authors: Colin E Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991; 2nd ed, 1997); Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993); Thomas F Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994); Duncan Reid, *Energies of the Spirit: Trinitarian Models in Eastern Orthodox and Western Theology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); Kevin Vanhoozer, ed. *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
- 3 Donald Bloesch, *The Battle for the Trinity: The Debate over Inclusive God Language* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1985).
- 4 Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Doctrine of the Trinity: Where the Church Stands or Falls", *Interpretation* 45 (1991) 117.
- 5 Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973) 19.
- 6 See, e.g., Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979); Virginia Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1983); Ruth Duck, *Gender and the Name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula* (New York: Pilgrim, 1991); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Gail Ramshaw, *God Beyond Gender: Feminist Christian God-Language* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Aída Besançon Spencer, et. al., *The Goddess Revival* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).
- 7 For very careful and thorough study and critique of this argumentation, see Alvin F. Kimel, Jr., ed., *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); and John W. Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).
- 8 Note that the early creeds speak of the second person as "begotten" not made, which, as such, contains no gender connotation. So, to speak of the Child begotten of the Father/Mother is consistent with the language of the early Church and preserves continuity while making a needed correction.
- 9 Note the telling title of an article opposed to feminist God-language revisionism, viz., Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Exchanging God for 'No Gods': A Discussion of Female Language for God," in Kimel, ed., *Speaking the Christian God*, 1-16.
- 10 For an exhaustive discussion of biblical references to God employing feminine imagery, see Cooper, *Our Father in Heaven*, chapter 3, "The Bible's Feminine and Maternal References to God," 65-90.
- 11 Elaine Pagels, "What Became of God the Mother? Conflicting Images of God in Early Christianity," in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) 107 comments that "the absence of feminine symbolism of God marks Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in striking contrast to the world's other religious traditions, whether in Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and Rome, or Africa, Polynesia, India, and North America".
- 12 Achtemeier, "Exchanging God for 'No Gods'" 8-9.
- 13 See, *ibid.*, 12, where Achtemeier acknowledges that many feminists deny that naming God as feminine links God with creation, but she asserts and then supports with numerous citations her claim, "But feminist writings themselves demonstrate that it does."
- 14 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. in 13 parts (Edinburgh: T. & T Clark, 1936-1969), I. 2., 878-879, writes: "The content of the doctrine of the Trinity . . . is not that God in His relation to man is Creator, Mediator and Redeemer, but that God in Himself is eternally God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . . . [God] cannot be dissolved into His work and activity."
- 15 Wainwright, "Doctrine of the Trinity", 123.

Church by the River Lune

The Free Grace Baptist Church, Lancaster, is now twenty years old. It started very small and the little group met in a hired hall. Here Phil Arthur, who became pastor there in 1988, tells the story.

Margaret Thatcher had been in power for almost a year and memories were still fresh of the high inflation of the late 70s and the 'Winter of Discontent' when a handful of Christians from a variety of backgrounds covenanted together to be a church early in 1980. I suspect that one question on many lips at the time was, "Why a new church?" After all, the general trend then as now was for churches to close. In any case, there were already a number of Evangelical churches in Lancaster of one stripe or another. Nevertheless, none of the churches in the city at that time were explicitly committed to the brand of Evangelical Calvinism that was the heritage of the Reformers and Puritans and the practice of preaching systematically through whole books of the Bible that so often goes hand in hand with that heritage. I am told that the reaction from other believers and fellowships within the city was often dismissive. The little group was written off and its early demise was confidently expected. The vision for a new church had been nurtured for some time when a nucleus of believers with Reformed convictions organised the 'Lancaster Bible Witness', a regular series of preaching rallies to which many of the leading Reformed preachers of the day came. This created a growing hunger for more of the same. While it was great to hear Iain Murray, Paul Cook, Erroll Hulse, Omri Jenkins and others at monthly intervals would it not be even



better to listen to the systematic exposition of Scripture every week?

It was this conviction, together with encouragement from some of the preachers who had become the mentors of the little group that persuaded them to step out in faith and attempt the daunting task of founding a new church. The assembly moved from the Jones's home in Bowerham to meet in a hired room in Ryelands House. Friends from a number of churches gathered to be present at the public constitution of the new church in February 1981 when Stuart Olyott and Erroll Hulse were guest preachers. Eventually the church obtained its own premises in Lune Street, which had by turns been a small branch of the Co-op and the home of 'Worthington Car Components'.

Milestones:

Fairly early in its history the young church recognised that two of its men,

Michael Pearce and Brian Ventress, had been called and equipped by the Holy Spirit for the work of eldership. Michael Jones was also recognised as a deacon. At this period the main challenge confronting the church was the mammoth task of making the premises in Lune St fit for use as a place of worship. A look at the old albums that recall the story of those years will probably cause a wry smile at the way that fashions have changed and the way that the ravages of time have altered hairlines and waistlines. Some who sported verdant facial hair now think better of it and others who appear in those old photographs were little more than toddlers then and are now married. Even so, both the purchase of the building and its renovation were a colossal undertaking for what was at that stage still a group of modest size.

It was at about this time that I first became aware of the church having begun my course of training with the Evangelical Movement of Wales at Bryntirion in 1981. There I met Steve Walker soon to be married to Sarah. It was through Steve that I became aware of this new church. At that time, I had no thought of moving outside my native north-east and when I was asked to come across the Pennines in my yellow VW Golf Mk I to supply the pulpit one Sunday I had little thought as to where it might lead, though unbeknown to me the church had now reached the stage where it felt able to support and therefore call a full-time pastor. Indeed, one or two men had already been considered with varying degrees of seriousness. I did note on that visit that the congregation had the endearing habit of visibly settling down to listen after the hymn before the sermon. In the May of 1988 I accepted the call to come to Lancaster and serve as teaching elder. Early days proved frustrating

because of the housing boom that sent prices higher with every succeeding week. Having sold our house in Sunderland we were gazumped more than once as we camped out in the manse owned by Lancaster Baptist Church and trudged around the estate agents with depressing frequency. (I still remember Luke, little more than a toddler then, saying, 'Not another house shop!')

I think it was in the January of 1991 that I received a phone call from John Marshall of Hemel Hempstead wondering if Lancaster were anywhere near Ulverston and if so, could I get in touch with an American couple named Smith who were feeling isolated and in need of fellowship. That very night, having 'drawn a bow at a venture' and telephoned, I made my first journey round the estuary. It was lashing down with rain and windy enough to have made hoisting a sail on my little red Nova worthwhile and I thought of paraphrasing Samuel Rutherford, *'I've wrestled on towards Ulverston, 'gainst storm and wind and tide'* I struggled to find the house and actually almost gave up but that journey has brought numerous rewards leading not only to many enriching friendships but by gradual stages to the Ulverston project now headed up by Steve Wood. Those stages included Guy Smith's Home Bible Study on Friday evenings being brought under the authority of the church in Lancaster and the commencement of evening services in Ulverston in the Coronation Hall. I have vivid memories of conducting services in the Supper Room there punctuated by noise from other events elsewhere in the building including Cruft's Dog Show, a Brass Band competition and the All-Star American Wrestlers. During all this time a number of friends from Ulverston committed themselves to travelling forty

miles and back each Sunday morning. The development of the Ulverston project has perhaps been the single largest commitment that the church has undertaken with the gradual expansion of the work there and the calling of Steve Wood, formerly with the Open-Air Mission who had, in the meantime, after a debilitating struggle with ME, been recognised along with Guy Smith as an elder of the Church. Now the group there has its own premises and is entirely responsible for its own life and ministry, which is exactly what we hoped for all along. We now function as one church on two sites but look forward to the day when our daughter becomes our sister and two churches link hands across the Bay perhaps with the shared vision of planting a third.

Another milestone of a different kind came when Michael and Glenys Pearce left not only the Lune Valley but the UK to take up their retirement in Northern Cyprus and in doing so have added a new dimension to our life as a fellowship.

For better, for worse

A number of changes have taken place in the life of our church over the last twenty years. Perhaps the most obvious has been the steady improvement of our premises in Lune St. When I first came to preach in 1986 the different classes of the Sunday School met in the four corners of the main hall and the congregation crammed into the kitchen for after service tea and coffee. Within a few days of my arrival I was at work helping Ian Richardson to lay the steps in the baptistry, which Jimmy Bell endearingly called the 'font'. I now have perhaps the best, if not the tidiest minister's study in the North of England but at that time I and my numerous books were temporarily ensconced in the room where Steve Walker normally houses his

Bible Class while the old lift shaft was cleared out and Roy Schofield built a platform across the resulting hole that sits under the left hand end of my main bookcase. Nowadays an excellent suite of rooms is used for a whole range of purposes. Sometimes we hear about the 'two-car family' but with the purchase of premises in Quebec St in Ulverston we must count as a church with two chapels.

Another obvious change that anyone who remembered the early days would notice has been the gradual evolution of public worship. While still committed to the traditional non-conformist 'hymn-prayer sandwich' a number of significant alterations have been made. These include the switch from the Authorised Version of the Holy Scriptures to the somewhat more contemporary New King James Version and the gradual change in hymnal from *Grace* through *Christian Hymns*, latterly used alongside *The Book of Praises* to PRAISE! There was no children's talk in those early days either.

Numbers attending worship have changed too. The original core together with their children only numbered a relative handful. Twenty-five church members called me across to Lancaster and now 55 are involved on both sites. Congregations at Lancaster probably reached their highest point in 1996 (before regular Sunday morning services started in Ulverston). Congregations of roughly a hundred were common in the parent church. The attendance of a number of students helps to keep congregations buoyant. Inevitably some faces have come and gone. First of all, the ranks have been thinned by death and there are dear friends who are missed every day who

now worship the Saviour in better surroundings and more sanctified company than we who are left. We thank God for some believers of high calibre who were given to us for a time and who enriched us while they were with us. Some subtractions are good. Departures to Northern Cyprus and Ulverston, while they have had an effect on our numbers, have been for honourable causes.

The spiritual climate in the world outside has also changed. The Toronto Blessing has come and (mercifully) gone again, though doubtless something else will take its place before long. Several other new churches with quite different emphases have arisen in Lancaster and made their distinctive marks. Churches like ours that stand apart from the 'Churches Together' bandwagon are becoming increasingly marginalised in a society that has simultaneously seen the erosion of Christian standards over the last two decades.

Was it all worth it?

Only those who were part of the original group who founded the church can say how far their hopes and longings have been fulfilled. For myself, who has shared thirteen of those twenty years, I have known both disappointments and encouragements. Things have happened with almost bewildering speed. Within a comparatively short time of arriving I found new ministries burgeoning at camp, in literature work both as an editor and author and in a modest way as a conference speaker. I have been encouraged as numbers have risen and troubled when the direction of the flow has gone in the opposite direction. The Ulverston project, while a large drain on the resources of a church that is not itself all that large, has been very satisfying. George Bush sr once famously said that

he was no good at 'the vision thing' but if I do have a vision it is to see the north of England dotted with Reformed churches holding to a Baptist church order and served by a generation of exciting preachers who can relate the old gospel to today's people. There is still much work and praying ahead of us if even a fraction of this noble vision is to become a reality.

In the meantime, we have much cause to give thanks. Every kind act of tender love performed by a heart touched by sovereign grace is itself a small triumph in a fallen world and we have been enriched by one another's friendship, have we not? And every moment around the Lord's Table, every time we gasp in awe at the wonder of the God of grace as we hear his Word, every time the truth is told in a world full of lies; these things are all real victories in the noblest of causes. Souls have been saved, though we would love to see more. Now and again in our prayer meetings the Lord is gracious and we tread the borders of Emmanuel's Land. Baptisms and weddings and the gift of children to our families are other reminders from time to time that God is far kinder to us than we deserve. For our church, the last twenty years have been a '*work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father*' (1 Thess 1:3). They have also been an unrelenting story of the faithfulness of our covenant God.

*Lord, for the years
your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us,
cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us,
pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years,
we bring our thanks today.*

Timothy Dudley-Smith.

Israel – Baruch Maoz

Grace and Truth Church – Last Nov 29 saw the breaking ground ceremony for what within 2 years, God willing, will become our congregational home. Available funds now cover approximately one third of the estimated building costs, but we hope to be able to reduce expenses through the help of volunteers. It was necessary to commence construction because our building permit is soon to expire and construction costs are beginning to climb.

Present were representatives from some Israeli congregations, friends from overseas and members of the congregation. The Orthodox sought to disrupt the event, but were not able to do so because the police cordoned off the area, allowing a very small number of protesters through. Our ceremony was simple, orderly and God-centred. A special joy was the arrival of representatives from the Arab congregation in Galilee. Here was another expression of unity in Christ.

In the church we continue to be encouraged. In December we held a baptism for six, four of whom were from the deaf community and one a

young man who had grown up in the church.

About one quarter of the church budget is devoted to gospel work in Israel and abroad. We hope to increase missionary concern beyond the borders of Israel. So far contributions are made to two overseas missionary families. In addition, one of our members is helping to set up a work among the deaf in the Ukraine and is supported financially by the church.

India – January earthquake

Gujarat state, a stronghold of Hindu extremism, has seen numerous acts of anti-Christian violence in the last two years and Christian victims of the recent earthquake disaster are being passed over in the aid distribution.

Canon Andrew White, Director of Coventry Cathedral's *International Ministry*, and Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director of the *Barnabas Fund*, returned recently from a previously planned visit of encouragement to the churches. The Christian community is thankful to have suffered very few deaths in the catastrophe – four Gujarati Christians



At the Carey Conference, David Clark of Evangelical Press explaining that more than half of the world's population of six billion can be reached through five languages: English, French, Russian, Spanish and Portuguese

and 17 Christian medical staff from other parts, but damage to buildings has been severe and many are camping out in the streets. A massive programme of repair and rebuilding is required.

Prayer and fasting has been the response of the Christians. Prayer meetings are being held nightly in many churches which are distributing relief to Christians and Hindus. However, in state re-building programmes, non-Hindus are being discriminated against. Many were living on valuable land. With the collapse of their homes they have been thrown off the land by wealthy Hindus who want to move in. The earthquake is the latest affliction for Gujarati Christians who have for the last two years been targeted in an increasingly violent campaign by militant Hindu

extremists. Over 50 churches have been torched, and pastors and evangelists beaten up.

Problems are compounded by the severe drought of the last two years. As many Christians are poor and live in rural areas, they have been badly affected. Gujarat has received very little help. Already an impoverished community, the task facing the Christians is way beyond their means. Rev V Malaviya of Gujarat appeals to Christians in other lands to help in the rebuilding and rehabilitation.

Gifts for the Christian earthquake victims can be sent to: The Barnabas Fund, The Old Rectory, River Street, Pewsey, Wiltshire, SN9 5DB, UK or by credit card donation by visiting the website

www.barnabasfund.org

Walking the Old Paths in New Shoes

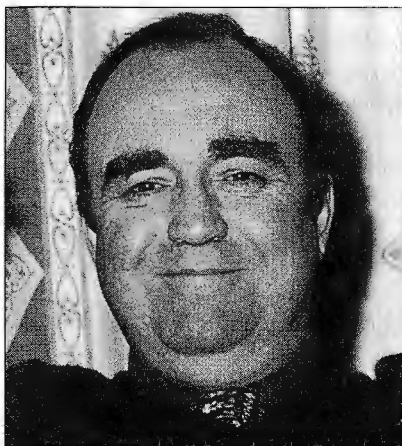
One Man's Pathway to Praise!

Phil Arthur

Since, and even before, its publication this year the PRAISE! hymn book has attracted a quantity of criticism, some of it measured, some less so. Attempts have already been made to give thorough and careful answers to the points that have been raised, so it was hardly necessary for me to attempt something that had already been done to good effect. I would like instead to do something more personal. Let me begin by saying that if PRAISE! in its present form had been published ten years ago, I would have been at best cautious about adopting it and possibly extremely guarded. Yet now I find myself pleased to see it in print and conscious of a real sense of privilege at having been involved as a member of the editorial board. Some of my friends might conclude that I have fallen a long way in ten years but I feel that it has been a valuable experience.

Early experiences

I grew up in the north-east of England. Like most English people of a certain age, my first real experience of hymns came in school assemblies where I sang of knights winning spurs 'in the stories of old'. When I joined the Scout troop attached to my parish church I was also recruited for the church choir. In those



Phil Arthur

days the 1662 Book of Common Prayer reigned in solitary splendour, so I can still recall much of Cranmer's splendid prose. At fourteen I began to attend a large independent evangelical church, which had been a force for good in my hometown for well over a century. What a difference! After the mannered precision of a 'steeple in the throat' parish choir it was stunning to hear a congregation of three hundred in full voice singing 'All hail the power of Jesu's name' to Diadem. The singing was uninhibited and full of gusto. The church hymnal was the old *Methodist Hymn Book*. A diet of two services every Lord's day with four or five hymns at each meant that the hymns of Watts and Wesley began to lodge in my

memory. Three years at Cambridge followed, where I read history. As well as the wholly predictable cultural collision when the miner's son tackled the bastions of ancient privilege, this turned out to be a period when my Christian faith was challenged and stretched by contact with fine young Christians from a variety of backgrounds. At the same time, I was puzzled. At home, choruses with actions were the staple diet of children at Sunday School yet the young intellectual elite seemed to have an insatiable appetite for them.

Christian Hymns

In my twenties I got involved in a new church, which used *Hymns of Faith*. At around this time I made several visits to Bryntirion near Bridgend to help with Evangelical Movement of Wales camps and also to attend the Movement's Theological Training Course. This brought me into contact with *Christian Hymns*. We adopted it at our church at home and enjoyed getting to know it. In 1988 I crossed the Pennines to take up my pastorate in Lancaster. The church there had originally been using *Grace Hymns*. (A set of *Grace* became available second hand at a knock-down price because a church in Yorkshire had given them up in favour of the first volume of *Mission Praise*.) A few months before my arrival however, a Christian Union in Wales had reached a similar decision. They too wanted to opt for the first volume of *Mission Praise*. Like Esau selling his birthright for a mess of pottage, they gave up in exchange, a

decent set of *Christian Hymns*. At that stage in my life I would have gladly settled for an unrelieved diet of *Christian Hymns* for the rest of my days.

This was partly because I automatically assumed that modern material would not bear comparison with the great hymns of the past. At that stage, I had not yet been exposed to the modern authors whose work I now enjoy. Having sung 'If I were a butterfly' once I had no wish ever to sing it again. At intervals I was also asked to preach at various Christian Unions. The low spot at such meetings was usually the time of singing, often a concentrated block of several songs sung one after the other. Some of these songs were so lacking in content that no thoughtful Buddhist would have objected to them. Frequent repetition of the word 'Jesus' is no guarantee that the Jesus we sing about is the one revealed in Scripture. I was puzzled that such engaging young people who listened so well to the exposition of Scripture sang things that were rapid and inconsequential and sang them over and over again. Anyone disposed to disapprove of the whole modern output could easily find ammunition. It was also apparent that the kind of songs that were light and flimsy mostly came from the same circles, those parts of the evangelical spectrum that sat light to sustained biblical exposition. It all seemed clear enough. The churches that majored on seriousness, reverence and preaching sang traditional hymns while the churches that specialised in 'worship' and not much else had bought into the

world of modern songs. Just occasionally I caught myself wondering whether I might not be guilty of unhelpful generalisation. In George Orwell's 'Animal Farm' the sheep ran around bleating, 'four legs good; two legs bad.' Had I unwittingly taught myself a similar mantra, 'hymns good; choruses bad'?

Mission Praise

As an occasional preacher in the 70s & 80s I inevitably became acquainted with *Mission Praise*. The various booklets and later the combined edition were used in many of the churches where I preached. In some places it was functioning as a supplement to a traditional hymnbook while in others it had established itself as the main book. Almost willy-nilly I became aware of some of the more recent material in circulation. At first I was not impressed. *Mission Praise* clearly contained a quantity of Christian ephemera. There was also the growing corpus of work by Graham Kendrick. While his output was considerable, I sometimes felt that the quality was patchy. He can turn a lovely phrase: 'hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered' is breathtaking. Even so, I was often left asking questions about certain aspects of his agenda. What were those 'works of sovereign power' with which he asked the Lord to 'come shake the earth again'? And for all its vibrant tune, 'Shine Jesus shine!' left me cold. Is it fitting that mortal beings should issue orders to the Son of God with such breezy confidence? But here and there I encountered the occasional gem.

Michael Saward's 'Christ triumphant' and 'Lord of the Cross of Shame' stood out. I have since come to appreciate that if I had moved in wider circles I might well have encountered these and similar items much sooner. These discoveries gave me cause for thought. At least someone was writing things in the traditional hymn format, with several verses where the thought developed from one verse to the next but in contemporary English.

The Book of Praises

In due course, I came across *The Book of Praises*, a collection of 70 Psalms compiled by David Preston. I was intrigued. I was obviously aware that some Christians north of the border sing nothing but Psalms. I had been attending the Banner of Truth ministers' conference at Leicester for some time, but felt irked by the policy at that conference of singing only from the *Scottish Metrical Psalter*. The verbal contortions needed to find suitable rhymes jarred on me. It was equally apparent that evangelicals south of the border outside the Anglican Communion sang very few Psalms at all. *The Book of Praises* opened my eyes. I was particularly drawn to David Preston's rendering of Psalm 84, set to the Londonderry Air, 'O LORD of hosts, how lovely is your dwelling place!' The marriage of tune and words gave me a new love for the Psalm itself. This compilation also introduced me to the work of Christopher Idle and Timothy Dudley-Smith. I had seen their names before. Timothy Dudley-Smith's, 'Tell Out My Soul' is in

Christian Hymns, but as that collection includes nothing else of his work, I had no idea that he had produced a very extensive body of material. His version of Psalm 115, 'Not to us be glory given', left me wanting more. As I got to know *The Book of Praises* a thought crossed my mind. Michael Saward, Christopher Idle and Timothy Dudley-Smith were all Anglicans. I had spent most of my Christian life in the sort of churches that tend to associate either with the FIEC or with the Grace Baptist family of churches. These on the whole had been Reformed in doctrine and conservative in ethos. They mostly shared the view that evangelical unity involves a prior commitment to principled separatism, a position championed by the British Evangelical Council. For many of us, ever since Dr Lloyd-Jones' watershed speech at the National Assembly of Evangelicals in 1966, contact with evangelical Anglicans had been quite limited. I now understood, at least in part, why much of my experience of modern Christian praise had been somewhat negative. Much of the best material was being written in circles that did not overlap with mine.

Grace Publications

By this time, I had become one of the Joint Managing Editors of Grace Publications Trust, the publishing house of the Grace Baptist churches, which came into being partly to oversee the production of *Grace Hymns*. One of the projects before us was the idea of producing a supplement to *Grace*, which could perhaps also serve those

churches which used *Christian Hymns*. As we saw it at that time, many of the 'Grace' churches had already concluded that they wanted to be able to use a selection of modern material alongside their traditional hymnbooks. While some of the larger churches had the pool of expertise to produce their own supplements, most were too small to pursue such an approach. They had little option other than to purchase one of the collections such as *Mission Praise* or *Songs and Hymns of Fellowship*. In my view, *Mission Praise* has proved something of a Trojan horse. Although often purchased originally as a supplement to a more traditional collection, because it contained old and new material, it often became, by slow stages, the main hymnbook. The older book would only emerge from the cupboard when a dose of Gadsby was required. In consequence, the range of older hymns in use in some congregations was shrinking. Our thinking eventually crystallised. Perhaps the time had come to produce a new book altogether.

A new hymn book

We were to discover that a team chiefly connected with Hook Evangelical Church was already at work. Exploratory discussions between that team and representatives from Grace Publications followed and the PRAISE! project took off. I was not able to attend the first two or three meetings of the board that grew up to serve this project, but when I did I was both excited and nervous. I was excited because this new project seemed to offer the solution to a

problem that by now was a source of some concern. I no longer felt that *Christian Hymns* or its close cousin *Grace*, would meet the needs of a modern congregation. I had come to see that there was indeed modern material that would enhance the worship of Christian people and much of it was not in either of these two books. Equally, I did not want to run the risk of purchasing one of the alternative collections available because they contained the sort of ephemeral, flimsy material that I felt was repugnant. How could we be up to date and selective? PRAISE! seemed to offer the mouth-watering prospect of recovering the Psalms for our churches and offering a carefully screened selection of modern material. My sticking point was the revision of traditional hymns. It is not that I was opposed to this on principle. How could I be? John Wesley had revised Watts and the compilers of *Christian Hymns* had sometimes taken a careful pen to expunge the more belligerent of Charles Wesley's Arminianisms. I was just not confident that a policy of wholesale revision could be made to work.

A number of things brought me round. First, I came to see that the process of revision was light years away from being the cavalier treatment that I had feared. As I got to know the team, I grew to feel that I could trust them. It soon became clear that every proposed revision passed through several stages where close and careful scrutiny was welcomed. Each of the board members had time to examine each proposed revision in detail and to make extended

comments. No revision was passed for inclusion until all of the concerns expressed by each board member were discussed at a board meeting. It was an education to see the meticulous care taken by David Preston and Christopher Idle and a delight to observe the way that these two men could disagree with a consummate blend of intellectual rigour and scrupulous courtesy. Working as part of a committee has its own disciplines. Sometimes decisions go against you. At other times you are on the winning side. I was reassured when it became clear that the other team members could all lose with good grace. Certain revisions in the book are not entirely as I would wish, but that is true of everyone on the team. I, whose instincts were mostly conservative, sometimes had to recognise that I was in a minority. It helps enormously when you have had ample opportunity to watch your more radical colleagues also conceding an equal number of their preferred emphases in a brotherly spirit.

Tyndale's ploughboy

I had also been giving considerable thought at this time to the whole issue of contemporary language. Suppose an intelligent Martian had visited one of our churches in about 1970. 'Why', he might have asked, 'does everything that concerns the great God you worship have to take place in a language that you no longer use in everyday life? He has revealed himself to you in a book, but that book is not written in the language that you actually use but the language used by your ancestors. This same God allows you to communicate

directly with him but many of your people do not speak to him as they would to their friends. They address him in a form of your language that ceased to be current over a century ago. You love to sing his praises, but you sing to him in words that, in some cases, have fallen out of use.' Over the last three decades many fine evangelical believers have struggled to see that my fictitious alien from Mars might have a point. It took me some time, but the time came when I had to concede that I was called to preach the Word of God to England as it is rather than England as I would like it to be. For good or ill, the English of the AV is no longer the English of everyday speech. The modern equivalent to Tyndale's ploughboy should not have to cope with Tyndale's English. By the early 90s I had come to accept that I ought to use a translation other than the AV and that it was not irreverent to call God 'you' in prayer. 'Thou' is not inherently reverent; it is merely old. I know well enough that some like to make the point that in the north of England some still use 'thou' as a matter of routine. I grew up in a part of the world where that usage is still common. When I am back in County Durham I still refer to my children as 'bairns' but if I were preaching in Cornwall I would neither use the word nor stipulate that others should acquire it before we can communicate. It had become increasingly obvious that the number of people who can use AV English in their prayers with fluency is on the decline. What so often occurs is an ugly hybrid. While I did not want the older members of my congregation to

stop praying as they always had, nor did I want my younger friends to feel that unless they could learn to imitate them they would be unspiritual. And if we had begun to read from God's Word in a more contemporary version and pray in modern English, why sing as though we were 18th century people?

What kind of ethos?

Like it or not, when we assemble for worship we communicate an ethos. I have no wish to communicate an ethos that is flippant or trivial, but nor do I wish to give the impression that God and all that pertains to him belong firmly in the past. I have always enjoyed history. At Cambridge, studying the Reformers and Puritans saved my sanity as a Christian. I did not join the swelling ranks of the Charismatic scene because I was much more attracted by the rational, disciplined and intellectually rigorous piety of my Reformed ancestors. These were Christians that I could respect. I felt then and still feel now that the church that forgets its history will rapidly acquire a spiritual form of Alzheimer's disease. I am an enthusiastic supporter of the Westminster Conference and am asked to give historical lectures on a regular basis. In 1995 I was asked to give a paper in Manila on the uses and abuses of Church History. It made me reflect more deeply on what it means to learn the right lessons from the past. I concluded that while it is a sad mistake to ignore the past we are not called to live in it. Not far from my hometown there is a place called Beamish where

they have tried to recreate a 19th century coal mining village, with terraced cottages, an old drift mine, working trams and a trading store. As I looked at the beautiful 19th century Methodist Chapel, I thought, 'what a pity they don't have any 19th century Methodists to put in it.' I was wrong. Twenty-first century Methodists of 19th century calibre would have been more to the point. We don't need another Spurgeon but a 21st century preacher of Spurgeon's quality. For all that I respect my ancestors in the faith, I want to serve a church that will have an impact on the people of my own time rather than turn myself into the curator of a religious theme park.

Old paths in new shoes

A few months ago, I was asked to address a conference under the title, 'Old paths; new shoes.' I warmed to the title. When I was a young man one of my passions was mountaineering. The Victorian pioneers who developed the sport in the Alps and the English Lake District wore nailed boots. A few people still use them, but changes in boot technology since the Second World War make that an exotic if not antiquarian choice. I wanted to climb where George Mallory climbed but I didn't want to have to wear his boots. In the same way, I am pleased that I now have PRAISE! While it includes some things that I will never choose (every hymnbook ever compiled has its weaknesses) it does give me an opportunity to choose material that my brothers and sisters can sing in the spirit and with the understanding. What, at

the end of the day, could be more Reformed than the view that the worship of God should be both fervent and intelligent?

Contemporary but not trivial!

Some have greeted the arrival of PRAISE! with suspicion. To them, it represents yet another step in the process of 'dumbing down' the historic faith of our ancestors. If I thought that that were the case I would want nothing to do with it. Sadly, I fear that a few of my colleagues have acquired the habit of instant disapproval, with their personal radar finely tuned to detect the thin ends of wedges. A concerned brother told me recently that in his view, within ten years my church in Lancaster will be the sort of place where we spend the services with our hands in the air. Well, time will tell. Twelve years after my arrival, we still have four or five times of singing rather than one extended one, we still stand to sing and sit down to do everything else. The most important element in our services is the sermon. We are not a church that majors on music. I'm not convinced that they did in the book of Acts. But taking it all in the round, I am glad to have been part of the PRAISE! project. I want nothing more than to proclaim the old truths to today's people. I want my church to be contemporary without being worldly or trivial; serious, fervent and holy without being a museum piece. If PRAISE! helps me to walk the old paths in new shoes I will be more than grateful.

Recommended Books

Evangelicalism Divided

A Record of Crucial Change in the Years
1950 to 2000

Iain Murray, Banner of Truth 352 pages
£13.50

This book provides a clear description of two movements, evangelicalism and ecumenism. These have offered different paths to unity. New challenges are upon us. We are pressed to honour unity in Christ on one side and on the other must be faithful to the gospel. If we are to be lucid and biblical in our inter-church relationships we need to read this book. It beckons for a full review.

Preaching to the Glory of God

Sermons by K W H Howard (1921-1992)
192 pp bound. Obtainable from
The Christian Bookshop,
23 Queen's Street, OSSETT, WF5 8AS
£13.52 which includes postage

David Bugden who trained at Spurgeon's College at the same time as Kenneth Howard describes him as a fountain of knowledge. This volume begins with a 20 page outline of the life of K W H Howard who was an admirer and friend of Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones. Kenneth pastored churches at Olney, Liverpool, Berwick-on-Tweed, Bow in London, then Rugby, and finally his longest pastorate at Union Chapel Bethersden, Kent. The 23 sermons of this book are expository and eminently Christ-centred and edifying. In later life Kenneth ministered widely among Strict and Particular Baptists. A fine historian, robust in Calvinism he was a 'free offer' man.

Forerunner of the Great Awakening.

Sermons by Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747) edited by Joel R Beeke. Eerdmans, 339 pages, paperback. orders @heritagebooks.org or www.heritagebooks.org

This work begins with a fascinating account of the life and ministry of Freylinghuysen who occupies an important place in the history of the Christian Church in New England. He was a soul searching experimental preacher. He aimed especially at the conversion of those who possessed a head knowledge of the gospel but who fell short of true conversion. This incurred malicious persecution. For those under pressure in the ministry Freylinghuysen is a sterling example of perseverance. Of the 22 expositions, number 19, 'Duties of Watchmen on the Walls of Zion' (Ezek 3:17-19), is especially powerful.

Deny Yourself

Examples of Christian self-sacrifice to renew our minds and attitudes for victorious life in Christ. 42 page booklet free on request from Chapel Library 2603 W. Wright Street, Pensacola, FL 32505, USA chapel@mountzion.org www.mountzion.org

Edited by Steven Gallagher this stirring booklet consists of 21 accounts of Christian suffering. Goforth, John and Betty Stam, the Ten Boom family, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jim Elliot and Richard Wurmbrand are among those whose lives are described. This booklet is designed to remind us that this life is not a comfort zone. Self denial is required.

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