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Websites www.reformation-today.org

The editor's personal website is <http://www.errollhulse.com>

<http://africanpastorsconference.com>

Email address of Kees van Kralingen kees.vankralingen@online.nl



Conference Manager for APC.

Blake Cassell resides in South Africa, where he has begun his duties as the new Conference Manager of African Pastors' Conferences. Blake is a graduate (MA) of the Midwest Center for Theological Studies in Kentucky, where he is also pursuing an MDiv in Pastoral Theology. Blake has been sent out by Heritage Baptist Church in Owensboro, Kentucky, where he served as a co-teacher with noted theologian Sam Waldron. Blake and his wife Niki have one three-year-old son, Garrett.

Erroll Hulse reports that there are now 38 annual African Pastors' conferences, in 6 southern African countries.

Front cover picture. *Malagasan children reached by the community health team from the Good News Hospital in Mandritsara (See news item by David Mann).*

Editorial

Knowing the one, true, living God who has revealed himself in his Son and in Scripture

WE HAVE A GOD WHO IS ALIVE AND HE HAS revealed himself in his words and deeds, in creation and in his providential rule over the world. He has spoken and revealed himself to us, rebellious sinners. He could have rightly judged us, but instead he has spoken to us by his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our great Redeemer, in everything he has done to save sinners. We have this revelation in written form in the Bible which we rightly call the Word of God.

These great truths form the main theme of this issue of Reformation Today. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews summarises these truths in his great opening statement. He uses these truths to encourage his readers who were in danger of giving up the Christian faith. We all need to take to heart the same message in our lives and for our ministry. As we know these great truths from the Bible, the Word of God, it is therefore essential to maintain a clear grasp of the doctrine of Scripture. Mostyn Roberts has very kindly agreed to start a new series of articles for Reformation Today on doctrinal subjects following the common treatment in Systematic Theology books with the specific aim of addressing contemporary challenges to these doctrines.

Knowledge of these truths in a biblical

sense means that we also believe them, know them in our hearts, and have experienced their truth and hence love, obey and accept them. Having this faith knowledge is not only a privilege but also a great responsibility. This means we need to develop and nurture our faith, knowledge and our walk with God. John Benton most helpfully addresses this topic especially for pastors (but all believers will benefit from this). Tim Cantrell brings a similar message to all of us as Christians.

Deep knowledge of the great truths of the gospel will inevitably lead us to deep-felt active commitment to the progress of the gospel in this world. Our news section also helps to stimulate our interest and prayer for the cause of the gospel. Knowing the history of God's mighty works throughout the ages will also encourage us to know God better and to serve him more diligently. We are therefore grateful for the book review in this issue. The book on the history of revivals in South Africa by the well-known author Edwin Orr reminds us of the work of God in history. We are planning to write more about the topic of revival in coming issues of Reformation Today.

Kees van Kralingen

God has Spoken!

An exposition of Hebrews 1:1-4 by Kees van Kralingen

Introduction

The letter to the Hebrews was written to Christians who were mostly believers from a Jewish background. Although the Jewish people at large had rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah (Acts 4:27), still many thousands had come to believe in him (Acts 21:20). We are not sure where the addressees of this letter lived; depending on how one reads Hebrews 13:24 this could have been Italy or possibly the land of Israel itself. The time of writing of this letter is generally assumed to have been before the destruction of Jerusalem as the letter frequently refers to the Jewish sacrificial ceremonies without ever mentioning that they had come to an end in the year 70 AD. Although many people argue for the apostle Paul as the author, we cannot be sure as the text does not mention the name of the author. The author and his readers did know each other, however, and together they were acquainted with Timothy (Heb 13:23).

The reason for writing this letter is, however, very clear. The believers to whom this letter was written were in danger of giving up their faith because of various kinds of discouragements. In addition the letter indicates they were tempted to sin. The author refers to these problems in graphic terms, showing how serious these issues were (Heb 2:1; 3:12-14; etc.). These believers lacked growth in the Christian faith and had to be fed again with milk rather than solid food (Heb 5:11-14). Some had even given up on meeting together as Christians (Heb 10:25). Their arms and knees had become weak and feeble (Heb 12:12). As is clear from the response of the writer, they were thinking of returning to their previously held Jewish faith with all its ceremonies. This may have been because the Jewish faith was still a recognised and accepted religion in the Roman Empire in contrast to the Christian faith which was seen as at least strange if not dangerous.

The spiritual decline among these believers is surprising in view of their experience mentioned later in the letter. Although they had suffered insults, persecution, the confiscation of their property and even imprisonment, the believers had stood their ground (Heb 10:32-34).

How does the author respond to these issues in his letter? He uses a variety

of means to get them back on the right spiritual track. He gives them different warnings; some of them very stern and in the most frightening terms (Heb 2:1-4; 3:7-4:1; 6:4-8; 10:26-32; 12:12-17, 25-29). He also calls on them not to throw away their confidence but rather to persevere (Heb 10:35-36). The author makes this very practical with a range of specific instructions which often begin with the words 'let us...' (Heb 4:1, 11, 16; 6:1; 10:22-25; 12:1, 28; 13:13,15). In this way he identifies himself with these people. In some cases he expresses confidence that his readers will not fall away (Heb 6:9; 10:39). The main body of his letter is devoted to one extended argument not to return to the Jewish ceremonies because of the superiority of Jesus Christ and what he has accomplished. Christ has fulfilled all the Jewish ceremonies in bringing them to their ultimate conclusion and rendering them obsolete. This is the subject of the letter up to 10:18, followed by application and instruction from 10:19 to the end of the letter. In summary, the remedy is to remind themselves about Jesus Christ, or as the author says in chapter 12:2 'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.'

This letter has been, and still is, of great importance for all believers up to the present day. How easy it is to become discouraged for all sorts of reasons! The pressures of society in our time against the Christian faith may wear us out. The world without God seems to move on relatively happily; so, why should we press on living the Christian life? The state of the church with all its divisions and factions can make us wonder about its future survival. We may be tossed back and forth by the waves as the winds of strange teachings blow all around us (Eph 4:14). Looking at ourselves, we can become very discouraged by our own lack of spiritual progress or possibly decline when we suffer discouragements and/or are tempted by sin. Should we continue the fight of faith or give up? If these are our difficulties, the author of the letter has a wonderfully effective antidote: He presents us again with the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and what God has done through him for our salvation.

The author opens his letter immediately with one powerful and majestic sentence which we find in verses 1- 4. He presents to us the Son of God and thereby tells us to look at him; to consider his glory. He is the one by whom God has spoken in a very real and ultimate sense. With this great sentence so rich in content, the author deals out the first major blow to all our discouragement and temptations. The heart of this opening sentence is 'God has spoken to us by his Son.' This is the key point not only of this sentence, but of the whole letter and even of the Christian faith. So, let us study these verses.

1. God has spoken to us by his Son!

The author begins his opening sentence by assuming that God exists. This is not put up for discussion. He is the subject of the sentence: He is there and he spoke! This latter statement is far more remarkable than we tend to think. We read in Genesis that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And then God spoke: ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light (Genesis 1:3). God spoke even before we existed. Speaking is for us human beings a normal and essential aspect of our being. But do we realise that it is God who gave language and that he spoke first, even before we were created? God’s speaking involves even more than just uttering certain words; speaking means acting. When God said, ‘Let there be light,’ there was light! What God said, happened, came into being: God’s speaking is God’s acting.

This becomes even more significant when we continue our reading of verse 1. The author introduces how God spoke initially, in the past, in what we call the time of the Old Testament; but then contrasts this with how God spoke in these last days by his Son. Most commentators recognise four parallel contrasts in the words of the writer, relating to the eras (‘in the past’ versus ‘in these last days’), the recipients (‘our forefathers’ versus ‘us’), the agents (‘through the prophets’ versus ‘by his Son’), and the ways in which God has spoken (‘at many times and in various ways’, but now, ultimately by his Son; see further comment below). According to commentator Peter T O’Brien, however, these contrasts are not absolute: they draw attention to two stages of the divine revelation that correspond to the Old and New Testaments respectively¹. Additionally, there is the idea of development within—the latter being the climax of the former.

God’s speaking in Old Testament times was sporadic, partial, varied in means (such as an audible voice, a vision, a dream etc.), preliminary, and incomplete, but progressing all the time. For instance, Isaiah received more detailed information about the promised Messiah than Abraham in his lifetime. The climax of God’s speaking, however, occurred when God spoke by his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This event introduced what the writer calls ‘these last days’, and to which he later refers as the ‘end of the ages’ (Heb 9:26).

¹ Peter T O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Nottingham: IVP/Apollos, 2010), p. 47/8.

It is important to notice that the Greek text says that God spoke ‘in Son’. In other words there is no definite article. The phrase may be rendered as ‘one who is Son’,² which emphasises the exalted nature of the Son. This opens up who he is and everything he has done and is doing now. The Son and all he is and all he does is the climax of God’s speaking. Again, God’s speaking was also his acting: what he has done in Jesus Christ. He is therefore not just the next prophet following on from the last prophet in the time of the Old Testament, but he is the ultimate Prophet. He is not the final piece of the jigsaw, but he himself is the great content of the whole jigsaw! This also means that there can be no other, higher prophet or revelation after Jesus Christ! This denies the claims of Mormonism and Islam, for example. The Son, our Lord Jesus Christ is superior in every way because of his glory, the fullness of God’s speaking in him, and the objects of God’s speaking: us, Jews and Gentiles.

It was crucial for the addressees of the letter to understand this. They should not despise their Old Testament, but understand that God’s speaking and God’s revelation has climaxed in the Person of Jesus Christ. To realise that they have enjoyed this wonderful privilege of having been spoken to by God in this way and to be the recipients of God’s climactic revelation, should not only be a great encouragement, but a powerful stimulus to remain faithful, to persevere. There is no reason whatsoever to throw away their confidence. And we have this very same privilege as these first century Jewish believers: this should encourage us and give us every confidence and resolve to follow him and remain faithful to the end.

2. The Son is the person through whom God has created and sustains the universe

As the author of the letter has demonstrated the superiority of Christ as the means of God speaking to us, he now goes on to give a range of proofs for this superiority of the Son. As Stuart Olyott observes, he tells us seven things about the glory of Christ.³ The first four focus on Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The last three describe the glory of Christ as the perfect Redeemer.⁴ In this section, we will be looking at the first four statements.

² O’Brien, p. 50.

³ Stuart Olyott, *I Wish Someone Would Explain Hebrews To Me!* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), p.11.

⁴ In this way, the passage has some similarity to the famous Christ hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 where the supremacy of Christ as the Creator and as the Head of the Church is portrayed.

The Son: Heir of all things

The Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, has been appointed by God to be the heir of all things according to verse 2. In our everyday language, the heir only receives the heritage when the one who has appointed him as heir dies. Obviously, God cannot die. So, what this expression means is that everything belongs to Christ, or, in the words of Colossians 1:16 ‘All things were created *for him*.’ Stuart Olyott adds: ‘In particular, Christ is the crown, the climax, the consummation of history. The whole future belongs to him.’⁵

Through the Son he made the universe

The Son is also the one ‘through whom God made the universe’ as the text states. So, Christ is not only the end of creation, he is also the beginning. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last (Rev 1:8,17). Creation is specifically attributed to Christ in John 1:3 and Colossians 1:16. These truths about Christ being the Creator and also the heir of all things already provide a tremendous perspective on who it is that we believe in and serve and why we should have every reason to remain faithful to him!

The Son shows us God’s glory

The writer continues in verse 3 by saying that the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being. First of all, it is important to notice that the subject of the text has now changed to the Son. The word translated as ‘radiance’ here in the NIV can refer to a reflection or a source of light. In the context of Hebrews and other parts of Scripture, the latter sense is more appropriate.

The Greek term, translated as ‘exact representation’ in the NIV, was used originally of a mark or impression placed on an object, especially on coins, and came to signify a ‘representation’ or ‘reproduction’.⁶ The Son thus represents exactly God as he really is. These two complementary statements about the Son indicate who the Son really is as the Son of God in his fundamental and eternal relationship with God being the Second Person of the Trinity (see also Col 2:9). The Son is unique as the final revelation of God. The Son reveals who the Father is and this has a crucial salvation-historical significance.

⁵ Olyott, p.12.

⁶ O’Brien, p.55.

We read in John's Gospel that 'No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known' (John 1:18). As the Old Testament had already made clear, no sinful human being can see God and survive. Moses was not allowed to see God's face (Ex 33:19-20), but could only observe his back after God's glory had passed by (Ex 33:21-23). But now in God's grace, he has revealed himself in his Son and let us see something of his glory. Jesus' disciple Philip did not understand this and asked: 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus' mildly rebuking answer emphasises the unique privilege that the disciples had and should have realised. He says: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?' (John 14:8-10a). Philip and the other disciples have had a much greater privilege than Moses. This is also what the writer to the Hebrews is referring to in verse 3.

How does this help the readers of this letter and how is this going to help us? We have not seen Jesus here on earth. The answer enclosed in the words of verse 3 is that we have the reliable witness of Jesus as the Son of God who came to earth and we have the written record of his words, indeed the very words he spoke to Philip. We now have the Bible, the Word of God which he uses by his Holy Spirit to give us this saving knowledge of God's speaking and acting in Jesus Christ, his Son. Paul explains this in his great statement in 2 Corinthians 4:6 linking God's creative and redemptive acts: 'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' This is why and how countless numbers of people from all kinds of nations, cultures and social classes have come to recognise Jesus Christ as the Son of God and have believed in him. And this goes even deeper and becomes more marvellous as we are promised to share and participate in the glory of Christ (see e.g. Romans 8:17; Philippians 3:21; 2 Thessalonians 2:14 etc.).

The Son sustains all things

The writer goes on to attribute to the Son the sustaining of all things by his powerful word. These simple words represent a most stupendous claim: all things, encompassing the whole universe from the largest and most distant galaxy to the smallest sub-atomic particle is being sustained by the Son. And he does this by his powerful word. By the word of the Lord the

heavens were made (Ps 33:6) and by his word he also upholds everything and brings it to its appointed end. Paul expresses this as follows: ‘All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together’ (Col 1:16-17). This truth is an essential aspect of the faith that should help the readers to retain their confidence in the Lord.

All of these truths are a most powerful antidote to the discouragements to which both first-century and present-day believers are prone. Our God is in control of everything. He has created the universe and everything in it, sustains it, and will most certainly bring it to its ultimate goal.

3. The Son is the Redeemer of his people

The writer continues his one great sentence with three more crucially important declarations about the Son. This glorious person whom the apostle is describing is the Redeemer of believers!⁷ Although he does not give a complete description of the redemptive work of the Son, he does mention three key points:

The Son has provided purification for sins

‘Purification of sins’ indicates the full, complete and effective nature of this redemption. Purification means that the polluting, corrupting agent, sin and the guilt associated with it, has been removed. For this purpose the Son of God came to earth, was born as a baby in the most lowly circumstances and suffered in his life and especially towards the end in his death on the cross. He put away the sin of every believer of every age.⁸ The New Testament speaks about this in similar terms of cleansing, washing, etc. (see e.g. Eph 5:26; Titus 2:14; Heb 9:14; 1 John 1:9). He has done this specifically by shedding his blood on the cross of Calvary in his death; hence, it is the blood of Christ that purifies from sin (1 John 1:7; and numerous other texts; see Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; Acts 20:28; Rom 5:9; 1 Cor 11:25; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14, 20; Heb 9:12-14; 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2,19; Rev 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11). This purification through the sacrifice of the Son of God is truly effective. The writer of the letter comes back to this several times later in the letter where he emphasises this using the recurring phrase ‘once and for all’ (Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:2, 10; see also Rom 6:10). The writer will show later in his letter in great detail why this ‘once and for all’ sacrifice of Christ surpasses the sacrifices of the old covenant.

⁷Olyott, p.13.

⁸Olyott, p.13.

The Son is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven

With these words the author draws our attention to the next point. Because of the perfect sacrifice of Christ, he has now been given access to God in heaven (Heb 9:12) and the right to sit at the right hand of his Father in heaven. This is the place of supreme honour. Hebrews 1:13 is the fulfilment of Psalm 110:1 with further allusions to this in Hebrews 8:1; 10:12; 12:2. He is there now to intercede for his people (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34). The glory of Christ in his exultation (Eph 4:10; Phil 2:9) demonstrates the effective and victorious nature of the redemption and is another wonderful element to strengthen our faith.⁹

The Son is superior to the angels

The author finishes his sentence by explaining the superiority of Christ over the angels in heaven, indicated by the superiority of the name Christ has been given over that of angels (compare Phil 2:9-11). In view of the context and also verse 5 citing Psalm 2:7, the name referred to here is the name of Son. One may wonder why the author draws a contrast between the Son and the angels. The most likely explanation in the context of Hebrews 1 is the superior role of the Son in God's speaking and revealing himself. In the time of the Old Testament angels often served as messengers of God's revelation. The New Testament also states that the law had been mediated to Moses through angels (Acts 7:38-39; Gal 3:19), a notion shared by the author of this letter (Heb 2:2). The Son is, however, superior to these messengers because God's final and ultimate revelation has come through the Son as verse 2 has already stated. The superiority of the Son over the angels is further demonstrated by the author in chapter 1:5-14 using a range of citations from the Old Testament. Finally, it should be stated that Christ did not become the Son only from the moment of his exaltation, for verse 2 makes it clear that he was the Son already before creation.

⁹ Although the author here does not mention Christ's resurrection, he does mention this in 13:20.

Conclusion

The great opening sentence in verses 1-4 of this letter immediately presents to its readers the climax of God's speaking and acting in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ as the only really effective remedy against all our weakness in faith, our discouragements and temptations to sin. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our great Prophet, Priest and King. He is our great Prophet through whom God has spoken and revealed his plan of salvation. He is our perfect High Priest who has made the perfect sacrifice of his own body on the cross once and for all, and who now lives for ever at the right hand of God the Father to intercede for us. He is our great King who will rule us by his Word and Spirit and who will protect and keep us in the redemption he has won for us. How can we ever consider giving up our faith and trust in the Son of God, our great Lord Jesus Christ? How can we ever throw away our confidence in God's message to us in his Word, the gospel of truth? Let us finish by taking to heart the words towards the end of this letter (Heb 13:20-21): 'May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.'

African Pastors' Conferences in May/June

May: Swaziland (13-14), Kabokweni (16-17),
Komatiepoort (19-20), Barberton (22-23)

June: Zambia - Ndola (12-13) and Lusaka (16-17)
Kenya – Nairobi (10-11) and Eldoret (13-14)
Uganda – Kampala (17-18)

Enquiries to: Blake Cassell, urredeemed28@gmail.com
Phil Roberts (UK), phil@tentmaker.org.uk

The Bible: God's Word

By Mostyn Roberts

‘THE HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE ONLY SUFFICIENT, CERTAIN AND INFALLIBLE RULE OF ALL SAVING KNOWLEDGE, FAITH, AND OBEDIENCE.’

So reads the first sentence of paragraph 1, Article 1, ‘The Holy Scriptures’ of the Baptist Confession of Faith 1689. After that the Article is identical to Chapter 1 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The reality of general revelation is acknowledged but also its insufficiency for salvation, and the necessity of ‘special’ revelation committed to writing is asserted. The canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are listed in paragraph 2; in paragraph 3 it is denied that the Apocrypha is inspired; the important paragraph 4 (see below) affirms that the authority of Scripture depends wholly upon God as its Author.

Subsequent paragraphs assert: the ultimate necessity of the Holy Spirit to persuade us of Scripture’s infallibility and divine authority; that Scripture is sufficient and not to be added to; its perspicuity (that its main sense is clear to all God’s people); God’s providential protection of the text; the need for translations; and the principle of interpretation of Scripture by Scripture.

There is therefore a full doctrine of Scripture in our Confession which is of abiding relevance and if you are not familiar with it, a study of it is recommended.¹ In this article I want to deal firstly with one issue – the authority of Scripture – and then to help us identify some erroneous alternatives to the classic Reformed doctrine. The best way to be armed against error, however, is to be forearmed with the truth – and the Reformers and their successors still help us enormously here.

The Bible: Its Authority

Paragraph 4 of the Confession reads thus: ‘The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, depends not on the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God its Author (Who is Truth itself). Therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.’

¹ Using eg. Samuel Waldron’s *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Evangelical Press); or (as the two Confessions are very similar) GI Williamson’s *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (P&R).

This sounds circular: you believe the Bible is the Word of God because it is the Word of God. A little reflection, however, should satisfy us that this must be true. We are talking now about the right that Scripture has to demand absolute trust and obedience from us, the reason why it should be believed and obeyed. Such authority cannot be given by anything beneath it – such as my reason, which perhaps sees its divine quality, and says ‘Oh yes, that book is God’s Word.’ That means that *I* have seen it as God’s Word, and that is the result of a work of the Holy Spirit *in me*, but my testimony does not make it God’s Word. Nor does the assent of the church in this or any age. Anything that pretends to authorise the Bible is effectively putting itself on a plane higher than the Bible; reason or the church become more authoritative than the Bible. No, only God can authorise the Bible. It is his Word, and that is why it is authoritative whether people personally see it or not.

This means that as Professor John Murray said, ‘The doctrine of Scripture must be elicited from Scripture just as any other doctrine should be.’² When we ask the question, ‘Where does the authority of the Bible come from?’ we are in effect asking, ‘Why should I believe it and obey it?’ It is a matter of profound importance for our salvation and our Christian lives. If, however, its authority comes from God, the rational foundation for my accepting that authority comes, as with any doctrine, from the Word itself. This means that *my acceptance* of the doctrine of Scripture is ultimately a matter of faith and a work of the Holy Spirit in my heart.

Let us look therefore at Scripture to see what the doctrine of Scripture is.

The Bible on the Bible

2 Timothy 3:16

We can be thankful that most modern translations of the Bible now translate the Greek word *theopneustos* ‘God-breathed’ (NIV) or ‘breathed out by God’ (ESV) and not ‘inspired’. The Bible is not ‘breathed into’ by God, nor were the human authors ‘inspired’ as the human author of a stimulating novel or a beautiful poem might be so described, but it was ‘breathed out’ by him. The Bible derives its authority from its origin in God. Psalm 33:6 speaks of creation in this way: ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.’ Scripture, like creation, is a product of the divine mind expressed in divine speech.

2 Peter 1:19-21

Peter is assuring his readers that what they know of Christ does not rest on ‘cleverly devised myths’. They have indeed the testimony of eyewitnesses of

² *The Infallible Word* (P&R, 1978), p. 9.

the Lord's glory. Even more sure, they have the prophetic word,³ and Peter goes on to assure us that every prophecy of Scripture was produced not by man but 'men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (v 21). 'Speaking thus under the determining influence of the Holy Spirit,' says Warfield, 'the things they spoke were not from themselves, but from God.'⁴

John 10:34,35

Jesus is defending himself against the Pharisees' charge of blasphemy for 'making himself God'. 'Is it not written in your law', he asks, '“I said, you are gods”?' If he calls them "gods" to whom the word of God came – and Scripture cannot be broken – Why do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming" because I said, "I am the Son of God"?' The argument of Jesus for his self-designation need not detain us, but note the *presupposition* he holds with regard to Scripture – even a relatively small and 'insignificant' part of it (Psalm 82:6): it cannot be broken. Christ here ascribes legal authority ('your law') to the whole of Scripture. Again to quote Warfield, 'This means of course that in the Saviour's view the indefectible [incapable of defect] authority of Scripture attaches to the very form of expression of its most casual clauses. It belongs to Scripture through and through, down to its most minute particulars...'⁵

Implications of the Bible's doctrine of the Bible

Firstly, we are here talking about what is usually called the doctrine of the *inspiration* of Scripture. It would be better to call it the 'spiration' or 'ex-spiration' of Scripture but we are probably stuck with 'inspiration'. It is the process whereby God uses men to cause to have written down in human words exactly what he wants us to have. We can say, because of inspiration, that what the Bible says, God says.

Secondly, as Timothy Ward says, 'Inerrancy is no more than a natural *implication* of inspiration.'⁶ If God is the author of Scripture then what it says is true. God is a God who does not lie, in whom there is no darkness and who does not mislead or deceive. Nor should we be embarrassed about asserting of Scripture either inerrancy (that the Bible is without error) or infallibility (that

³ This is sometimes translated e.g. by the NIV to suggest that the prophetic word is made more sure by the event of the Transfiguration, but the ESV translation (as here) reflects that favoured by e.g. BB Warfield, and seems to fit the sense of the passage. However the meaning of verse 21 is not affected by this diversity of translation.

⁴ Article 'Inspiration' in *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. 3, p. 1475.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 1476.

⁶ *Words of Life* (IVP, 2009) p. 137, his italics. Ward usefully discusses the importance of inerrancy in the context of the authority of Scripture.

the Bible always accomplishes its purpose), which older writers always took to assume inerrancy anyway.

Thirdly, the fact that ‘the Scriptures are throughout a Divine book, created by Divine energy and speaking in every part with Divine authority directly to the heart of the readers’ and that ‘the whole of Scripture in all its parts and in all its elements as well as in substance of teaching, is from God’ does not detract from the fact that also ‘the whole of it has been given by God through the instrumentality of men’.⁷ Men ‘spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit’ (2 Pet 1:21), rather like a ship borne along by the wind. Some critics of the doctrine of inerrancy have used the ‘human element’ in Scripture to explain how, in their view, there could be errors in the Bible. The sun of God’s revelation shines, they say, but it is coloured and tainted by the stained glass of the human personality, which of course includes the potential to make mistakes, so that the light we receive through them is not pure. But, says Warfield, what if that stained glass has been manufactured, selected and designed by God to provide exactly the tints and colours he wants, so that the resulting whole is exactly what he intended, and that the result has been supernaturally superintended so that no errors result? Warfield brings into play a strong doctrine of providence in God’s preparation of the authors, but also makes clear that inspiration is more than just providence. By what we call ‘inspiration’ the Spirit of God works alongside (‘confluently’ or ‘concurrently’ with) the providentially determined working of an author, to give the writing a divine, error free, quality, otherwise unattainable. Moreover, this Word speaks to the heart of each reader, so that we do not have to make our way to the Word of God painfully and uncertainly through the words of his servants, but can listen to the voice of God himself immediately. Scripture is not only Truth, God’s explanation of reality; it is a covenantal love letter from God to his people.

An illustration some people use is that of the incarnation. How useful is this? The Bible is a divine-human book, and two aspects of the Bible may be illuminated by the analogy: first, that the divine can govern the human without destroying its integrity and freedom; second, that something within creation can be human and yet flawless but only because of the direct intervention of God. However that is about as far as we can take this analogy. By ‘inspiration’ human forces work under the superintendence of God to produce an end result which is divine and human; there is no ‘hypostatic union’ between the elements, no divine Person in which the two elements inhere. In the incarnation of Christ, the person of the Son of God unites in himself divine and

⁷ Warfield, p. 1479. This, says Warfield (of the whole quote), is the doctrine of Christ and the apostles.

human natures. This is a very different thing from a divine-human ‘product’.

Fourthly, it will be clear from John 10:34,35 that Jesus held that all of Scripture was God’s Word – unbreakable in even its forms of expression and in its less prominent parts. It is the testimony of Christians that part of their worship of Christ is to take the view of Scripture that he did. Not only does Scripture give us a high view of Christ, and we would know nothing of Christ as Lord and Saviour without Scripture, but Christ gives us a high view of Scripture and our best reason for receiving it as God ‘s Word. So we need to say more about Jesus and Scripture.

Jesus and the Bible

From the point of view of Christian worship and obedience, the high honour in which Christ held the Bible is immensely fruitful. It is also, however, probably the best place to begin in apologetics – trying to persuade others of the veracity and reliability of the Bible. Many who will have no time for arguments from philosophy, archaeology or history may listen to you if you show what Jesus, for whom some residual respect may linger, thought of the Bible.⁸ You could show in many ways that for Jesus what the Bible said, God said. For example,

1. It was the ultimate authority, as in his temptations – ‘It is written...’ was final (Matt 4:1-11). See also his debates with scribes and Pharisees – Matt 19:3-9; 22:29-31, 27-40; 23:23; Mk 7:9,10.

2. He accepted without question Old Testament history – Abel (Lk 11:51); Noah (Matt 24:37f); Abraham (Jn 8:56); the institution of circumcision (Jn 7:22); Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt 10:15); Lot (Lk 17:28-32); Isaac and Jacob (Matt 8:11); manna (Jn 6:31); David (Matt 12:3,4; 22:43); Solomon (Matt 6:29); Moses (Matt 8:4; 19:8; Mk 1:44; 7:10); Jonah (Matt. 12:40). He set his stamp on passages from both Genesis 1 and 2 (Matt. 19:4,5; Mk 10:6-8). Indeed if Jesus had wanted to authorise parts of the Old Testament which are most under critical attack, he could hardly have done more.

3. Scripture must be fulfilled – Lk 4:21; Matt 11:10; Mk 9:12,13; Lk 24:25-27, 44-47; Jn 5:39, 45-47; 13:18.

4. The phrase ‘God says’ and ‘Scripture says’ are equivalent for Jesus. Matthew 19:4,5 quotes a statement (from Gen 2:24) written by Moses but it is attributed to God by Jesus.

5. He taught his disciples to find him in the Old Testament and base their preaching on that – Lk 24:27, 44-47.

⁸ A helpful book here is *Christ and the Bible* by John Wenham, especially the first three chapters.

Many similar examples could be cited.

A fuller case for the doctrine of inspiration could include

(a) The witness of the Gospel writers and apostles – Matt 3:3; Lk 24:44f; Jn 19:24; 1 Cor 15:3,4. Note how Paul personalises Scripture in Rom 9:17, ‘The Scripture said to Pharaoh...’ for what God actually said. Cf Gal 3:8.

(b) The Old Testament’s witness to itself – e.g. prophets claiming to write the Word of God (Jer 36:2,32) and regarding the law of Moses as God’s Word (Isa 58:13,14).

(c) The Old Testament’s witness to the New Testament – the ‘prophet’ of Deut 18:15,18, who is Christ (Acts 3:22,23) is surely a promise of a future revelation of God’s Word from and accompanying that prophet.

(d) The New Testament’s witness to the Old Testament – see point (a) above, and numerous references to the Old Testament in the New – eg Matt 1:23, 2:6,18; Jn 19:28, 36,37. The UBS Greek New Testament lists over 300 quotations from the Old Testament in the New (1985 edition, pp 897-98).

(e) The New Testament’s witness to itself: (i) Christ’s promise to send the Holy Spirit to lead the disciples into all truth – Jn 14:26; 15:26,27; 6:13. (ii) The very fact of a new revelation from God in the person of his Son, leads one to expect a new written revelation to accompany it. The coming of the Prophet (Deut 18:15) would make little sense without a ‘word’. (iii) The flow of redemptive history requires that if the era of promise had a word of revelation, so would the era of fulfilment. (iv) The New Testament authors show a sense of God-given authority – 2 Cor 13:10; Gal 1:8; 1 Thess 4:8; 2 Thess 3:4; 2 Jn 10; Rev 22:18. (v) Peter recognises Paul’s writings as equivalent to ‘other scriptures’ (2 Pet 3:15,16). (vi) Old and New Testament are quoted together as scripture (1 Tim 5:18).

(f) In the early church, says John Wenham, four things characterised the period in relation to Scripture: (i) For Christians the words of the Lord possessed unconditional authority; (ii) They assume that the Lord’s and apostles’ doctrine is the only norm of Christian belief; (iii) Considerable knowledge of apostolic writings is shown and there is at least one instance of a quotation from Scripture introduced by ‘It is written...’ (in Barnabas 4:14); and (iv) Although there is no *formal* establishment of a canon, by AD 170 at the latest the concept of a New Testament Scripture is firmly established and the main contents undisputed. Complete unanimity on all the books would take longer. Warfield however is careful to remind us that the canon was complete as soon as the last New Testament book was written. The quality of inspiration, not the imprimatur of the church, creates the canon. The Church’s task is not to create anything, but only to recognise the books God has caused

to be inspired. This process of recognition happened remarkably quickly. ‘The church did not gradually form the canon by coming eventually to decide which books to include in it and then rendering official judgements accordingly. Apostolic authority was recognised from the beginning. The New Testament canon was “imposed on the Church by its founders, not evolved by the Church in the course of its controversies”’.⁹

Warfield elsewhere¹⁰ summarises the argument for inspiration by saying that it is like an avalanche. Whereas one might be able to dodge a stone or two rolling down a mountain, it is much harder to avoid an avalanche. The biblical evidence for its divine origin is not a stone or two here and there; it is a mass of evidence which cannot be avoided without explaining away the whole Bible. What we have in the Bible is a doctrine of plenary (every part of it) verbal (the words not just the ideas) inspiration.

Nevertheless, many have sought to explain away the avalanche. What arguments are used?

Some sub-biblical theories of the Bible’s inspiration

We all know there are difficulties in the Bible, apparent errors and alleged discrepancies which cast doubt on the doctrine of inerrancy. Many books deal well with these.¹¹ There are those however who want to maintain some version of inspiration without inerrancy (i.e. a Bible that is still God’s Word though it contains errors) or in some other way to have less than a full doctrine of inspiration. Some of the alternatives are:

1. The Bible contains the Word of God – i.e. the Bible is partly, and partly not, the Word of God. The Word of God has to be found in it. This is typical of older style ‘modernists’ or ‘liberals’. The problem is – I am left to decide what God’s Word is.
2. A similar position is that the Bible is inspired in part e.g. you can believe it on spiritual things but not on historical or scientific. But if it is not trustworthy on history why should I trust it on spiritual and eternal matters?
3. The Bible’s ideas are inspired but not its words - conceptual inspiration but not verbal inspiration. But how can you separate words and ideas? What is a wordless idea? How do I know what the ideas are if I cannot trust the words?
4. Karl Barth was fond of saying that God’s Word comes to us in a flawed container and that is part of its wonder. Almost the more flawed the more wonderful! We believe its spiritual message all the more readily because

⁹ *In The Theology of B.B. Warfield*, Fred Zaspel (IVP, Apollos, 2010) p. 147.

¹⁰ *Revelation and Inspiration* (Works vol. 1) pp. 65-6.

¹¹ E.g. Brian Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth* (Evangelical Press, 1993).

God has humbled himself to using human authors who keep getting the facts wrong. 'If God was not ashamed of the fallibility of all the human words of the Bible, of their historical and scientific inaccuracies, their theological contradictions, the uncertainty of their tradition and, above all, their Judaism, but adopted and made use of these expressions in all their fallibility, we do not need to be ashamed when he wills to renew it to us in all its fallibility as witness...'¹² So God adopts a flawed vessel and uses it. The problem with this is – here is a very different Bible from that which Jesus believed where Adam and Jonah and Noah are very real people and every word and syllable of the text was God's Word.

5. From Barth also comes the existentialist idea of God's Word encountering us through Scripture and Scripture becoming God's Word. Problem? Of course the Word of God 'becomes' his Word for us in a personal way when the Spirit takes it and applies it to us, but it is also God's Word whether it affects us or not.

6. Then there is the idea (associated with Barth again) of the Bible being a witness or response to revelation but not itself being revelation. What we have is not God speaking to us but the fallible record of what human beings thought God said and did by way of revealing himself – a very different thing.

Finally we come to some more recent writings by men who would profess to be evangelicals but whose doctrine of Scripture I suggest is not that of the historic church.

(a) *Scripture and the Authority of God* [called *The Last Word* in its US edition] (Harper, 2005).¹³ In this work NT Wright examines the Bible's authority. His basic thesis, in what is at times a helpful and thought-provoking book, is that the Bible's authority is 'the authority of God exercised through the scripture' (p 25 etc). But there are problems with this. His definition of authority (e.g. pp 29,33) suggests that it is a question of God's power at work. He does not like the idea of speech itself being authoritative. So the danger is that Scripture loses its inherent (albeit derived) authority and becomes authoritative only when God does something with the Bible. So it gets a bit like Barth - the Bible is not God's Word but becomes an authoritative act of God when God does something. But what is it when he does not 'do anything'? Is it not God's Word then, equally? It is a dangerous detraction from the majesty inherent in Scripture.

¹² *Church Dogmatics* (T&T Clark, 1956) vol. 1.2, p. 531, cited in Robert J. Sheehan, *The Word of Truth* (Evangelical Press, 1998) p. 162.

¹³ For a not dissimilar approach see Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Westminster, 2001).

(b) *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Baker, 2005).¹⁴ The author Peter Enns, formerly a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, is troubled by trying to harmonise the Bible with the fact that a lot of it seems to be similar to Ancient Near East (ANE) stories and history. He is also troubled by the ‘theological diversity’ within the OT i.e. its inner contradictions as he sees it. He proposes a solution to help us –the *incarnational analogy*. That is, we are to see Scripture as something like the two natures of Christ, human and divine. It is the humanness that interests Enns. The humanness of Scripture, he says, is what enables us to understand how it takes on the cultures and conventions of its age, and so we should not expect it to conform to our ideas of truth and error, right and wrong, etc. He applies this to among other things the creation account in relation to other ANE accounts, ANE cultural norms in the OT and the difference of theology between the biblical books, seeing them as not something to be harmonised but as a positive exhibition of Scripture’s humanness.

The only trouble is - Christ’s humanness did not mean he was limited to or immersed in one culture, certainly not to the extent that he made mistakes or embraced wrong or sinful ideas. He was perfectly capable of challenging culture when he wanted to. The ‘incarnation’ analogy breaks down. We are left with a sub-biblical theology of Scripture.

(c) *The Divine Spiration of Scripture* (IVP Apollos, 2007) by ATB McGowan, formerly principal of Highland Theological Seminary. ‘Spiration’ is his preferred translation of the word in 2 Tim 3:16 that we could translate ‘God-breathed’. Dr McGowan’s thesis is that it is not credible to maintain a theory of inerrancy so we should use the word infallibility. What we then do is recognise that God used men who are fallible and why not accept that he could have used their errors as well? So he argues not only that there may be errors in the copies of our texts but in the original autographs too. The big problem of course is, how do we know when Scripture gets it right? We may think we can detect some obvious errors, though we could be wrong on that too, but how do we know the whole thing is not some big mistake? An even bigger problem is that a God who is Truth, whose every word is pure, who cannot lie, is said to be putting errors and mistakes into his immediately inspired writings. It drives a coach and horses through the doctrine of inspiration. It seems to be very close to Barthianism. It calls our doctrine of God into question.

So debates about Scripture are alive and well. It is not a merely academic debate. These things get into the churches. You must know what you believe.

Mostyn Roberts is the pastor of Welwyn Evangelical Church.

¹⁴ For a thorough and critical interaction with this book, see Greg K. Beale *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Crossway, 2008).

How well do Pastors Know God?

by John Benton

IDON'T CLAIM TO HAVE ACHIEVED MUCH, BUT THIS IS A SUBJECT THAT HAS EXERCISED ME OVER YEARS.

And it was particularly impressed upon me last Autumn. I was out in our town helping with some of our church's street evangelism. I don't want you to get the wrong idea. I'm not great at this and I don't often do it. But as we were there on the High Street giving out invitations to a gospel talk a man stopped. 'The trouble with you Christians,' he said, 'is you are so shallow. You trot out this trite gospel. But there's no depth about your prayers – no sense of the divine about you.' He went on to talk about being a Buddhist and spending time in meditation. Well, I think his religion is wrong. But did he have a point?

Let me follow that up with some words from Kevin De Young: 'We would be far less likely to lose our young people and far more likely to win some others if the spiritual temperature of our churches was something other than lukewarm. People need to see that God is the all-consuming reality in our lives. Our sincerity and earnestness in worship matter ten times more than the style we display.'

'We need passion, a zeal fuelled by knowledge. Young people want to see that our faith actually matters to us. They are like Benjamin Franklin when asked why he was going to hear George Whitefield preach. "You don't even believe what he says," people told Franklin. To which he replied, "I know. But he does." If our evangelical faith is boring to us, it will be boring to others. If the gospel is old news to you, it will be dull news to everyone else.'

'We cannot pass on what we do not feel. Whitefield blasted the church of his day because "the generality of preachers talk of an unknown and unfelt Christ. The reason why congregations have been so dead is because they have dead men to preach to them." People don't need a lecture or an oration or a discussion on Sunday morning. They need to hear the mighty deeds of God. And they need to hear the message from someone who not only understands it but has been captured by it.' (This is a quote from *Don't call it a Comeback* published by Crossway).

It is the same point as is made by Dr. Lloyd-Jones when he says 'Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.'

All this prompts us to ask the question, 'How well do pastors know God?' There has been a tendency in recent decades to make us into academics rather

than men of God. There should not be a tension between those two things, but I suspect we have become those who spend hours and hours with books, and hardly an hour in prayer and devotion. And so the fire goes out. Intimacy with God should serve as the foundation for every aspect of our lives, but especially it should be the foundation and mainspring of our ministry to others.

A charismatic leader from years gone by in our town was David Pawson. He used to say: 'A man with an experience (of God) will always beat a man who simply has an argument.' That statement requires some finessing, but there's truth in it. So, 'How well do pastors know God?' I have three headings.

A background to intimacy with God

First, let's get a Bible overview, a rough biblical theology of knowing God, of intimacy with God, of God's dwelling with human beings and men knowing his presence. We will leaf through Scripture in seven swift steps with an eye on the temple motif.

1. Adam and Eve dwell in God's 'temple' of the Garden of Eden

- They are made in God's image, God spoke to them and they knew him, (Gen 1:26, 27; Gen 2:7; Gen 3:8).
- But when they fell into sin they were banished from the Garden and God's glorious presence (3:23), but with a promise of restoration (3:15; 21).

2. Abraham and the Patriarchs know God through his visits

- Though men may not visit God, yet graciously he visits them. Sovereignly God comes to Abraham and promises that through him all nations will be blessed (Gen 12:3). The LORD appeared to Abraham saying... (Gen 15:1).
- The patriarchal period is characterised by God's visiting various people, Jacob at Bethel in a dream, again at Peniel more substantially, but although the patriarchs build altars in various places there is no permanent dwelling place of God.

3. Moses and the tabernacle

- After the exodus God enters into a covenant with Israel and tells Moses to build the tabernacle (Ex 40:1), God's dwelling place, his sanctuary among his people.
- Though Moses knows the LORD 'face to face' (Ex 33:11) exemplifying intimacy with God and the tabernacle is a permanent dwelling place, nevertheless access to God's presence is only occasional and restricted to the high priest on behalf of the people.

4. Solomon and the temple

- Restricted access remains yet God's dwelling place, now in the Promised Land, is made a more permanent temple under Solomon (1 Kings 6:1). God's glory fills it (1 Kings 8:10).
- In the courts of the Lord the joy of the Lord's presence is known and enjoyed. In the temple (Ps 27:4) the Psalmist longs to gaze upon his beauty; the living God is there (Ps 84:1-4).
- But through idolatry and the sin of the nation the presence of the Lord departs from the temple (Ez 10:18) and the Babylonians destroy it.
- Though the temple is rebuilt under Haggai and Zechariah there is no record of the glory of the Lord returning, for the Lord through Jeremiah has promised a new covenant in which all his people will know him personally (Jer 31:31-34).

5. Jesus and the incarnation

- In the Lord Jesus the Lord himself comes to his temple. God is seen on earth, for anyone who has seen the Lord Jesus has seen the Father (Jn 14:9).
- John is one of those who is able to say, 'We have seen his glory.' (Jn 1:14) Intimacy between God and man is being re-established in the most astonishing way as God becomes man in Christ.

6. Jesus and the Spirit

- When Jesus is crucified as the atonement for our sins, the veil of the temple is torn down (Mk 15:38).
- At Pentecost the Spirit of God comes to fill his new temple. The Church and the bodies of believers provide that new temple. God the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) in new covenant reality.
- We know God in reality as we are born again through the Word of God and filled with God's Spirit. We are brought near (Eph 2:13).
- But our present experience of God is that of 'already but not yet' and will be transformed when Christ returns, 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face,' (1 Cor 13:12).

7. Heaven and the *Parousia*

- Believers who die in Christ in this time go to be with Christ 'which is better by far' (Phil 1:23).

- Of the new heavens and new earth which Jesus brings we are told, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will be with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.’ (Rev 21:3) Here we know him ‘face to face’.

To know God is the essence of salvation (Jn 17:3) and we have scanned this thumbnail sketch of knowing God through biblical history.

But with that 1 Corinthians 13 reference in mind we need to locate ourselves on that time-line and recognise that our present knowledge of the Lord is partial. We do know him but do not yet know him ‘face to face’. We are not yet ‘with Christ’ as are those who die in the Lord and go to that state which is ‘better by far’. So when our Buddhist friend challenges us and we ask about how well pastors know God we must accept limitations. We must not pretend to claims which are unbalanced. And yet, of course, there ought to be a power about us, a sense of God’s presence with us.

It is perhaps worth highlighting at this point some components of knowing God.

Knowing God does include an informative element. We know about him. We value the truth about God which comes to us through Scripture. There is no true knowledge of someone unless we know about them.

Knowing God also includes a cognitive element. We know him, not just know about him. In the words of Whitefield, we should have a relationship with Christ we can ‘feel’. It is partial, but real. We are able, through the work of the Spirit, to contemplate the Lord’s glory (2 Cor 3.18).

Knowing God also includes a transformative element. Going along with that contemplating of the Lord’s glory, inevitably there is a ‘being transformed into his likeness’. Paul wants to know him and to become like him (Phil 3:10). Without that transformative element we have not really ‘seen him’ (1 Jn 2:4).

How well do pastors know God? Our people need pastors who know God. They need men who are ‘men of God’.

A promise of intimacy with God

In that new covenant context of ‘knowing God’ then let’s look at one of Christ’s promises concerning intimacy with God: intimacy with himself.

Jesus promises, ‘Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him’ (Jn 14:21).

There are arguments for the phrase ‘show myself to him’ in this verse as referring to resurrection appearances of Jesus to the disciples. I don’t dispute

that these may possibly be included here, but it seems to me that what Jesus refers to here must include more. But I do not think that the resurrection is the primary reference. Why?

First, the fact that his manifestation is linked to obedience in this verse. The disciples can hardly be spoken of as being in an 'obedient' condition when it came to resurrection appearances. They were actually in a shambles.

Second, v21 is very much in the context of the sending of the Spirit v16. The Spirit is 'another Comforter' like Jesus, and will be 'alongside' them – *parakletos*, lives with them, v17 and will be in them.

Third, v21 is linked both by proximity and the flow of the conversation to the indwelling of the Father and the Son in v23.

Fourth, it seems Jesus is speaking of more than resurrection appearances because v21 and v23 are in terms of 'whoever' and 'anyone' and so would seem to have a wider reference than to just the apostles. So I take this as speaking of Whitefield's 'felt Christ'.

Now this gives us the vital key to intimacy with Christ – and of course this is nothing new to us. We see in v21 love, showing [himself] and obedience tied thoroughly together. And that leads us to the straightforward challenge that knowledge of God comes through obedience.

Notice, that intimacy with God does not come primarily through prayer (though of course I do not want to dismiss the importance of prayer) but obedience. There is the challenge.

Let's just clarify. Don Carson says in his Pillar Commentary on John, 'The idea is not that the believer initiates this relation of love by demonstrating obedience, and that Jesus and his Father simply respond. After all, the Fourth Gospel repeatedly makes it clear that the initiative in the relationship between Jesus and his followers finally lies with Jesus (6:70; 15:16) or with his Father (6:37; 10:29). The idea, rather, is that the ongoing relationship between Jesus and his disciples is characterised by obedience on their part, and thus is logically conditioned by it. They love and obey Jesus, and he loves them, in exactly the same way that he loves and obeys the Father, and the Father loves him. Moreover, as the Father in function of his love for the Son shows him all things (3:35; 5:20), so the Son in function of his love for his disciples says, 'I will ...show myself' to them. The groundwork is being laid for the 'oneness' between Jesus and his disciples that mirrors the oneness between Jesus and his heavenly Father, a theme developed in John 17.' (page 503).

So it's not that obedience merits Christ's showing himself; it is of grace – but a relationship with God necessarily involves obedience, because he is God.

The way I like to sum up the challenge of v21 is like this: Information is

turned to intimacy through loving obedience. There's the challenge to us. Information (Jesus commands) is turned to intimacy ('I will show myself') as we obey Christ out of love for him. That's the great promise of closeness to the Lord. And of course, this is just one NT expression of one of the great themes of Scripture 'Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.' (James 4:8). And it is as God draws near that we know reality, depth in our faith and fire in preaching.

Let's face nine practical questions to encourage and challenge us.

- Do you long for intimacy with God? (Ps 42:1). A good appetite is usually a sign of a healthy person. Do we love Christ? Do we thirst, have an appetite for God?
- How would you describe your relationship with God? If a non-Christian, like my Buddhist acquaintance, asked you to commend your experience of God what could you say?
- Do you believe, in the light of the gospel, that God wants to know you and to be known by you? Does that prospect excite you? Is your perception of God who loves you or merely tolerates you?
- Do you recognise besetting sins in your life? If intimacy with God is dependent on obedience what are you doing to address those besetting sins? Or have you just made peace with the idols that feed those sins?
- If 'the expulsive power of a new affection' (Thomas Chalmers) describes the biblical pattern of sanctification, how much does lack of knowing God and therefore more deeply loving God make you vulnerable to sin?
- Do we preach the gospel to ourselves when our spiritual life is flat, in order to stir up again our love for Christ? Or do we just soldier on grimly?
- How would you describe your obedience to Christ? Do you read the Bible to get a sermon or to find out how to be obedient and put it into practice? Preachers are vulnerable to being the foolish builders in Jesus' parable who hear but do not do his word.
- If obedience is the key to intimacy, how far are we willing to change our lives that we might know God better? How far for our own good and the good of our people?
- Do you realise it is possible for you to be a great preacher, because through intimacy with Christ you can preach from a heart filled with Christ? In Whitefield's words, 'What comes from the heart will go to the heart.'

A test of intimacy with God

Let's flip over now to 2 Timothy 3. Here we have Paul's counsel to Timothy concerning ministry amid the 'terrible times' of the last days. We believe 'the last days' includes the whole period between Christ's first and second comings, and it certainly describes the situation for ministry in the modern West.

Verses 1-5 give a vivid picture of the last days. They begin seemingly by talking about society at large; (v2a people will be lovers of themselves), but end by apparently describing the false church, where people are 'lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God' v5a. One runs into the other - it is difficult to make a distinction. The frightening thing is that it seems therefore possible to be a Bible teacher and yet be proud, ungrateful, unholy, unforgiving etc.

Notice first, the dominant characteristic of both society and the false church is lack of proper love, in particular lack of love for God, v3a, v3c, v4c. This is what we've just been talking about.

Notice second, as Paul goes on to describe false teachers, he likens the false teachers to Jannes and Jambres the opponents of Moses in Pharaoh's court, and the implication seems to be therefore that the true gospel minister in some way parallels Moses, the 'man of God'. Moses was the man who was intimate with God. And it seems meaningful that Paul uses that 'man of God' description at the end, 3:17. How can we possibly compare to Moses? Scripture is the great resource, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (vv16,17). But it goes without saying that Paul has in mind here not just a knowledge of Scripture, but an obedience to it as the Word of God.

In contrast to 'last days' society and the false church we are to love God, and to know God, to be 'men of God'. But what does that look like? What's the test? What's the litmus indicator of what kind of men we are? The turning point of the chapter is v10. Paul directs Timothy to himself.

In contrast to all the superficial, godless, false, destructive lifestyles you see around you, 'You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings...' (v10, 11a).

'If you have a real love for God, and truly know God, you will look like me,' says Paul. If you want to shape up as a man of God then follow my example, says Paul.

That phrase 'know all about' at the beginning of v10 is rather under-translated in the NIV. It is better rendered 'closely followed' or 'fully investigated'. It's

the same word that is used by Luke in Luke 1:3 to describe his research into the history of the Lord Jesus. It can also be thought of not just as 'closely followed' but 'steeped myself in'. It is like a tea bag immersed! So if you would be a man of God, a man who truly knows God in the last days, closely follow, steep yourself in Paul.

He sets before us a 9-fold description (rather like the 9-fold fruit of the Spirit) in those verses 10 and 11. But these are the marks of a godly minister a pastor who truly knows God.

These 9 characteristics can be grouped in three sets of three.

The Ministry of the Gospel – teaching, way of life, purpose.

First there is Paul's teaching. It is the 'whole counsel of God', all Scripture. But it is not just what we teach but how we teach. I came across this quotation from the autobiography of an ex-slave named Gustavus Vassa, who attended one of Whitefield's services. Vassa states how he viewed Whitefield as a pious man but that Whitefield preached with 'earnestness, and sweating as much as I ever did while in slavery. I was much struck and impressed with this; I thought it strange I had never seen divines exert themselves in this manner.' I think Paul too would have been an earnest teacher.

But notice the ministry is not just teaching. There is a radical wholeness, a unity about all of a 'man of God's' life. His ministry is teaching, way of life and purpose – a whole package. He teaches God's Word but he lives it out so as to be an example to others. That word translated 'way of life' has built into it the idea of 'leading others' (it is related to the word 'swayed' or 'led away' in v6). It is a life which makes others think, 'I want to be like him!'

And purpose – Paul's purpose of course is to know Christ and glorify him (Phil 3:10). My wife and I were watching the old film 'Dr. Zhivago' recently – a love story set against the background of the 1917 Russian Revolution. And there you are confronted with the dedication of those early Communists in the person of Strelnikov. Only one thing mattered – the Revolution, not their own personal ambitions or feelings. We are meant to be God's revolutionaries. The ministry is not just my job, my career, it is my life, my everything! And not to my glory but the glory of Christ.

Here's the litmus test – how well do you know God? Is your ministry for Christ your everything – not to the detriment of family life or friendships – but all those things handled in such a way as to serve the one great purpose – knowing Christ and serving him?

The Life of Faith – faith, patience (longsuffering), love

These three words of course reflect the three classic Christian virtues of faith, hope and love. Why are we patient? It is because we have hope.

And we ought to just distinguish between the word 'patience' here and the seventh word in Paul's list, 'endurance'. Both can be translated 'patience.' What's the difference between them? According to Trench, John Chrysostom distinguishes them as the first being patient in the sense of persevering with something which is proving difficult but you could give up on, whereas the second is being patient with circumstances over which you have no choice.

But it is out of this inner life of the heart of faith, hope and love; it is out of this heart (at the heart of the nine) that Paul conducts his ministry and lives as a 'man of God'.

Where are faith, hope and love nurtured? They are nurtured in the presence of God – in the hidden life of waiting upon God. This is where loving obedience springs from. If we really are concerned to be men of God, people who really believe in God in a secular age, then we will prioritise speaking to God, waiting upon God (Psalm 27:14). And nowhere is that dedication to the establishing of the kingdom of God seen more clearly than in Paul's commitment to prayer. 'You know my life,' he says to Timothy. Timothy had lived cheek by jowel with Paul. He would have known those times when Paul slipped away to attend to his prayers. In every letter of Paul he explains how he is praying for people. In Acts 6 how do the apostles sum up their ministry? They say, 'We will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.' Notice which one comes first.

Richard Bewes writes in an introduction to one of the reprints of EM Bounds' books: 'The work of God cannot be undertaken without prevailing intercessory prayer. Indeed we must go further and insist that prayer actually is the work.' If Richard Bewes is right many of us are hardly working at all. No wonder my Buddhist contact concluded that so much Christianity is superficial!

How well do pastors know God? How much time do they spend looking to him? It is out of this inner life, nurtured by gazing at the Lord, that a powerful ministry flows. Pastors need faith to believe that with God nothing is impossible. We need patience to persevere with a work for God, which is proving difficult and which we could walk away from. We require love sparked by the love God has shown for us in Christ which is reflected back to God and overflows in love for others.

Here's the litmus test. How well do I know God? If you know him well you won't give in to the 'tyranny of the urgent'. Spending time with God will be a closely guarded area of your life – with barbed wire fences, soldiers and dogs on patrol around it – to stop the urgent driving out the important – and to stop frantic Martha coming in and leading you away from Jesus' feet.

The Reality of Suffering – endurance, persecutions, sufferings

Having directed us to the character of his ministry and the quality of his inner, spiritual life, which makes him a 'man of God' he now shows us the reality

of suffering, the inevitable reaction to the 'man of God' by a godless world.

If Chrysostom is right about the distinction between the two words for 'patience' this second, 'endurance' means that suffering is inevitable for the 'man of God'. Indeed Paul underlines that in v12. 'In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.' The only way a man of God can avoid suffering in a godless world is by not being a man of God, not doing what he is actually called to do.

The word 'persecution' here is used in the New Testament of persecutions which are exclusively for religious reasons (Acts 8:1; Acts 27:13). The word 'sufferings' (always plural) reflects more general sufferings which Christians get caught up in simply, for example, because they are in many places the bottom of the pile in society.

You don't need me to tell you that as our nation changes and the PC World of political correctness takes over, the reality of suffering for being a faithful Christian in the UK has increased and will increase. North Korea has been at the top of the World Watch list of countries for the worst persecution of Christians for the last 10 years.

I came across this quote from a North Korean describing a Christian friend who was imprisoned for owning a Bible: 'When he came to faith, he made a decision that one day he would die for Christ. Every Christian in North Korea has made that choice. Every Christian in my country has the spirit of martyrdom in him.' Looking at those words, 'You know...my endurance, persecutions, sufferings' v11a it is clear Paul had made that decision. Have you and I? It sounds shocking to begin with, but listen, what better way is there to die – should the Lord will? To die, not just of some disease or old age, but to die in the service of God. That's Paul's desire, 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,' (Phil 3:10).

Here's the litmus test. How well do we know God? Can we put our very lives at God's disposal and say to him, 'Lord, if it is your will, I would love to die in such a way as to positively serve the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

How well do we know God? Do we have a ministry for Christ which is our everything? Do we have a life of faith which shows itself in obedience and deep communion with God? Have we a willingness to suffer and even to die for the cause of Christ?

Such pastors know God and preach with the fire of God. There is something of a sense of God about them. Our churches need pastors like this!

John Benton is the pastor of Chertsey Street Baptist Church in Guildford.

Why You *Should* be a Closet Christian

By *Tim Cantrell*

HERE IS ONE OF THOSE BALLOON-POPPING QUESTIONS THAT TEND TO REDUCE SWELLING IN THE HEAD: 'SO, HOW ARE your quiet times going lately? How has your private prayer and meditation on Scripture been?'

Among many Christians it seems that what was once assumed has now become optional. In the name of liberty, we are losing essential disciplines. In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord *assumes* that we have a regular habit of private prayer: '...when you pray, go into your inner room [your 'closet', KJV], close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret....' (Matt 6:6) When it comes to personal devotions, Christ commands you to be a kind of 'closet Christian' who regularly fellowships with him. Oswald Chambers wrote, 'It is impossible to live the life of a disciple without definite times of secret prayer.'

There is a breed of Christians and even pastors who snap back and say this is legalism. 'Show me one verse in the Bible that says you should have a quiet time!' they say. So I decided to take up that challenge. *Here is a brief sketch of more than 30 different texts of Scripture that would be almost impossible to apply without some kind of daily quiet time.* I've organised them under two major headings: biblical examples and biblical instructions.

Biblical Examples of a Quiet Time

Think of the great examples in Scripture of regular devotion: Adam walked with God in the cool of the day (Gen 3:8); Enoch and Noah 'walked with God' and were known for their regular friendship with their Lord (Gen 5:24; 6:9); Moses' regular prayer life was an example to all (Exod 33:8); Job was known for his regular prayers for his children (Job 1:5); and no one had more predictable devotions than Daniel, as even his enemies testified (Dan 6:10,13).

No wonder then that Wilberforce once wrote in his journal, 'This perpetual hurry of business and company ruins me in soul, if not in body. More solitude and earlier hours! ...Surely the experience of all good men confirms the proposition that without a due measure of private devotions the soul will grow lean.'

Christ himself got alone with his Father (Mk 1:35). Isaiah even prophesied of how Messiah would be sure to hear from God every morning: '...He awakens

me morning by morning, He awakens my ear to listen as a disciple' (Isa. 50:4). If the sinless Son of God needed this, *how much more* do we!

Andrew Murray wrote: 'That is the secret of true prayer, of true power in prayer... and of power for service. There is no true... conversion... holiness... power... peace or joy, without being daily alone with God. What an inestimable privilege is the institution of daily secret prayer to begin every morning.'

The apostle Paul also models for us a life of regular intercession for other believers. How could Paul have ever prayed for all the different needs that he lists without some kind of plan (Eph 1:15-19; 3:14-21; Phil 1:3-11; Col 1:9-14; 1 Thess 1:2-5; 3:9-13; 2 Thess 1:3-12, etc.)?

Biblical Instructions about a Quiet Time

We are helped both by biblical models as well as biblical principles. Christian, how could you ever enjoy the 'day and night' meditation on Scripture that Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2 speak about without some kind of daily habit? And who would not want to be that 'tree planted by streams of water, yielding its fruit in season and prospering'? Or Psalm 119, filled with 176 verses from a man consumed with the Word of God and the God of the Word – verses that could never have been written if he had no devotional life.

Psalm 62 speaks of seeking God in silence, and Psalm 63 speaks of seeking God early and earnestly, hungering and thirsting for his presence publicly and privately. These are the kinds of longings that drive the believer into the closet to commune with Christ. The apostle Paul speaks of constantly offering ourselves up as living sacrifices and renewing our minds, and praying without ceasing, and praying all kinds of different prayers (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Thess 5:17; Eph 6:18-20). It is hard to do this without a regular habit of some kind. Corrie Ten Boom said, 'Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A man is powerful on his knees.'

Paul also calls us to 'discipline' ourselves 'for the purpose of godliness' (1 Tim 4:12). In my twenty-five years as a Christian, I've not met one mature believer who did not have regular devotions. J.C. Ryle states, 'What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe the difference in nineteen cases out of twenty arises from different habits about private prayer. I believe that those who are not eminently holy *pray little* and those who are eminently holy *pray much*.'

My brother or sister in Christ, how can you live a life of repentance and confession, without regular times of quiet soul-searching (1 Jn 1:9; Ps 139:23-24)? How can you continue 'drawing near', as Scripture urges us, without private devotions (Heb 4:16; 7:19; 10:1, 22; Jas 4:8)? Don Whitney

writes, 'Can we expect the flames of our worship of God to burn brightly in public on the Lord's Day when they barely flicker for him in secret on other days? Isn't it because we do not worship well in private that our corporate worship experience often dissatisfies us?'

May the living God motivate you, and those around you, to become true 'closet Christians' who enjoy spiritual intimacy with their God. Murray McCheyne said, 'I ought to pray before seeing any one. ...I feel it is far better to begin with God – to see His face first, to get my soul near Him before it is near another. ...Ah! dear brethren, have you ever tasted this blessedness? There is greater rest and solace to be found in the presence of God for one hour, than in an eternity of the presence of man.'

Tim Cantrell is the Pastor - Teacher at Antioch Bible Church in Johannesburg, South Africa.

News

Erroll Hulse

Many readers will be interested in news of Erroll Hulse. His daughter Sharon wrote the following message:

Erroll was discharged from York Hospital on 31 March. He had been in hospital continuously since his stroke on 14 November, first in Richard's Bay, South Africa, then in York, where his son Neil and family live. Erroll is, at present, comfortably settled at a nursing Home in York. He is already taking opportunities to invite staff to local evangelistic events; and would value prayer for his witness to both staff and fellow-residents. Erroll has continued to appreciate visits. In a few weeks' time he will move to a new care village on the east side of Leeds, when he will be nearer to daughters Joanne and Michelle, and his various friends in Leeds, including those from Leeds Reformed Baptist Church.

Erroll has been suffering, intermittently, from severe post-stroke pain. He remains deeply concerned for his various worldwide mission contacts, especially the African Pastors' Conferences. A highlight was when a group of Christians in York booked a room in Mulberry Court and met with Erroll, Neil and Isaac (Neil's oldest son) for a 'Concert of Prayer' prayer meeting on 5 April, the date and time when a good number of churches were holding prayer meetings to intercede for Holy Spirit revival. Erroll's main ministry now is one of intercession, and he loves to pray with others.

Erroll sends warm thanks to those who are praying for him.

'Regions Beyond' – in Madagascar



Bako, the missionaries' Malagasy teacher

The Good News Hospital in the remote town of Mandritsara is a small mission hospital founded 20 years ago - a ministry of the Association of Bible Baptist Churches of Madagascar and a UK charity 'Friends of Mandritsara Trust'. The aim is to show practical Christian love, proclaim the gospel and plant churches. The town's Bible Baptist church has grown 20-fold since 1993. Sixty surrounding villages now have small churches.

But 'Regions Beyond' still beckon...

Bako, who teaches Malagasy to the missionaries, recently accompanied the hospital's Community Health team to a village with no road access, 100 miles away across mountains and rivers. The team visits villages to vaccinate children, teach health and hygiene, initiate water and sanitation projects – and to preach the gospel. As far as we know no-one has ever been to this village with the gospel before.

Bako wrote: 'From 10-13 March we went by Helimission's helicopter to Anivorano. This is in a dangerous cattle-rustling area. The village is surrounded by 2 rivers. During the rainy season no-one can leave because of crocodiles and a taboo on canoes. This February, ten people died because they could not reach a doctor, several hours walk away.

The children are malnourished even though food is plentiful. The people

fear the god of their ancestors and believe that taboos protect them from the displeasure of the ancestral spirits. Almost all the children had pagan ‘medicines’ tied around their neck and waist. Small children also had tufts of uncut hair on the front of their heads, indicating that protein foods – eggs, cow’s milk, meat and peanuts are taboo until the child can walk.

In addition to the health work we spent 3 days teaching the people the Bible message of salvation from sin through faith in Jesus. Each day I taught Bible stories, memory verses and songs to 130 children. They were eager to learn and by day 2 we could hear them singing the songs around the village.

At 9 pm on the third day, we were already sleeping when the villagers knocked on our door. ‘Come and teach us some more and pray with us,’ they said. Almost the whole village was gathered on mats in the centre of the village. It seemed like everyone was seeking God. I left the meeting around 10.30, but others in the team stayed until midnight.

We left the village exhausted, but full of thanks to God. He is at work and there is a thirst for His Word. We hope to return soon – by helicopter or by bike (100 difficult miles!) Please pray for this village!’

www.mandritsara.org.uk

David Mann

Morning Star



Morning Star children enjoying the sea near Durban

Morning Star Children's Centre provides compassionate care for underprivileged children who are infected with HIV/AIDS. The day care provided by the team led by Joan Adams includes nutritious meals, medication and stimulating activities for the children. It also aims to help the children's mothers and guardians become self-supportive by way of a job-creation programme. From time to time Christians from the UK go out to Welkom to help the regular team operating at two bases in Welkom. Earlier this year John and Marion McDonald from Kent in the UK reported on their visit which incorporated the annual treat of taking several of the teenagers to the seaside at Hibberdene near Durban. The journey from inland Welkom to Durban is over 350 miles.

Two minibuses and a hired trailer set off from Welkom with 20 teenagers and 10 adults (including 3 drivers) on Wednesday 5th March at 6am. They all arrived safely 12 hours later. The children were awed into silence by the waves of the sea crashing into the shore. The photograph shows the excited young people enjoying themselves in the powerful surf during their stay by the Indian Ocean. All the adults capable of swimming and the normal lifeguards kept an eye on the children who generally lacked strength in their legs and were vulnerable to the strength of the sea. On the final day everyone enjoyed a visit to Ushaka Marine World to witness the performing dolphins along with many other wonderful sea creatures. Other delights were a sand castle competition, splashing in the swimming pool, braving a 'super-tube' water slide, paddling in a safe tidal pool, bouncing on trampolines and playing football.

John McDonald

Evangelical Press Missionary Trust (EPMT)

There has been an organisational change of EP Books and EP Mission. The board of EP Books has decided to set up its missionary work as a formally independent organisation in the form of a separate charity under UK law. This gives us the opportunity to attend to the specific needs and opportunities of the missionary work whilst retaining the synergy and cooperation with EP Books.

The full name of the new organisation is E(vangelical) P(ress) M(issionary) T(rust) (abbreviated EPMT) and came into full operation on the 1st January 2014. The current Directors are John Rubens, Roger Fay, John Norris and Kees van Kralingen with Kees being chairman. The immediate priorities for the new board of EPMT are to seek more funds for the publishing work and to find more people who can strengthen the board.

EPMT is planning to continue and build its publication and teaching work aimed at strengthening churches and pastors/leaders in missionary situations in the French and Russian-speaking parts of the world. The French work of Europresse is directly led by our brother Jean-Claude Souillot and focuses not only on French-speaking Europe but especially on French-speaking West Africa and Haiti (see report below). The Russian work is carried out from Minsk, Belarus by our brother Slava Viazovski and his team.

We greatly value the prayers of the Lord's people for his blessing and guidance for the future as we seek to spread the gospel of his free grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. Gifts can be sent to EPMT at Darlington and can be Gift Aided.

Contacts for EPMT are: Kees van Kralingen (kees.vankralingen@online.nl) and John Rubens (John.Rubens@epbooks.org). The postal address is: EP Missionary Trust, Faverdale North, Darlington DL3 0PH.

January/February missionary visit to Benin and Togo (West Africa)

The main reason for the trip was the annual Grace Conference held in Bohicon, Benin. This year there was no overall theme, but a number of messages were preached to present various aspects of the free grace of God in Christ alone. A little over 60 participants came, and the interaction between the friends was good right from the first moment. Many of the men present are students of the Preachers' Correspondence Course run by Europresse and Échos de la Vérité. The conference is always an opportunity for these men to meet with the tutors and exchange ideas and advice, and this year was no exception.

While in Benin I was able to visit a number of churches in various places. Such times are always an encouragement to the brethren (and to me as well). So, beside the Bohicon church, I was asked to preach in Cotonou, Porto Novo and Parakou mainly.

I also went to a small country town, Klouékanmé. This place is very interesting. Many years ago, a group of men in a village were impacted by the gospel. The friends from Bohicon went several times a month to teach them. Now these men are planting another work in Klouékanmé. It is so exciting to see the work spread!

I was also invited to teach for a whole day in a Bible school in the north of the country. This was situated in a very small hamlet, Soudé – quite an

experience! About 30 students were there, and we had the day together, teaching and taking questions, then preaching in the evening. The head of the school is a Frenchman, a dear brother who endeavours to teach the Word faithfully in that environment. We had a sweet time of fellowship together.

On my way to Soudé I stopped to preach for a dear friend in Bembéréké. The Lord blessed the preaching of his Word, and the friends have extended an invitation for a week-end conference next time I am over. This will probably take place in August.

With my colleagues, Julien and Paul, we then went to Lomé, the capital of Togo. We have a few friends there in the Grace Church that came into being several years ago. I was also asked to speak at a week-end retreat in a Baptist church in one of the neighbourhoods, Djidjolé. This was the third time we had such an opportunity. This time we also added a time of discussion around the Word (we call it a biblical workshop) with the young adults. This was really blessed of the Lord in touching on many subjects that trouble these young people and to which they seldom get answers.

So the three weeks spent in West Africa were very blessed, as were the previous trips to Congo Brazzaville in Sept and Haiti in Nov 2013.

Jean-Claude Souillot

Central African Republic

This is a country with 8 million people and is experiencing a civil war between ‘Christians’ and Muslims. An imam and archbishop have called for peace. We need to pray for peace in CAR.

Erroll Hulse

Evangelical Awakenings in Africa

By J Edwin Orr

Review by Bruce Button

1. INTRODUCTION

The author of this book, J Edwin Orr, was born in Ireland in 1912 and converted at the age of nine. In his early twenties he began preaching the gospel across the globe and is said to have visited 150 countries of the world. This tireless evangelistic zeal was matched by scholarly study, and one of his doctoral degrees was awarded by Oxford University for a study on the Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain. Orr is thus well qualified to give us valuable perspectives on the important subject of Christian revivals.

2. SURVEY OF THE BOOK'S CONTENTS

Orr begins his book by defining an evangelical awakening:

An evangelical awakening is a movement of the Holy Spirit bringing about a revival of New Testament Christianity in the Church of Christ and its related community. Such an awakening may change in a significant way an individual only ... or indeed the larger body of believers throughout the world. The outpouring of the Spirit effects the reviving of the Church, the

awakening of the masses, and the movement of uninstructed peoples towards the Christian faith (p.vii).

The body of the book is structured chronologically, using the Second to Fifth General Awakenings as a framework.

Chapters 1 to 3 cover the Second General Awakening and its effects. As spiritual preparation for this awakening Orr points to the widespread commitment by believers in many denominations throughout Britain and the United States to pray for revival and the extension of the kingdom. The revival began in Britain in late 1791, spread to Europe, and swept across the United States. In the following decades European settlers in South Africa also experienced the reviving work of the Spirit. This led to mission work among the surrounding Hottentot, Bantu and other communities, many of whom testified to the transforming power of the gospel. This worldwide awakening led to the formation of many denominational and interdenominational mission agencies, laying the foundation for a century of pioneer evangelisation.

The Third General Awakening occurred during the 1830s, with very powerful effects in many parts of

the world, including South Africa (chapter 4). Orr is careful to note (chapter 5) the powerful social consequences of spiritual revival, including the abolition of slavery, care for the sick, labour reform and education. During the 1830s some remarkable awakenings were experienced by the Bantu peoples in southern Africa and many missions were established in other parts of Africa (chapter 6).

The Fourth General Awakening began with prayer meetings in New York City during 1857 and soon enveloped cities throughout the United States. The same revival spread to the United Kingdom in 1859 and was responsible for sending many workers into the Lord's harvest fields, both at home and abroad. Importantly this awakening served to promote spiritual unity among the various streams of evangelical Christianity (chapter 7). Reports of the revival created a longing in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the Cape, and in 1860 a group of young people in Worcester, where Andrew Murray was minister, suddenly experienced a powerful working of the Spirit; the whole region was deeply affected (chapter 8). This revival in the western Cape was in fact preceded by revivals among the Zulus in Natal during 1858-1859. In the years following 1860 thousands of Xhosa, Zulu and European people were converted (chapter 9). The revival also led to efforts at social upliftment and to the establishment of a chain of mission stations across Africa (chapters 10-13).

The sources of the Fifth General Awakening were in 'little prayer meetings which seemed to arise spontaneously all over the world' (p.113), but the initial and most powerful expression of the awakening was the Welsh Revival of 1904-1905. From there the work of the Spirit spread throughout the whole world (chapter 14). Just before this, however, South Africa benefited from the evangelistic mission of Gipsy Smith, which led thousands to enquire after salvation and also helped to bring healing between Afrikaans and English in the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War. During 1905-1906 many communities in different parts of South Africa experienced awakenings and revivals (chapter 15). At this time also, and in the decade following, awakenings were experienced throughout Africa (chapter 16). Orr reflects helpfully on the profound role that missionaries played in establishing the education system of Africa, along with the transforming effects — some of which were inherently problematic — on African culture (chapter 17). From the 1920s onward Africa saw remarkable growth of the church, including many genuine revivals and awakenings. This was also a time of increasing political tension which saw the rise of the syncretistic African Independent Churches, as well as other aberrations from evangelical faith.

Orr concludes by summarising the book and giving some interpretative comments. His conclusion is that evangelical awakenings 'have been

one of the major factors, perhaps the greatest, in the winning of South Africa and all Africa to faith in the Good News of Christ' (p.200).

3. EVALUATION

Orr has obviously tried in this book to give a 'factual' survey, with as much detail as possible, of the evangelical awakenings that he describes; he doesn't offer any sustained theological reflection on the phenomena he describes. Though it would have increased the length of the book, one would have appreciated some evaluation of the phenomena as to their genuineness and lasting spiritual effect (both positive and negative). In spite of this omission, the central thesis of the book is clear and one is not inclined to disagree with the author on the important role that revivals have played in the extension of God's kingdom in Africa.

There are at least three important lessons that we can draw from the book:

(1) We must never underestimate our need for the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised his disciples that they would receive *power* when the Holy Spirit came upon them, enabling them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The record of Acts shows how that power overcame otherwise insuperable opposition, and Orr's account bears testimony to the same power at work in more recent times. All the orthodoxy in the world cannot replace the power of the Spirit, who alone can ensure

that our message comes 'not only in word' (1 Thess 1:5).

(2) Recognising our need for the Spirit's power should lead us to prayer. This is how the believers responded in the Book of Acts, and Orr shows how central prayer was to the revivals and awakenings he describes. Concerts of Prayer have a distinguished history, finding some of their greatest advocates in Jonathan Edwards and the 18th-century Particular Baptists like Andrew Fuller. We would do well to imitate their example.

(3) As a South African who is painfully aware of the racial tensions that still divide our beloved country, it is encouraging to learn how the balm of the gospel helped to heal the divisions created by the Anglo-Boer War. We who live in this divided society as God's children must look to him for ongoing healing and reconciliation.

Full details:

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Editor ERROLL HULSE, 75 Woodhill Road, Leeds LS16 7BZ
Associate Editors MOSTYN ROBERTS and DAVID KINGDON, UK,
TOM NETTLES and MICHAEL HAYKIN USA, IRVING STEGGLES,
South Africa, JOHN CAMPBELL, Australia,
*KEES VAN KRALINGEN, Netherlands (Acting Editor).
Subscriptions General Enquiries: Frederick Hodgson, 170 Coach Road,
Sleights, Whitby, North Yorks., YO22 5EQ, UK
frederick.hodgson@gmail.com

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