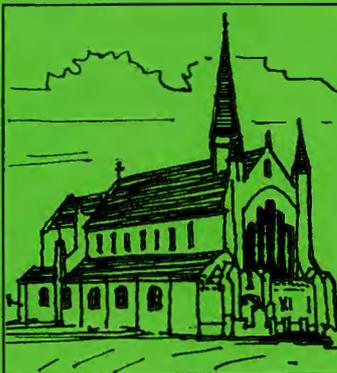
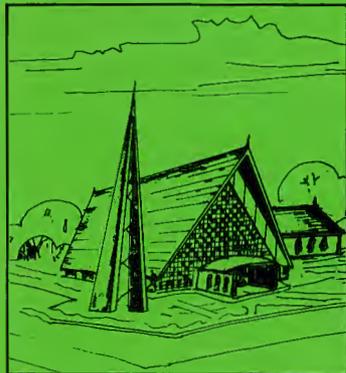
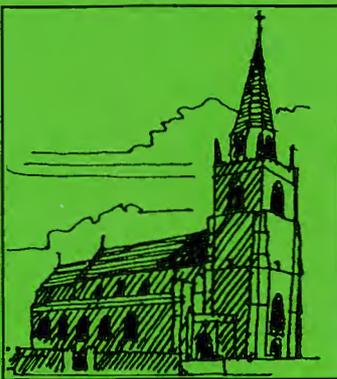
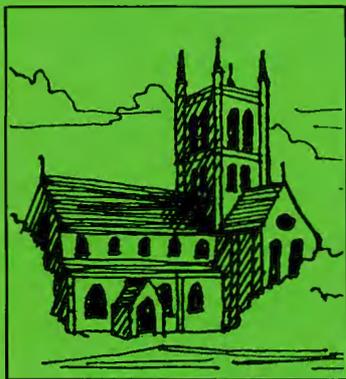


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# REFORMATION TODAY



■ MARCH-APRIL 1988

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# Ethnic Churches and the Truth of the Gospel

by Ray Porter

When our Saviour Jesus Christ prayed for the future life of his Church,<sup>1</sup> the matter which was uppermost in his mind was its unity. We have so often reflected on this in the light of denominational differences two thousand years later, that we rarely ask what Jesus saw as the threat to that unity. The rest of the New Testament gives us one important answer: a chief threat to the unity of the people of Jesus was that there should be separate churches for Jews and Gentiles, or that the racial and ethnic character of the people of God should be maintained under the new covenant. This was a foremost issue in the early Church and particularly one for which the Apostle Paul had to fight so much. Does not the racial question lie behind all the arguments about the Jewish law that are to be found in Romans and Galatians? Paul was not attacking the law *per se*,<sup>2</sup> but rather the use of the law as the identifying sign of the people of God. Here was the reason for the Jewish Christians' insistence on circumcision — that the people of God might continue to have a physical and national identity.

To defend their exclusive position the Jewish believers could quote so much of the OT where the way in which the Gentiles come to know the God of Israel is by becoming members of Israel.<sup>3</sup> Paul's great argument is that the people of God are now identified as those who have faith in Jesus the Messiah whatever their ethnic and cultural characteristics.<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2 is perhaps the clearest chapter explaining God's purpose of complete unity for his

Church. In the first part of the chapter Paul demonstrates that it is faith in Jesus that saves both Jews and Gentiles and not the works of the (Jewish) law. Then he goes on to show how Jesus has reconciled his people to the Father and in so doing 'has broken down the middle wall of partition' (v. 14) creating one new man.<sup>5</sup> Under these circumstances the terms Jew/Israel and Gentile have no meaning. What is important is whether a person is in Christ Jesus or not.

With the theory of one community of the people of God, most would be happy. But problems arise when we come to the practice of transcultural and transethnic communities. The first dispute in the church was not one between Jews and Gentiles, but an internal dispute between Greek and Aramaic speaking Jews.<sup>6</sup> The cause of the dispute was the conviction among the Greek speakers that the Aramaic speaking apostles were being too generous to their own linguistic group. The apostles therefore made an appointment from among (what appears to be) Greek speaking Jews, of men who would be responsible for the whole distribution of relief supplies to both language groups. The apostles thus emphasised not only their own prior ministry of prayer and word, but also that whilst the linguistic problem was recognised and accommodated, there was no separate dispensation on the basis of language. It is interesting that it is with his appointment to minister in this way, that Stephen first

*Continued on page 29*

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# Editorial

## **Ethnic churches and the Truth of the Gospel**

The above article was given to a Chinese pastor for his opinion. His response was to point out that few churches provide the conditions which encourage evangelism suitable for Chinese students or Chinese who are not Christian. How many churches show such concern that they truly analyse the social background and customs, and language difficulties, in order to make conditions as congenial as possible should those of other ethnic groups attend? Is it not true that not a few church members regard their local church as their own special concern and resent the possibility of it becoming different in flavour to accommodate others of a different social background? We should not wonder that the 300,000 Chinese in Britain and Europe do not easily attend our churches. However it is entirely conceivable that when the matter of cross culture is attended to earnestly and practically, there should follow the pattern of Christian unity which Ray Porter describes. Our hope is that many will treat the subject as one of prime importance.

## **Apologetics and Evangelism**

It is much easier to be a dogmatist than it is to be an apologist. That is, it is much easier to simply learn and know facts, and state or assert them, than it is to reckon with how other people think and then apply the truth to them skilfully and compassionately. What is involved in reasoning about the gospel is very well presented by Austin Walker. Far from being a subject for experts, it is important and totally relevant for all Christians.

## **The Carey Conference**

It was the Leeds Reformed Baptist Church that made this year's Carey Conference a success just as that church with her officers was responsible for the successful move to Liverpool in January last year. There were valuable practical contributions from some Strict Baptists as well as Belvidere Road Church, Liverpool. John Rubens and Bill Marshalls' work accounts in human terms for much of the blessing which we have enjoyed at these Conferences. The following is just one expression of appreciation, from pastor Dean Olive of Salhouse Baptist Church:

*I am writing to express my sincere thanks to you for organising such a splendid Carey Conference this year. It was good from beginning to end. It was an instructive conference but also very challenging as well. I will be praying that the Lord will give you and whoever else that is responsible for setting the next*

*meeting up, much wisdom. The Lord willing, I will be present and I hope to encourage many of the Suffolk brethren to be in attendance.*

After last year's conference we published synopses of some of the papers with details of the cassette service. There is only room for one synopsis in this issue but we hope to publish several more in the next issue. David Kingdon's work on 'Independency and Inter-dependency' is of historic importance and it is our intention to include the main part of that in *R.T.* 103.

*Synopsis of paper given at recent Carey Conference*

## Van Til and his step-children

Dr Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) passed away one year ago after being a professor of apologetics for forty years at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia. Geoffrey Thomas was one of many students taught by him, and in this lecture he gives a fascinating outline of the life of Van Til, and then looks briefly at three of his 'step-children' — Schaeffer and his approach to defending the Christian faith, Rushdoony and the Christian reconstructionists, and Dooyeweerd and the 'reformational' perspectives in the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto.

Mr Thomas found things lacking in all these three claimants to be the custodians of a 'Christian mind', especially the I.C.S. set-up. He suggested another approach to the understanding of the 'Christian mind' and examined these various movements, with their strengths and weaknesses by the following five criteria, in order of priority.

1. A Christian mind is one that is set upon the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. A Christian mind is thoroughly evangelical in its doctrines, and the more reformed the better!
3. A Christian mind is a righteous mind, ethically structured by the commands of God.
4. A Christian mind is a blessed mind, characterised by love, joy, peace, contentment, and freedom from fear and worry.
5. A Christian mind will look at, participate in, and evaluate all of creation and culture from the perspective of the Word of God.

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*The substance of this paper was presented at a Whitefield Ministers' Fraternal in September 1981 though section 5 has been rewritten to clarify the role of the Holy Spirit and the place of rational arguments in our defence of the faith.*

# Apologetics and Evangelism

Austin R. Walker

## 1 The need for apologetics

Francis Schaeffer once told a story of an American national leader who spoke to a group of student leaders about restoring values in their culture. When he finished there was a deathly silence. Finally a Harvard man stood up, and in a moment of complete brilliance asked, 'Sir, upon what base do you build your values?' The leader lowered his eyes and said, 'I do not know'. He could give no justification for restoring values. His case crashed to the ground and Schaeffer said, 'I have never felt more sorry for anybody in my life'.<sup>1</sup>

Christian apologetics is concerned with defending and justifying the claims of the Christian faith. Paul used the word *apologia* when he offered a defence, a vindication, of all he believed. Every believer has a duty to evangelise and a responsibility to defend the faith. Peter urged his readers, 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (1 Pet 3:15). Christian apologetics, says Van Til, is 'the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life over against the various forms of non-Christian philosophy of life'.<sup>2</sup> Not everyone agrees that we need to justify the claims of the Christian faith. Some have suggested that because the natural man cannot discern the things of God it is utter foolishness to reason with him. Those who believe this usually present the content of the gospel on a 'take-it-or-leave-it' basis, which is far removed from the apostolic method. Others have

said that apologetics leads to an arid intellectual faith, and if it is of use it is only so when speaking to intellectuals, not to Mr. and Mrs. Average. Still others are less than happy with apologetics because it can so easily degenerate into an aerial dog-fight, with each person trying to outmanoeuvre the other until one shoots for the kill. These and other objections are a misunderstanding of the nature and use of Christian apologetics. I am not suggesting for one moment that apologetics replaces illumination and regeneration by the Spirit of God. Christ died in vain, we proclaim the gospel in vain, unless there comes that breath from heaven to breathe life into those who are dead in sin.

Nevertheless it is shortsighted to be concerned only with 'the what' (content) of the gospel, without also being concerned with 'the why' (justification). For we are then left in the same dilemma as the man described by Dr. Schaeffer at the outset of this article. This is particularly important when we consider Western civilisation today. Man has lost his moorings. Sadly, we live in a day when most people are ignorant of the Old and New Testament Scriptures and have little idea of what God, sin and redemption mean. Philosophers, like A. J. Ayer, dismiss theology as meaningless, and psychiatrists, sociologists and anthropologists have managed to persuade most of us that notions such as sin, personal responsibility, guilt, and just punishment are

outmoded. Secular thinking has pervaded every area of man's thought and behaviour — in religion, education, politics, leisure, art, literature and music.

How do we go about persuading twentieth century men and women to believe the Bible and receive the Lord Jesus Christ? Surely we cannot go to the world and preach our Bible texts without justifying our assertions, without coming to terms with where we find these twentieth century people when we approach them with the gospel. A good army is not only well-armed but knows *how* to use the weapons at its disposal to best effect, and knows the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. All Christians should be continually acquiring this knowledge and ability to handle their weapons. I have no time to survey the ways in which the Christian faith has been defended since the days of the early Church. Suffice it to say that some have been more, some less, faithful to Scripture. Our task is to work towards an apologetic that is faithful to Scripture, that enables us to be better equipped to preach Christ to secular twentieth century man. It may well be that part of our failure in evangelism is caused by a lack of confidence in the gospel and a lack of ability to defend the gospel against its attackers.

## 2 Popular apologetic methods

As soon as anyone asks questions like 'How do you know there is a God?', 'Why does God allow wars, sickness etc.?', or 'Can you prove the resurrection of Christ?', we are involved in apologetics, in vindicating the Christian faith. If you talk to someone about the gospel of Jesus Christ it is not long before they ask you a question along that line. Sometimes it may be a red-herring, but at some point in the discussion you must provide an honest

answer to the question. In looking at popular apologetic methods which are in use I shall limit myself to three well-known contributors of the last thirty to forty years — C. S. Lewis, Sir Norman Anderson and John Blanchard. The criticisms I make later in no way question the motives of these men, only the methods that are employed by them in vindicating the Christian faith. In fact I should imagine that many of us have been greatly helped in different ways by at least one, if not all three of these writers. Furthermore, I shall limit myself to looking at methods employed to defend three fundamentals of the Christian faith — God's existence; the truthfulness of the Bible; and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### *i God's existence*

The unbeliever says he is not sure that God exists, or he professes atheism. He wants some kind of proof for God's existence. Our answer may go something like this. 'Look at the order and beauty of nature, the regular pattern of the seasons, of day and night. Surely it has not come about by chance? It shows that there is a plan and a purpose, so there must be a superior intelligence. That superior intelligence is God.' Or take C. S. Lewis who used the moral argument to put the case for the truth of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> He said that all men have a sense of right and wrong and that there is someone behind moral law, a purposeful mind who made the universe. He argues from our experience of these things to the existence of a personal God who made everything. Such arguments have one thing in common, they rely on premisses derived from evidences *within our human experience* (order in nature, sense of right and wrong). They are called 'a posteriori' arguments, i.e. posterior to, or after experience. You start with a blank sheet, fill it in with the stuff of human experience and argue logically from there. You begin with premisses de-

rived from human experience and not the Word of God.

### ii *The truthfulness of the Bible*

We turn now to Blanchard's popular book, *Right with God*.<sup>4</sup> He wants to convince his readers that the Bible is God's Word, and brings in evidence to support his assertion. In the first place he appeals to 'one simple piece of logic' which answers all the arguments against the divine authorship of the Bible. He quotes with approval John Wesley,

The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God. It could not be the invention of good men or angels, for they neither would nor could make a book and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying 'Thus saith the Lord' when it was their own invention. It could not be the invention of bad men or devils, for they could not make a book that commands all duty, forbids all sin and condemns their souls to hell for all eternity. Therefore the Bible must be given by divine inspiration.<sup>5</sup>

That kind of argument, incidentally, has its parallel in C. S. Lewis, who said that Jesus Christ must either be a complete lunatic, the Devil of Hell or the Son of God.<sup>6</sup>

Now what impressions do you have from listening to this argument? Does not Wesley say in effect that *anyone can see for himself* how good the Bible is, so who but God could have been its author? Surely it begs the question, because not all men are convinced that the contents of the Bible are good. More important though is the appeal to logic, to human reason which judges the truthfulness of God's Word. Then Blanchard backs up this first reason for accepting the Bible as God's Word with a second, 'No expert has ever disproved a single statement in the Bible.'<sup>7</sup> In connection with this he quotes Dr. Irwin Moon, a scientist who said, 'I have covered every word from beginning to end many times, and, so far as I know, there is not within the pages of this book

one single scientific inaccuracy, contradiction, absurdity or blunder.'<sup>8</sup> Does Dr. Moon's limited but expert knowledge provide us with the basis for saying the Bible is true?

### iii *The resurrection of Jesus Christ*

Finally, let us look at Sir Norman Anderson's sixteen page booklet, *The Evidence for the Resurrection*.<sup>9</sup> This was first published in 1950 and has been reprinted no less than eighteen times. He speaks of sifting the evidence and examining the historical evidence to 'try to determine whether it is contemporary, honest and convincing and whether it is susceptible to any naturalistic interpretation'.<sup>10</sup> He first examines the documents themselves. The weight of historical proof shows that they are early documents, not second century AD but substantially the record of eye witnesses. He then examines critically the attempts to avoid the implications of this conclusion (deliberate invention, stealing the body, swooning, etc.). Modern medicine is called in to deal with theories about hallucinations and pathological and psychic phenomena. He goes on to give eight more points which provide evidence for the resurrection, e.g. the institution of the Lord's Day; the success of the early Church; the prophecies about Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>11</sup> Finally, he says the ultimate proof of the resurrection is the evidence of experience.<sup>12</sup> As far as Sir Norman is concerned the only *theory* which adequately explains the empty tomb is the fact that Christ did rise from the dead. This is the conclusion reached on the basis of historical proof, scientific evidence, prophecy, human experience. The resurrection of Christ is true because it passes the tests based on the evidence available.

### 3 An appraisal of these methods

The books I have mentioned were written primarily for unbelievers, How-

ever, Christians who have read them, perhaps soon after they have been converted, have been greatly strengthened in their faith. In each case the evidence is carefully presented and is true. But it is true *only* from a biblical perspective. The unbeliever listening to our arguments has a very different perspective of truth and reality. Such arguments will hold very little water with him because he has a different set of premisses and different views of authority. So, for example, he might counter our argument for the existence of God by saying that quite apart from seeing a universe with a plan there is plenty of evidence to the contrary, e.g. disasters, sickness and death. Camus said, 'Life is a bad joke'. He might say to a Christian, 'Your view of reality is coloured by your belief in God.'

Such 'a posteriori' arguments used by the authors do not go to the root issue. They do not deal with the unbeliever's basic presuppositions, that is the assumptions that underlie a person's thinking and behaviour. By appealing to logic in this way *the unbeliever is credited with the ability to judge whether God exists or not*. Logic is made a kind of neutral common ground between the believer and the unbeliever. The position is not substantially different when we look at the methods used to defend the other fundamentals of the faith. Scientific methods, historical evidences, and personal experience, are all used to back up the assertions of the Christian apologist. Anderson says that no 'unbiased critic'<sup>13</sup> can disregard the evidence of Paul, Mark and Luke. He is sure that 'no intelligent critic'<sup>14</sup> would suggest that Christ was party to gross deception. 'All competent scholars'<sup>15</sup> he concludes, generally admit that the actual appearances of the risen Lord are not lies or legends but eye witness reports. My problem with such conclusions is that once again it assumes that the unbeliever can look at the facts and

the evidence and judge for himself whether they are true or not. Is the critic, whom we assume is not persuaded at the moment, really as unbiased as Anderson says he is? How can we appeal to the unbeliever's intellect and say, 'Now you judge the evidence available and the credibility of revelation', when he does not accept God or submit to the Scripture? Such a method does not adequately take into account what Scripture says about the natural man. It does not call him to repent of his independence and rebellion against God, whereby he rejects God's authority and interprets the facts according to his presuppositions. In other words it does not take into account sufficiently 'total depravity'. Man's reasoning and logical faculties are fallen.

Have you not been in a position with an unbeliever where you make an assertion from Scripture, for instance that Christ rose from the dead, and he says 'I can't accept that'? What he means is that his preconceived notions do not allow for that kind of supernatural event. Or again, you share your experience of salvation, and he says 'Well it works for you but I could not see that happening to me'. He is looking at things with a different set of coloured glasses to you.

This popular method of apologetics is attempting to graft the truth of the Christian faith on to the stock of fallen man's reason. It assumes that there is common ground between the believer and the unbeliever in logic, in the scientific method, and so on. But the facts are not neutral. The unbeliever is certainly not impartial in his approach to the evidence available. In the concluding half of this article we will examine how an unbeliever thinks, and the ways in which this relates to a consistent biblical apologetic.

#### **4 The way an unbeliever thinks**

The critical question is, How do we find

the unbeliever as we approach him with the gospel of Jesus Christ? May we in effect say to people who are unconvinced, all you need do is clarify your thinking, be unbiased and look intelligently at the facts, and you will become convinced of the truth? Or going one step further, may we conclude with William Bright, Founder and President of Campus Crusade for Christ International, when he says 'The majority . . . do not need to be convinced of his (Christ's), deity, nor of their need of him as Saviour. They need rather to be told how to receive him as Saviour and follow him as Lord'<sup>16</sup>

Scripture is very clear, and tells us we cannot assume that the natural man's estimate of himself and his thinking is true. The average person to whom we present the gospel is a very different sort of person than he himself thinks he is. He has a high opinion of himself and his abilities. Van Til sums it up this way, 'When man became a sinner he made himself, instead of God, the ultimate or final reference point. And it is precisely this presupposition, as it controls without exception all forms of non-Christian philosophy, that must be brought into question.'<sup>17</sup>

Fallen man wants the first and last word on whether God exists or not, whether Christ rose from the dead or not. He listens to the facts and filters them through his own system. He is the final reference point, he wants to decide, independently of God, what is true or false. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says that man is not only *unwilling* but also *unable* to understand the things of the Spirit of God. Men are by nature darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God (Eph 4:17-18). There is a moral inability rooted in the mind and will. When Adam and Eve disobeyed and rebelled against God they set themselves up as independent judges of right and wrong. Ever since, men have lived

in the same spirit, thinking they were right all the time, but living independently of God. Our evangelism and apologetics must strike at the root. If you want to be rid of the weeds in your garden it is little use lopping off the tops of the weeds, you have to uproot them. If a man thinks he is the final reference point, and acts and thinks accordingly, then we must tackle this first and foremost. A good doctor will not prescribe medicines according to a patient's own diagnosis. That patient might think he simply needs a course of antibiotics when what he needs is a radical operation to remove the cause of infection. So, in our apologetics, I would liken the traditional method to that which prescribes a medicine based on the patient's own diagnosis, suggesting he can use historical criticism, logic etc. What is needed is a more radical operation that challenges the very independence of the unbeliever, and calls him to humble repentance and dependence upon God.

Our apologetic method must take into account the teaching of Romans 1. Here we are told what the natural man knows and the points of contact we have with him. I shall draw your attention to four basic points:

- i The natural man possesses knowledge about God, and of himself as a moral, responsible being. He is totally surrounded by divine revelation, in providence and the things that are made. It is a knowledge of God's eternal power and divine nature, verses 19-20.
- ii It is an *implanted* knowledge of God. He is the author of this knowledge; he has made it plain. In every man there is an indestructible, implanted knowledge, that incessantly impinges upon his heart.
- iii This knowledge is understood – verse 20. Perception is made, conclu-

sions are drawn, *but* it is suppressed — verse 19. Men hold down this knowledge. They want to drown it. It is not that man is ignorant and has failed to make perception, but he is guilty of suppression.

iv This knowledge renders man inexcusable — verse 20. He has no defence before God and will go to hell with this knowledge of God.

So Van Til says the natural man is 'in the position of throwing water on a fire he cannot quench'.<sup>18</sup> Their response is to exchange the truth of God for a lie. Men have not glorified him, nor given him thanks. There is rebellion in every mind and every heart. This means that there is no such thing as an unbiased, objective search after the truth. There is no neutrality in man's heart, so he is willing to be swayed either way. The facts he sees are stretched to fit a preconceived pattern, consistent with the basic attitude of heart, 'I am in rebellion against God and independent of him'. You might say, 'But I have not met many people who think that way.' Quite right. But that is all we said before. 'The average person to whom we present the gospel is a very different sort of person than he himself thinks he is.' He plays at being God. He does not acknowledge that he is God's creature made in his image, and therefore dependent. He does not recognize the derived nature of his powers of thought and action, and that he is using those powers independently of God.

If we present the reasons for believing as founded on logical consistency, historical evidences, scientific arguments, and human experience, we are inevitably bolstering man's independence and man's mistaken views as to himself and his abilities. We are saying that by an intelligent use of reason the natural man can correctly interpret reality.

## **5 Towards a consistent biblical apologetic i A clear goal**

In practice there has invariably been a

tendency to divorce apologetics from evangelism. Sometimes apologetics has been used as a preparation for the gospel, as a kind of 'clearing-house' for removing doubts about the truth, before coming to the gospel of faith and repentance. Such a tendency may be the result of an inconsistent apologetic method. It is quite possible to come away from reading Anderson's booklet without having any conviction of sin, without any awareness of a wrong relationship with God. This is because its arguments are aimed at the human reason, which it is assumed can judge the truthfulness of the evidence. Furthermore, this method is prone to concentrating on certain fundamental truths, like the three we have discussed. There is a danger of cutting away parts of Christianity from the whole. The reason for this concentration is, I think, the result of a faulty method. It is assumed that if we can convince the unbeliever of the truth of fundamental parts, then he will be convinced of the whole. By choosing these fundamentals it is felt that we have a better chance of making the truth intelligible to the unbeliever and persuading him of the truth. In reality, every aspect of God's revelation can be employed in our apologetic.

I am persuaded that the distance between apologetics and evangelism is much smaller. There are differences, but not as great as is usually assumed. At every point in our presentation of the truth we should be attempting to confront the whole man (not just his mind), with the claims of God, on the basis of what that man knows but rejects. Apologetics should be aimed not only at the mind, but the conscience and the will, bringing him to acknowledge his pride and repent of his attempts at being God. Apologetics is not some intellectual game we play with an unbeliever. We are confronting him with salvation and judgement, and in

our apologetics we must preach Christ and him crucified.

When we witness to our faith in Christ there is no magic formula. There must, however, be a structure to the words and arguments we use. By this I mean that we should be clear as to the goal and the methods of reaching that goal; clear as to the point of contact between the believer and unbeliever. Within this structure there must be flexibility. No two situations will be identical. An unbeliever will not have all the questions of unbelief, and so it is not necessary to go through a prolonged defence of the gospel before Christ is offered. Such a defence may be brought in as and when needed. Our aim is to bring the unbeliever to the point where he sees he is acting independently of God. It must be done in a spirit of compassion.

We may liken this to receiving an electric shock felt throughout the whole nervous system and thus the whole body. We are seeking to shake the natural man at the very roots of his way of looking at life. Deep down we know that this man is trying to hold out against God. 'The sinner,' says Van Til, 'has cemented coloured glasses to his eyes which he cannot remove.'<sup>19</sup> As you reason with him, he is like a man attempting to plug holes in a sinking ship. Therefore I am saying that we have not been complete in our presentation of the gospel unless we proclaim the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, and in so doing not only call the unbeliever to repent of his individual sins, but to repent of his basic commitment which colours all his thinking and conduct. Not to do so is to compromise the gospel on the one hand, and to frustrate our own efforts on the other.

At the end of the argument we might not see the unbeliever persuaded, in which case we can only leave the unbeliever to God's mercy. By presenting the gospel in this way, we are being

faithful to God's word. We are not saying, 'Believe because the Christian faith is as reasonable as any other faith, or because it is more probably true than any other faith.' Throughout we have insisted that human reason is not to be regarded as an independent, impartial judge of the truth or falsehood of the Christian faith. Verification of our faith is not simply by a process of reasoning.

#### *ii Rational arguments and the Holy Spirit*

We are dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit, what is called his internal testimony. He operates in our hearts and minds to illuminate and persuade us of the truth of God's words and deeds. This work is necessary because it is our sinfulness, and not our lack of logic or the lack of evidence, that lies at the root of our unbelief.

Reason is our ability to assess and make judgements, to draw conclusions and makes inferences. By saying that our sinfulness is the root cause we do not mean therefore that we should abandon rational arguments. Rather, we should realize that it is sin which keeps us from acknowledging what we *ought* to acknowledge as true. The work of the Holy Spirit is vital. He does not give us the ability to go above reason. Neither does he come and have a quiet word in our ear and give us special reasons why we should believe. Rather, he opens our eyes to acknowledge the evidences that are already there in the Word of God, and that deep down we already know (Rom 1:19-21). He changes us on the inside so that we accept what is rationally warranted. This is a very different thing from saying that human reason by itself can judge whether or not something is true, whether, for example, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. It is the Spirit who gives us a new heart and mind, and illuminates our minds, leading us to accept and obey the Word of God.

#### *iii How do we approach the unbeliever?*

Where do we start? Do we simply say

'You must accept the Bible's authority because the Bible says so?' After all, rational arguments cannot persuade a person that there is a God. An unbeliever can only start where he is. It may be that he is prepared to accept the Bible as a fairly reliable source of Christian doctrine, though not absolutely reliable. Encourage him to read the Bible. In doing so he will find himself confronted with authoritative claims from the lips of God. These are claims about God himself, about the Lord Jesus Christ, claims on himself as a creature of God and as a sinner, and claims about the Scriptures. He will come to see that there are two ways of looking at things, his way and God's way. You may need to help him see this. Then, if the Spirit of God is pleased to open his eyes, he will see the wrongness of his way and the rightness of God's way. That should lead to a thorough repentance, not just in the will and feelings, but in the heart and mind. He will come to see that the criteria and proof *he* wants cannot be used in the way *he* wants. Rather, he must bow before the Lord and acknowledge that the evidences are 'God's evidences', in fact nothing less than God's own self-witness contained in the Word. When you accept that witness the only proper response is to bow in humble obedience.

This happens in a number of different ways with different people. Sometimes you can spend months trying to persuade someone. All, it seems, is to no avail. Then one day you meet them, expecting to confront a brick wall again. But today they are different. They know, and you soon discover, that they have come to faith in Christ. As they describe it to you it is clear that suddenly everything fell into place. 'The penny dropped.' There were no new arguments, but now the old ones make perfect sense. The Word of God is clear and plain, fresh and exciting. Everything has

become new, Christ is precious, the gospel *is* the best news that person ever heard, and there is a joy and an amazement that they were so slow to see the truth before.

What happened when 'the penny dropped'? The Spirit brought light and life, and dealt with the root cause of the person's blindness, his unwillingness and inability to obey. Now, someone will object, they were converted to Christ as a result of reading Anderson, Blanchard or Lewis. That may well be the case, because believing in Christ is not irrational. But we are dishonouring God and deceiving the unbeliever into thinking that *he can decide* whether something is true or false. The sad result is often a shallow repentance which may well leave the new Christian thinking he is still free to sit in judgement on the Word of God. Perhaps that is one reason why some Christians struggle to accept the infallibility of Scripture, or why they believe in evolution.

The right use of the mind is to think God's thoughts after him, not to sit in judgement on God and his ways. Even in Eden reason did not act independently of God. Reason was a servant that Adam used in the service of God. Since the fall, despite all God's revelation in creation and redemption, man will not and cannot acknowledge God. There must be that God-created response, which is the work of the Spirit, for man to accept the divine testimony, to repent and to believe. If man's lofty thoughts are to be cast down to the ground, and brought to obey Christ, then it will be by the powerful grace of God.

Nevertheless ours is still a ministry of persuasion. You will find in the Acts of the Apostles a number of approaches. Paul before Agrippa starts with his up-bringing and conversion experience, and ends with a powerful appeal to Agrippa's conscience. In Athens and

Lystra he concentrates on the character and work of God, 'he has not left himself without testimony' (Acts 14:17), or, 'He has given proof . . . to all men by raising him from the dead' (Acts 17:31b). By reasoned argument Paul challenges the wisdom of the world. Often we would go into the synagogue and 'reason with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead' (Acts 17:2-3). John in his Gospel, tells us why he wrote it, John 20:30; that the signs Jesus did might lead his readers to 'believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.' You may compare this with Luke's aim in Luke 1:1-4. Each makes an authoritative declaration, knowing that their case was entirely defensible, and that there were no new facts to disprove Christianity, but their declarations were God's evidences to be believed.

**6 Some conclusions**

The Christian faith is not irrational, but it is only an illuminated reason that is persuaded of the truth of God's Word. You cannot establish the authority and truthfulness of Scripture apart from the witness of Scripture. It is the role of the Spirit to bring us to the point of acknowledging God's self-witness and the sinfulness of thinking we, as fallen creatures, can declare whether God's Word is true or false.

We can make a right use of the Scriptures, evidences, and our own experience, in presenting the gospel. At the same time we are seeking to expose the basic assumptions of the unbeliever and point him in the direction of a true and thorough repentance. The evidence employed by Anderson may be used to persuade an unbeliever of the truth of our faith in Christ. But a consistent biblical apologetic argues from a position of complete dependence upon

God for a correct interpretation of the evidence. There is no neutrality. We do not therefore appeal to the unbeliever to judge whether something is true or false, and give him the impression that he has the power and right to decide. On the contrary, our task is to confront him with the Sovereign Lord so that he bows in humble adoration.

My concern is not to carp at my brethren in Christ, but to work out together how we can become more faithful in presenting the message we believe. In one sense the gospel needs no defence, and we are not ashamed of it. Let us go forth boldly, in the power of the Spirit, praying and persuading men to receive God's glorious gospel.

**References**

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<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics* (Class Syllabus), p. 1.  
<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Fontana, 1955.  
<sup>4</sup> John Blanchard, *Right with God*, Banner of Truth, 1971.  
<sup>5</sup> *Idem*, p. 10. <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.  
<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52. <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.  
<sup>9</sup> Sir Norman Anderson, *The Evidence for the Resurrection*, IVP, 1979 reprint.  
<sup>10</sup> *Idem*, p. 2. <sup>13</sup> *Idem*, p. 3.  
<sup>11</sup> *Idem*, p. 14-16. <sup>14</sup> *Idem*, p. 10.  
<sup>12</sup> *Idem*, p. 16. <sup>14</sup> *Idem*, p. 11.  
<sup>16</sup> p. ii, Foreword to Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972.  
<sup>17</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defence of the Faith*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Third Edition 1967, p. 77.  
<sup>18</sup> *Idem*, p. 92. <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

**Some further reading**

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 Paul Helm, *Faith, Evidence and the Scriptures*, in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, IVP, 1983,  
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# Calling all Students

*A Review Article of the book Contending for the Faith: A History of the Evangelical Movement in the Universities and Colleges by Douglas Johnson.*

There is an urgent need to call Christian students to consider their responsibility with regard to effective witness to the whole counsel of God's Word. The above book goes a long way to achieve this objective.

We badly need a generation of evangelical Christian students who will clearly and boldly contend for the faith. We see the *sufficiency* and *infallibility* of Scripture not only attacked by liberals, but also by some who would claim to be evangelical. Therefore students who are convinced of the historic truths of Christianity should be encouraged to make a clear stand for these truths, within their Christian unions or other places of witness. Home churches with good teaching and doctrine are not just equipping students for 'survival' for three years. They are equipping students with the powerful ammunition of Biblical truth. Students have a responsibility to share such truth with other (perhaps less well-taught) believers and to witness to the truth to unbelievers.

I have been encouraged by the account of how Christian Unions in this country were founded, in the book *Contending for the Faith* by Douglas Johnson (IVP 1979). In the early part of this century, when evangelicals were dismissed as 'narrow-minded', 'bigoted', 'dyed in the wool Evangelicals' and 'trouble makers', young Christians in ones and twos were willing to brave the sneers of more liberal fellow students, the opposition of college authorities, and the mockery (sometimes physical threats) of unbelievers, to form Bible-based CUs.

Several points arising from this book may be of interest and inspiration to students.

1. There is a long tradition of Christian students regarding it as a duty to meet to gather for prayer: both to encourage each other and to pray for others. As early as the 18th century in America there were prayer groups in the colleges in New England which Cotton Mather regarded as 'incomparable nurseries unto the church' (p. 17). Jonathan Edwards wrote of the student group of which David Brainerd was a member: 'At the time of the Awakening at the College, there were several religious students who associated themselves with one another for mutual conversation and assistance in spiritual things, who were wont freely to open themselves to one another as special intimate friends' (quoted on p. 18). Johnson tells of the pioneers in the British universities from 1665 to 1876; Henry Scougal and his group in Aberdeen in the seventeenth century; the 'Praying Societies' of the Scottish universities in the eighteenth century; the 'Holy Club' at Oxford formed by Charles Wesley and joined by George Whitfield; the student group at St Andrews encouraged by Thomas Chalmers in the nineteenth century; and the Daily Prayer Meetings at Oxford and Cambridge started in 1862 and 1867. It is a heartwarming account of devotion and zeal leading to various initiatives in the encouragement and building up of other students.

2. Equally challenging is the deep conviction of missionary responsibility so evident in the student groups of the late nineteenth century. In Scotland this was particularly true. In Edinburgh at one time half the total number of medical students (about 400 out of 800) were contemplating missionary work. In 1884 the 'Cambridge Seven' offered themselves for missionary

service. The example of Charles T. Studd, the captain of the University Cricket XI and Stanley P. Smith, the Stroke of the Cambridge boat and others made an enormous impact on the student population and the public. In the years before 1914, hundreds of students offered themselves for missionary service. Between 1882 and 1894 one society alone (the CMS) accepted 95 Cambridge graduates. In 1889 Spurgeon chaired a Missionary Convention at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. More than 1,500 students attended and 152 London students signed the 'pledge', that 'it is my earnest hope, if God permit, to engage in foreign missionary work'.

3. Particularly relevant for today is the crucial struggle for doctrinal distinctives. In the early years of the century, sadly, many student groups were influenced by liberalism. In 1910, a group of Cambridge students split with the Student Christian Movement over this issue. They formed the CICCUC, or Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union, which had to take a lead in encouraging evangelical Christians in other universities to take the same step. Between 1920 and 1925 eight new Christian unions were formed by small numbers of evangelical students, often against considerable opposition from the university authorities. In 1928 the Inter-Varsity Fellowship (IVF) of evangelical Christian unions was founded with a very clear doctrinal basis. Each succeeding generation of students as had to face doctrinal challenges particularly on the issues of cooperation with non-evangelicals. They stood firm except for a few individual CUs who opted for a 'broadening' policy of cooperation and disaffiliated from the IVF. In 1955-6 there were particularly virulent attacks on 'fundamentalism' in the student world from several Christian leaders. This controversy again forced evangelical students to clarify their position as standing without compromising on the infallibility of scripture. They were greatly helped by J I Packer's contribution to the debate *Fundamentalism and*

*the Word of God* (IVP 1958).

Obviously today there is enormous variation in the health and doctrinal emphasis of the Christian Unions, but any CU affiliated to the UCCF has an excellent doctrinal basis and evangelical students should point the committee of the CU back to the basis, and ultimately to the foundational truths of scripture it rests on. Johnson shows forcefully that evangelicals in the past have not 'left it to others' nor retreated fearfully into isolation, but in faith have stood up for the great Biblical truths of the sufficiency and infallibility of scripture, Justification by faith alone, and the Atonement.

4. Extensive opportunities for evangelism are open for evangelical students. Their fellow students are under great pressure to succumb to the prevailing humanistic, God-less, secular world view. CU's can be used as a base for live, outgoing witness among the 700,000 full-time students in our universities and colleges. There are about 600 CU's affiliated to UCCF and they are supported by 35 travelling secretaries. There are particularly exciting opportunities among the 71,000 foreign university students and many other foreign language students in Britain. About 20,000 of these are from Muslim countries. (Figures from the 4th edition of *Operation World*.)

5. IVP has achieved a vital work in encouraging evangelical Christian scholarship of the Bible. The publication in 1953 of the *New Bible Commentary* was a landmark. The IVP pocket books were launched in 1958 with *Authority* by D M Lloyd-Jones and *Basic Christianity* by John Stott.

The Tyndale Commentaries and many other such books proved of great value to evangelical Theology students at a time when liberal scholarship was otherwise virtually unchallenged. (The vital role played by Dr D Martyn Lloyd-Jones in

supporting IVF in the formulative years is well documented by Johnson.)

Moreover Christian students have been encouraged not merely to react defensively against modern developments in science and the arts, but to formulate clear Christian responses to the challenges of modern thought. Students of all disciplines would be a great deal poorer without the contribution of IVP in their particular areas of study. Outstanding books recently published, *The Masks of Melancholy* (John White) and *The Creative Gift: The Arts and the Christian Life* (H R Rookmaaker). Christian students have a responsibility to think through all aspects of their study from a Biblical perspective. We must reject a 'dualistic' approach which keeps Christian experience as something which happens in quiet times and meetings but is quite separate from learning and the rest of life. The Creator God is Lord of *all* areas of learning and endeavour. Christian students must be encouraged to be bold in applying the foundational truths of their faith to all of life.

#### **Doctrinal Basis of the UCCF**

The doctrinal basis of the Fellowship shall be the fundamental truths of Christianity, as revealed in Holy Scripture, including:

- a. The Unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.
- b. The sovereignty of God in creation, revelation, redemption and final judgment.
- c. The divine inspiration and infallibility of Holy Scripture, as originally given, and its

supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

d. The universal sinfulness and guilt of human nature since the Fall, rendering man subject to God's wrath and condemnation.

e. Redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin only through the sacrificial death (as our Representative and Substitute) of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God.

f. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

g. The necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to make the death of Christ effective to the individual sinner, granting him repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ.

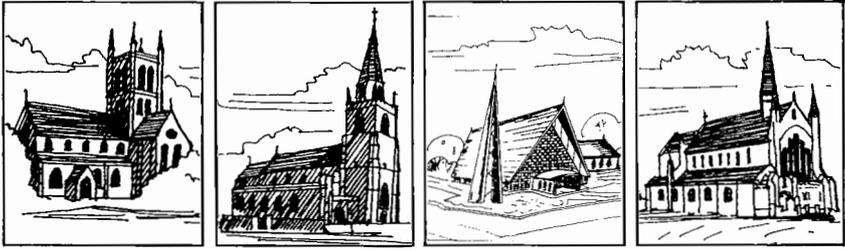
h. The indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

i. The one holy universal church, which is the Body of Christ, and to which all true believers belong.

j. The expectation of the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Doctrinal Basis is signed by all CU committee members, travelling secretaries, visiting speakers, and UCCF staff.

The IVF (Inter-Varsity Fellowship) changed its name in 1974 to the UCCF (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship of Evangelical Unions).



# MGW

## The Merseyside Gospel Witness

### Promoting Christian Unity

It is necessary for evangelical churches to resist fragmentation and seek to unite throughout the nation. Such unity is already expressed in the existence of ministers' fraternals. The Evangelical Alliance and the British Evangelical Council represent a focus of unity for some churches. Nevertheless there are hundreds of churches which are isolated and the form followed by Merseyside churches could well be followed in many other areas. Leadership is needed. We note that the Ecumenical Movement is organised by well paid full-time ecumenical officers.

The funding required for evangelical churches to keep contact and for occasional rallies to be organised is modest especially if it is borne by as many churches as possible. Such support will in itself be a token and sign of willingness to demonstrate unity in Christ and in the Gospel.

There follows a letter written by one minister who has undertaken a leadership role for MGW. It is published as an example which might be followed in other areas.

# A Letter to Your Church

*Dear pastor R,*

*From the time of its inception in 1985 several meetings have been organised by MGW. It is recognised by all who have given support that we should improve the way we organise ourselves. Consequently it has been agreed that I write to you to formally ask that you bring the needs of MGW to your church meeting. Up until now the expenses have been met by a small proportion of the churches that have participated. These expenses which include printing, stationery and posting, as well as the organisation of rallies, have been modest compared to the benefit that has accrued. (Also we should note that the costs are tiny compared to the great outlay of the Ecumenical Movement in supporting full-time Ecumenical officers to achieve their goal of one great body at the expense of the gospel.)*

*If every church undertakes to contribute an annual sum (£10.00 for a small church or £50.00 for a larger church) then costs will easily be met, an efficient service of information can be maintained, and the occasional useful rally be organised. If your church is willing to subscribe please fill in the slip provided and return to me. Support is in itself a gesture of unity with like-minded evangelical assemblies.*

*At the last meeting it was proposed that early in the New Year a week should be designated when the churches could concentrate in prayer on the need for unity especially because of the crises looming in 1988. In addition it was suggested that leaders should meet during a day of the aforementioned week for prayer and discussion.*

*The meetings organised so far have been as follows:*

*The formation of MGW David Samuel and Erroll Hulse on the subject of Justification by Faith.*

*The life of J. C. Ryle John Beattie*

*What is the Gospel John Blanchard*

*The Primacy of Unity in the Church James Hogg (Australia)*

*Reunion with Rome David Samuel*

*Two rallies for 1988 are at present the subject of discussion and prayer.*

# The Dangers of the Ecumenical Movement

There are three reasons why it is wrong for a Bible believing Christian to support the Ecumenical Movement.

The first reason is that the basis of the Ecumenical Movement is liberal in the sense that there is no meaningful doctrinal foundation. Liberalism is not only a different religion from Christianity, it belongs to a totally different class of religions. Liberalism is at loggerheads with every essential truth of the Bible. Liberalism is an expression of subjective human wisdom and rationalism, whereas Christianity is a revealed objective religion. Liberalism is not Christianity watered down. It is diametrically opposed to Christianity: an implacable enemy. Liberals are at the forefront of the leadership of the Ecumenical Movement.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of Christ is antithetical to liberalism which, if it believes in 'salvation' at all, is universalistic: nobody will be lost. Liberals are not prepared to hold to the uniqueness of the Gospel except to grant that there are lofty morals in the Gospel and there is the example of the wonderful love of Christ. Liberals are ready to stand alongside those of other religions and worship as if all men worshipped the same God.

The second reason follows from the above and that is that the Ecumenical Movement is syncretistic. This means that leaders of the Ecumenical Movement are prepared to mix Christianity with other religions, just as in ancient Israel there were those who worshipped Jehovah, but at the same time served and bowed down to the gods of Canaan. Syncretism holds that the true God of the Bible suffuses, inspires and supports the main religions including the Eastern religions of Hinduism and Islam. This is well illustrated by Archbishop Runcie who actually asserts that 'God' is in the idols of Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> Inter-faith dialogue is very prominent among the Ecumenical leaders who worship together

with those whose religions are antithetical to the Christian gospel. We can appreciate the attraction to be friendly. We too believe in maintaining peace with all men, but at the end of the day either we believe the exclusive claims of Christ or we reject them: there is no midway mark.

The third reason why it is wrong for a Bible-believing Christian to be in the Ecumenical Movement is because of the powerful and increasing presence in the Ecumenical Movement of the Church of Rome. This is illustrated by the probable union of the Church of England with the Roman Catholic Church, following the conclusions of the ARCIC II statement (Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission).<sup>2</sup> The character of our nation could well be changed dramatically, and when the change takes place it will be too late to do anything about it.<sup>3</sup>

Christian unity is for all God's people, that is for all believing churches as they relate to each other, as well as internal unity within each local church. This is a blessing extolled by Psalm 133, a virtue described and insisted upon by Ephesians 4:1-6, and a reality fervently prayed for by our Lord in John 17. Such unity is however meaningless, indeed downright evil, if the Gospel of Christ which is the foundation of that unity has been betrayed and abandoned as the price for obtaining it.

<sup>1</sup> **Where is the Ecumenical Movement Taking us?** Booklet by Erroll Hulse published by *Reformation Today*, 25 pence, available from Eurobooks, 361 Aigburth Road, Liverpool L17 0BP.

<sup>2</sup> **Justification by Faith**, David Samuel, booklet published by Church Society, 186 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BT, available from Eurobooks as above at 70 pence including postage.

<sup>3</sup> **Reunion with Rome**. An address given by David Samuel available on cassette and obtainable from Carey Recordings, Eurobooks, 361 Aigburth Road, Liverpool L17 0BP.

# The Aims of the MGW

- 1 To foster and promote true Christian unity based upon union with Christ and the truths which sustain that unity.
- 2 To encourage Christians and churches to define the gospel of justification by faith as well as preach it to all. It is no longer adequate to talk about the gospel when it means different things to different people.
- 3 To inform churches of the dangers of the present Ecumenical Movement.
- 4 To encourage evangelical churches to observe the mighty power of God in the gospel (Rom 1:16), especially by links with other nations where the gospel is flourishing compared with the decline of Christianity in the UK, which decline is reflected particularly by the Ecumenical Movement.

# The Basis of the MGW

The doctrinal basis of MGW shall be the basic truths revealed in the Bible including those eleven expressed in the UCCF statement of faith which we are required to believe sincerely when we are asked to speak at UCCF Christian meetings. This basis is chosen not only because of its clarity but because it is a pledge of our unity with evangelical students. (See article 'Calling all Students' for doctrinal basis.)

It is also required that those in union with MGW be clear about the doctrine of justification by faith as follows:

- 1 I BELIEVE THAT ALL EVANGELICALS MUST BE FAITHFUL TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST AS EXPRESSED BY THE APOSTLE PAUL IN ROMANS AND GALATIANS, THAT IS THE GOSPEL OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE AND BY GRACE ALONE. JUSTIFICATION IS AN ACT OF GOD'S FREE GRACE BY WHICH HE FREELY PARDONS ALL OUR SINS AND REGARDS US AS RIGHTEOUS IN HIS SIGHT, ONLY ON ACCOUNT OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED TO US, AND THAT BY FAITH ALONE.
- 2 I BELIEVE THAT IT IS UNFAITHFUL TO PROMOTE, UNITE WITH, OR SUPPORT THOSE TEACHERS WHO OVERTHROW THE ABOVE GOSPEL.
- 3 I BELIEVE THAT WHILE ALL BELIEVERS AND CHURCHES SHOULD BE FREE TO PROMOTE THEIR OWN DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVENESS THERE IS A RESPONSIBILITY FOR US TO EXPRESS OUR BASIC UNITY IN CHRIST AND IN THE GOSPEL.

# Prophecy in the New Testament

## The Need for a Clear Test Case

by Victor Budgen

### PART TWO

#### A Critical Attitude to Scripture

*It is necessary for the reader to have before him the previous articles on the subject of prophecy (see RT 101), in order to appreciate the material which follows. The KJV and NKJV render 1 Peter 1:13 'therefore gird up the loins of your mind' ('therefore, prepare your minds for action' NIV). That is an exhortation which is most suitable with regard to the material before us in this further article. The matter does require concentration but then the precious nature of Scripture demands our closest attention — editor.*

1 There are important consequences that flow from all this. The views of Wayne Grudem and those who follow him lead them to criticise the biblical record and a Christian prophet where the biblical record gives no ground for so doing. Our study of their treatment of the second Agabus prophecy gives clear proof of this. Scripture is made to stand on its head. The obvious reading of the passage is that God is giving to his people a positive example of what is involved in true prophecy. The other view reads it as a warning tract on how prophecy should not be given! This involves the rejection of the genuineness of an introductory formula which is acknowledged as divinely authoritative ('the Holy Spirit says'); the impugning of the authenticity of countless details which indicate continuity between Old and New Testament prophecy (the Greek phrase in the introductory formula, the prophetic symbolism, the whole demeanour and approach of Agabus); and refusal to acknowledge that Paul's own appraisal of the

prophecy indicates not a skimpy, partial fulfilment but quite the reverse — a detailed fulfilment over a long period of time against all kinds of odds.

In his explanation of Acts 28 verse 17, I feel that Wayne Grudem does justice neither to the context of this verse (which does form a unit with the three which follow), nor to the content of Acts chapters 21 to 28, nor to the variety of ways in which prophecy can be fulfilled, nor to the way in which Luke expects the ordinary reader to assess Paul's verdict. Wayne Grudem writes, 'And in Acts 28:17 *ex Hierosolomon* can hardly be taken to refer to Paul's initial capture by the tribune *in* Jerusalem (21:32-3), but makes much more sense as a reference to his transfer *out of* Jerusalem to Caesarea (23:23ff).'<sup>22</sup> He sees Caesarea as the place of the procurator, who represented Roman rule over Palestine.

In commenting on a difficult verse in Genesis where there are many interpretations, Luther writes: 'I steadfastly

follow this rule: the words ought to serve the subject matter and, not conversely, the subject matter the words.<sup>23</sup> I feel that this comment is relevant here. Also the questions still remain, Who handed over Paul to the Romans?, and did Paul envisage the prophecy as fulfilled? As I have sought to expound at length the answers seem obvious.

We must also strongly reject Wayne Grudem's attempt to drive a wedge between the prophecy of the Old and New Testaments, except of course in the case of the apostles whom he acknowledges as legitimate successors to the Old Testament prophets. Max Turner has written, 'The New Testament surely was not claiming that the Old Testament Spirit of prophecy had now returned, but merely to the apostles — thus dividing all other persons or charismata off and levelling them down with the sort of phenomena professed by early Judaism in its consciousness that the Spirit had been withdrawn (Acts 2:17-38). Paul does not say that all New Testament prophets see through a glass darkly while apostles see clearly. The apostles' prophecy, too, is *ek merous* and *en ainigmati* (1 Cor 13:12).'<sup>24</sup>

Both Herbert Carson and Roy Clements follow Wayne Grudem in his view that the New Testament foundational apostle is the successor to the Old Testament prophet.<sup>25</sup> Both also follow him in seeing 'the inter-testamental period' and 'rabbinic writings' (Clements), or the fact that Paul was 'schooled in rabbinic writings' as providing 'valuable clues' (Carson), to the way words were used in the New Testament.<sup>26</sup> I believe that they have failed to recognise a) that the rabbinic writers obviously do not claim inspiration by the Holy Spirit as Wayne Grudem more or less admits,<sup>27</sup> b) that there is a real theological significance in the prophetic silence in the inter-testamental period (prophecy is only

given when Scripture is being written),<sup>28</sup> and c) that Paul was supremely 'steeped' in the teaching of the Word of God which is determinative for giving the proper background for his use of words and concepts. In that Word all prophecy, without exception, comes from God (2 Pet 1:21).

Subtle linguistic arguments are being used today to undermine this old orthodoxy. I do not profess to be a skilled linguist myself. Like many men I did Hebrew and Greek at University but now I rely largely on the labours and research of others in this realm. If I have specialised at all, it has been in church history. Yet there is another book on this subject which ought to be given publicity. It is *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts* by Douglas Judisch, a professor at Concordia Theological Seminary. His book, in my view, shows equal skill in the use of Greek and Hebrew to that of Wayne Grudem, is entirely orthodox in its concept of prophecy and is quite brief (only 96 pages). In a sense I do not think that our opinions on this subject depend on the subtleties of Greek grammar. I rather think that our whole theology is the key factor. In fact, before I read Douglas Judisch I had already reached the same conclusions on the relevance of Old Testament passages like Daniel 9:24-7 and Zechariah 13:2-6 even without his technical know-how. In particular, Judisch powerfully shows that Paul's concept of prophecy was rooted and grounded in the teaching of the Old Testament.

#### *A Lack of Reverence for the Holy Spirit*

**2** If all true prophecy originates from God it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore my next concern must be over the down-grading of the role and power of the Holy Spirit. Both Agabus prophecies are said to be given by the Holy Spirit. Wayne Grudem not only sees the second Agabus prophecy as

only partially inspired, but also considerably undermines the status of the first one. He engages in an analysis of the language and commenting on one word suggests that there is 'a rather loose relationship between the Holy Spirit and the prophet, since it allows room for a large degree of personal influence by the speaker himself'. With regard to the word *semainō* (translated 'predict') he argues that 'a degree of imprecision is also suggested by *semainō*, which is elsewhere used of prophetic speech "that simply gives a vague indication of what was to happen"'.<sup>29</sup>

Although he refers to a renowned lexicon for this verdict, I would vigorously query the accuracy of all this. If a 'text without a context is a pretext' we ought also to recall that to a considerable degree Greek words must be interpreted within their context. What reader can turn to Acts 11:27-30 and feel that there is any imprecision or vagueness either with regard to Luke's intention to portray Agabus as a prophetic figure; or the prophecy itself which is crystal clear and of tremendous consequence; or the response (Agabus was heeded and obeyed); or the fulfilment. There was a great famine as predicted. At this rate we shall hardly need the modernist to come along and undermine Scripture! His work will have been done for him.

Another aspect of this is the contrast which Roy Clements makes between Moses and Elijah and poor insignificant, straying Agabus. We recall his rhetorical question, 'Why do you think Paul was so obstinate in his determination to go to Jerusalem? If a Moses or Jeremiah had told him not to go, would he have felt able to reject their advice?' This kind of argument was answered long ago by B. B. Warfield in a discussion, where specifically acknowledging the supremacy of a figure like Moses, he also

showed that lesser figures were not less inspired. He wrote, 'We have already been led to note that even on the occasion when Moses is exalted above all other organs of revelation (Num 12:6ff) in point of dignity and favour, no suggestion whatever is made of any inferiority, in either the directness or the purity of their supernaturalness, attaching to other organs of revelation.'<sup>30</sup> These words are applicable to all attempts to suggest different levels of inspiration because of differences in the stature of prophets. This is to fix our gaze excessively, almost idolatrously, on men, and to withdraw our gaze dangerously, almost irreverently, from the Holy Spirit. To oppose Moses to Agabus is quite unwarranted.

Let us leave the last word under this heading with John Calvin. He puts the issue in true focus, when commenting on the phrase 'the Holy Spirit warns me' in Acts 20:23. '. . . I do not take this to mean secret oracles, but predictions which he was hearing everywhere from the prophets. But this statement is of more value for commending prophecies, than if the very men, who uttered them, were cited as witnesses. For a word of God has its authority established in this way, when we acknowledge that his Spirit is the Author even although men are its ministers.'<sup>31</sup>

#### *Anti-supernaturalism*

3 This leads on naturally to our next point which is that there is an anti-supernaturalism in the view being advocated. Prophecy is no longer infallible. Yet anyone, from devotees of the Delphic oracle to modern fortune-tellers, can give words that are partially true. Indeed some, inspired by the devil, can be uncannily and persistently accurate. Could we ask Wayne Grudem whether he feels that the 'slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future' was not according to his argument better endowed than Agabus?

(See Acts 16:16f). Yet this undermining of the super-naturalism of the Bible is not confined to prophecy. It goes right the way across the board. In the realm of healing some speak of 'tentative miracles'. One modern writer, whose book on healing is a best-seller, recommends that 'beginners pray for the cure of minor ailments, such as colds' before tackling the bigger illnesses!<sup>32</sup> We also have a new breed of 'apostles' who confessedly perform none of the great signs and wonders performed by the first apostles and who have certainly not seen the risen Christ nor been commissioned by him.

The same thing applies in discussion of tongues. For example, Wayne Grudem (in a review article to be mentioned later), can say of a writer that 'he makes some puzzling statements about speaking in tongues, claiming that the tongues of Acts 10:46 and 19:6 were intelligible languages . . .'.<sup>33</sup> It has today become almost common practice to drive a wedge in this way between the tongues of Pentecost and all other instances in the New Testament. This enables people to admit that Pentecost was unique and unrepeatable (we agree in part with this), and then to argue that the tongues in the rest of the New Testament like the 'tongues' of today are not recognisable languages.

Indeed, when you probe behind all the footnotes and all the technicalities of the book of Wayne Grudem you will simply find that the emperor has no clothes on. In other words the evidence evaporates under scrutiny. It is little more than a very elaborate justification of modern error. He more or less admits that his distinction is not an easy one to work out. 'If we assume for a moment that this study is correct in seeing two types of NT prophecy, the one thought to have a divine authority of actual words, and the other only thought to have a (divine) authority of general

content, it must still be admitted that such a distinction between types of authority is a fine one, and one which might easily be blurred or forgotten. It would eventually be very easy for more and more Christian prophets, whether for good or ill motives, to begin to claim not only that they had received a "revelation" from God or Christ, but also that they spoke with a divine authority of actual words. This was in fact apparently what happened, at least in Montanism, and probably in many other cases as well.<sup>34</sup> He then admits that 'a failure on the part of the Church itself to distinguish between these two types of prophecy might have been the cause of a total loss of prophecy in the Church'.<sup>35</sup> But if the Early Church, standing so close to events, could not make the distinction, how can we hope to do so more successfully and accurately? The clear teaching of God's Word on the supernaturalness of prophecy and the other gifts has been undermined by his thesis and the result is general confusion.

#### *Standing in Judgement on the Word of God*

4 I am aware of Wayne Grudem's assertion that he accepts the infallibility of Scripture and I do not query the sincerity of what he says. Nevertheless I do query whether he and those who support his view have really thought through the implications and consequences of what they are advocating. The view has clear modernistic overtones. Already we have seen this and we shall now see further evidence, for another corollary of the view is that prophetic words from God can be sifted and criticised, indeed should be so treated. It is assumed that prophecy is a mixture and that the good must be sifted from the bad. Two passages, 1 Corinthians 14:29 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, have been used by Wayne Grudem, Peter Lewis and others to justify this procedure. But have these

passages been properly interpreted? And what is the likely effect of this interpretation on the outlook of the believer?

On 1 Corinthians 14:29, Calvin comments, 'But it may seem odd that men are allowed to make judgements concerning the teaching of God, which ought to be established beyond any dispute. My answer to that is that the teaching of God, is not subjected to the judgement of men, but their task is simply to judge, by the Spirit of God, whether it is his word which is declared, or whether using this as a pretext, men are wrongly parading what they themselves have made up. . . .'<sup>36</sup> And again, 'What it amounts to, therefore, is that the gift is subjected to examination in this way, that the prophets weigh up what is said to see if it has come from the Spirit of God, *for if it is established that the Spirit is the source of it, there is no need for further perplexity.*'<sup>37</sup>

This, I would submit, is the correct interpretation. There had to be an initial sifting to find out the source. Did the prophecy come from the Holy Spirit or from some other source? If the former, 'there is no need for further perplexity' and it must be totally accepted. If the latter, it must be totally rejected. It was not a call to pick out the good bits from the bad. Therefore, C. J. Ellicott writes that it was a command 'to test the words spoken . . . whether they really came forth from the Spirit, or were only the imaginings of the speaker's heart'.<sup>38</sup> David Hill, linking the verse with 1 Corinthians 12:10 which refers to those gifted with 'the ability to distinguish between spirits' writes, 'A particular instance of this exercise of this gift of evaluation, in our view, is 1 Corinthians 14:29: there prophecies are tested, weighed, evaluated in order to determine their source of inspiration, their genuine or counterfeit quality.'<sup>39</sup> As it stands, I can accept that statement,

though I would apply it in a different way from the writer himself, as will be seen.

It is also interesting to see what many commentators make of 1 Thessalonians 5:21 which, in connection with prophecy, reads, 'Test everything. Hold on to the good.' Repeatedly they say that this is an illustration taken from the testing of metals. It is about choosing the 'genuine as opposed to the counterfeit coin' says Milligan. It means, 'Stick to the true metal; have nothing to do with the false,' argues E. J. Bicknell. True prophecy is 'to be accepted like a coin that is found to be genuine' is the verdict of Hibbert. Leon Morris explains that the verb *dokimazo* was often used of the testing of metals, and that the word used for 'good' particularly means 'that which is good in itself'.<sup>40</sup> The illustration is apt. A coin is either genuine or counterfeit. There is no half-way stage, no percentage of counterfeitness! The same is true of authentic prophecy. This interpretation properly brings these two passages in line with the Old Testament passages on testing prophecy, which indeed never envisage the sifting of the genuine from the false in the prophecies but rather the genuine from the false among the prophets.

In line with his mistaken interpretation of these two passages, Wayne Grudem assumes that, because the setting of 1 Corinthians 14 is the local church assembly and because the prophets were known local figures, there would therefore be little likelihood of false prophets standing up.<sup>41</sup> There are two replies to this. Firstly, there is his own point that from time to time people would be venturing on their first prophecies.<sup>42</sup> The congregation would have no prior knowledge of their proven ability or genuineness. But secondly we need to recall that a genuine prophet told an established congregation with

numerous elders that 'savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them' (Acts 20:29, 30). We never know when Satan is going to seek to introduce his deadly errors. The terrible dangers of false teaching and prophecy are never adequately acknowledged by Wayne Grudem and those who follow him.

*What has Happened to False Prophecy?*

5 This leads on logically to our next point. I would like to know from proponents of the other view whether, except in very rare instances, there can be such a thing as false prophecy. For example, what do they make of these words of Roger Day, in *How to GROW UP as a Christian Boy or Girl*. 'When God gives you a message in a meeting or in your family prayer time, such as a prophecy, you'll know deep down in your heart. It may be only a few words but they might be just right for the people who are there. I've heard young people speak a prophecy from God like: "I love and care for you," and it's really blessed grown-ups. . . . Sometimes the words you get might not be for that meeting. If you're not sure, ask your dad or a leader before you speak out. Then wait for the right meeting and bring your prophecy. Don't worry if you make a mistake. I'm famous for the mistakes I've made in prophecy. I once came up to a microphone in front of 200 people with a prophecy and after two words my mind went blank! But I'm learning that if we're afraid to try, we'll never get anywhere. We often then learn by our mistakes.'<sup>43</sup>

Or there are the words in the address of Bernard Thompson at the Conference of Reformed Charismatics. 'People have a right in open praise and worship to bring a prophetic word that is an encouragement to the flock,' and 'This

prophetic word I give is not infallible. I make mistakes. I am not frightened of getting it wrong.'<sup>44</sup> An example he gives is that he accuses a brother of immorality but, finding he is wrong, just seems to laugh it off, adding casually that he is not normally as insensitive as this.

Is it really satisfactory to reply, 'Well, these men are evidently not as serious as others. They are far too glib and superficial.' Yet is that not too glib and superficial an answer? One man may give dozens of false prophecies and not bat an eye-lid or feel a pang of conscience. Another may be in error on only a few details and may mourn and repent earnestly. But is it just a question of the degree of seriousness in the speaker? Or is it the percentage of error? Would a prophecy 80 per cent correct pass muster because 75 per cent of truth is the pass mark? Or does the pass mark vary in different congregations in different parts of the country? (I rather think that it might!)

Putting the issue simply, how much would Agabus have had to be wrong to be not just mistaken, and, prophetically speaking, rather too big for his boots, but actually a false prophet? Or is the creature now almost extinct, except perhaps in prophecies which are palpably heretical or totally false? And has anyone else noticed this -- the definition of true prophecy is actually now the same as the definition of false prophecy in the Old Testament (Deut 18:20). Satan never did like making frontal attacks when he could squeeze in by the back door. He infiltrates, smuggling in an ounce of poisonous falsehood with a pound of scriptural truth. And what now is to stop him increasing the dose if a percentage of falsehood is permissible?

*Acceptance of Modernism*

6 My next illustration of the decline of clear adherence to Scripture is Wayne Grudem's review of the book on New

Testament prophecy by David Hill (published in *Themelios* in January 1982). Undoubtedly this book has some helpful insights. I have myself quoted some. Not unnaturally Wayne Grudem seizes favourably on the emphases which are almost identical with his own position. He mentions with approval the 'error' in the second prophecy of Agabus, the arguments that New Testament prophecy was not infallible, the belief that the apostles are the successors to Old Testament prophets and various points of interpretation with regard to 1 Corinthians 14.

I have myself reviewed the book quite fully elsewhere. (See note 1.) I can only give a synopsis of what I have written there. 1) David Hill infers that certain events in the New Testament are not presented accurately. For example, Acts 13 shows how Luke thought Paul might have addressed a synagogue audience, not how he did. 2) The Pauline authorship of Ephesians and the Pastorals is denied. 3) Various sayings of Jesus are seen as not authentic. On the discourses in the Fourth Gospel he writes that 'these may indeed be homilies composed around sayings of Jesus and presented in the form of a speech by Jesus himself.'<sup>45</sup> 4) Authorities like Bultmann and Tillich are praised and Evangelicals largely ignored. 5) Here is David Hill on the death of Christ. 'Constantly under threat from his opponents he had to reckon with the possibility even the likelihood, that he would meet the fate of the prophet — persecution and martyrdom.'<sup>46</sup> And on the resurrection, '... what we can say on the basis of authentic sayings of Jesus is this: as a prophet he foresaw his violent death in terms of prophetic martyrdom and probably foresaw his vindication as well in relation to his wider expectation that the consummation of the Kingdom was at hand.'<sup>47</sup>

Wayne Grudem alludes to Mr Q and to the undermining of Pauline authorship

(without comment) but to nothing else that I have mentioned. Yet although he makes a few criticisms of points of exegesis, he begins his review with the statement, 'This book is a sober and very helpful contribution to the study of New Testament prophecy,' and concludes it in this way, 'Yet the strengths of this book far outweigh its deficiencies. It stands as a valuable contribution to the study of New Testament prophecy.'<sup>48</sup>

It must be conceded that we do not always have the space we would like for reviewing, but I would submit that this is a totally inadequate assessment of a very dangerous book. There are a series of questions which arise. How far are we prepared not only to assert our belief in the authority of Scripture but also to defend it against those who would undermine it and to warn the flock clearly about them? How far is his view on the gift or prophecy, which leads, as I have sought to show, to a critical attitude to parts of Scripture, one which leads to a diminution of firm conviction in other areas? Are the points on which the two writers are in agreement on prophecy of such importance that their disagreements on the reliability of Scripture are peripheral? (I am assuming Wayne Grudem had them. He did not himself say so.)

I am taking the liberty of giving the closing section of my own review. 'On the question of the modernism we put the issue bluntly. 1. **It is futile** as the following illustration shows. We are reminded of the dilemma of Mr Boffin in *Our Mutual Friend* by Charles Dickens. Upon acquiring wealth, he also acquires Silas Wegg, a "literary man" to read to him. Laboriously Wegg wades through a book on the Roman Empire, Rollin's Ancient History, The Wars of the Jews and eventually through Plutarch's Lives. Mr Boffin experiences growing perplexity. "What

to believe, in the course of his reading, was Mr Boffin's chief literary difficulty indeed; for sometime he was divided in his mind between half, all, or none; at length, when he decided, as a moderate man, to compound with half, the question still remained, which half? And that stumbling block he never got over." Are they sure it is the right verse which is authentic? . . . 2. **It stems from falsehood.** In the open-air I used to talk about "Satanic euphemisms". I now refer to the "devil's fancy talk". He gets men to refer to shop-lifters, light-fingered people, even kleptomaniacs — God calls it stealing. The devil likes talk of Casanovas, having a way with the girls, a bit of a boy — God speaks of adultery. Therefore when Hill suggests that "Luke may well have de-eschatologised and historicised what was originally an eschatological declaration"<sup>49</sup> meaning with regard to the first Agabus prophecy that Luke fitted two totally different things together — some of us who do not move in scholarly circles might feel that it is really being implied that Luke "cooked the books" or more simply, lied. 3. **It is all dishonouring to Christ, God and the Holy Spirit, the author of all Scripture and true prophecy** (2 Pet 1:19-21). Enough said?

But was anything like enough said in Wayne Grudem's review, which was in fact given considerable space? Equally worrying is the fact that one interpretation of the second Agabus prophecy which he sets down together with three others is this: 'Luke has confused either the prophecy, or the introductory formula, or the subsequent narrative about the capture of Paul.'<sup>50</sup> This is the first explanation of the passage he gives and although ultimately he opts for another explanation, he does add that, 'Others, however, may find one of the first three more acceptable.'<sup>51</sup> Is it in any way acceptable to an Evangelical understanding of Scripture that Luke is confused and therefore, to put it bluntly,

inaccurate? I feel that the confusion and inaccuracy lie elsewhere and that with regard to the inerrancy of Scripture it is a most dangerous confusion.

### *Conclusion*

Herbert Carson, writing at length and in strong terms of certain arguments of those who believe that the perfection in 1 Corinthians 13 is completed Scripture says, 'This certainly is novel doctrine coming from those who wax eloquent in face of the contention that there are two levels of prophecy.'<sup>52</sup> Later, where he is again discussing the subject of two levels of prophecy, he again pleads that Christians be allowed to 'discuss the subject without being accused of incipient liberalism or some subtle attempt to undermine the canon of Scripture'.<sup>53</sup> As one who has profited considerably from books by Herbert Carson I am sure he does seek to adhere to the Word of God. Yet I have not been able to work out the full logic of many of his own comments. For example, he is one of the few writers, contending for the gifts today, who is prepared to state, after alluding to Deuteronomy 18:19-22, that 'The death sentence then to be carried out points with solemnity to an equivalent church decision now, namely, suspension from fellowship, and from the Lord's table, and the discrediting of the one who laid claim to a God-given knowledge of the future.' This would include anyone 'whose prediction is falsified by the events'. The context of this is a discussion of false predictions for recovery of the sick. He reiterates this later, again referring to Deuteronomy 18 and the penalty of stoning, and saying, 'In a day when predictive utterances have been all too lightly given this is a very sobering reminder that the subsequent proof that they are unfounded brings great spiritual peril.'<sup>54</sup> Again, writing of the Holy Spirit, he says, 'It can be concluded that he must be utterly consistent in his speaking. There is no

possibility of contradiction.<sup>55</sup> Yet later still he refers to the clear predictions of Agabus, argues that he is partially wrong and sees him as a pattern for such mixed prophecy today! It is difficult to sort all this out.

My plea is that the issues be really sorted out and the consequences clearly faced. Both sides on certain occasions have made references to 'liberalism'. Long before I wrote anything on this matter Peter Lewis was arguing that, if we believe certain gifts have ceased 'we have come close to reasoning like liberals, have argued like Catholics and entrenched ourselves behind a new dispensationalism'.<sup>56</sup> Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes similarly, 'It seems that this idea that these things belong only to the New Testament period and have nothing to do with us is really guilty of the error known as "higher criticism"'.<sup>57</sup>

The position of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones is strange. I certainly cannot summon him to support my position. But surely neither can those who take the view that there are two levels of prophecy. His general view is that while the gifts may sometimes be bestowed today they are always 'perfect'. Thus the healing is instantaneous, complete and without relapse. Similarly the prophecy is always accurate. Thus he refers to the 'accurate, literal prophecies of things that subsequently took place' by Alexander Peden and others.<sup>58</sup> This is not the view of those who follow Wayne Grudem.

Acknowledging that charges of incipient modernism have been made by both sides the question still remains where does the truth of the matter lie? In both cases is it the pot calling the kettle black? My submission is that the view that prophecy is a mixed business and yet is valid is modernistic even though some of its proponents are not themselves modernists. It contradicts the Old Testament teaching that there are only two types of prophet. It turns the second prophecy of Agabus upside

down and leads men to become critics of Scripture where there is no ground for doing this. It downgrades the supernaturalism in all prophecy and in a real measure downplays the role of the Holy Spirit who is always the Spirit of truth. It leads to some strange alliances (the need for support from Hill and Aune), and some even stranger views of prophecy. (Roger Day and Bernard Thompson.) It rarely treats error in this realm with utter seriousness.

Let me quote John Bunyan in one of his comments about how we should deal with Scripture. He wrote, 'Also, truths are often delivered to us, like wheat in full ears, to the end we should rub them out before we eat them, and take pains about them, before we have the comfort of them.'<sup>59</sup> Bunyan meant by 'rub out' that we should get to the kernel and feed. The trouble today is that there are those who would 'rub out' or erase truths of Scripture to accommodate modern error. My plea is that we both retain the original meaning of Bunyan and adhere to the old orthodoxy on this question of prophecy.

Listen to John Owen's categorical reply to a writer of the past who held the view that prophecy was a 'mixed phenomenon'. He wrote, 'That men receiving any revelation from God had always an assurance that such it was, to me seems most certain; neither could I ever approve the note of Gregory on Ezekiel 1, — namely, "That prophets being accustomed to prophesying, did oftentimes speak of their own spirit, supposing that it proceeded from the Spirit of prophecy." What is this but to question the truth of all prophetic revelations, and to shake the faith that is built upon it?' He adds, 'But that any true prophet should not know a true revelation from a motion of their own hearts wants not much of blasphemy.'<sup>60</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Grudem, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, Vol. II. Concordia Publishing House. 1960, p. 137.

<sup>24</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 16.

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<sup>25</sup> Carson. p. 164. Clements. pp. 22f.

<sup>26</sup> Clements. p. 22. Carson. p. 162.

<sup>27</sup> Grudem. pp. 21-33.

<sup>28</sup> See *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, George Smeaton. Banner of Truth 1961. p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> Grudem, p. 76. Aune in a complicated discussion seems to feel that Agabus was wrong and that Luke has tampered with the evidence. 'Luke has, in effect, removed the eschatological features of the prediction of Agabus' (p. 265). See later for similar views of Hill.

<sup>30</sup> B. B. Warfield *Biblical Foundations* Tyndale. 1958. p. 26. See also p. 24. Actually Numbers 11:24-30 is one of the passages used by Wayne Grudem to prove a secondary type of prophecy. See Grudem pp. 36f and 151 note 65.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin on *Acts 14-28*, Oliver and Boyd, 1966, pp. 178f.

<sup>32</sup> Francis McNutt as quoted in *The Charismatics and the Word of God*. p. 214.

<sup>33</sup> *Themelios*. January 1982. p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> Grudem. p. 111.

<sup>35</sup> Grudem. p. 112.

<sup>36</sup> Calvin on *1 Corinthians*. Oliver and Boyd. 1960. p. 302.

<sup>37</sup> *op. cit.* p. 304.

<sup>38</sup> C. J. Ellicott on *1 Corinthians*. Longmans. 1887. p. 279.

<sup>39</sup> Hill. p. 134. David Aune writes 'W. Grudem "A Response to Gerhard Dautzenberg". pp. 256-8 is unnecessarily sceptical about the connection between 1 Corinthians 12:10 and 14:29' (p. 411 note 185).

<sup>40</sup> Milligan on *1 Thessalonians*. MacMillan. 1908. p. 76; E. J. Bicknell on *1 Thessalonians*. Methuen. 1932. p. 63; Hibbert on *1 Thessalonians*. Moody. 1971. p. 248; Leon Morris on *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Tyndale. 1956. p. 106.

<sup>41</sup> Grudem. p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> Grudem. pp. 231, 261.

<sup>43</sup> *How to Grow Up as a Christian Boy or Girl*. Roger Day. pp. 51f.

<sup>44</sup> Tape of Bernard Thompson.

<sup>45</sup> Hill. p. 169.

<sup>46</sup> Hill. p. 61.

<sup>47</sup> Hill. p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> *Themelios*. January 1982, pp. 25 and 26.

<sup>49</sup> Hill. p. 107.

<sup>50</sup> Grudem. p. 81.

<sup>51</sup> Grudem. p. 82.

<sup>52</sup> Carson. p. 48. I think I am the one to whom he refers in this paragraph. My own position has always been that a study of prophecy rather than a particular interpretation of 1 Corinthians is the key question with regard to the gifts. See the layout of my book *The Charismatics and the Word of God* where I quite deliberately deal with prophecy first. See also my comment in a review of two books by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. 'On prophecy he is particularly disappointing because of the brevity of his treatment. This, Judisch . . . would emphasise, is the lead-in to the gifts (and I would agree). . . .' See Review article in *Reformation Today*, 92. p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Carson. p. 158.

<sup>54</sup> Carson. p. 97 and p. 160.

<sup>55</sup> Carson. p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in *Charismatics and the Word of God*. p. 55.

<sup>57</sup> *Prove All Things*. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Kingsway. 1985. p. 43. In my review (see note 52) I have sought to reply to this.

<sup>58</sup> Lloyd-Jones. p. 45. See also p. 88.

<sup>59</sup> *Works of Bunyan*. Baker Book House. 1977. Vol. II. p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in *The Charismatics and the Word of God*. pp. 137f.

# Ethnic Churches and the Truth of the Gospel

*continued from Inside Front Cover*

becomes an evangelist to those who had the same background as himself and then the victim of their murderous attack.

In human terms one of the contributory factors to the Reformation was national consciousness. There were linguistic attacks upon the unintelligibility of Latin for the common man.<sup>7</sup> We all know the claims of the English crown against the foreign jurisdiction of a Roman prelate which are so well enshrined in the 37th of the Thirty-nine Articles:

*The bishop of Rome has no jurisdiction in this realm of England.*

The German Reformation as well could make use of the sovereign ambitions of German princes. However the Reformers themselves never saw their national background as a barrier to fellowship or service. We may think of the influence of Bucer and Martyr on the formation of the English Prayer Book. During the Marian period we see however two different reactions to exile. There were the men of Frankfurt who were determined to maintain everything that was 'English', whilst others, like Knox, were happy to join in the life of Continental Christianity. Most of us would have little doubt as to which party contributed most to Biblical Christianity. The Puritans were ever wanting unity with their Continental brethren, whilst their independent opponents were so often little Englanders.

For many years I have worked in Indonesia where the differences between churches are rarely on deno-

minational lines, but more often on an ethnic basis. I have worked with a church which not only seeks to minister to all Indonesians from a variety of the ethnic groups that form the nation, but also to provide within some local churches for those from overseas who are not yet able to worship freely in Indonesia. For some time I was myself involved in ministering to the English language service of an Indonesian church. This was not a separate church but one which was part of the ministry of the local national church and under the control of its leadership. There was a small committee on which both expatriates and members of the Session of the church were represented. Occasionally it was possible to do things together. Always there were Indonesians who attended the English language service for linguistic rather than spiritual reasons, but at least one Indonesian was converted through that ministry.

On returning to England I have been saddened to find increasing division among Christian believers on ethnic grounds. It is not a new phenomenon. Since the last century there have been churches in London for Welsh and Scottish congregations. With the large influx of West Indian Christians in the middle of this century we saw the setting up of separate congregations for them. But now as we become a more multicultural society it seems to be accepted as right that there should be separate churches of Chinese, Iranians, Bengalis, Pakistanis as well as English, Welsh, Scottish, West Indian. Some go even further and argue that we must also expect to see churches divided into

middle-class and working-class and that such a situation is right!

There are it seems three main arguments for ethnic churches: 1 Evangelism; 2 Preservation of culture; 3 Impossibility of one acceptable form of worship for different cultural groups. Let us look at these in more detail:

**1 Evangelism** Church Growth<sup>8</sup> has for many years argued that people find it easiest to come to Christ within their own culture; that it is homogenous groups that grow. There is some truth in this. I don't in any way want to question the need for specific mission to ethnic groups. It is exciting to see churches begin to take up the challenge of contact with and ministry to ethnic minorities. The burden of Chinese students for restaurant owners and other resident Chinese in Britain is to be commended. More churches should be involved in having services in languages other than English and fostering fellowship and evangelism groups for specific ethnic groups that are around them. But this does not need to lead to separate churches that institutionalise the differences of ethnic origin.

**2 Preservation of culture** has for long been a major argument for ethnic churches. This played a part in the formation of Scottish and Welsh congregations in London. It is a potent argument for minority cultures. We are all very attached to our own background culture and do not want to accept its total submission in another alien culture. The desire is understandable, but is it right?

**a** Is it right that the Body of Christ should be divided to maintain specific cultural identities? Should a church be established in order that it might be an instrument for maintaining a culture? Does not such an attitude suggest that a

person loves his culture more than he loves Christ and that the Gospel is being subordinated to cultural and ethnic needs?

**b** Does language need to divide Christians? Often those who play the cultural card will argue about the need to hear God's word in one's own mother tongue and the impossibility of groups worshipping together who speak different languages. Services with interpretation rarely fully satisfy anyone (and are very long), but they may be the only way in which some small churches can tackle the problem. In large churches services in different languages may be possible with occasional united services. But such services should not only be attended by those of that particular language group. If we are in a situation where there is more than one language represented in the church, should there not be a responsibility for all the members to learn something of the language of the other? Welshmen can learn English and the Englishman working in Wales should make an attempt to learn Welsh. To learn to speak another person's language is to place oneself in a position of dependence upon him. It is our way to 'in honour prefer one another'.<sup>9</sup> When our love for our own language causes us to separate from brethren in Christ, have we not taken a wrong step? One is saddened to hear of conferences that have divided on linguistic ground and of a church where a brother from Indonesia was not allowed to speak about God's work there, because interpretation from English was unacceptable and he didn't speak Welsh!

**c** If linguistic diversity within a culture causes all to worship in another language (as often happens in Chinese fellowships) what justification can there be for separate churches?

**3 Impossibility of reconciliation** between different styles of worship etc. is often

advanced as another reason why we need ethnically identified churches. This was perhaps most used at the time of West Indian immigration. That we now have many congregations that do successfully integrate West Indian and English people would be one argument against this, but there are also others:

**a** To state that reconciliation is impossible is to deny the power of the blood of Christ to reconcile all things in himself. It is to argue that there are aspects of our human nature that we don't want redeemed.

**b** Practically it is to put the Church alongside all those forces that would tear British society into fragmentary parts, whereas the church should rather be a demonstration in the midst of racial and cultural disharmony, that in Jesus Christ there is a true unity for all men. Praise God that in areas of race riots there has often been such a testimony. Practically also ethnic minorities need to integrate themselves sufficiently into the majority culture if they are not to be for ever depressed ghetto minorities. No church should want to contribute to maintaining the disadvantaged position of racial minorities.

**c** To fail to face the challenge of different cultural groups is to be unaware of one's own cultural sins. Paul in his advice to Titus could emphasise that the cultural norms of the Cretans, so well identified by their own poet Epimenedes, were incompatible with a faith in 'the God who does not lie'.<sup>10</sup> As a Jew he identified the things 'the Gentiles do'<sup>11</sup> as something that should no longer be done by his Gentile converts. Monocultural churches are blind to many aspects of their culture that are sinful. Within a multicultural church there is the humility of realising that by God's common grace, there are other

cultures whose traditional pattern of living is closer to life in Christ Jesus than traditional British culture. In matters of worship there should also be a willingness to discover unity and variety as together we seek to glorify Christ.

We do not start from a clean page on this matter. Some ethnic churches have lasted a long while. May I make some suggestions for your prayerful consideration.

**1** If your church is an ethnically identified Church, ask how you may:

**a** Evangelise other communities in the area in which you are now placed using their culture and language.

**b** Establish a deep fellowship relationship with a church which represents (a)other cultural background(s).

**c** Examine your own hearts about racial and cultural prejudices that are denying the Lord who came to redeem you 'from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers'.<sup>12</sup>

**2** If your church is not ethnically identified, ask yourself whether

**a** This means that you are neglecting segments of your local population.

**b** The majority racial and cultural group is ignoring/crushing the other groups in the congregation. I recently asked a Singaporean student why he preferred the Chinese church to an English one. His reply was that in the English church there was no opportunity given to him to serve or minister. I am sure the English church was ready to minister to a young overseas student, but did not realise that such a person from a young growing church in Singapore had much ministry to give to an English congregation.

**3** If an ethnic church meets on your church premises, can you seek to find ways

From March 7th to May 7th Lyn and I plan to visit several countries, DV. A round world ticket is the most economic way to accomplish this purpose. Conditions permitting, the itinerary will include Malaysia and Singapore, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, New Orleans, Memphis and Greenville SC. Any enquiries as to my ministry should be directed to Pastor Peter Parkinson, Crag House Farm, Cookridge, LEEDS LS16 7NH 'phone (0532) 679422.

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**a** To establish a spiritual relationship with them.

**b** To become one congregation of God's people.

It is not easy to build a multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual church. There are many past sins of which we must repent. It may be that we need to face honestly racial hatred and fears. It is not natural to give up long cherished patterns of worship or 'the way we English / Chinese / Scottish / etc. do things'. But we are not natural people, but rather the people of the crucified Messiah. As we follow him our culture and race will be crucified in order that he might be glorified in the demonstration that there is in fact a new man in Christ Jesus. Thus our churches will become more of an indication of what it will be like on that great day when all will sing to him:

*You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth.*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John 17:11, 20-23.

<sup>2</sup> Note especially Rom 7:12 and other positive references to the law in Paul's writings.

<sup>3</sup> Tamar, Rahab and Ruth being prime examples of this in the genealogy of David.

<sup>4</sup> Those who wish to see this discussed in an academic fashion are referred to N. T. Wright's unpublished 1980 Oxford D.Phil. The people of the Messiah. This is written from an evangelical position. A non-evangelical discussion of the question of the position of the law in Jewish writings contemporary to Paul, will be found in the writings of E. P. Sanders and especially his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, SCM 1977 where he argues that the keeping of the Law is the indication of the people of God rather than the means by which one becomes the people of God! He is less clear when he discusses the question as to what was proclaimed by Paul.

<sup>5</sup> D. W. B. Robinson in *Faith's Framework* Paternoster 1985 ch. 4 argues against interpreting this verse as indicating that the distinctions within the people of God into Jew and Gentile are abolished by the cross of Christ because it is a new Adam and not a new Israel that is created. He fails to understand that if there is a new Adam — a new mankind — there is no need of an ethnic Israel as a distinct segment of the people of God.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 6:1-7.

<sup>7</sup> But a continuing recognition of Latin as the universal language of worship for those who could understand it, as is shown by Luther's revised Latin Mass! Latin also continued as the language of scholarship into the Seventeenth Century.

<sup>8</sup> Reference may be made to any books by Donald McGavran or Peter Wagner.

<sup>9</sup> Rom 12:10.

<sup>10</sup> Tit 1:12 cf. v. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Eph 4:17.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Pet 1:18 NASB.

<sup>13</sup> Rev 5:9, 10.

**Editor** ERROLL HULSE, 361 Aigburth Road, Liverpool L17 0BP.  
**Associate Editors** JOHN DAVISON, DAVID KINGDON, U.K., JIM VAN ZYL, S.A., TOM NETTLES, WAYNE MACK, U.S.A.

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