

Fulness

First the good news: *David Matthews*

Cheap evangelism: *Charles Schmitt*

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One Lord: *David Lillie*

Not under law: *Gerald Coates*

Head in the clouds, feet on the ground: *Nick Butterworth*



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Editorial

A personal gospel

The heart of the gospel is the creating of a personal relationship between God and man. The sinner finds harmony in the presence of the Holy. This fact both enthralls and perplexes, bringing the sense of paradox that moves to praise and adoration. God loves me! Can it really be so?

Paul, aware that God had singled him out, expressed the gospel in very personal terms. 'The son of God loved me and gave himself up for me.' He calls it simply 'My gospel'. 'I did not receive it from man nor was I taught it.' Here is good news rooted in personal experience, nourished and renewed by constant fellowship.

We need to ask ourselves, not so much, 'What is my ministry for God?' as, 'What is my relationship with God?' Our function can change with circumstances and with the passage of time. There is nothing permanent about position or function. Relationship with God is the abiding feature of a changing life. If that friendship is deepening in love and maturity, our gifts and function will look after themselves. It was A W Tozer who said, 'The Presence is more important than the programme.' We must get beyond our gifts and ministries to what A B Davidson called 'the irresistible attractiveness of God'. Here is ultimate reality.

It may well be in the past that Protestant faith has overstressed the importance of the individual and his God to the neglect of corporate life. But when held in balance with other truths it is always necessary to come back again and again to our own personal walk with God. Sometimes a strong community life with plenty of activity can hide our individual condition. Like the bird borne on the wind, we can be carried along by the faith and

inspiration of others. Fine for a while, but sooner or later we must face the challenge ourselves. How much truth is really mine? How real is my love? How deep is my commitment? If it ceases to be personal it ceases to be 'my gospel'.

There should be no conflict between our personal life and our fellowship in the community. One should stimulate the other. If the chain is as strong as its weakest link, the community is as strong or as weak as my personal relationship with God.

This volume shows that in our automated and computerised society God still has the personal touch. He is still the God of the individual, longing for us to enjoy a deeper friendship with himself. We are glad to include a number of personal testimonies that not only emphasise the 'my gospel' approach but help to give this issue a wide appeal. You may wish to send in an early order for more copies to use in your church.

We also look at various aspects of the gospel as it is presented in our generation. Our writers examine subjects ranging from discipleship through law and grace to the Lordship of Christ. It all culminates in a fresh challenge to us. Let us take stock as we read and allow God to kindle anew our love and discipleship.

Let me also remind you that we now have binders available for your copies of *Fulness*, details of which will be found on the back cover.

Enjoy the Good News!

Graham Perrins

David Matthews



Because most Christians have a certain degree of gullibility they imagine the world to be afflicted with the same disease — hence the often strained ‘efforts’ to convince men that our good news is either good or for that matter news. There are thousands of books apart from scriptures on the content, meaning, relevance, and eschatological significance of the gospel. Hans Kung, whose writings I enjoy, took 600 learned pages to adequately cover the various meanings of the word ‘Christian’! The gospel, in its simplest form, is the Lordship of Jesus Christ: ‘God has made him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified’. There is an eternity of benefits that accrue from this central fact of divine history. There are many responses that are demanded in the light of such a revelation, but the benefits and the responses are not the essential gospel. The essence of good news is that Jesus Christ, Son of Man, Son of God is both Lord and Christ and no other. This simple fact is not up for debate, nor is it dependent on any man’s response; it is simply there and will not go away. Not now — not ever!

In these simple yet profound truths we have a rock-like foundation on which to build in an age when man’s technical ability seems to be hell-bent on planting the seeds of obsolescence in everything he builds or makes. For example, there are fewer and fewer consumer goods that are repairable — most you simply throw away and replace. In the middle of our petty, materialistic ‘democratic’ society stands a rock of offence. This same Jesus, with the values his life so powerfully portrayed, is Lord of all! All men, all governments, all systems, all religious activity will in the final analysis be measured by the value of Jesus of Nazareth. That is the good part of the news, but there is also a news part, a part that is so up to date it makes tomorrow look old fashioned. A part that, so to speak, is constantly changing, like light radiating from a multi-faced mirror.

This happens when the gospel becomes localised in an individual or a company of people. Then a man can say, like Paul, that Christ did such and such according to my gospel. If gospel presentation is to be effective it must contain two elements: the historical facts concerning Christ and the relevance of those facts in my life now. There are some beautiful examples of this in the scriptures. The woman at the well immediately comes to mind. All her life she had wanted a man who would fully satisfy her needs and desires — the sad fact is that she tried five and met failure with each. Listen to her news after meeting Christ. ‘Come and see a man . . .’ She had found her man and such was the potency of her news that it brought a village out to see and hear what she was going on about.

One other example I love is the story of the blind man who as a result of his healing was called before the religious authorities. These religious men denounce Jesus the healer as a sinner to which the man replies, ‘Whether he is a sinner or not I know not, but one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind now I can see.’ One would think that with such a basic doubt his gospel would be totally ineffective, but read the story for yourself; it’s quite remarkable. On the other hand there are many of us who would argue ardently for the sinless nature of Jesus and rightly so. But somehow it all becomes cold hard facts that no longer move us either to dance

or to weep. Somehow it has ceased to be ‘my gospel’ and has become a system of belief that must be defended at all costs, even at the cost of turning away men the moment they express sincere doubt.

We tend to start with a declaration of theological intent and demand a grasp of the passion and resurrection of Christ that I doubt we ourselves possess. Had we dealt with the woman at the well she would still be going to the well at the same time for the same reasons. Not because we didn’t love her, but because we are not yet secure enough to receive ‘sinners’ with all their doubts and questions — a ‘don’t confuse me with the facts, my faith is already made up’ kind of attitude that conveys narrow-mindedness and hardness to our hearers. Yet I am convinced that most of us are not like that at all. If we could only grasp the fact that the Lordship of Christ is not shaken by doubts or questions — even questions to which we don’t have answers!

In our attempts to remain ‘orthodox’ at all costs, we lose the thrust of freshness. Paul declares with conviction, ‘Christ rose from the dead, according to my gospel.’ That Christ rose from the dead is a fact, but what a vibrant fact it becomes alongside the words ‘according to my gospel’. His declaration has both the facts of history and the fire of conviction to commend it to his hearers. The man is so consumed with the idea that it almost sounds brash. The little word ‘my’ is a bit offensive. You want to remind Paul that everyone believes in the resurrection and that he is talking about it as if it was his own private revelation. Well, in a sense it is. Paul is on fire with the relevance of it all and, in a special way at that point in time, it has become gospel to him and to those who listen. It is the fact that it is such tremendous news to Paul himself that makes it so attractive to all kinds of people. King Agrippa, the Romans, Jews and Gentiles, all are touched and challenged by it because the man is so obviously in what he is saying.

The mistake we have so often made to our loss, is that we have felt guilty about our personal lack of burning enthusiasm on the resurrection, and have endeavoured to sound convinced. Such a witness is doomed to failure from the start. It is rather like listening to a politician on the eve of an election, telling you how much he is concerned with your welfare. You would like to believe he meant it, but you are not convinced. So secular man has listened to our dull sharing of vital truths and has written off the gospel.

A preacher once asked an actor why people responded to the actor's performance, and were left unmoved at his preaching. The reply went something like this: 'I take fiction and make it sound like facts; you take facts and make them sound like fiction.' What was missing in the preacher was the commitment of conviction. If we are to learn from this we must become adept at sharing with others what is currently real to us at the moment. For some that will be great topics like forgiveness or the crucifixion; for others it will be healing, friendship, a caring community. Whatever it is as we share it with our fellow men in the flow of life, it will become to some of them, and to us, the gospel. It will be gospel in the sense of being both 'good' and 'news' and will

prepare hearts for their own revelation of Jesus Christ the Lord.

Perhaps the other great hindrance to folk hearing our gospel has been our wrong motivation. So many of our efforts to evangelise have been self-redemptive. By that I mean that our real motivation has been for our own personal sanctity and not concern for the people we are trying to reach. So we have preached out of a sense of condemnation and wondered why people do not respond to the love of God that we are trying ever so hard to convince them of. This is equally true of the so-called social gospel as it is of the evangelical variety. Both tend to come across as self-redemptive. By that I mean that whether the advocate is talking about my social condition or about my eternal well-being, I get the sense that he is seeking to redeem his own 'soul' in it all. He is not really all that concerned about me, but feels he should be!

God so loved that he gave. He did not give in order to love or to provoke love, but rather the giving of his son was the outflow of his love. Christ's motivation in his passion was not to save himself, but to save others. He was not trying to either justify or vindicate himself, but rather to justify and vindicate me. So we are also sent into the world with the good news

of salvation to restore to men their dignity, to freely love as we have been loved, and to freely give what has in the first place been given, because that is the desire and overflow of our hearts.

I was once preaching to a group of young people, and I happened to say that I thought people were wonderful, I described how at times I stood in a crowd and was amazed at the variety and complexity of the people around me and at times like that I am deeply moved to find ways of telling those people my good news. The leader of the group came to see me a few days later a bit troubled by my statements. 'People aren't wonderful,' he said; 'they are sinful.' Yes, I know. I have personal experience. I don't deny it, but you see, this man Jesus receives sinners, he actually eats with them, and if I'm not mistaken he enjoys their company. In this matter as in all others, the disciple is not above his master! Perhaps if men could sense in our 'evangelism' a total lack of self-interest and a real human warmth topped off with a dash of humility that allows us to listen as well as speak . . . then that in itself might be the best good news of all, that here are a group of Christians who actually do like people. You see, it could continue God's great love affair with the world.

My gospel

Dave Bilbrough

me now. They had a very real hold over me; I believed that if I failed to perform certain actions something would go wrong in my life.

Then one Grand National Day my sister invited me to the local Baptist youth group. At first I resisted because of my fear of meeting others and of not being accepted by them. But eventually with great trepidation and also a deep need for friendship, I gave in and went along. Some of the people seemed a bit strange talking about God (I didn't know people still believed in him!), but at least the table tennis was good and I found myself going back again.

It was on a youth weekend that I first heard the gospel clearly preached. I found it very thought provoking and I began a quest over a period of some months for truth. I didn't want to be carried along by the crowd. I wanted an experience that was real. 'God, if you're there, give me faith to believe in you,' was my constant prayer. Cutting a long story short, the Lord answered me

and one September night, confounded by the glorious simplicity of it all, I knelt by my bed and asked God to come into my life. A sense of gratitude filled me as God revealed his love and acceptance for someone as insignificant as me. I was overwhelmed with joy. 'I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly' seemed to ring in my ears as I responded gladly to such good news.

The peace I felt didn't leave me in the morning, but somehow, in a miraculous way, my fears had disappeared. God had given me the strength and ability to overcome them. No longer did I feel compelled to carry out the demands of my superstitions. I was a prisoner set free!

I no longer categorise myself as shy and inadequate. Being loved by God has wrought in me a new security to be myself. Experiences I would never have dreamed of have happened. God has been unbelievably good to me, and I know there's much more to come.

From as far back as I can remember I found myself my own worst enemy. I remember vividly the frustration I felt, being unable to overcome shyness and inadequacy when confronted by a roomful of people. 'Lacks confidence' appeared continually on my school reports along with that familiar phrase 'could try harder'. I seemed to spend most of my spare time down at the local park, trying to emulate George Best.

I was definitely the superstitious kind. I didn't avoid ladders or throw salt over my shoulder but I had my own brand of superstitions which all seem rather ridiculous to

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Charles Schmitt takes a look at cheap evangelism

Recently I was invited to be a seminar speaker for one of the main christian television networks in the US. The burden of this particular TV outreach, with which I can deeply identify, is evangelism. I was impressed by the sincerity and the fervour of its men and women, but my in-depth evaluation of the situation as a whole was not so positive. On one of the TV programmes the well-known host of the talk show noted that their programme was now rated as top entertainment in its field. My journal entry for October 30, 1978 reads as follows: '... that Christ is preached — in this I can be glad. But that such ... worldly and secular means are used, I find inconsistent with the preciousness and the dignity of the one proclaimed ... How I long, with all my being, dear Jesus, to see you raise up anointed evangelists and apostles in the earth, whose message will be holy and true, whose credentials will be signs and wonders wrought in your great name, and whose passion will be to see trees hewn down upon the mountains that lumber might be gathered to build the glorious house of my God in all the earth! ...'

A new message

Our modern-day cheap gospel of simply 'receiving Jesus' is totally out of character with the apostolic message. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

defines cheap grace as 'the preaching of forgiveness without discipleship, grace without the cross ... Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again ... such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it gives a man the only true life.' Apostolic evangelism would never have qualified as 'top entertainment' in its field. It was a rugged call to a total surrender to the Lordship of Christ Jesus in the most devastating of terms: '... God has made him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified ... Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2: 36-38).

I believe that the reason why there is such shallowness among so many believers in this present movement is simply that many of its adherents are scarcely born-again, if at all. At best they are prematurely born, and unable to survive outside of the charismatic incubators that are being presently established all over the country as life-support systems for a sorry people who have been introduced to God under this cheap gospel.

The gospel has now indeed become the top form of entertainment in its field! It is fashionable to be 'born-again' in America. In the times of the apostles it was not fashionable; it was devastating! The gospel of

grace involved a deep, broken-hearted repentance and resulted in a truly transformed life; one that was totally out of character with the materialistic world system that surrounded it. The low spiritual level of our charismatic life in the US is clearly exemplified by the overwhelming success of that kind of hilarious 'faith message' that is presently being preached everywhere in which materialistic gain is being construed as godliness. American charismatics are determined to have the most, the best, the nicest, the costliest and the kingdom of heaven besides. In contrast, I can only think of Peter's startling confession, 'Silver and gold have I none ...', and to remember him who had 'nowhere to lay his head'!

But thanks be to our God, a new form of evangelism is emerging, in which a new message is being declared — a message of genuine and thorough repentance, a message of true and godly faith, a message of deep and lasting moral transformation that is birthing a strong, vibrant, healthy people for God's own glory — a people that stand out of character in the midst of a warped and materialistic generation.

New credentials

It pleases God to draw attention to his own message. He is his own advertising agency, by 'many wonders and signs ...' As to the advertising means of the early

Church, we are told that 'with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and great grace was upon them all'. Great power and great grace were their only credentials. They would never have relied on the carnal means that men have presently resorted to in calling attention to the claims of the gospel. Today, in the charismatic movement, the gospel is big business. Indeed, it is the best form of entertainment around! This new charismatic breed of evangelistic showmanship never ceases to amaze the world with its Hollywood razzle-dazzle. Gospel recordings, some of the lyrics and music of which are thoroughly nauseating, are at an all time high. But thank God a new sound is being heard; a new demonstration is being seen upon the face of the earth; a new man of God and a new woman of God is emerging! Thanks be to God that the restored body of Jesus

Christ is being shut up to this kind of holy evangelism! For without it there could be no effective way to reach this final generation for him.

A new purpose

Conventional modern-day evangelism is nearly always content to encourage new-born souls simply to 'attend the church of their choice'. The fact that many of these would remain immature and weak all the days of their lives because of a poor choice of church does not seem to be worth consideration. Most present-day evangelists seem to have no real vision for doing anything with the trees once they have been cut down upon the mountain top. The timber simply lies strewn here and there because of the great and consuming false notion of ecumenical unity that obsesses many in the charismatic movement. Some would reason, 'We certainly would not want to start yet another

church. That would be divisive. That would cause hard feelings!' Actually in many cases, that could cut off the flow of support from various traditional sources. And so we continually fall short of what God is really after in this generation in our evangelism.

'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and glorified."' Thanks be to God that a new breed of evangelist is beginning to be given to the Church by the Lord — men who see the rebuilding of the House of God in these last days. Evangelists are starting to emerge who have a vision for the present purposes of God in the earth. They are bringing wood, and in team-ministry with apostles and prophets, pastors and teachers, they are moving towards the rebuilding of God's glorious House in every place.

My gospel

Dave Taylor

Val and I had met in India and we came back to England to get married and look for a home church. Looking back on that time it is amazing how serious and naive we were about that search.

For myself, I had never been a dyed-in-the-wool convinced Anglican. Having made my first response to the Lord at a boys' camp, I returned to a church where the gospel did not seem to be preached. My 'spiritual home' was a Bible class which I looked for and joined. This was soon supplemented by a school Christian Union and, later, a young people's group when a more definitely evangelical vicar/curate team arrived. The same combination continued when I left home for University, except the vicar was certainly not evangelical.

All this time, I had been continually exposed to a brand of christianity which hinged upon what I believed and what I did. My understanding of the gospel grew and my desire to do something about it grew with it. I felt the call of God to 'full-time work'.

Five years in a completely alien culture is a good training ground. I experienced some success, some failure, and learned a lot. There were times when I was continually full of happiness, and a long time of deepening gloom when God seemed to be deaf.

I can still clearly remember the night when, in talking to other people, I realised that I had been blind. God made me see in a new way, and I began to experience the Holy Spirit overflowing in me. Out of the flood of new light, I began to discover a ministry, and longed to see the Church built up. But I was forever travelling in different parts of India, and could not stay anywhere to really belong to a church.

Val and I shared our plans and aspirations. We had felt called to India, but were painfully aware of the fact that neither of us had really been sent by our home church. I didn't even really believe I belonged to one! So we combined our marriage plans and ministry plans and returned to England.

I think we fondly imagined that we would come back, make immediate impact, stay for six months and then be sent back to India in a wave of prayer and financial support. It didn't happen! Nearly seven years have passed, and we are still here. We tried to find a 'home' in Suffolk, made some good friends, but were not 'adopted' as we had hoped. We

allowed ourselves to get inveigled into another year of evangelistic activism, learned more about ourselves, each other and other people, but were still 'homeless'.

When I was offered a temporary pastorate on the borders of Essex and East London, we hoped that this was it. It wasn't, but Father had it all planned as usual. Through friends we knew in India we came in touch with some folks living in Romford who seemed to be talking about a very New Testament-like sort of church structure, and we began to become involved.

I suppose it was this ideal structure that first attracted me, and I am not sure how long it took me to discover that I had now met some people who did not want to know how much I knew, nor how much I did, but genuinely did want to know who I was. The bubble of mere thought and action has been burst, and I am enjoying being who I am, and discovering more of what I am like. I am meeting others on the same relaxed level, and discovering more of Father's nature, not just what he wants thought and done for him.

If God speaks to this little group and tells them to send us out to India (or anywhere else), my heart will be torn. I love India, and would dearly love to return there, but it is here that I have begun to experience the life of the Church. I have come home.

DRAMA

by Roger Davin

Within our present experience of restoration, we are often surprised to discover how earnest the Holy Spirit is in renewing areas of life we might tend to neglect. What God seems to be after in many different places might be described as clarity of expression, a sharpening of the tools with which we express ourselves to him and each other. Our speech, for instance, has become more pointed, laced with grace and honesty. Our songs have become increasingly more relevant to the situations from which they spring. A certain liberty in dance and movement has furthered the colour and range of our expression.

Here in Duluth, we have had unique experiences in the realms of drama. Although a few of us have had university training in theatre, we never presumed that acting and its related arts would ever become a part of our new-found church life. In our early days together we mainly occupied ourselves with peering into the vast and intriguing possibilities for God's people prophetically disclosed in scripture. At one point, however, one of the fellows sought to enlist our aid for his drama project at a local college. He wanted to write and stage a play concerning the life of King David.

'I've done a fair amount of study about David's life,' I told him, 'and have a few interesting observations about his relationship with Saul and Jonathan. If you need a bit of help or insight, let me know.' By the end of that day, he was saying to me, '... and if you need any help or insights while you're writing the script, I'd be happy to offer what I have.' Our roles were reversed.

So *David: Man of God* was written and well received by the community at large during its performances.

Throughout the rehearsals, however, we found ourselves working not simply with interpretation of lines, movement, and props, but also having to contend with the issues of accountability, responsibility, authority, and commitment. Few people fully comprehend the exacting requirements necessary for a quality stage production. Those six weeks together in intense preparation contained all of the ingredients of deepening relationships — clashes, rubbings, confrontation. We emerged all the wiser for the experience. Although we were not quick to jump into another theatrical venture, we went on to appreciate our new-found insights into the practical nature of relationships and corporateness.

Our experience with drama may well have ended there. The success of our initial project did not tempt us to pick up drama as the 'missing key' to evangelism. It wasn't until a few years later that dramatic expression began to work its way into our lives. It happened in a very natural and unassuming manner.

It was convenient for us then to meet on Sunday afternoons. Following a time of worship we would share a meal together, simply enjoying being together, talking, eating, laughing. We expected people to be quite ready to go their separate ways at the conclusion of the meal, having the rest of the evening to themselves. Yet, invariably, the atmosphere was just so positive, so congenial, that most people were reluctant to leave.

There we were, 25-45 people crowded into a small flat enjoying tiny groups of discussion. Before long, that after-dinner time of togetherness began to take on some form and shape all its own. On a few occasions someone would

gain the whole group's attention for the telling of a particularly successful joke. One evening a few of us were given the task of acting out characters and situations invented by our audience — impromptu! A rehearsed, but pointless, tale was enacted once simply as a vehicle for our more introverted members to try their hand at being in front of a crowd. A well-known christian television show in America fell victim to our spoofing as we created our own colourful version.

In the middle of all this, we brought together some of our parents and relatives for a small banquet. We elected to draw from the various evenings' antics in order to put together some kind of presentation which would allow these people to see the real us. The performance went well. We became convinced at that time of the need to create some format whereby people around us in the city would have the opportunity to see christians merely being themselves. We sought to counteract the distorted, confused opinions others may have held about how christians live.

Once a month, we rented an auditorium and offered the public what we called *The Acts 29 Revue*. It was a mixture of an interview show and a variety presentation.

Our own little orchestra provided the music. We had an inventive director/host whose wit and charm were most engaging. This monthly production afforded us the opportunity to express our creativity in so many ways. In addition to interviewing a number of different individuals, we staged short musical concerts, humorous skits, and we poked kind fun at the prejudices people accumulate. From time to time I recreated a bible personality in full costume and make-up — King David, Bethu-el, Nehemiah,

Bartholomew . . . As a special project, we put together a parody of the very popular American film 'Rocky', which was particularly well received.

We brought *The Acts 29 Revue* to an end on its second anniversary performance. Having felt that it had run its course, we didn't want to prolong its existence only to close down in obvious weakness.

In the meantime, our own gatherings of the church have continued to be coloured by bits of poetry, skits, or readers' theatre.

Readers' theatre is the interpretation of a piece of literature by a small group of people. They simply read it, in parts and unison, with no props or costumes. Some of us did the first part of the book of Job this way and we are currently putting together a presentation of excerpts from *The Gulag Archipelago* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

In all we have done, we have tended to avoid the Hollywood style of popular entertainment. We endeavoured to keep two important elements in mind — quality and integrity. We believed in being well-rehearsed and drawing from the depths of each person's abilities. By committing ourselves to integrity, we intended that what people saw on stage was to be a fair and accurate representation of our actual lives. We wanted folk to see Christians being themselves, so almost all we did publicly had its roots in our everyday lives.

Drama, then, is taking its place alongside music and dance in our efforts to see the church come into clear and complete expression. Although we recognise the need for practical covering, owing to the ease with which stage performance can be used to display one's inflated ego, it does need to be noted that the whole range of theatrical art is a redeemable commodity in the hands of such an expressive God.

James states, rather boldly, in Acts 15 that the Tabernacle of David 'which is fallen' will be set up and built again. One of the strongest characteristics of the activities surrounding that homely tent was that it was a place of full, complete, liberated expression of men's hearts unto God. They used everything, and it seemed as though they never lacked for words, or music, or appropriate movement with which to honour Jehovah. As David

set this unique tabernacle in order, his burden for the priests was that they should 'celebrate, thank, and praise' the Lord continually. This word *celebration* is worthy of investigation. It means 'to remember, to mention, to bring to remembrance'. David wrote his instructions for celebration in the psalm with which they inaugurated this priestly function. He enjoined them (and us) to 'celebrate his marvellous works that he has done'. And much mention was made of the past and present deeds of their righteous deliverer. Their faith was strengthened as they rehearsed again the parting of the Red Sea, the manna falling in the wilderness, the defeat of countless enemies.

'Celebrate . . . his wonders.' With a perceptive eye David recognised and brought to remembrance the infinite creativity of God's nature as it is revealed unmistakably in the wonders of creation. From the earth-shaking roar of thunder to the delicacy of the dew clinging to the spider's web, men need to have their capacity to appreciate the Almighty expanded. We need to notice such things and celebrate them as reflections of our Father.

'Celebrate . . . the judgments of his mouth.' When God intervenes and renders a decision, he is right. Whether we include the laws of Moses or the sacrifice upon Golgotha, we are to call to mind the righteousness of God in performing judgment, chastening, and bringing men to an inescapable sense of reality.

'Celebrate his covenant forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations.' What rich material for rejoicing! Mention needs to be made of the sustained efforts of God to covenant himself with men, despite mankind's repeated failure to accept and respond to such a relationship. He has given his life to us!

When we enlist the use of drama in this brand of meaningful celebration, theatre becomes a valuable tool in 'bringing to remembrance' these various aspects of life in the kingdom of God. Thus our efforts in drama are given pointed purpose, yet with an infinite variety of subjects and presentations available to us, another tool whereby we are able to expand the range of our expression in order to more completely honour Jesus.

Muir

Muir Gebbie

'Muir, you are going to hell with no brakes on.' It was September 1950, I was almost fourteen years old, and the one speaking to me was my father. It was six years later that my direction changed, not because of counsel from my parents but because I had a real encounter with Jesus Christ.

In these six years many things had taken place. I had been moved from Glasgow (where I was on probation for stealing) on the assumption that a change of environment would bring about a change in my life. But, if anything, the situation grew worse. The rebellion and conflict within me gathered around me young folks of the same aspirations, and there was born the first Teddy-boy gang in Darvel. A new image emerged, that of violence, pride and living for kicks. Motor bikes, fast cars and drink were all I lived for, with all the fringe benefits that these things brought.

But September and October 1956 brought real change to my life when, in rebellious response to a dare, I went to church. God spoke to me there and I was convicted of sin through the children's message. My conviction led me to Jesus, who, when I confessed my utter need for him to change me, came into my life and for twenty-three years has led me on to know more of himself and of myself, and my constant need for his grace and love every day.

It appears, as I look back over these years, that God has been committed to redeeming me from the image others had me walking in, to the real me, finding true expression and joy in his perfect will for my life. I'll never forget the day in Brazil when God said, 'Muir, I loved you when you were still a sinner, and that love hasn't changed.' Somewhere in the midst of serving God, I'd lost the wonder of knowing that fact. But as I've seen myself fail, it has brought me to an ever increasing awareness of his love and commitment to bringing the Muir he created into fulness in Jesus.

One Lord

by David Lillie

Israel had the living oracles of El Shaddai — the Almighty God. They had been conveyed to them by prophets and written down to be passed on to future generations, ensuring purity and continuity of God's testimony among his covenant people. In Abraham, their father, he had given them a mandate that through them all families on earth might be blessed.

Central to this testimony was the self-revelation of God himself. When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush he told him, 'Say to this people, I Am . . . has sent me to you; this is my name for ever.'

'I Am', 'El Shaddai' — these were titles which spoke of the omnipotence and providence of God. God had made man in his own image, and although that image had been blurred by sin, man still retained an instinct which craved an even fuller revelation of his Creator.

And so when he appeared again to Moses, he said, 'I appeared to Abraham, and to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name Jehovah I did not make myself known to them. Say therefore to this people of Israel, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you . . . , I will redeem you . . . , and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am Jehovah your God."'

The nations around might boast of their innumerable deities; but Israel gloried in the fact that their God was Jehovah, the one, universal Lord. It was by that redemptive name that he spoke repeatedly to them by the prophets:

I am Jehovah, and besides me there is no saviour.

I am Jehovah, that is my name; my glory I give to no other.

Yet from time to time, statements or allusions were made by the prophets which seemed to imply plurality within the Godhead. Who, for example, was the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah's prophecies who, although 'a man', seemed exalted so far above the level of mere humanity? And in David's Psalm 110, which opens with the words, 'The Lord says to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool,"' who is 'my lord' to whom 'the Lord' thus speaks? The prophets spoke often of the messiah who should come to deliver the people of God. Who was he?

Questions like these must often have teased the minds of godly Israelites; men like Saul of Tarsus, the devout Pharisee who had sat at the feet of the great teacher Gamaliel. To such men, the title 'Lord' was reserved for Jehovah alone. And when Saul heard that people of his own race, yes even some professing godliness, were using it with reference to a certain Jesus of Nazareth, a claimant to messiahship who had been executed some years before, his indignation knew no bounds. Many of his own countrymen were joining this Jesus cult, apparently on the strength of a rumour put around by his disciples that he had been raised from the dead.

Immediate and drastic action had to be taken to suppress this cult before it got out of hand. Obtaining credentials from the high priest, Saul set out for Damascus with a considerable militia, to launch his crusade against these Jesus heretics.

Approaching the city, he was suddenly blinded by a strange light which flashed around him, and he fell to the ground. Then a voice said, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' Recognising the voice of deity Saul must have been greatly disturbed by the implica-

tions of that question. With great trepidation he asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' (The address 'Lord' should be noted.) Did the answer which followed, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' confirm his worst fears?

For in that tremendous moment of truth Saul had to come to terms with the fact that the Lord Jehovah, whose servant he so zealously sought to be, was one and the same as Jesus of Nazareth, whose implacable enemy he had hitherto been. And if Jesus had been raised from the dead — as the evidence now overwhelmingly indicated — his claim to be Christ the Lord could no longer be denied. Satisfied by the evidence, from that moment Saul became the bondsman of Jesus for ever.

Henceforth the service of Jesus was to motivate his every plan and movement, so that in later years he could say, 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.' All earlier ambitions were 'counted as loss for the sake of Christ', and for 'the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord'. To relinquish his dedication to the cause of the Jew's religion in order to follow the despised and rejected Nazarene must have seemed madness to most of his contemporaries; but for Saul there was now really no alternative. For God had evidently set the seal of his entire approval on Jesus, in raising him from the dead and in giving him the Name above every name, the Name at which, as Isaiah's prophecy foretold, every knee shall bow, and which every tongue shall confess: the name of Jehovah, or Lord.

So the step Saul took that day was not a step aside, but a giant stride forward into an understanding of God. For now he was able to grasp what earlier converts to Jesus had already grasped, that not only had Jesus spoken the word of God, but

had been in himself a 'speaking' from God: the Word made flesh who dwelt among us. In due course this unlikely convert was to become, not only the outstanding evangelist and apostle of his age in the service of Christ, but also for all time the Church's chief interpreter of the great mystery of the faith: God manifested in human flesh. Of more than 600 references to 'the Lord' contained in the New Testament, almost half come from the pen of Paul.

No wonder that when he introduces the sevenfold cluster of 'unities' in Ephesians 4, the 'one Lord' takes central place. In my previous article we saw that the first three of these unities — the one body, the one Spirit, and the one hope — are linked together. And it is in fact the 'one Lord' who is the uniting bond between them. For the 'one body' is his Body, 'the fulness of him who fills all in all'. The 'one Spirit' is that 'Spirit of truth' of whom the Lord declared, 'He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.' And the 'one hope' is the hope of his kingdom in which the overcoming saints are to serve under his headship.

Let us then consider four aspects of the Lordship of Jesus which are presented to us in Paul's writings:

1. Lord of creation

In a powerful endorsement of the apostle John's statement that 'in the beginning was the Word; . . . all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made', Paul writes to the Colossians as follows:

'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities — all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.'

Jesus was 'the Word' by which the Father had called the universe into existence. That Word 'became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth'. Beholding his glory, we know that we have glimpsed omnipotence. Jehovah revealed in Jesus is indeed a great mystery; but knowing him, we know he spoke truth when he declared, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'

2. Lord of redemption

Jesus himself claimed, 'I am the way . . . no man comes to the Father but through me.' Boldly, at Pentecost, Peter had quoted the reference to 'my Lord' in David's Psalm 110 and had declared, 'Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified . . . There is salvation in no one else.'

Paul is also unwavering in his endorsement of that claim. In passage after passage he points to the once-crucified, now risen, Lord and declares that, in virtue of his self-giving 'as a ransom for all', he is the one and only mediator between God and man. To a mixed company of Jews and Gentiles at Antioch in Pisidia he declares, 'Through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.'

The foundation of this claim was that, Jesus having died for all, God had raised him from the dead. In the light of this gospel, no other Saviour — and no other gospel — can claim credibility; for no other is needed. So much for the 'many roads to heaven' of which we sometimes hear. All but the one which goes via Calvary are blind alleys along which the blind grope their way to disillusionment.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus has been 'crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one'. He is the universal Saviour, the One Lord, not only of creation, but by his death and resurrection, of redemption too.

3. Lord of the universe

Paul speaks in Ephesians of the Father's 'plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth'. In Paul's teaching, this prospect is invariably interwoven with the great theme of redemption, as also in the passage from Hebrews quoted above.

One of Paul's great statements in this connection is found in the passage in Philippians 2:8-11 where he says, 'Being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore

God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.'

'Obedient unto death . . . therefore . . . highly exalted.' 'Crowned . . . because of the suffering of death.' From a human point of view these statements may seem paradoxical. But not from God's; for in the divine plan the Cross and the Crown are inseparably linked. Here are seen the credentials which ensure that Jesus alone has the right to the throne of the universe. The One who is to share the throne of God is the Lamb who had been slain; to him, all in heaven and on earth shall bow the knee.

4. My Lord

In the whole mystery of our faith, nothing is more wonderful than this: that the One who is the Lord of creation, the Lord of redemption, and the coming universal Lord, is also, by deliberate and loving intent, the personal Lord of every man, woman or child who comes trustingly to him, claiming the benefits of his saving work. For Paul, in spite of the magnitude of his 'kingdom' vision, this personal relationship — 'the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord' — was his most priceless possession. To the Galatians he writes, 'The Son of God . . . loved me, and gave himself for me.'

We meet Mary as she stands weeping outside the empty tomb crying, 'They have taken away my Lord.' And a little later John records how the risen Lord invites doubting Thomas to place his fingers in the wounds in his hands and side; 'and Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God"'. .

How often merely 'religious' people are heard to refer to 'the Lord' or even 'our Lord', yet they seem strangely unable to take that personal confession on their lips, and to speak of him as 'my Lord'. Yet that confession, if made from the heart, is the key which unlocks the door into the discovery of 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge', which, says Paul, 'are hid in Christ'.

'There is one Lord'. Those who can testify, 'He is mine', are of all men most favoured. And of him, to whom so much is given, much is expected.

I'd never even heard of George Tarleton until the day he visited the Baptist church I was then attending, to speak to the youth fellowship about the dangers of witchcraft — and while he was about it, the importance of being thoroughly saved. 'He takes it all much too seriously,' I thought. And besides, I didn't like his haircut. But when, not long after, I was wanting to take things a little more seriously myself, I felt George was the man to go and see, haircut or no haircut.

As he sat and socked it to me about baptism in the Spirit, as far as I could make out, the coiffure didn't hinder him in the least. And in the years that have passed since he prayed for me in the living room of his Chingford home, 'old things have passed away; all things have been made new' — he's changed his hairstyle. Several times.

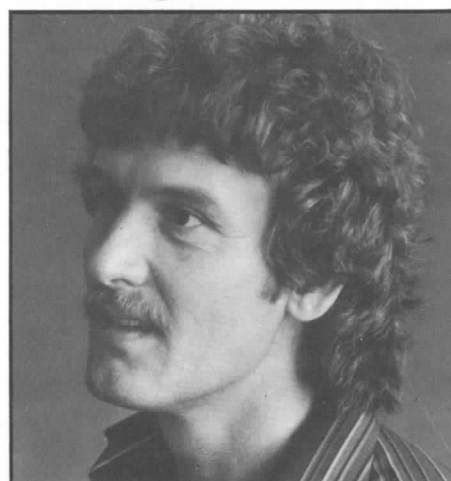
So it was with a fair amount of expectancy that I set out one mild April evening to drive the dozen or so miles to George's North London home, to conduct an official interview. On the way I had to repent in anticipation of the jealousy I usually feel when going into houses like George and Dorothy's. It was built at a time when they used to take a bit of trouble over things like cornices and lintels; in the days when houses had some character. And theirs is no exception.

When Dorothy answered the door and showed me through to the back living room, I was not disappointed, for I had chanced upon a new George Tarleton hairstyle. Notwithstanding (the sofa is perfectly comfortable), we got down to business, and George began to unravel 41 years of history. They proved to be quite dramatic too. For one thing I learnt that the Tarletons originate from Southern Ireland, where once there stood a castle that was the family seat. Not that there's much more than a couple of boulders left now, but George assured both Dorothy and myself that it was an important fact. So I dutifully record it here.

At the time of the Indian Mutiny, George's ancestors were 'called up' to go and help with the fightings; and so began a long family involvement with the East. His father helped set up Horlicks in Burma, George proudly told me, and George himself was born in Rangoon, in 1938.

I.D.

Bernard Cope puts a face to the name of George Tarleton



With the outbreak of World War Two, George's father was obliged to leave Burma for India, with the assurance that his wife and son would be flown across to join him. But George and his mother had a difficult journey to make even to reach the airfield, and such were the delays they encountered on the way, the root cause being a bomb attack or two, that they missed the last plane. With no other way of fleeing the country, Mrs. Tarleton surrendered to the Japs; so from the age of 4 to 7, George was a prisoner-of-war.

Nor was peacetime without its troubles. They used to beat him up at school because he was white. Not surprisingly he was inclined to run away, to the detriment of his education; and George reluctantly acknowledges that he's been trying to catch up ever since.

The family left Burma on Independence Day in 1948 and came to England. George was sent first to a prep school in the south and then, in complete contrast, to a co-ed school in North London. He eventually left school without any clear understanding of his own identity, and, perhaps with the intention of countering that problem, he fancied his chances

as a Shakespearian actor, in spite of his career adviser's incredulity. Whilst waiting for his stage career to unfold he took a selling job in a John Lewis store. Then, at last, he met a man who offered to train him as an actor. But before his training was long underway, George got saved, after being taken aback by the conviction of a young christian girl he was getting to know.

The evangelical orientation of the Anglican church he joined rather threatened his theatrical aspirations, so they were shelved, and anyway he was called up for National Service. He joined the RAF because he saw himself as a pilot, until they told him it meant signing on for 12 years, to which his reaction was rather negative. But if he signed for an extra 11 months, he also discovered, he would get nearly double the pay. Now that was more like an offer.

Whilst fulfilling this extended obligation to Her Majesty, he met Dorothy at the church youth club. Their relationship was founded on a sort of supply and demand basis: George had tried all the other girls in the group except Dorothy, and Dorothy found herself in a similar predicament with regard to the boys. Half way through his National Service, they were married. The WD motor bike George had bought for £13 was up for sale to raise some badly needed cash for their new home, when he crashed it, and lost his thumb at the same time. He got his thumb sewn back on and £100 compensation, which came in very handy. Their first home was in Hampstead, and then they moved to a Norfolk toll-house near to where George was stationed. During their first 18 months of marriage they had several other homes, none of which was too special.

On leaving the forces George returned to selling. He wasn't particularly the salesman type, but he loved meeting people. So he sold leather, frozen foods, and then hearing aids. Dealing with the deaf gave him more pleasure than the other jobs because he was communicating with individuals who needed extra attention. He and Dorothy also began to take more interest in church life in general and young people in particular.

As a youth club leader George tackled the odd gang or two who

occasionally broke up the meeting and the furniture. As a referee in youth football he blew a mean whistle. But as a gospel preacher on Hampstead Heath he felt he was little more than a quaint subject for the American tourists to photograph. After two hard years, his enthusiastic evangelistic team of one hundred had diminished to a disappointing five. All in all he was finding the going pretty tough; so that when Dorothy inherited some money, they moved to a large house in Sunbury where they opted out of all the activity, and settled into a church situation that was far enough from their new home to leave them free to run their lives undisturbed.

Then in 1962 their son Mark was born, and for practicality's sake they needed a church that was more local. The Congregational church fitted the bill. And there the ministry caught hold of them. The insularity of the life they had been leading was challenged, and before long they were to see their home filled with young people again, nice wall-to-wall carpets or no nice wall-to-wall carpets.

When the pastor discovered that George could preach, he began to encourage him 'into the ministry'. George himself knew that the Lord was calling him, and he responded in the only way he knew, which was to do as the man said and apply to become a minister. Nevertheless George felt that his calling was 'to pluck up and break down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant'. The words stared at him out of the opening pages of Jeremiah.

So George began his course at London Bible College, which he frankly feels was spiritually useless. The only benefits were to get hold of a working knowledge of Greek and Church history. 'And even they belong to the past,' he pointed out to me.

He was appalled by the unreality at the college, by the competitiveness which was so out of place, and by the discovery that many students were struggling under spiritual and even mental problems as a result of the pressure. George believes that it was the deep-end practical situations he was thrown into as a student pastor that taught him the most. These were principally at his own congregational church in Sunbury, amongst the people who were supporting him through college.

At the completion of his course in 1966, their daughter Sharon was born and George was inducted as minister of a congregational church in South Chingford. Martin Lloyd-Jones, his mentor at LBC, ordained him.

For two years he had sought baptism in the Spirit, and the Lord had filled him and thrilled him almost beyond his belief while he was still a student. Now in the context of his responsibility for a growing congregation George saw the effect of that blessing on a somewhat startled church.

His ministry there was to last five years, at the end of which he felt the Lord was compelling him to leave. It was a difficult step to take, but George willingly acknowledged the truth in a prophecy given to him by John Noble in the middle of his struggle to make the decision: 'You have been the captain of a ship that hasn't left the harbour. The crew have been willing to talk about the destination, but frightened of the wind that would take them there.' He wept and wept when he left.

Nevertheless, from George's point of view now comes the good bit. During the first six months after he left South Chingford £2000 mysteriously accumulated in his bank account. To this day he doesn't know where the money came from, but it made a fine deposit to put down on a house for his family.

With his new found freedom from 'denominational christianity' he felt like a bird out of a cage, and he's been flying ever since. He began to find his own identity; to discover he wasn't quite so conservative, for example, and accordingly to dress as he really wanted, free from any obligation to do the done thing.

His involvement in dealing with occult problems, which had begun in ordinary but positive day-to-day dealings with folk at South Chingford, mushroomed in a way that he didn't expect. Although it was exciting to see people delivered and demonic forces put in their place, he was relieved when the other London leaders, whose fellowship he was appreciating more and more, urged him to put this aspect of his ministry aside.

The fellowship in Chingford began when 12 to 18 people left the

congregational church looking for the kind of shepherding they knew George could give them. A house group took shape in the Tarleton home and numbers began to increase, with sometimes whole groups of people linking with the growing family.

By the time there were 200 people George was feeling lonely out in front, particularly conscious of the need for somebody else to share his responsibility and enlarge the ministry of the leadership. Dave Mansell, in whom George saw a clear and profound prophetic gift, was moving to within a few miles of George's home, and on the strength of this he invited Dave to get involved. Dave taught George a great deal about prophetics, and when the fellowship was later divided in half, it too had benefitted from this aspect of Dave's ministry.

George moved to the house in Muswell Hill in 1977, his ministry by now extended to establishing and covering a number of other groups in different parts of the country. This meant he was a travelling man, but since the Lord explained to him that the sheep should be led out to pasture and allowed to roam, rather than be penned in, it has been George's ultimate objective, having given each fellowship everything he's got, to encourage them to stand on their own feet and develop their own personality.

As we talked of the present, and his vision for the future, I had a bit more jealousy to repent of when I realised how much squash he is getting in. I also learnt that for the time being family meals are taken around a thinly disguised table tennis table. And I was surprised to hear George say that he is not quite sure of his ministry. Pressing him to explain a little more, he expressed a desire to see some radical new forms of evangelism developing. He would love to use the media, for example, especially TV, even though, with his current thinking, TV could only serve as a kind of appetiser.

For George, the charismatic movement is dead. And so is the house church movement. He is moving more and more into what he calls 'experimental christianity', because he knows the Lord is an ongoing God. I for one am looking forward to what he does next. I just hope he doesn't go changing his hairstyle again. Because I quite like this one.

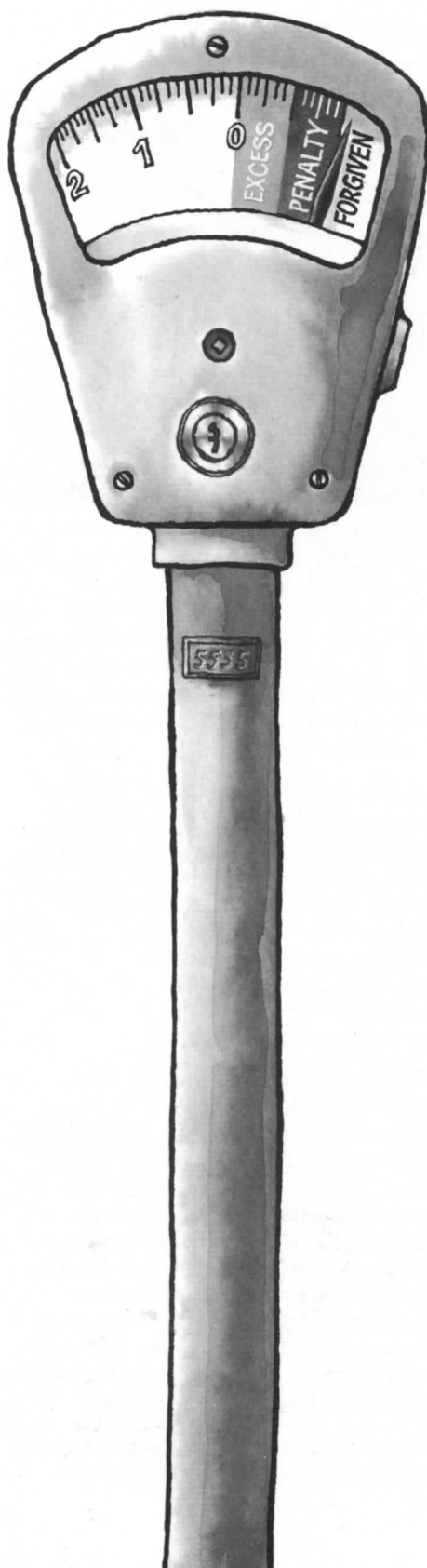
It was not a large meeting, but the place was packed to capacity. There was an air of expectancy as I began the talk on law and grace. Keeping to the main points of my book, *Not Under Law*, I spoke about the lack of scriptural evidence for such things as 'quiet times', tee-totalism and sabbath-keeping as New Testament laws. Suddenly a hand shot up in the congregation. 'Excuse me,' he cut in, surprising us all. 'This is nothing short of disgusting. You call yourself a minister of the word and yet discourage the very things that the christian life consists of. If we don't read our Bibles every morning, where are we going to get our food from? It is my deep conviction that every christian should be up early in the morning reading his Bible and praying.' His wife, sitting next to him, nudged him in the ribs, raised her eyebrows and loudly declared, 'Why don't you then?' The congregation froze with embarrassment. He had been exposed, legalistically banging the drum for a cause he neither believed in nor practised. He was afraid that if the accepted standards of the christian way of life were taken away, his whole life would collapse. Like so many others, he legalistically and aggressively defended what he felt he ought to believe, demanding that others do the same and thus putting on a facade of spirituality.

Another example of this was when a friend of mine hinted that all the women in his fellowship should wear ankle length dresses. With skirts getting shorter and shorter, he feared that nothing would be left to the imagination of his brothers. However, he confessed to me later that the long dresses now left everything to the imagination! To me, at least for a while, and certainly to his congregation, he appeared to be tremendously spiritual, modest and sensitively aware of other people's needs. As it turned out, however, it was all a cover for his own moral problems. Instead of getting the help he needed, he pressurised the sisters in his fellowship into a pattern of behaviour which made them look spiritual but was in fact nothing of the sort. I could probably fill this issue with similar stories.

How on earth did we get into this situation where we preach God's grace whilst we ourselves are enslaved to value systems which are often unscriptural and void of real life? Ideals and principles for

NOT UNDER LAW

by Gerald Coates



which we proclaim we would die and yet in which we have completely missed the heart of God. How is it that the Church has become a mill of fantasy, grinding out the illusion that if you can't find the resources to be spiritual, settle for something less and just look spiritual?

Leaders or signposts?

Firstly, I have to say, that, almost against my will, I have come to the conclusion that the Church is in the main run by a group of frightened men; men afraid of the consequences of voicing their true feelings on a multitude of issues; afraid of saying or doing anything that will cause folk to leave their congregations; afraid of being ill thought of by their public. Such men foster 'secret fellowship' where everyone in a local church knows what is really believed by everybody else, but knows it in confidence.

The result of this fear among preachers is the preaching of another gospel. Preaching a gospel of grace, but practising a gospel of coercion, albeit implied. What preachers and leaders must understand is that law, with its rigorous approach to life, is as damaging as permissiveness with its complete lack of absolutes. Law will initially make things look better than waiting for the grace of God to operate. Life becomes orderly, problems rarely emerge and, if they do, we keep them away from as many people as we can, for things must appear to be better than they really are. We are in desperate need of men who will lead, preach from their hearts and take people by the hand and lead them into the reality of life in Christ; not signposts, who supposedly point the way to the kind of godliness that quite often they themselves are not enjoying, nor in fact believing in.

Ahead of reality

Secondly, tension is created when we try to live beyond where we are in God. Grace becomes insufficient to cleanse, and motivate us. We must work, sacrifice, go out of our way, make an effort and look upon all things as duty. Such activity is applauded in the average church, regardless of whether it is motivated by the grace of God, or by condemnation and pseudo-righteousness. Jesus said, 'Out of your innermost beings shall flow rivers of living water,' not out of

the Bible, tradition or even those in leadership. Out of our bellies, our wombs and our innermost beings. This is the gospel.

Many, however, fear that if they live from within they will end up in godlessness. Surely though it is better to live as an outlaw if that is what we really want, than pretend that what we are doing is coming out of our relationship with God. The only thing that the Holy Spirit can do with us at this stage is to convict us of our pretence. However, if almost everybody else is pretending, we then regard our pretence as normal. But if we live from the heart and find ourselves obeying the lusts of the flesh, responding to the world system of things and disregarding God and his word, the Holy Spirit can then bring conviction and grace to change us inwardly in order that our lives may be a true reflection of godly hearts.

Initially we may look a mess, but we can ask the Spirit to deal with the mess. Jesus said, 'I am the truth.' He never hid things under the carpet. God is after real holiness, not glued-on holiness; genuine love, not cultural niceness, conviction with integrity, not group pressure or condemnation. This is the grace of God; he accepts us as we are, so that we can accept ourselves and others. God loves us too much to leave us the way we are, and we will love others too much to leave them as they are. But God is not continually seeking to change us through pressure and coercion, and we mustn't do the same with ourselves or others.

The will

Thirdly, it was Augustine who formulated the saying that went something like this: 'Love God and do what you like.' That of course has been used and abused depending on the condition of the heart of the hearers. Augustine was not, contrary to public opinion, condoning Christians who follow their every whim and fancy, whether it be praying or committing adultery. We are back to the heart again. Either we have people doing what they basically like and enjoy doing, because their heart has been changed by the power of Christ or we have them doing the opposite which we then look upon as being sacrifice and spiritual.

God's love in human beings produces character. Right character produces people who make right

choices. Jesus said, 'My will is to do the will of my Father in heaven.' Jesus continually chose to do what pleased his Father, because that is basically what pleased him, whatever the cost. Christ has not come into our hearts simply to help us, but to transform us. He has changed our basic desires and this is evidenced when we are faced with the flesh or the spirit, the world of God's kingdom or the world of our kingdom. He has set us free to make choices, choices that affect us in everyday situations. So it is that often we find ourselves praying, 'Lord, in my tiredness I choose to attend the meeting this evening, I choose to be kind when I feel I have the right to be hostile. I choose to tell the truth when I would tend to tell a lie or bend the truth for a quiet life. I choose to give myself to people and not to things; I choose to work and not be lazy. I choose to communicate with people and not leave them guessing what is going on in my heart and mind.' Thank God for the ability to choose and co-operate in his purposes.

Of course, many of us are dealing with people whose hearts have not been changed. That is precisely the issue. Leaders do not want to lose such people from their congregations, so providing they toe the line and remain religious they are left unaffected by the gospel and its radical implications. Indeed, if they listen to it being preached for long enough they become immune to it. It was Tozer who said, 'There are many within the fold of evangelicalism who look the same as everyone else, but who have never been born again by the Spirit of God.' Many, in the face of this startling revelation, will have to choose to throw themselves upon the mercy of God, for there is no procedure which will bring about a change of heart short of a visitation from God himself. I can only commend to them the words of the Lord, 'Seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.'

Why the law then?

'The law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ,' says Paul, 'that we may be justified by faith, but now that faith has come we are no longer under a tutor.' He is, of course, writing to Jewish Christians schooled in the law. Timothy further explains, 'The law is for the lawless.' In a world that is increasingly being taken over by

anarchy and those with little regard to decency, humanity and the ethic of the Christian message, the only way to keep society together is to impose further legislation. So it is that we have policemen to make sure that laws are adhered to and judges to deal with the offenders. As citizens we are required to submit to the law of the land.

When, however, we come to the Church and the role of the law within the redeemed community, we need to understand that God does not wish simply to impose his will on his converts. God wants to change our attitudes. For example, if drivers genuinely cared for all road users, they wouldn't drink in a way that impairs their judgment and the increasingly stiff penalties would become irrelevant. This of course is exactly how it is with Christ. Some would say this is far too idealistic, but we need to understand that the early church lived in a similar way to this and without the 'law' of the New Testament as we know it today, and for many gentiles, without knowledge of the Old Covenant laws either.

The weaker brother

There is the often legitimate statement, 'Well if we all follow our consciences, even allowing for the fact that Christ lives in us and we are seeking to live truthfully, we are bound to upset a few folk.' That is true, but this is where the exercise of grace becomes necessary. Unfortunately, as a general rule I have found that grace only works one way. The brother who mows his lawn on a Sunday should, it appears, cease to do so for fear that he will offend his brother who regards Sunday as a special day. However, few people consider the fact that maybe the brother who doesn't mow his lawn on a Sunday should be gracious toward him who does. Paul says, 'One man honours one day above another and another man honours all days the same.' As grace operates among us all, we can do what we feel comfortable with, taking into account the freedom of all brothers and each other's weaknesses. A converted Jew, for example, may have a problem if we mow our lawn on a Saturday. There are converted Jews in the Church, but I don't know of one single person who stops mowing his lawn on a Saturday, in case he offends an unknown Jew. We would have to

actually know a Jew who is genuinely a weaker brother, who was being genuinely offended, and our choices would be made in the light of our relationship with him. Otherwise, if we live under the concept of not doing things in case we offend, we'll end up doing nothing.

We also need to draw a distinction between two types of people who become offended. Firstly, there are the pharisees, who think they know how to live and also how everybody else ought to live. They have made their doctrines the pattern for all. Unwritten rules caused them in Jesus' day to strain out gnats and swallow camels. These people need offending. Their gospel is bad news, hindering the life and grace of our Lord. He, for example, healed publicly on the sabbath in the temple. He could, if he had used a little bit of charismatic wisdom, taken his sick patient behind the temple pillar for a quick pray, told him not to rejoice or shout 'Hallelujah' and to quickly disappear out of the back door, miraculously healed but offending nobody. However, with the pharisees in full sight, watching him and waiting to be offended, he deliberately healed the man.

Our freedom, however, does not extend to doing whatever we feel we want to do, which would cause a weaker brother to fall away from Christ. Those we have already mentioned are not weaker brothers but stronger brothers. Indeed, perhaps not brothers at all. But if I knew that the drinking of wine, the wearing of denim to meetings, watching television on Sunday, or mowing my lawn on a Saturday could so stumble a brother as to make him fall away from Christ, I would stop doing these things. So it should be with us all. Until such circumstances arise, however, we must carry on living from within, doing what we feel comfortable with, honouring God and being sensitive to those around us.

But what about absolutes?

The Scriptures are quite clear that we must not use our freedom as a pretext for evil. Certain things, such as stealing, drunkenness and adultery are absolutely wrong, whereas thoughtfulness, purity and honesty are absolutely right. Most law and grace issues, however, centre on things where there are no biblical absolutes and it is in these areas that our Father wants us to

grow up into manhood and maturity and not make petty rules that are often a cover for our own insecurities.

The lawgiver became the lawkeeper and now keeps the absolutes of his royal law of love and liberty in his people as they co-operate with him. This process of co-operating with Christ to fulfil the law of God in our lives is nothing short of a twentieth-century miracle. Sadly, many christians have got a completely wrong idea of the law and of God's absolutes. *Punch* magazine recently carried a cartoon of Moses descending the mountain with two large tablets of stone underneath his arms. Below are the people waiting for him to hear what he has to say. Underneath is the caption, 'Well fellows, this is only the first draft, but it seems nobody is going to get away with anything.' It is not, however, God's intention to demand a moral excellence which he knows his people will find totally unobtainable. In the Holy Spirit he has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Thus we will gladly fulfil his law.

An acquaintance of mine in the USA was speaking at a conference. Attending was a proud young man, clothed in the religious garments of his denomination, hat and all. After a few days he came and placed the clothes before the leaders of the conference. Most of us would have been thrilled at this outward expression, but my friend could see that although things had changed outwardly, inwardly his attitude remained the same. So he faced him up with this. The young man broke and found grace to repent of his ungodly attitude. The next week he was back in his church, complete with religious clothes, hat and all, but inwardly transformed and radiant. Joel prophesied, 'Rend your heart and not your garments and turn unto Jehovah your God.' How satisfied most of us are to settle for a change of garment, a shorter hairstyle, a shaven face, polished shoes, the right words, agreement to our code of practice, but how unlike true spiritual repentance that is.

God grant us hearts big enough to receive the fullness of his grace, so that we fulfil the law without being under it. May he write his law upon our hearts and grant us the ability to break with any tradition that will hinder its fulfilment.

etc

The song 'Bind us together' was written some years ago by Bob Gillman from Romford. During the past year a musical presentation of the same name has been produced and performed in many church situations locally and around the country. A team of around twenty from Romford and Cobham have also toured Norway and Sweden to share the musical there. It has always been well received. The thrust of 'Bind us together' is that as christians we should not only come together but stay together, and by narration, songs and dance drama, this burden is expressed and light given as to how we may dwell together in unity. At the beginning of 1980, Kingsway Records are to produce an LP and a booklet similar in style to that of 'Come Together'. There are also plans being made to tour a number of the major cities in Great Britain during the same year. Further details will be released through the christian press.

With over 40,000 copies printed, the 'Hallelujah' song-sheet seems to have met a real need in the two years since it was compiled by Nick Butterworth. Now, with many new songs emerging he has compiled a supplement of 50 songs and hymns priced 8 pence. Because many of the songs will be unfamiliar, a tape cassette is also available featuring all the songs (not the hymns) together with a few notes on keys and chords. Both are available from Nick at 57 The Drive, Collier Row, Romford, Essex.

If life in the Kingdom of God presents you with practical problems that you feel could be aired on this page, please write to Gerald Coates and John Noble at 47 Copse Road, Cobham, Surrey.



John Noble and Gerald Coates

Q. Drama is a thing which puzzles me, for this reason: I have read of past servants of God who have found that one of the things the Lord did was to strip them of all unreality and make-believe. In the light of this, where does acting come into the presentation of the gospel which surely has at its heart, reality.

A. Both of us came from 'non-drama' church backgrounds, and have therefore been through most, if not all, of the traumas regarding the place of drama in the Church, especially as we are both speakers. There are perhaps two things that have helped us thus far.

First, a confession. We have restricted the gospel to preaching. Whilst this is a most important part of the declaration of the message of Christ, it is not everything. Character, miracles of healing and provision, and the redeemed community itself are all a part of the proclamation of the good news. Most preachers fear that they will be edged out as singing and drama, dancing and creativity become priorities in the Church. We need to see that God is bigger than our preaching and we have to confess that for all the sermons preached in Western nations, we have achieved extremely little.

Secondly, you are of course right in saying that God wants to strip us of all unreality. But the area of make-believe in drama is a long way from the area of unreality. Drama involves a creative use of the imagination that God has given us with a view to communicating some aspect of truth, always involving a tacit acceptance between performers and audience (or in the case of children between performers

and parents) of the aspect of illusion. Unreality, on the other hand, is bound up with the unhealthy spirit of deception and self-deception where some part of the truth is obscured — delusion rather than illusion. Of course we do not want people acting things out simply for their own personal fulfilment. A key for us has been the prophets. God knows that words are not always sufficient. The Old Testament is full of what we may call prophetic actors who lived out their message and acted out the burden of the Lord.

One prophet felt it necessary to lie on one side for many weeks and then turn over on the other for a shorter period. Another took a stone and inscribed the name of Jerusalem on it and built ramparts around it. Another used his shepherd's rod and staff as props and the congregation as extras. Even in the New Testament we have Agabus who, when enacting Paul's end, took his girdle and used it as a visual aid. It is true, of course, that in the New Testament such a thing is only mentioned once, but then we read of only one evangelist as well, and look what we have done with that!

Drama then, to be truly authentic, should be an expression of the burden of God, rooted in what the Spirit is saying to the Church and not simply the product of individuals looking for personal fulfilment, artistic drop-outs who have not made it on the stage of the world, creating a platform for themselves among God's people. We need men and women caught up with the prophetic spirit of the age enacting in life, both privately and publicly, the purposes of God.

Q. How much time do you think should be devoted to ministry during the course of a meeting?

A. It is a matter for some debate as to how long the preacher should go on. It may have been Wesley who said, 'If you can't say what you have got to say in 20 minutes, then it is best unsaid.' On the other hand, one reads reports of ministry during revivals which has gone on all day 'from morn to setting sun' with blessing. You remember Paul himself ministered late into the night, and we are gratified to discover that people fell asleep in his meetings too.

The mind seems to absorb things better in small doses and this fact is used as an argument in favour of the half hour message, but this does not allow for a work of the Holy Spirit. Often where there is a large gathering, folk switch on and off; some get blessed at the beginning, some during the ministry and others at the end. So not everyone appreciates the whole of a sermon; the Holy Spirit works in different ways with different people.

Generally speaking, we tend to say unnecessary things and take too long to say them, but how to rectify that, bearing in mind that the most prepared message can lack life and the spontaneous may really be blessed by God, we do not know. One suggestion is that the congregation (that is you, probably) can pray for the one who is ministering and encourage him, so drawing out the very best. Verbal responses are often appreciated, and if you have real problems with anything that is said or the length of time it has taken, share with the speaker before sharing it with your best friend.



Head in the clouds

Some time ago a friend of mine was talking to a lady after a church meeting. Their conversation was about God's involvement in our lives and it seems they were not in agreement. Mick was trying to point out that reserving our relationship with God to a few meetings a week was not quite what God was after. Yes, she could see that, but obviously, she said, you must draw the line somewhere. No, said Mick, there was no line to be drawn. God desires to be involved in every part of our lives. He then proceeded to explain how the division of life into sacred and secular, spiritual and mundane, was in fact quite wrong, and tried to show how, for a person born of the Spirit, the whole of life is spiritual.

When he said that it was possible to enjoy God's presence at every moment, whatever we happened to be doing, she could contain herself no longer. Suddenly she exclaimed, 'Surely you've got to have some time to yourself!'

The passion with which she made this assertion made it evident that she was in that unhappy position of having acknowledged God in certain areas of life but not in others. Worship and intercession were of course his right, and obviously it would be foolish not to refer to the Lord at times of crisis or when making important decisions. A little time spent in prayer and bible study each day

would not be considered fanatical, and might even be a worthy goal. But, heavens above, surely you've got to have some time to yourself?

Of course the truth is that God does not wish to separate us from our time. The problem only arises when we try to give him our time without giving him ourselves. Those who have faced the crisis of consecration, who have totally capitulated before the King, discover that God does not want to take away our enjoyment in life but to increase it.

Unfortunately many of us never make this marvellous discovery. We limp along as if we're trying to buy the Lord off with presents of time and sacrifices of some of our pleasures, hoping that we might in this way divert him from what appears to be an obsessive intention to possess us. If this is our condition we may well find that the Lord seems to have certain issues with us. Try as we may we just don't seem able to win his approval of our intentions. Should I really be buying a new guitar? Could I really justify driving that sort of car? At every turn of the way we are hounded by nagging doubts about our desires whether it be for a new pair of shoes or a husband or wife.

A few years ago I developed a yen for a stereo record player. The little portable auto-change model I owned had certainly outlived its

day and in its death throes seemed to be trying to take all my records along with it. I enjoyed listening with friends to Bob Dylan and Paul Simon, and on my own I would conduct a Brahms piano concerto with a wooden spoon. A record player was almost vital. Why then would the Lord not see it my way? Desperately I struggled to justify buying a new one. All my friends had one. Well, lots of them anyway. The old one was ruining my records. Had ruined them actually. It wouldn't cost that much. Aha! but should you be spending money on such indulgence? And so on.

Eventually, with the aid of a Christmas bonus I managed to justify buying a new record player just long enough to make the purchase and get it home from the shop. Then condemnation struck. The presence of that shiny new record player was like an evil spirit in the room. I found no peace to play it whatsoever, and so, valuing my peace with God more than a stereo rendering of *Messiah*, I vowed not to play it for my own pleasure, but only for the pleasure of visiting friends. There were a number of similar controversies I faced with the Lord around that time, but the only real resolution came when I faced the crunch issue of his lordship. 'Whatever you say goes, Lord. I have no rights. You are God.'

At such a meeting with God priorities are rearranged. To quote



feet on the ground

Nick Butterworth

the unlikely source of Lamentations, 'the Lord is my portion; therefore I will hope in him.' He becomes a fund of deep and satisfying joy and a serenity of spirit replaces anxious discontent. In the light of this encounter the record player and its bedfellow issues lost their significance. I could laugh at the pathetic struggles as I revelled in my enjoyment of the Lord.

But this is where we often make a mistake. Having found such satisfaction in God himself we tend to denigrate the enjoyment of anything less, and so we end up evaluating ephemeral aspects of life on the basis of their utility. This is wrong thinking. We are not only to benefit from such aspects of life, but to delight in them, enjoying them as good gifts from our father. But there is even more to it than this. Perhaps we need to start further back.

When man first made his bid for independence the result was shattering, literally. In seeking autonomy, he removed the Kingpin which holds all of life in perfect harmony and effectively reduced the whole to a fractured and disjointed mess. In being restored to fellowship with God the way is open to restore the unity and wholeness of life in all its facets. When we belittle the exploration and enjoyment of that which is not purely spiritual we are demonstrating immaturity contrary to the illusion of spirituality that this attitude may seem to give.

We are a people who bridge heaven and earth, with a source of life in the spiritual realm and an effect in the physical. Or at least we are meant to be. Some of us seem to want to escape into the spiritual realm as soon as possible and see our role in the material world as trying to take as many people with us as we can, a bit like a black hole. Instead of opting out of life we are to be a demonstration of how beautiful it can be with a new King ruling in our hearts. Head in the clouds and feet on the ground should be an apt description of us.

Jesus did not say, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will somehow become irrelevant.' He promised to provide for our material needs. Now before someone points out that record players and the like are hardly essential, let me try and clear up an old chestnut.

I have heard a number of preachers use the very passage of scripture that I have just mis-quoted to emphasise their belief that God will provide for our needs, but not for our wants. Of course this contention may present a needed challenge to unyielded cupidity and ambition, but at best it is a rather crude and insensitive means to go about it, like using an axe to sharpen a pencil!

Many of the things we take for granted as part of normal life are in fact quite useless, if we persist with this utilitarianism. Surely we could do without flowers in the garden. Vegetables would be much more practical. Do we really have to have a table cloth when we eat? What a needless waste of money to spend even a pound on that redundant strip of material that hangs idly from men's shirt collars. This line of thinking is shown to be absurd when it is exposed, but the trouble is, it rarely is exposed. Rather, it lurks about at the back of our thinking breeding a sort of vague condemnation just strong enough to interrupt the flow of sweet fellowship between ourselves and God.

We cannot separate needs and wants in a legalistic way. God has created us with wants, legitimate wants, not to be confused with avarice. In a real way these wants are our needs. There are aspirations within us which go beyond the purely functional and utilitarian, which are an essential part of our humanity. As we live in open hearted fellowship with God, sharing our hopes and desires with him, we can make the liberating discovery that we are not so out of line after all, that God wants for us what we want for ourselves. There will almost certainly be a sequence involved in the fulfilment of our desires related to maturity. A prudent father may help his son to buy an old Ford as his first car even though he could afford to buy him a Rolls Royce. But ultimately he wants to see his son driving the Rolls Royce. There may well be a place for sacrifice ahead, but it will be joyful sacrifice, the good for the better, as was the sacrifice of Jesus, who endured the cross, not for the sake of being a fine chap or doing the right thing, but for the joy that was set before him.

Now this is good news. Not only am I wonderfully forgiven for my past disobedience, but suddenly a

whole bright new future has opened up before me. I am not trying to sublimate all my present desires into a past experience of forgiveness, but offering them to God, allowing him to rearrange and fulfil them in ways that previously I dared not hope.

A couple of years ago my wife and I decided that we would like to replace our old car. It had served us well, but was now ailing somewhat. I fancied a Rover and Annette agreed that it would be very nice. It just happened that at that time a friend of my father was selling a Rover 2000 TC and so, whilst visiting them in Devon, we arranged a test drive. Soon I was behind the wheel of the Rover admiring the instrumentation which put me more in mind of a small aircraft cockpit than a car. As I eased the car out of the drive into the main road I remember very clearly a brief exchange with the Lord. 'Lord,' I said, 'I would be very content if you were to say no to me buying this car.'

'I know,' said the Lord, 'but you'd really enjoy driving it, wouldn't you, son?'

The words were whispered into my spirit and I confess I did what I guess most of us do when we receive words of encouragement from the Lord. I doubted their source.

No sale that day. Annette and I returned home and I continued to keep an eye open for a prospective new car. One day I saw a Rover advertised in a local paper two years younger than the one we had test driven and only a couple of hundred pounds more. I felt a check in my spirit as I entertained the possibility, but reasoned that it wouldn't hurt to get a friend to look at it with me.

My friend agreed to come with me the next day. As I lay in bed that night with my wife sound asleep, I chatted it over with the Lord.

'What do you think about this car, Lord?'

'The question isn't what I think about it. What do you really think about it, son?'

'Well, Father, I know that you would like me to have a Rolls Royce, but you don't want to spoil my character by giving me what I'm not ready for . . .'

'Yes, son, I'd love you to have a Rolls Royce, but . . .'

Then I switched off. I knew what

that last 'but' was leading up to. I lay awake for a while and finally convinced myself that you can't really trust these voices that go on in your head!

In the morning my friend and I duly set off to inspect the car. We parked outside the house and I crunched up the gravel path and knocked at the door.

'Excuse me,' I said as the door opened, 'I've come to look at . . .'

'Sorry mate — it's gone.' And the door closed.

My immediate reaction was relief and straight away I lifted my heart to the Lord in thankfulness and repentance. How gracious he is. In that moment of clarity he did not reproach me, but simply drew my attention to what he had said some

weeks earlier in Devon. I decided to ask my father's friend whether or not he still had the first car for sale. 'Yes,' he said when I telephoned. Strangely enough he would have sold it last week, but his wife's car was out of action then and she was using the Rover, so preventing the sale. We bought it, and, as the Lord said, really enjoyed driving it.

Of course we could have bought a Cortina. But we didn't, and it wasn't the fact that the Rover did more miles per gallon than a Cortina which persuaded us. On that basis we should have bought a mini.

There is no formula by which we can make easy calculations as to what is legitimate and what is extravagant in this realm. Books

have been written trying to rationalise the christian attitude to material possessions, but generalisations are necessarily insensitive to an individual's personality, their ability to cope and level of maturity and most of all, the particular life to which God has called them, fidelity to which cannot fail to bring fulfilment.

'My sheep hear my voice,' said Jesus, and added, 'and they follow me.' I would not like to be dogmatic about the operational order of these two statements. They are certainly very much interrelated. It is only by talking to him, listening to him and following him that we will discover our own level and be able to live at peace, enjoying to the full the seen and the unseen world.



Martin Weir

The moment I was baptised in the Holy Spirit I began to see what the Church was all about. It was a revelation in embryo at first, but the essential understanding was there.

It hadn't always been like that. From my earliest years I was taken, and later as a converted teenager willingly went, to a denominational Baptist church in North London. Later, after spending four years in theological college, where I enjoyed the 'rags', studied a little, and failed a degree, I emerged to pastor a Baptist church in Barking as a 'doctrinally sound' conservative evangelical. I am not at all sure that I know what that means now, but I was very certain at the time.

Much of that past I remember now with gratitude, and much that I learnt then still stands true for me today. But I still didn't understand what the Church was all about. I understood the theory, and could talk about the Church as the body of Christ, or discuss it in other theological terms, but I had been reared too close to one particular traditional interpretation of the Church to be able to really understand

Father's heart from my spirit. It took a revolution to do that.

In fact it took another 9 years, during which I pastored a church in East London (I am not sure who endured whom!). There were many things I enjoyed, but increasingly I felt that my role was simply to keep a monolithic structure ticking over. The words 'nothing changes here' were too often frustratingly true.

I would drift helplessly from a groundless optimism when something good had happened somewhere in the organisation, to a depressed frustration because I couldn't really see the thing going anywhere—ever.

Gradually I took on the role of the professional minister, doing the right things at the right times, and saying the appropriate thing for the occasion. In an uncanny way I began to feel manipulated by the thing I was supposed to be leading.

In reality there was no direction, either in my own life, or in the church. Yet in my heart I knew that this wasn't it. I knew there was something else. For what I was in bore little resemblance to New Testament life and teaching, or to the heart of the God I knew.

The revolution in my own life came suddenly, totally unexpected, but the Holy Spirit did such a thorough job on me that I was at one and the same time blessed and blasted apart. I had never known anything like it, but I did know that what I had received was not a personal blessing

trip. I had been hit between the eyes by the spirit of revelation.

For the first time I saw the Church. I saw it in terms of the people and the mighty purpose of God. It was a totally new experience to be excited by the Church. I no longer had any basic doubts about how Father was going to work his purpose out. He had committed himself to do it through the Church. I now had purpose and something directional to share with the people, and for a further 3 years I sought to lead them into the purposes of God. Some were blessed, but many were upset that I had dared to rock the boat. It soon became clear that this was no longer where Father wanted me. It was not easy to leave the denominational situation, but I was convinced it was right for me to do so, and I have no regrets.

Eighteen months have passed since then, and Sylvia and I are still in Barking. We have bought our own house now, and I have a job. There are about 30 people around us—not very much, but it feels good.

It's not perfect by any means, but it's exciting to begin to work out commitment, discipline and covering, not as heavy, isolated dogmas, but as part of the natural life of the Church. It's good to see character developing and ministry slowly emerging. It's good to feel a growing security in one another, a security born of the knowledge that the course on which we are set is no blind alley—we really are going somewhere.

In a word (werd) prep./adj./n. (colloq.) Regular feature (not all Gk.) in printed publication, lucid, free of obscurity, radical (of the roots), concise, enlightened, particular, source of which can be traced from original Jn. (abbr.) MacLauchlan.

IN A WORD

Background

In the OT, a throne symbolises majesty, regal power and authority, justice, and constancy or permanence. The transcendence of God's throne (Is 66:1) is compatible with the exercise of his kingly power over his creation (Ezek 1:4-28 — the creatures represent God's rule over the world). God cannot be reached by man, but conversely he is always moving upon man. The explanation becomes apparent: man is destined by God to share his throne (Dan 7:9, 13, 14, 27).

Indeed, his very creation was so that he might represent God in the material realm, and rule for him (Gen 1:26).

In the NT, the concept is the same. The word *thronos* occurs 55 times, of which 41 occurrences are in Revelation. Outside Revelation, we find the relationship between man and the throne enlarged. Now the Son of Man sits on the divine throne as Judge, and others join him (Mt 25:31; 19:28). The enthroned Christ also fulfils the picture of the 'mercy seat'. He has suffered like us, and he feels for us. His throne is a 'throne of grace' (Heb 4:15, 16).

The throne in Revelation

The throne of God is mentioned first in the greeting at the beginning of the book (1:4), and strikes a note common to the rest of the book: that the majesty and sovereignty of God is fundamental to all else that is revealed. But it is in the letters to the seven churches, which so contrast the failure of the churches with the glory of the risen Christ, that a call to overcome goes forth,

a call to victory that will involve sharing the throne of Christ (3:21).

The most important chapter for an understanding of the throne is chapter 4. There, in answer to his disappointment over the state of the churches, John is ushered into the unseen realm to see the completion of God's purpose, what must take place because of the divine authority and power (4:1). He sees a throne before he sees the occupant (4:2). The only way we can really know the living God is by recognising his majesty and power. Then around this magnificent one on the throne, he sees 24 other thrones, whose occupants symbolise the people of God (4:4). Also around the throne he sees the four creatures representing the fourfold creation of God (4:6-8). As the creation worships, rightly related to the throne of God, the people of God fall down in worship, removing their crowns (4:10, 11). Don't despair over the state of the churches, John, for the church's authority is derived from the throne of God. Through the church's role, all the creation will be brought into manifest submission to the throne of God (cf Rom 8:19-21), and the people of God will rejoice at the accomplishment of their role.

But the unfolding of this purpose, its outworking on earth, is hindered (5:1). However, the Lamb, through his death and resurrection, is Victor, 'standing in the centre of the throne' (5:5, 6), and through his sacrificial and consummating work, the purpose of God can unfold. Again, all creation, heavenly and earthly, is seen worshipping around the throne.

From here on, the throne is seen as bringing judgment on recalcitrant mankind (6:16), and as the gathering-point for resurrected saints (7:9ff; 12:5). It is contested by the dragon and the beast (13:2), but through the first fruits and harvest of the people of God (14), God's rule is manifested, and the throne of the beast is destroyed (16:10). The voice of triumph comes from the throne of God (16:17). Babylon, the entire world-system opposed to God, is judged, and saints rise from the dead to sit on thrones and administer the world in righteousness (20:4). Ultimately, the throne of God is the source of full and final judgment (20:11).

In the manifest reign of the Christ of God and his saints, the goal is realised, and a voice from the throne confesses this (21:3-5). The throne is seen as the source of authority, justice and life (22:1-5).

Hence a picture emerges which is of fundamental importance for us. If we see Christ in his risen glory (1:12-20), but are perplexed at the state of the churches (chs 2, 3), then we must, by faith, 'see the unseen', the unchallenged, absolute throne of God, a glorified and reigning church, all creation rightly related to God on the throne (ch 4). If the outworking seems impossible, the one who cried, 'It is complete' on the cross is now in the centre of the throne to bring it all to pass (ch 5). His throne is a mercy-seat for us, and it is the source of all authority. He is Victor, and we are called to emerge from the death round about us and to become victors too (chs 2, 3), our victory derived from his, our thrones from his throne (3:21).

Maurice Smith Dripping on

'Lordship? Man, these are democratic days!' So runs an expressive line in Ken Medema's classic presentation of the good news in song. If you've not heard the LP by this blind American, then I commend it to you. It comes on the Word label and is entitled *People of the Sun*. He is referring to a man who is considering joining that early band of pilgrims round about AD30 onwards. It all seems very attractive; the sense of family, the esprit de corps, the peace and the joy in the face of venomous opposition. Then he hits the snag; he discovers that the central issue in every single life is the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, and to him that does not sound at all like good news. Our aspirant in the song just cannot countenance the surrender of his rights, particularly in these democratic days. He has joined the ranks of millions by believing the current gospel of democracy. Casting my mind back I can still vividly remember a burly infantry corporal who held a different philosophy.

A startling thirty-four years ago I was endeavouring to leave the barracks at Aldershot. 'Let's see yer studs, son!' barked the corporal of the guard, and I presented the sole of my army boots for inspection. 'Some of them studs need replacing,' he said with a wry smile. 'Improperly dressed — can't leave the depot in that disgusting condition.' I returned to the barrack room, unofficially borrowed replacement footwear and returned with confidence to the guardroom. My confidence was shortlived. 'Now take orf yer belt!' he yelled. When I obeyed I was informed that the inside was insufficiently clean. The striped tyrant was enjoying his taste of power, for we were a training battalion and one day would all emerge as officer cadets or, if unsuccessful, would return to our units as non-commissioned officers. Meanwhile these were his hours of glory.

I was desperately trying to get mobile in time to take my girlfriend to the Town Hall dance back in London. At this rate of progress I could foresee that I would not escape the grip of the establishment in time for the last waltz. Eventually I began to lose my cool and, bordering on insolence, informed the corporal that I had been granted 36 hours leave and I was entitled to nothing less. The corporal drew himself up to his full height and told me to present my pass for inspection. Seeing the look in his eye I whipped it out very smartly.

'Now read it out loud!' he bellowed down my eardrum, 'and show me where it says you are entitled to anything.' I timidly began to read, 'Private M L Smith, number 10943082, is hereby granted 36 hours . . . privilege leave.'

'Do you understand now, laddie?' he mocked. 'It's *privilege* leave you're nearly on. Privilege. Privilege. You are entitled to nothing. Since the day you came under the authority of His Majesty, everything you get is a privilege. Learn that early on and you won't 'ave so many disappointments.'

I know that the corporal's attitude is a million miles removed from that of the king whom we Christians have chosen to serve under; but the principle holds good. We have given up all our rights and come under his total lordship. We are to demand nothing. We have lost all our entitlements and are to be content with God alone. Everything else we get along life's way is an added bonus. Those who have learned this lesson, in any real measure, are among the most contented souls on earth.

Madame Guyon was a classic example of someone who knew the satisfaction of God being her all in all, and so being suddenly transferred from her palatial home to the damp environs of a prison cell did not mar her faith in the goodness of God, or cause her to demand from him her rights. Those who know me at all will know of my love for hymnology, and among my favourites I number the following Guyon classic which so adequately described her lifestyle. I would like you now to read it through slowly and thoughtfully. If you want a tune to sing it to, then I suggest *Elim (Hesperus)*.

All scenes alike engaging prove
To souls imprest with sacred love;

Wher-e'er they dwell, they dwell in
Thee,
In heav'n, in earth, or on the sea.
To me remains nor place nor time;
My country is in every clime;
I can be calm, and free from care,
On any shore, since God is there.

While place we seek, or place we
shun,
The soul finds happiness in none;
But with my God to guide my way,
'Tis equal joy to go or stay.

Could I be cast where Thou art not,
That were indeed a dreadful lot:
But regions none remote I call,
Secure of finding God in all.

Madam Guyon has expressed more beautifully than ever I could what is the aspiration of every true seeker after God. A deep longing to find our entire satisfaction in him alone, and with that a true appreciation of all that he so freely gives. Why don't you take the time to read it, or sing it, through again before you read on?

Maybe the emergence of what a friend of mine termed 'the confectionery gospel' has done more to hinder the progress of the purposes of God than much of the head-on opposition and persecution. For decades most preachers told us that if we would only ask Jesus into our lives as Saviour, we would reap all the benefits he has promised us. The confectionery is then tantalisingly listed as joy, peace and an eternal resting place free from the judgments to come. It would be hard to find a more inaccurate one-sided presentation than this, as it totally ignores the kingdom of God which is the very essence of the good news.

Like some of the followers of Jesus two thousand years ago, I used to think of the kingdom in terms of geography or eschatology; but one day I was sitting in a conference taking copious notes as usual, when a sentence hit me with divine conviction. The speaker stated simply that the phrase 'the kingdom of God' could be well translated 'the sovereign rule of God.' So to come into the kingdom meant to come under the sovereignty of God, to put oneself under total authority and to yield one's rights to the King. It was like a shaft of new light to me as I realised that so much disillusionment I had encountered in Christian circles could be traced to the lack of Lordship being experienced from the outset. So often, by flimsily stretching 'Behold I stand at the

door and knock', we had heard the word picture painted of a timid Jesus, cap in hand, standing outside the door of our heart and pleading to come in. From this weak beginning it is but a short step to making our own terms for allowing him inside at all, with Jesus finally accepting them. No wonder there is a shock in store when he starts to assert his authority, or the chastening work of the father begins to shape up the new convert. With such a false start it is no wonder that many decide they have been misled and finally opt out when the race gets tough.

Of course, authority for authority's sake is nobody's idea of good news, but there are two things I should like us to clearly bear in mind:

Firstly, the kingdom takes its essential character from the King, and it is an encounter with him that brings a man into the experience of true conversion. It is not giving assent to a series of true facts that makes the difference. It is not knowing about the cross, the blood and the resurrection that gives new life. It is possible to give sincere intellectual agreement to all these and to be utterly dedicated to the propagation of these truths, without being inwardly affected at all; and yet 'the kingdom of God is (to be) within us'.

Nor is it by any other form of religious sincerity that men find themselves intrinsically changed. It is an encounter with Jesus Christ the King that does it. I do not mean having an understanding of his Lordship, but rather, having searched for the truth, to have had a revelation that this wonderful man really is the son of God. And having seen something of the beauty of his nature, either gradually or in one blinding moment, we have felt able to put our whole lives under completely new ownership, to hand over the rights of our life to the only man we have ever encountered who engendered enough confidence to enable us to totally trust him. An adequate revelation of the nature of the King is essential to an adequate acceptance of the sovereign rule of God, for surely a man is foolish to submit just because a preacher says he should, without encountering the nature of the one he is to submit to.

Secondly, God's idea is not to get us all into 'heaven' one day and quickly lock the gates so that we do not escape him, and from there

on to continually exercise his authority over us. His plan is to bring us to maturity so that we are acting in a responsible and godly manner all the time, and so in need of no supervision. All true leaders have this goal deeply implanted in them. They have no desire to be in charge for ever. When people met Jesus they did not encounter someone wanting to rob them of their initiative and get them under him. Any imposing that he had to do was with an end in view, and that end was unto enlargement and not restriction.

Let's stop feeling we are being robbed of our entitlement and thank the Lord for all the ups and downs thus far, recognising that many of them have been of our own making, and say, 'I take my sticky hands off my life and yield to you Lord. I choose to believe you that just everything is positively working out for good. I give you the right to call all the shots and, by your grace, I am going to look upon anything that comes my way as a bonus from now on.'

Now don't expect to succeed perfectly at this right away. We set our sights in the right direction and determine to go through, even if we have to learn obedience through the things that we suffer. 'Your kingdom come — on earth . . .' If that is our desire and purpose we shall reap a host of benefits which will confirm that 'the hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets'.



etc

Over 8,000 copies of the two worship records 'A New Song' and 'City of God' have been sold to date. Both were recorded by the fellowship in Cobham, led by Gerald Coates. They are obtainable from London Literature, 33 Hogshell Lane, Cobham, Surrey KT11 2AG. Record or cassette £3.78 including post and packaging.

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