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What will happen to God? (part III)

GERALD BRAY

But when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will lead you into all truth . . .

I have chosen this text, partly because I believe it has great intrinsic importance and partly also because it comes in the middle of the clearest and most concentrated teaching about the Holy Spirit to be found in the entire Bible, but mostly because I believe that it corrects a very serious imbalance in the general teaching which the Church today is being given. Much of what I have written has been concerned with correcting what I believe to be false and misleading emphases which have pervaded the Church.

My aim throughout has been to try to hold the balance which alone can do justice to the teaching of Scripture and give us the right foundation for ministry today. In the Augustinian tradition which we have inherited the Holy Spirit is worshipped as the bond of unity between the Father and the Son, the perfect seal of their mutual love, so that there is a particular justification in using this paper to forge links between what has gone before and to establish the harmony of the whole theological enterprise.

The particular imbalance which we see today can best be expressed, I think, by saying that we suffer from an over-exclusive reliance on Paul and on his contribution to the New Testament canon. I do not want to drive a wedge between the apostles or to disparage Pauline principles in any way, but we have to admit, that consciously or unconsciously, we have allowed a Pauline perspective to dominate our thoughts, with the result that other parts of the New Testament, and especially the Johannine corpus, have faded into the background (apart from selected texts like John 3, which can be readily integrated into a Pauline framework).

The Pauline emphasis is to be regretted for two reasons. First, Paul was exceptional as an apostle, and if we base what we say about the apostles and their teaching exclusively on his experience, we are liable to be misled to some extent. It is true of course, that Paul is the one who explains what an apostle is in a way that the others do not, but we should bear in mind that the reason he does so is precisely because his own case is so exceptional. Secondly, this overly-Pauline emphasis is to be regretted because so much of what Paul said and did was based on principles and teaching which are given their most fundamental exposition elsewhere in the New Testament—above all

in the Gospel of John. Here we find explained in detail things which Paul assumed—and which he expected his congregations to know and accept already. Here we find set out the main lines along which we are to proceed in our work of preaching and teaching—whilst Paul so often is concerned primarily to correct errors or to explain additional elements which for one reason or another had not been fully understood by the new converts. The result is that if we rely too exclusively on Paul we are liable to find ourselves dealing with exceptional circumstances rather than with the norm. This seems to me to be particularly true in matters of the Holy Spirit, where volumes have been written and preached on I Corinthians 12 and 14 in more or less blind and sovereign indifference to the normative principles which governed Paul's thinking and which are set out in Jesus' teaching recorded in John 14–17.

The coming of the Holy Spirit, as we know, is a major theme of the Fourth Gospel. It is clear from what we read there that the Spirit will not come until Jesus has gone back to the Father—in theological terms, Pentecost is directly dependent on the Ascension, an important point to which we shall return. It is also true, however, that John is the Evangelist who records the curious incident in Chap.20: 21–23 where Jesus commissions his disciples at his first resurrection appearance to them, and then breathes on them the Holy Spirit, together with the power to forgive and remit sins. This strange passage has puzzled great theological minds down the ages, because it appears to go against not only the testimony in Acts 1, but also the assumptions made earlier on in the Gospel itself.

It seems to me however, that we can begin to understand the meaning of this passage if only we can liberate our minds from their servitude to the exceptional circumstances of Paul and concentrate on the norm for the disciples as a whole. Paul tells us that one of the marks of an apostle is that he has been a witness to the resurrection, something which was granted to him as one born out of due time. But because of the Upper Room appearance of Christ after the Resurrection and the light which shone on the road to Damascus, we are liable to think that being a witness to the Resurrection means no more than *seeing* the Risen Christ, yet the Gospels and even Acts 1 make it quite clear that the resurrection appearance of Jesus was the beginning of a forty day period of *instruction* in which Jesus recalled the teaching He had given before His crucifixion and explained to His disciples the meaning of the miracle which had just occurred. They were given the power to understand all this, not by their own natural wits but by the Holy Spirit who had been given to them. Thus it was the Spirit who was instructing them even as it was Jesus who spoke—and in this relationship we begin to see the norm by which the New Testament and the Apostolic Church came into being. As for Paul, he himself makes it clear that he had to demonstrate that he fitted

into this established pattern—he did not judge the other apostles on the basis of his own experience, but allowed himself to be judged by them. It is possible, though the Scriptures do not say so, that the reason why he spent three years in Arabia before beginning his ministry was because this was the length of time which the disciples themselves had spent with Jesus during His earthly ministry.

As for Pentecost, we know that the breathing of the Spirit after the Resurrection did not excuse the apostles from participating in the tongues of fire—nor were there only apostles present on that occasion. Mary, the mother of Jesus was there, as were more than 100 other people whose names are unknown to us. Yet it is a curious fact that despite the importance of Pentecost as the launching of the Church, nobody who was present either then or later used this to establish a claim to teach or exercise authority over the church as a whole. In the sort of tribute that vice pays to virtue, and from which we can learn so much, even Simon Magus realised that the apostles stood out among those who had the Pentecostal gifts—and it was from them that he sought to buy this power. Later on, when Paul deals with the Corinthian Church, there is no mention of Pentecost—though presumably it would not have been too difficult for the Corinthians to have produced one of those who had been present in the Upper Room and used him as an authority superior to Paul.

The answer to this seems to be that Pentecost must be understood, not as the sudden recollection of Jesus' *teaching* but as an empowering for *ministry* which had a decidedly evangelistic flavour to it. Incidentally, this may explain why so much of the current 'renewal' movement says almost nothing about teaching but dissolves everything into ministry, though it is usually ministry of a kind which is at best a distortion of New Testament principles and at worst, a pure invention. We shall return to this later, but right now we must go back to the principle of the teaching given to the apostles between the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus.

Two things stand out immediately. This teaching was *unique* and it was also *definitive*. It was unique, because it was given to the apostles alone—something which had not been true of Jesus' earthly ministry, where some of his most important teaching had been given either to great crowds like the 5,000 or to individuals like Nicodemus, who were not among the apostolic band at all. It was definitive, because it was the final explanation of Jesus' earthly ministry after it had been accomplished, so that there was no more excuse for the bewilderment and incomprehension which the disciples had constantly experienced before, and which might have led to very different conclusions had they been simply left to reflect on their experience for themselves. Here Jesus puts the record straight, ensuring that there shall be only one account of his mission—the one which He himself had received from the Father. It is also definitive in that when it was completed,

He ascended into Heaven where He will remain until the Last Judgment. In other words, this teaching will not be supplemented until Jesus comes again and all things are revealed.

Now two points must be noted about the coming to the apostles of Jesus and the spirit in John 20. The first of these is that Jesus showed them His hands and His side. We immediately think of this in terms of evidence for the Resurrection, but although it certainly is that, that is not the real purpose behind Jesus' action, as we learn from the story of Thomas, which follows straight after. Thomas was the classical sceptic, but although Jesus graciously accommodated his weakness, he made it plain that such evidence-seeking was a sign of unbelief and was not to be commended to future generations. The real purpose, it seems to me, was something different. Jesus showed the disciples His wounds because He wanted them to see that *they were still there*—the resurrection body had not been healed of its scars, which meant that the ascended body would continue to have them as well. The significance of this is that by ascending into Heaven Jesus took His earthly sacrifice and presented it to the Father as the plea for our forgiveness. Only then can it be said that the Work of Christ was truly finished, that He was finally reconciled in all the fulness of the rich meaning of that term, with His Father in Heaven. The Resurrection was really only the first-fruits of Christ's glory—the sign of what was to come. It was the Ascension which turned the sign into a reality, when Jesus took up the Kingdom which He had won by His victory over sin and death. It was in the light of this coronation that the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost—when He ascended up on high, He gave gifts below to men. There is therefore every reason to concentrate on the Ascension of Christ as a more significant moment in the history of salvation than Pentecost. But remember that we are concerned to correct an imbalance, not to set up a new distortion.

Once we succeed in bringing the Resurrection, the forty days' instruction and the Ascension into focus we can begin to appreciate the true glory of the Pentecost. For Pentecost was the moment when the Church was given the power to live out the truth which the apostles had been taught. 'When the Spirit of Truth comes', said Jesus, 'he will *lead you into* all truth'. Note the implied sense of movement. It is not 'he will teach you all truth'; it is certainly not 'he will dazzle you with all truth', like some university professor or young curate just out of theological college. No, it is: 'he will *lead you into* truth'. There is a movement here, and movement requires power. Without the power of the Holy Spirit we are unlikely to be led anywhere in the direction of God, and we shall certainly not show much inclination to preach what we have learned to the ends of the earth.

The empowering of Pentecost should not be understood as opening the door to *new* truth; still less should it be seen as a new truth in

itself. Rather, it is the *confirmation* of what has gone before and the *release* to spread this news to those who have not heard. It is in effect, a dismissal from the Upper Room where the disciples had met the Risen Jesus for the purpose of applying what they had learned there to the rest of the world. (Once again, it seems that Paul is the exception who proves the rule. For just as the Christian mission began in Jerusalem, so too he had to go up to Jerusalem in order to receive his commission from the other apostles. It is also worth remembering that although he later travelled far and wide, his links with the Jerusalem Church remained strong, and it was there that he was arrested, tried and sent to Rome for judgment.)

There is one more aspect of Pentecost which we must consider. This is that God chose that particular moment to pour out His Spirit on all flesh, giving a missionary dimension to the event which is one of the main features of the narrative in Acts 1. But why did God choose that particular moment? I am not really concerned with what I call 'microchronic' matters like the fact that there were a lot of people in Jerusalem at that time of year. This is true and no doubt it has its significance, but it is not the real issue which confronts us today. Rather we are being faced with the 'macrochronic' issue, which is why God should have chosen the Jewish diaspora in Graeco-Roman civilization as his first and principle vehicle for spreading the Gospel. There were plenty of religious traditionalists then who wanted a Messianic Jerusalem which would keep the Gentiles at arm's length as before. The New Testament records how Peter was influenced by this desire, and Paul had to combat it as soon as he took the Gospel beyond the walls of the synagogue. Today, however, it is not religious *traditionalism* but religious *radicalism* which is the danger. Far from wanting to perpetuate an outmoded cultural structure, the loudest voices today are calling for cultural reorientation of a quite fundamental kind, which would relegate large portions of the New Testament to the limbo of cultural inappropriateness. This trend may have begun with such things as the wearing of hats in church or the nature of Sunday observance, but it has now reached the point where virtually any New Testament precept can be set aside on the ground that it is no longer applicable to the society in which we live.

Here we are faced with an issue which cuts all the deeper, because to some extent this radicalism is a reaction against an excessive literalism which dominated the Church in the past. The Victorian idea of Christianity was more ethical than spiritual, and it is this which our age has generally rejected. That is all to the good—we do not want a return to middle-class legalism. Unfortunately what has not been understood is that legalism can only be overthrown when spiritual power is put in its place—if that does not happen, the result is an antinomianism which is rife in the church today. The Law, as we saw in part one, is spiritual—what matters is that the power

which applies it in our hearts and lives by the very power of the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost, and not the pressures exercised by legal tradition and social convention.

We certainly need to learn from the mistakes of the past, if only to understand the aberrations of the present, and we dare not disclaim our own responsibility for them. For like it or not, Evangelicals today belong to a particular theological tradition which has a heritage of both good and bad elements. We cannot escape from this by being vague about what we mean by Evangelical, and opening the door to anything and everything. The only long-term remedy is to confess our sins and failures, and return to the Rock from which we were hewn to seek more light for the future.

As Evangelicals we have a firm belief in the final authority of Holy Scripture in all matters of faith. This is a bedrock belief from which we dare not depart, nor must we interpret it in a naive way. We must be prepared to recognise that we are also heirs of tradition, and develop a theological understanding which takes both the text and its subsequent interpretation into account. If we divorce *sola Scriptura* from its historical context, we are liable to land ourselves in a kind of fundamentalism which has no legitimate application to the modern world. We may be acute enough not to have been deceived by the wilder forms of American fundamentalism, but we need to remember that there are sophisticated varieties which are just as dangerous. One thinks for example of the philosophy generally known in this country as Dooyeweerdianism which seeks to create an alternative culture on the basis of the Bible, but which in fact ignores the actual text of Scripture and uses the word 'Biblical' for a philosophical method whose links with the text are often tenuous. Somewhere in between Amsterdam and America is the Restoration movement in our own country. This is more ecclesiastical than the Dutch and more socially aware than the American brand of fundamentalism, but it is equally inadmissible and reprehensible. The idea that it is possible to create *ex nihilo* a church which is a pure reproduction of the New Testament ideal is faulty, because it is not historically possible to start again at the beginning, nor had there ever been a New Testament ideal to imitate. Yet I fear that this delusion is the logical outcome of years of teaching *sola Scriptura* out of context, and once again we Evangelicals must be prepared to take our share of the blame.

The same objection applies to the suggestion that the Charismatic movement is a *New Pentecost*. Writers from the movement are constantly harking back to the theme 'as at the beginning', as if a return to square one is what the Holy Spirit's purpose is. Yet we need to state as forcefully as we can that the cyclical view of history which this teaching pre-supposes is a pagan Greek idea. It is *not* the teaching of the New Testament. Charismatics who talk about the divine fire of renewal are actually closer to Stoicism than they are to

the Bible, even if they have set large numbers of isolated verses from the Authorised Version to music in order to back up their point. The Biblical view of history is linear—there is no going back to where we have been before; eternal salvation is portrayed in the Bible not as a return to the Garden of Eden, nor even as a rebuilding of the temple, but as the descent of the New Jerusalem, in which there is no temple and where the tree of life stands in the middle of the city, not the garden. The onward march of progress is not denied in heaven, where its purpose is revealed and given its proper meaning. We who live in the late twentieth century have entered the Spirit's work at a particular stage in this history which it behoves us to accept. It is certainly not being obedient to Scripture to pretend that the Spirit has never worked anywhere but in us since the end of the New Testament period!

As truly Biblical Christians then, we need to come to terms with the concept of tradition, and we can only do so on a proper theological basis. *Tradition*, in theological terms, means the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. It thus follows that where there is a difference of tradition, there is a different understanding of the work of the Spirit. This theological reference point has become all the more essential of late, since the word tradition has now become an ecumenically positive way of referring to the ecumenically negative concept of denomination. Thus we now hear of the Baptist tradition, the Methodist tradition, the Brethren tradition and so on. Yet we need to be careful not to misuse what is really a very valuable concept. For if we take these so-called traditions to the bar of Scripture we find that in terms of the work of the Holy Spirit, they do not differ. All the main Free Churches, like the Church of England, hold what is essentially the same doctrine of the Work of the Spirit—viz. that He works in and on *persons*, not things. No Protestant believes that consecrated water is a spiritual clearing agent which can produce regeneration, whatever secondary differences there may be among us. The real divides are the divide that separates us from Rome, and the divide which separates *both us and Rome* from the Eastern churches.

Now I realise that this is an Anglican point of view, but I think it is one which needs to be taken seriously by Free Churches. Are the things which divide us really important enough to keep us apart? Is there not a danger, when separation occurs, that points of difference—like baptism, for instance—will take on an importance and evoke passions which ought to be reserved for the Gospel message itself? It is not my intention to proselytise for the Church of England, but I do think that the Durham affair has shown us that the National Church has far greater potential for doing damage to the Gospel than any other church in this country, and that as long as this can be resisted Evangelicals in the Church of England ought to remain where the

action is—not hiving off into conventicles of the like-minded which by their very nature are abandoning the field to the enemies of Christ. But I digress.

Let us recall that the Reformation provoked a crisis in the Church which caused it to divide into those who believed that the Holy Spirit works through external means—a Vicar of Christ on earth, a sacerdotal priesthood, transubstantiation and an infallible Church which like institutional food is *semper eadem* — always the same; and those who believed that the Holy Spirit's work is primarily internal and spiritual, that every Christian is an ambassador of Christ, that every Christian is a priest but only Jesus offered a sacrifice, that the sacraments are a meeting with Christ whose validity can only be tested in spiritual terms, that the infallible Church is an invisible army of the saints of every age.

These differences are not trivial, but fundamental and enduring. They have an importance which makes differences between Anglicans and U.R.C.s, Methodists and F.I.E.C.s look tiny by comparison. And they are important, *not* because we need to unite against Rome—a policy which is both silly and ultimately self-defeating, as our 19th century forebears discovered to their cost—but because we *need* these truths in order to preach the Gospel faithfully. It is in this sense that we are always brought back to square one—not to some imaginary Golden Age that never was—but to the urgent need for Gospel proclamation today.

Now it is precisely at this point in our thinking that we can ask ourselves whether we are in some sense witnessing a new reformation today. Some of you may recall that there was a book of that title by the late John Robinson, in which he suggested that the changes in academic theology were of such far-reaching significance that it looked as if the result would be a new type of Church, as different from the old as Protestantism is different from Roman Catholicism. I do not myself think that academic theology has had any such result, but I do believe that Robinson's question has been taken up and repeated in circles where his own views would be thought somewhat unsound. I am referring, of course, to the so-called Neo-Evangelicals, who have made a determined bid in recent years for recognition as *the* voice of Anglican Evangelicalism. They are characterised by a desire to be fully involved in the structures of the Church, a love of committees, and a sense of embarrassment when more traditional Evangelical subjects are mentioned. Neo-Evangelicals do not oppose evangelism, nor a high doctrine of Scripture, but they are hardly in the vanguard of those who make such things priorities, nor is there much evidence that their greater involvement in Church structures had moved the latter any closer to these principles.

Nevertheless, Neo-Evangelicals are united by a conviction that something new has occurred in the life of the Church which makes

the old ways and old attitudes no longer adequate for today. It is notoriously difficult, as those who have tried will know, to make the spokesmen for the new look explain *why* they think this—it comes across like an article of faith which reason cannot question. It is obvious, for example, to Neo-Evangelicals that liturgical change *must* be welcomed—and here I am not talking about thee's and thou's, but about the widespread switch to such practices as Family Communion, which have the effect of reducing the available time for preaching. There is a remarkable naiveté about new forms of worship, whether they are authorised or not. The authorised forms are doctrinally weak and ambiguous, but this does not seem to matter; it certainly does not stop anyone from using them. And to think that as recently as 1928, Evangelicals in all the churches—not just the Church of England—rallied round to preserve not the language, but the *doctrine* of the Book of Common Prayer! How times have changed since then. As for *unauthorised* forms of service, anything goes—and what is worse, it goes in the name of the Holy Spirit. We live in days when disorder, confusion and any type of self-expression, some of it bordering on the explicitly erotic, are regarded as the spiritual alternatives to exposition, liturgy and regulated participation in worship. It is true, of course, that formality is often dull; it is often done badly, and it can easily become a meaningless ritual. We all know that this has happened and will doubtless continue to happen until the end of time. The cure for formalism however, is not anarchy, but a living message which can make the dry bones of liturgy come to life. A beautiful body is not made by replacing the skeleton with a lump of fat; the fat must be distributed in the right places and in the right order, on top of the necessary bone structure!

Here is a lesson which we desperately need to relearn at the level of fundamental principle. I am concerned with principle, not with practice, which will certainly vary according to time, place and temperament. What is essential in our worship is that we worship God in spirit and in truth, because that is the kind of worship—and the kind of worshipper—the Father Himself wants. And if we are to maintain the right spirit and the fulness of the truth we have no alternative but to organise ourselves. As someone once said—it may have been C.S. Lewis—liturgy or formal worship exists not for the spiritually high, but for the spiritually low, just as salvation exists not for the righteous but for sinners. When we are up, we may be carried along for a time by our own buoyancy, but when we are down, we need support from outside ourselves. Whether we are up or down, at all times and in all places we need to be guided and corrected by a pattern of worship which takes every aspect of Christian faith with balanced seriousness. We must not wallow in self-condemnation and ignore the word of gracious pardon—nor may we clap our hands in praise at the expense of daily repentance. Formal worship is not a

prison of the spirit, but a foundation for truly Biblical spiritual expression. This is why its doctrinal content is so important, for without the truth the spirit will go badly astray, and the latter state will be worse than the first.

Neo-Evangelicals are also characterised by a lack of sensitivity to the exclusive claims of truth. By this I mean that they tend to equate truth with a charitable spirit, regardless of what is actually said. A few years ago I had to review the confessions of an evangelical clergyman who had been in dialogue with Roman Catholics. This man said that he had begun with a certain amount of anti-Roman bias, based on inherited prejudices, but that his attitude changed when he saw how *nice* the cardinals and monsignori really were. From being against the reunion of the churches, he had swung in favour of ecumenical rapprochement!

I was scandalized by this testimony and said so in the review—which of course, drew down the wrath of Neo-Evangelicalism on my head. But the *reason* for my feelings went unnoticed. It was not that I disagreed with his estimation of Roman Catholics. I was shocked that there could be any serious Evangelical who thought about other Christians at a basically emotional level. I am a strong believer in having good and broad ecumenical experience, not because I believe in theological indifferentism, but because I believe that it is essential to know what other Christians are like from the inside. If all you know about Roman Catholics is basically hostile prejudice, then you should go to a monastery or retreat—it will do you a world of good. The same, of course, applies equally if you ignorantly oppose the Brethren, the Baptists or whatever brand of Anglican incites your wrath. There is no place for this sort of thing in the Christian church, and we owe it to ourselves, as much as to anyone else, to be as fair as we can be to every Christian denomination and tradition.

Above all, of course, we owe it to the cause of the Gospel for which we profess to stand. Luther and Calvin could attack the Roman Church with power because they knew what they were talking about, and said the right things at the right level at the right time. Later generations have too often merely repeated their attacks and as a result they lack conviction, are quite often out of date, and are consequently not listened to by anyone of influence. Of course it is true that we are really no closer to Catholicism now than we were in 1600, but unless we understand why—and have the courtesy to speak to post-Vatican II Catholics, not pre-Tridentine ones—we shall make no impression on anyone. The Gospel is too precious to be lost in prejudice, and we need to examine ourselves carefully in this matter. If your faith cannot survive exposure to such a challenge, then your faith is weak—and you too, might be converted to ecumenism, or to Roman Catholicism, if one day you meet someone of that persuasion who does not correspond to your stereotype.

Let us then, by all means, appreciate those with whom we disagree and love everyone who is seeking to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. But at the same time, let us never compromise or forget the light which has been given to us. If we believe that the Holy Spirit works in people and not in structures or on physical objects; if we believe that he is a God whose kingdom is invisible, not visible—then let us say so with conviction, and try to persuade others of the truth which we hold. If we are clear about what we believe, and why, then we will achieve both a genuine openness to others and a sincere desire to win them over to the vision of God which has been given to us. I am an Evangelical Christian, not because I find Evangelicals the most congenial people to be with—let's face it, Anglo-Catholics are usually much more entertaining dinner guests, if only because they have more than one topic of conversation.

Nor am I an Evangelical because I am in general sympathy with most other people who prefer to call themselves Evangelicals—from what I have written it must be quite clear that I am not. I am an Evangelical because I believe that the understanding of the work of the Holy spirit given to the Reformers and maintained ever since by orthodox preachers, teachers, pastors and evangelists is the understanding of the matter most in line with the teaching of the New Testament and the experience of true believers ever since—from whatever tradition or denomination they may come. I am prepared to believe that it is not the last word on the subject—indeed, the fact that I believe that Christ will come again to reveal all things *compels* me to believe that it is not the last word on the subject—but it is the closest we have so far come in our study of the Scriptures and in the practice of the Christian life, and for that reason we must hang on to it until something better is clearly revealed by the Word of God.

When I look at the claims of modern academic scholarship or of modern charismatic renewal, I see two sides of a coin which has been panned across the middle since the beginning of the eighteenth century. On one side is the head of René Descartes, the first modern philosopher, the man who made human reason the criterion of all judgment: I think, therefore I am! On the other side are Durer's praying hands—magnificent in the strength of devotional fervour, but cut off from the body and suspended as if in thin air. The coin itself was one minted all over Europe in the early sixteenth century, and if you put it back together you will find that the face of Descartes is really that of Calvin, and the praying hands are his also. In Calvin and his followers there was a unity of mind and worship which testified to the power of the Spirit of Truth. What he learned with his mind could be and was applied to worship with the hands and heart—if learning could not be turned to worship, it was rejected.

But after about 1650, many minds in Europe lost their praying hands. They became purely theoretical, cultivating knowledge for its

own sake. They rediscovered Plato—it was happening at Cambridge, I am ashamed to say, during the Protectorate of Cromwell—and from Plato they learned to despise the praying hands and, indeed, to despise any contact with matter. By the eighteenth century these minds were trying to reshape the material world in accordance with their own ideologies, and the result was revolution and technological progress devoid of moral principle. This is the world we live in, in which we have to *struggle* for such basic rights as natural childbirth and the freedom to die a natural death.

In reaction to this, the pious believers in the Church turned to prayer—but it was prayer of a kind which despised the teaching authority of the Church and exalted the right of the individual to choose his own understanding of Christianity. It is not generally appreciated today, but at the very time when orthodox, Bible-believing and Bible-exalting professors were the norm in our universities, the greatest opposition they faced came not from the intellectual liberals but from pious Church members, who accused them of preaching a dead religion, not a vibrant faith. The Pietists, as these people were called, had an enormous influence, particularly through the Wesleys in this country. But although John Wesley had a vibrant faith and a deep missionary zeal, he had only a weak grasp of the theological matters—a fact which produced division in the ranks of the Methodists almost from the very beginning.

Although the ground has shifted so much now that the old pattern is hardly recognizable any more, at least in terms of labels, the fundamental problem is very much the same now as it was two hundred years ago. This is that the conservative, Evangelical wing of the Church is divided into two mutually opposed camps—those who use their minds in spiritual matters and those who do not. As was the case then, the mindlessly spiritual expect the conservative intellectual minority to do battle against the liberals. At the same time they undermine them with the suspicion that for a Christian to think spiritually is unsound. One Christian is just as *good* as another, so there is no point in listening to an informed opinion or to an authoritative teaching voice.

Now the great fallacy about this approach is the belief that it is the intellectual whose faith is dormant or dead, so that he will soon lapse into liberalism. But as a matter of historical fact, it is the anti-intellectual pietist who is more in danger here. In the seventeenth century the Quakers began to go astray when they put more weight on the 'inner light' than on the Word of Truth, and before long they were equating this light with their own reason. A faith rooted in emotionalism may find academic life uncongenial, but the tendency will be to put theology in a separate compartment, sealed off from religious experience. I know many teachers of Bible and theology who are just like that—they have an emotional faith which lacks any

logical centre, but at the same time they can quite happily teach rather liberal critical theories of the Bible. These two facets simply never come together in their minds! But when the tumult and the shouting dies and the emotion fades, these people are left with nothing but a liberal theology to keep them going.

This psycho-spiritual split in the Evangelical community is all the more serious because the lack of a creative theological tradition in the twentieth century has left the field wide-open to the emotionalistic type of Christianity which calls itself 'renewal'. From personal experience I know that an ever growing number of men training for the ministry have come out of such a background—and are quite unprepared for the intellectual demands which will be made upon them. I have met theological students from Oxford and Cambridge who have prided themselves on their lack of books and the fact that they read nothing beyond Ian Fleming and Agatha Christie. Their 'culture' comes from television and the Christian gutter press—nothing else! The pressures on men today *not* to become academic, *not* to educate themselves, above all *not* to go on learning once they are ordained, are enormous—and the result is that we are producing a race of spiritual pygmies adept at raising holy hands and strumming a guitar, but harmful in the pulpit and useless in the study.

Yet the Scriptures tell us in no uncertain terms that the Spirit of *Truth* will come to lead us into all *truth*. The truth is something which speaks primarily to the mind—which is why we have a written revelation in the first place. If love of the truth is not our first priority, then we are doomed, and we shall drag the Church down after us into ruin. The truth is something which is incisive, cutting more sharply than a two-edged sword *through* our illusions and self-deceptions. It is something which is constantly tearing us apart, and re-shaping us in its image, according to its likeness. The truth is something which we can never possess, but it must possess us. There is no call for a superiority complex, or that awful sense of academic pride and distance which has done so much to discredit learning among us. The lover of the truth will always be open-minded and humble, ready and willing to learn from any source available to him.

But to be open-minded is not to be empty-headed! No true philosopher has ever investigated life without having a system, a criterion by which to judge the truth of the things which he encounters. Here the Christian is at one with the philosopher, except that for the Christian truth is *the* Truth—the Word of God which dwells with the Father, which became flesh in the Son and which is spoken by the Holy Spirit. This is the true Word which created us, which redeemed us, and which now preserves and sanctifies us in our union with Jesus Christ. If we are truly members of His body animated by His Spirit we can no more dispense with the truth or put our minds on the shelf than if we were Jesus Christ Himself. 'We have

the mind of Christ', said Paul—therefore we are called to *think*, called to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling.

In the world today there are giants of unbelief waiting to be slain. There is apostasy in the Church. There are psychoanalytic theories, often popularized as counselling, which deny the power of God and fail to respect the human person. There are ideologies, religions, cults and drugs which compete for the minds of men. Just look and listen to the 'pop' culture of today—the voices are the voices of prisoners trapped in their own illusions and unable or unwilling to break free. Look at the value system which, more and more, dominates our whole society—a value system in which progress, profit and convenience are put before the righteousness which alone can exalt a nation. There is the threat of nuclear warfare—our Church leaders want to ban the bomb, which is impossible, but why are we not crying out for men to *repent* while there is still time? I do not want to say today that the Gospel is more relevant and immediate now than it ever has been in the past. That would be going too far. But the Gospel is at least *as* relevant now as ever it has been. The heart of a man does not change; nor, thank God, does the divine mercy and forgiveness.

Today we do not need reasons to preach—the reasons are all around us. What we need is the will, and this can only come from faith and commitment. Do we really believe in God? Do we know him as the Father? Do we live in and with Him in the Son? Do we hear the voice of the Holy Spirit as he leads us into all truth? These are deep questions—they demand deep and serious answers. May God have mercy on us and give us the grace to take up our cross daily and follow him into the truth.

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Concluded