

The Fraternal

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Prophecy and the Pastor

The recent growth in the exercise of the gift of prophecy in our churches has caught many of us unawares and ill-equipped to handle this, for us, new element in Christian worship. Response to the gift has often either been that of uncritical acceptance or outright rejection and either of these responses brings in their wake pastoral problems.

Whilst it is not the intention of this article to discuss the nature of prophecy in any depth nor to justify its use, some definition of the gift is necessary. The term prophecy seems to refer to a wide ranging gift in Scripture which involved either ecstasy or the use of the rational mind concerning either the social and political affairs of nations or the personal affairs of individuals. Our concern is limited to the gift referred to in I Cor. 12 and 14. Until recently the idea that prophecy here referred to preaching seemed quite acceptable. But the advent of short impromptu messages claiming to come direct from God to the congregation has caused a re-examination of that view.¹ Michael Green has described it as follows:

Prophecy is neither bizarre nor ecstatic. It is a perfectly intelligible word from the Lord through a member of his Body, inspired by his Spirit, and given to build up the rest of the Body. It is a message which the speaker does not make up. It is borne in upon him. He has to speak it out. And it is an act of faith. He or she does not normally know how it will end, only how it must begin...²

It is only by accepting such an interpretation of the gift of prophecy that Paul's general argument and his apparent identification of prophecy with revelation (I Cor. 14:6,26,30) makes sense.³

The Value of Prophecy

That this type of prophecy is being rediscovered in our churches should not surprise us in view of all that the New Testament has to say about it. Note, for example, that:

- (a) It is a mark of the age of the Spirit (Acts 2:17).
- (b) It is the only gift which Paul includes in all his lists of spiritual gifts.
- (c) It is given a place of tremendous importance in relation to other gifts and the prophet is only second to the apostle in the list of gifted people (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).
- (d) It appears to have been a fairly widespread gift in the New Testament church.
- (e) Its function of building up the body of Christ, encouraging and comforting believers, revealing the will of God and convicting sinners makes it important in the life of the church (I Cor. 14:3, 22-25, 30,31).
- (f) It is a gift we are specifically told not to despise (I Thess. 5:19-22).

The Pitfalls of Prophecy

Even if what has been said so far is accepted, there still remains the problem of the church's reaction to the gift and the question of how it should be handled. Many will inevitably look to the Pastor for a lead. Some will feel overwhelmed that the gift has been exercised in their fellowship and credit it with a status out of all proportion to its place in the New Testament. Others will feel daunted by it and perhaps fearful and either try to explain it away, or try to ensure that it does not happen again or pass on in embarrassment to the next hymn. Where there has been an openness to accept the gift from God there has sometimes been a tendency, as with most things which are new, to be too preoccupied with it or to grant it too much significance. Three aspects of this enthusiasm call for comment.

(a) Occasionally the prophecy, because it is a message from God, is put on the same level as Scripture itself and every word is assumed to be inspired and searched thoroughly for its meaning. Wayne Grudem's recent study⁴ argues rightly that this is to misunderstand the gift in I Corinthians where it is not so much the actual words but the general content which is important. Grudem believes that the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament prophet for whom every word counted and whose words were enshrined in Scripture was not the prophet referred to in I Cor. 12 and 14 but the apostle. He furthermore points out that Paul was apparently happy for prophecies to be interrupted and lost (I Cor. 14:30) and to ignore their message once they had been received (Acts 21:4, 10,11). The prophets of I Cor. therefore play a useful God-inspired part in building up the church but cannot claim the same authority or status as their O.T. predecessors.

(b) There is sometimes a misunderstanding about how one authenticates a prophecy. It is sometimes assumed that the mode of expression is what determines whether it is from God or not. Ecstasy clearly cannot be the test, for Paul says that 'the spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets' (I Cor. 14:32). Man may be the tool of the Holy Spirit, but even so he is a 'rational free, co-operating partner and therefore also responsible'⁵. He may speak under compulsion but not as a totally determined being. If ecstasy cannot be the test neither can the form of words used. In some circles it is common to begin with the word 'I the Lord say to you...' or to use the language of the AV. This can appear to carry tremendous spiritual authority and people may shrink from the task of assessing the authenticity of the prophecy as a word from God lest it appears that they are questioning the Lord. But no prophecy is self-authenticating and no mode of delivery exempts the church from the responsibility of assessing the source and significance of that has been said (I Cor. 14:29).

(c) In their enthusiasm to give the Spirit freedom to speak through this gift some have become over-dependent on it and been paralysed into inactivity unless specifically guided to take a particular course of action through prophecy. But there is no evidence that any New Testament church ran its

affairs on the basis of frequent words of prophecy. Moreover there is no evidence that there were special meetings where words of prophecy were sought as is the habit of some today. Prophecy seems to have taken an unselfconscious place in the church as one means among several by which God spoke to his people. There is no New Testament warrant for abolishing the responsibility to think because of prophecy nor of abdicating the responsibility of church meetings because of prophets.

The Discernment of Prophecy

Since no prophecy is self-authenticating and no prophet is infallible it is crucial that each prophecy received is subjected to a process of assessment. Is it a word from God or not? If not, where does it come from? It may be demonic in its inspiration or merely the well-disguised wish of the prophet himself. When it is the latter it is often so well disguised that not even the prophet himself realises its origin and he is not in any way trying to be deliberately deceitful. He often feels the matter raised by the prophecy deeply and believes it to be from God. Even if the prophecy is from God its significance still needs to be assessed. To whom is it addressed and what exactly does it mean still needs to be asked?

It is pastorally vital that such discernment should take place. It is destructive to the prophet and to the church as a whole where it does not. Such discernment was regularly linked with the gift of prophecy itself in Scripture as Dunn has pointed out (see I Cor. 12:10, 14:29ff. and I Thess. 5:21). Dunn goes on to say that the fact that this evaluation is described as a charisma presumably means that the evaluation was not simply a matter of logical and rational analysis but ultimately a sense shared by (most of) those involved that this word was (or was not) a word of the spirit and that the significance discerned in it was in accord with the mind of the Spirit (cf. I Cor. 2:16; 7:40).⁶

Since Paul gives few specific guidelines for discerning a prophecy it is this aspect of the gift which most of us find difficult. But perhaps a number of principles can be outlined.

(a) Does the prophecy deny the deity and Lordship of Jesus Christ (I Cor. 12:3 and I Jn. 4:1-3), or is it in conflict with the plain teaching of Scripture? If so, it cannot be of the Spirit whose unity with the Father and Son would prevent such a contradiction (Eph. 4:4-6). But this test alone is often insufficient in testing a prophecy since although the content may not be in contradiction to Scripture it still needs weighing up as to whether it is from God or not. Prophecy often deals with matters of exhortation or decisions not explicitly dealt with in Scripture, hence the need for further guidelines.

(b) How do the rest of the church respond to the prophecy, especially those who are spiritually mature and have proved themselves in the exercise of other spiritual gifts (I Cor. 14:29-22)? The Old Testament prophet was often seen to be opposed to the people of God and provoked a hostile response from them. But since Pentecost the relationship of the prophet of

God's people has changed. Obviously on occasions he will say uncomfortable things and reveal awkward secrets. But for the most part his words, if from God, will strike responsive chords in the rest of God's people. The prophet is one of them, part of the body, not separate from them or superior to them. When the gift of prophecy is allowed to elevate itself above other gifts and to function independently, the pastoral consequences can be immensely damaging. A true prophet submits to others in the Church.

(c) Does the prophecy fulfil the functions of prophecy (I Cor. 14:3, 24, 25, 31)? If not, what is its aim or effect?

(d) What of the tone of the prophecy? Is it conveyed in a manner which you would expect if it originates from God? Some prophecies I have heard have contained a note of threat, harshness, bitterness, selfishness or partisanship which is quite uncharacteristic of God's relationship to his redeemed people. As Dunn has pointed out, charisma by definition means manifestations of grace. Unless, therefore, the prophecy comes in love and seeks for the unity of God's people, its legitimacy may be questioned.⁷

(e) What of the character of the prophet? Is the prophet a stable man or woman of God? It is all too easy for the immature or less stable to use prophecy as a means of manoeuvring themselves into a position of influence or authority in the church which they would otherwise not have.

(f) For whom was the prophecy intended? The options are wide-ranging from an individual present through to the whole church; from those present to the church as a whole, present or not. The implication from I Corinthians would be that they were usually messages given for those present there and then and it is unnecessary and inappropriate to make them more widely known or to keep repeating them. Perhaps, if the norm is that those present are being addressed, extra care should be taken if they are subsequently shared with others and additional guidance from God should be evident before doing so.

(g) What about prophecies that are specific and strongly directive? These occur over decisions which churches or individuals are reaching and it makes it very difficult for a sincere Christian to decide otherwise once the prophecy has been given even if he believes the Lord would have him do so. On such occasions it is important to ensure that the prophecy has come through an uncontaminated source and not one that has been primed or is partisan. In many cases, when it is from God, it will come simply as a confirmation or prompt to aid people to do what they know to be right. Occasionally it may need to come as rebuke.

(h) What does it mean and what is to be done about it? Prophecy is not always unambiguous. Once received the church needs to ask what does it mean and what is the appropriate response for us to make.

Much enrichment will come to our worship and spiritual lives if we strive to maintain the balance advocated in I Thess. 5:19-21 regarding prophecy. We must avoid being self-appointed fire brigades who delight in dampening down or even putting out the fire of the Spirit. To do that means that we miss out not only on the warmth and light that the Spirit can give but on his power and purifying processes too. But if we are not to be self-appointed fire brigades, neither are we to be self-appointed arsonists. We are to ensure that the fires kindled are those of the Spirit and not those of our own making. Fire is destructive and would do much damage in our hands. In the hands of the Spirit, it is both constructive and well controlled.

Derek Tidball

Footnotes

1. Donald Bridge and David Phipers, *Spiritual Gifts and the Church* IVP, 1973, pp.39-43 and 63.
2. Michael Green, *To Corinth with Love*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1982, p.74.
3. James Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, SCM, 1975, p.230.
4. Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in I Corinthians*, University Press of America, 1982, passim.
5. Arnold Bittlinger, *Gifts and Graces*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1967, p.109.
6. Dunn, *op.cit.* p.234.
7. *ibid*, p.270f.

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Preaching from the Sermon on the Mount

“The first business of an interpreter is to let the biblical author say what he does say instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.” Martin Luther’s statement must surely be the fundamental guiding principle which undergirds the proclamation of all those who are called to preach or teach the scriptures. To preach from the Sermon on the Mount is to let Matthew 5-7 speak as clearly and as powerfully to men and women in twentieth century Britain as it did to the followers of Jesus in the first century. For this to happen the preacher must first understand the sermon’s teaching; he must himself be able to interpret its contents and grasp its meaning if he is to present its message faithfully. This is, of course, true for any passage of scripture, but nowhere is this need more keenly felt than in tackling these chapters of Matthew’s Gospel whose sublime simplicity is seen, on closer inspection, to hide a multitude of exegetical problems. Indeed, not only do the individual parts of the sermon present tantalizing conundrums to the preacher, the sermon as a whole has been subject to any number of interpretations. Harvey McArthur, in his book *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* mentions twelve different approaches to the ethics of the sermon, and in addition to these there are debates about the background, setting, formation and structure of the sermon, all of which have a bearing on its interpretation! Clearly, it is not possible within the confines of this article even to attempt to provide a full discussion of the variety of interpretations put forward, nor can there be a detailed exegesis of each section, and even less a set of suggested sermon outlines! If, however, what follows leads to others re-examining the sermon, if it can inspire a fresh study of the enormous riches it contains, and if that in turn leads to a fresh proclamation of its message, it will have more than fulfilled its purpose.

1. The interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

One of the striking features of Matthew’s Gospel is the way in which he has collected together much of the teaching of Jesus into five great blocks or sections of teaching, of which chapters 5-7 are the first. The fact that much of this teaching appears in different contexts in other Gospels would suggest that the “sermon” as such has been constructed by Matthew, probably as a teaching aid for the members of the Church for which he writes. Just as the sermons in *Acts* are not verbatim reports of everything that was said on the occasions reported, but rather provide us with the outline of the main themes, so the sermon on the mount is a distillation of some of the great themes of the teaching of Jesus, each section, and sometimes individual sentences (notably the beatitudes) being almost the text which Jesus would have expounded at some length. Matthew has arranged the material contained in the “sermon” in this way (as he has arranged everything in his Gospel) to present to his readers the person and work of Christ in as clear, as compelling and as relevant a way as he can.

What then is the message of this “sermon”; how is it to be interpreted? It is interesting how many interpretations of the sermon on the mount, whether intentionally or not, have the effect of either reducing its demands or

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restricting its validity. On the one hand the classic Roman Catholic approach has been to distinguish between the precepts of the Gospel, essential for salvation, and the counsels of the Gospel, essential for perfection. The latter category, into which the sermon on the mount falls, is reserved only for those making a total commitment by separating themselves from the world — mostly the clergy. On the other hand Martin Luther thought of the Christian as belonging to two spheres of existence, the spiritual and the temporal. As a Christian in the spiritual realm the sermon must be obeyed; but as father, judge, soldier etc, in the temporal realm, a different standard applies.

Modern Dispensationalism, as evidenced by the Scofield Reference Bible, neatly avoids all the claims of the sermon on the mount, by asserting that its teaching is for the kingdom dispensation which is yet to come, and thus it “gives neither the privilege nor the duty of the Church”. Such a view has, interestingly enough, the same effect as that of A. Schweitzer, who understood Jesus to have made such radical demands because he felt the approach of the last hour and the imminence of the End; since Jesus was mistaken (according to Schweitzer) the modern disciple is under no compulsion to obey the sermon.

Yet others propose to take the sermon quite seriously, but in fact rob it of much of its impact by insisting that its “deliberate hyperbole”, intended to dramatise its demands, needs to be “toned down” to make it practicable; or that the specific language of the sermon was intended only to convey general principles; or that it presents intentionally an impossible ideal, aimed at driving men to despair and thus preparing them for the Gospel.

Almost all of the above approaches contain at least a tiny grain of truth; but whatever else the sermon may be, its setting in the ministry of Jesus, and its setting within Matthew’s Gospel, make it quite clear that it was intended to be taken seriously. Matthew at least has passed on this teaching because he believed that it both could and should be observed.

For numerous commentators the sermon is best understood in terms of a new law; Jesus, the new Moses, ascends the mount (as Moses did at Sinai) and promulgates the law for the new people of God. Undoubtedly Matthew’s Gospel as a whole, and the sermon on the mount in particular (especially 5:17-48) raises acutely the question of Jesus’ attitude towards the Old Testament law. Furthermore, the apparent ambivalence of Jesus towards the law in Matthew makes the answering of the question far from straightforward. On occasions, while deploring Pharasaic failure to observe what they taught, or their over-emphasis on tradition, Jesus appears to underline the importance of the law itself (15,3,6; 23:3) and commends its observance (8:4; 19:17). He himself observes the feasts and appears to understand the law to be eternally valid (5:17-20). On the other hand individual laws are approached more critically: the Mosaic divorce laws are described as a concession to human hardness of heart, the food laws are apparently set aside (15:1-10), and Jesus asserts his freedom in respect of the Sabbath law. That this ambivalence is an accurate representation of Jesus’ attitude during his ministry is highly probable (see esp. the article by W.D. Davies in the bibliography); he neither accepted the law uncritically or

abolished it entirely. That he should present a new law in such a context is understandable, but it is unlikely to provide the key to understanding the sermon on the mount, especially if we fall into the trap that led Israel to see in the law a means of attaining salvation instead of a guide to those already redeemed. There can be no question of 'doing the sermon on the mount' in order to find salvation.

What then is the sermon? It has for long been acknowledged that there are two elements which make up New Testament proclamation: the *kerygma*, the preaching of the gospel, and *didache*, the instruction of converts. The secret of understanding the sermon is the recognition that it is *didache*, instruction for disciples. (Jeremias, who has championed this approach, suggests that Matthew's version is aimed mainly at Jewish Christians and Luke's at Gentile Christians). The sermon presupposes the proclamation of the gospel, and indeed presupposes commitment to discipleship. To every part of the sermon one must prefix words such as 'your sins are forgiven, you are a child of God, you have entered His kingdom, therefore.....' The sermon on the mount is a description of life in the Kingdom of God. It says to us, as T.W. Manson puts it, "This is how you who are in the Kingdom of God must live if your citizenship is to be a reality."

It must seem the height of presumption to dismiss all other approaches to the sermon in such cavalier fashion, and then to present *the* correct understanding in a handful of sentences with no argument whatsoever! I can only plead lack of space (whole books have been written on the subject!) and trust that before either accepting or rejecting this approach you will, at least, consult some of the literature in the bibliography.

2. Preaching from the Sermon on the Mount.

Perhaps a very brief word about preaching in general may be in order here. I have already said that our task is simply to let these chapters speak for themselves, as clearly and as powerfully as possible. How can this be accomplished? It seems to me that there are three elements which should make up our sermon preparation.

1. Exegesis — attempting to discover what a passage or text originally intended to say; being prepared to use all the aids which are at our disposal to uncover that meaning; being prepared to leave aside our preconceived notions of what it must mean, or ought to mean; weighing different viewpoints, analysing words and phrases, remembering the context of the passage and the situation being addressed. As far as this last item is concerned, in the Gospels, and therefore in this sermon, there are, of course, two contexts; that within the ministry of Jesus, and that within the Gospel of Matthew. It is not necessarily the case that the significance of a saying will be identical in both contexts, and indeed it is possible that two quite different sermons can emerge from a passage, depending upon the context on which we concentrate.

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2. Translation — if what our exegesis has brought to light is to be conveyed in our sermon there needs to be
 - a) The elucidation of terminology and concepts not readily understandable to twentieth century congregations. In these chapters the concepts of blessedness and the kingdom of God need careful explanation, as do a number of words and phrases drawn from a first century Jewish background.
 - b) The clarification of the content. Whereas a) involves individual parts of a passage, we are concerned here to present the whole clearly.
 - c) The illustration of the truth — an attempt to make the truth more comprehensible and memorable.
 - d) The presentation of the whole — an attempt to order our material so that we can present it and others can grasp it.
 - e) The application of the truth. What is this saying for those to whom we minister? For the application to be at its best there needs to be a grasp of the implications of the truth being expounded coupled with a deeply compassionate understanding of the position of those to whom we preach.

What then of this sermon? Obviously a detailed analysis of even parts of it is not possible here, but perhaps a few brief observations may be sufficient to whet the appetite and provide a stimulus for a more detailed study.

The sermon begins with the famous beatitudes. The blessedness is essentially the joy that comes from participation in the kingdom of God, the joy of salvation, a joy which has its source in the presence and activity of Jesus, a joy which rightfully belongs to the age to come, but which can be experienced here and now in the midst of everyday life because the powers and privileges of that age have come in the person and work of Christ. The sermon is utterly Christocentric — it is proclaimed by Christ, its blessings are found in Christ, its challenges can only be met through Christ. These beatitudes describe the character of those who are in the kingdom. They do not describe nine different people, but present nine characteristics which should be present in all members of the kingdom and equally make clear that all the blessings of the kingdom are available to all the members of the kingdom. Furthermore, they demonstrate the need to understand the Old Testament in order to interpret correctly the New, for terms like 'poor in spirit' (those who recognise their need of God), 'those who mourn' (concern for the sin and failure of others, especially God's people, rather than one's own sins), those who 'shall see God' (not the beatific vision but the ability to stand before God in judgment, to look on God and live) and others can only be rightly understood when their roots in the Old Testament are acknowledged. Here is a rich vein from which to quarry our sermons!

The sermon proceeds from character to witness (in itself significant) presenting both the challenge to wholesome involvement (the salt sayings) and the encouragement of participation in the life of the city of God, so that

it is God's light which shines through us (How does he get that from 5:14-16? See the commentaries).

At a time when much Christianity has, as far as the Law is concerned, lapsed into a form of Christian Pharaism, often more Pharaic than Christian, which pays lip service to the sole need of faith for salvation but which cannot really accept such a daring Gospel and retreats into voluntary captivity to a whole system of regulations essential to salvation, or, in revolt against this tendency, and under the banner of 'freedom', has declared that Christ is the end of the Law (if ever a text was abused it must surely be Romans 10:4!) and has rushed down the slope into the sea of experience, where the ethics of the New Testament have been diluted into 'feeling led', at such a time there is surely a need to re-discover the remainder of Matthew 5. Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it. For Jesus both law and prophets pointed forward to a coming fulfilment (cf Matthew 11:13). When Jesus fulfilled the Law some parts of it were necessarily superseded and rendered obsolete: the sacrificial laws, for example, are no longer necessary for that which they foreshadowed, the once for all sacrifice of Christ, has rendered them unnecessary; the laws governing the ritual of approach to God have been swallowed up in the new and living way which has been opened up through Christ. Other parts of the Law, and notably the moral Law, that which governs behaviour, have not been rendered obsolete at all; indeed it has been deepened and intensified, as vv 21-48 demonstrate. Now the demands are even greater, the holiness which is called for is even more radical; but the man or woman who is in the kingdom is indwelt by the Spirit of God who now writes this Law on our hearts and empowers us to meet its just requirement (Romans 8:4). This law is not a means of attaining salvation (but then nor was the Old Testament Law rightly understood—the attempt to be saved by it was Israel's great folly) but is an expression of how those who have been saved will live. It is this Law, fulfilled and in its fulfilment transformed, of which Jesus says that not the tiniest part will pass from it. Whether or not you accept the details of this interpretation is, in a sense, secondary compared to the need to let the sermon on the mount raise again the vital question of the Law and the Christian and drive us to tackle it openly, honestly and biblically. It is a complex area; it does require study and hard work; it is not the sort of sermon that can be tossed off in an odd hour on a Sunday afternoon; but by tackling it we can, perhaps, save our people from so much heartache, and lead them into so much that is rewarding.

The rest of the sermon abounds with material that is as relevant now as ever it was. The priority of good relationships among God's people (more important even than worship — 5:23,4!) and the importance not only of overt acts (which we can often control) but the inner attitudes which, if harboured, can poison a fellowship. Holiness at all costs (5:29,30) and if ever we needed to preach and teach about sex, marriage and divorce it is surely now, (5:27-32).

Chapter 6 raises fairly acutely another misunderstood element of Jesus' teaching, namely the question of reward; the language can easily be taken to imply a form of contract morality. Here Bultmann and C.S. Lewis can help

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Dear Friends,

“N” is for Negligence

This is a hard word but one that has a definite meaning in English Common Law. I referred to it as recently as last October in my letter on the subject of Liability Insurance. However, I think it bears further thought.

I can understand that hackles may rise a little if, when deacons enquire regarding a claim being made against the church, we ask on what grounds they are considered to have been negligent. It seems an unkind question to ask of people who give their time and energy administering and caring for the church in God's service. Negligence has been defined as the omission to do something which a reasonable man would do or doing something which a reasonable and prudent man would not do. In practice this imposes quite a high degree of care, particularly with regard to the safety of premises. It is rather easier with the benefit of hindsight to see that a step might have been better lit or a projecting nail should have been removed from a wall.

Nevertheless it must be stressed that if an accident befalls some unfortunate person on church premises solely because of their own lack of care or even clumsiness, the question of deacons' negligence does not arise, and there is no liability for us to protect. Sympathy with the unlucky individual is a proper sentiment but its practical expression must be undertaken advisedly. It is not unknown for an offer made out of pure fellow feeling to be construed as an admission of liability where there has been no negligence. Reimbursement cannot and should not be sought from insurers for acts of pure generosity on the part of a church, but we live in litigious times when it behoves us to ensure that an act of kindness is not mistaken for an admission of negligence. It is against this background that we in common with all Insurers, ask for claimants' letters to be sent to us unacknowledged so that we can frame a suitable reply in the light of our experience.

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our congregations; Bultmann's dictum "He promises reward precisely to those who obey not for the sake of reward" is very important, as is Lewis' idea of 'proper' rewards, i.e. things which are the necessary outcome of a particular action because they are an integral part of the action itself.

There is surely room for a sermon on the dangers of public piety, and we should need no prompting to provide teaching on practical aid, prayer, fasting (the latter often neglected and misunderstood and so misused), but might need courage to take seriously 6:14,15.

As for the rest there is material here for preaching on materialism (6:19-34) which is timely in the midst of our affluence; the danger of criticism (7:1-5) and the need for discernment (7:6), and more on prayer (7:7-11). Have you ever preached on the 'golden rule', including the last part of the verse? And in the present climate 7:15-24's emphasis needs to be heard.

All in all there is enough here to stimulate us and our people for months to come, but they will only be stimulated by it, and enter into the blessings it offers, and respond to the challenges it presents, if they hear these words of Jesus that they might do them. The wise man will preach this sermon so that he and his people may become wise in living this sermon.

Finally a word about books. The following are intended as a general introduction to the sermon, including its background, with the commentaries providing the verse by verse exegesis.

- | | |
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| J. Jeremias | <i>The Sermon on the Mount:</i> this is a splendid introduction. |
| T.W. Manson | <i>Ethics and the Gospel:</i> a marvellous book. |
| W.D. Davies | <i>The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount:</i> massive work dealing with the introductory matters. |
| W.D. Davies | <i>The Sermon on the Mount:</i> a précis of the above. |
| H.K. McArthur | <i>Understanding the Sermon on the Mount:</i> a useful guide to the different approaches. |
| D. Hill | — New Century Bible — on balance probably the best commentary on Matthew at present. |
| R.H. Gundry | — Most recent; quite interesting and worth consulting. |
| G.A.H. McNeile | — Old but still useful. |
| E. Schweizer | — Often stimulating, but you need the companion volume on Mark. |
| F.W. Beare | — recent large commentary, but rather disappointing. |
| W. Hendriksen | — useful for preachers, but too long. |
| R.V.G. Tasker | — small but useful. |
| H.B. Green | — one of the best in the New Clarendon series. |

J. Fenton	— rather limited in value.
F. Filson	— disappointing.
W. Albright & C.S. Mann	— can safely be ignored.
A.M. Hunter	<i>Design for Life:</i> a splendid little book.
J. Stott	<i>Christian Counter Culture:</i> a good exposition to help other expositors.
W.D. Davies	<i>Christian Origins and Judaism.</i>
R. Banks	<i>Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition.</i>
H. Thielicke	<i>Life can begin again.</i>

John Maile

The Incarnational Basis of the Ministry

In the January 1983 issue of *Fraternal* three colleagues share their insights into the basis of their ministries and their ministerial roles as they see them. What I write is in no way a reply to the valuable insights shared by my colleagues. Gethin Abraham-Williams writes suggestively and intriguingly about the minister's role in relation to the doctrine of creation.

Paul Beasley-Murray, on the other hand, bases his understanding of the ministry upon Ephesians 4:11-12. That is, the call to ministry arises out of the triumphant exaltation of Christ and the consequent pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the gifting of Christians with the various gifts of ministry.

Only Keith Sobey mentions the incarnation, and then only in passing. I would like to suggest that in addition to all that my friends have written, the incarnation also adds something to our understanding of the calling and role of the minister.

My starting point, however, is not Scripture, although that is where I shall eventually arrive. I start from the experience we all share, whether we approve or not, of being regarded as members of the so-called "helping professions". Like doctors, lawyers, social workers, youth leaders, community workers, counsellors and so on we are involved in working directly with people in offering support, help, advice or counsel. We do this from our pulpits, in our vestries and in other people's sitting rooms.

What, I think, we do not always realise is that there are basically two kinds of help to be offered, and there are circumstances when each is right and proper. The first kind of "help" is the kind offered by an "expert" in cases where people have neither the knowledge, nor the training, nor the skill, nor the experience to solve their problem themselves. There are many obvious examples of this sort of help such as when we go to see our doctor about a medical problem. We expect our doctor to have the right sort of training and skill to deal with our problem and we feel aggrieved if we do not leave his surgery with at least a prescription.

There are two dangers involved in this kind of helping, however. The first is that the person seeking help will tend to put the helper up on a pedestal

with the result that the helper and the helped find themselves at an emotional and psychological distance from each other. (The somewhat exaggerated respect accorded to members of the medical profession in our culture would be an example). This, of course, is seldom consciously acknowledged. Sometimes the helper colludes in this process, deliberately helping to put a distance between himself and (for want of a better word) his clients. The use of furniture, the wearing of some kind of a uniform and so on, are the various techniques employed in this setting the client at a distance, and, indeed, putting him in a dependent position. To be sure, such things do not always affect the quality of the helping process. If the problem requires the attention of an "expert", then that is what is being offered, although "clients" will sometimes complain about the facelessness and off-handed way in which the help is offered them.

The other danger involved with what I have called "expert help" is that too easily people can fall into the assumption that this is the only kind of help on offer, that there is no other way of helping a person with a problem, and that all problems can be solved with this kind of help.

I do not believe that to be true. There are, indeed many problems that do need the attention of an expert helper. When my car breaks down I take it to a garage where an expert mechanic can fix it. But there are also many problems where a person can discover the answer himself, or find the resources within himself to cope with the problem if there appears to be no solution. Problems of personal relationships come into this category. So do choices about many of the important issues of life — marriage, career, where to live, how to bring up the children, what values to live by, coming to terms with death, faith in Christ and so on. What is fatal in such cases is the assumption that responsibility for such choices can be off-loaded onto someone else, an "expert" who will solve the problem and save the person involved the effort and thought and work and prayer required to overcome the difficulty. People, if they are to become adult and mature, must be allowed to live their own lives, make their own decisions and come to their own faith. That is not to say that a helper will not be any use but that he will be a helper who does not set himself at a distance from the person seeking help, a helper who works alongside and suffers alongside and who is at the same level as the person seeking help. The help that is offered will be the help that clarifies the problem under discussion, helps the person involved to see clearly the choices that confront him, helps him to discover his own ability to deal with the situation and so lets him take the responsibility for his own life. At no stage in this kind of helping process does the helper take the responsibility for making decisions on behalf of the person being helped, although he may need to help his client to understand the ethical issues at stake.

This second kind of "help" is much more difficult for people to understand and accept. Basically, human nature does not like being responsible and would much rather let others carry the can, even though that is not the way to mature adulthood. And it also quite often happens that when a person cannot or will not accept the kind of help which does not take away his responsibility and the other kind of "expert" help is not forthcoming, there is



WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

York House, 409 Barking Road,
Plaistow, E13 8AL

Patron: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother

Dear Fellow Ministers,

It is all a matter of keeping our balance!

So much of life is just that. In personal relationships we must try to keep the balance between the head and the heart. In the life of society, we need to keep the balance between self-reliance and a proper degree of inter-dependence. In the local church, a balance must be struck between our cherished autonomy and the demands and disciplines of the wider fellowship.

When we come to matters of theology and doctrine, we realise that there has been a never ending struggle to hold in balance apparently contradictory aspects of the truth about God and man:- law and grace; justice and mercy; humanity and divinity; faith and works; dignity and depravity. In these, and many other issues, balance is vitally important.

As far as the West Ham Central Mission is concerned, there are two areas in particular in which we are trying to maintain a proper balance. Firstly, the balance between the proclamation of the gospel and the attempt to meet the physical and emotional needs of the people who come to us. I hope that no-one dismisses what we do as "just social work". We do bring technical skills in counselling, nursing, etc. to our work, but all that we offer is "for the sake of the Name" of Jesus. We are not ashamed of the gospel, and we have found again and again that men and women have discovered Christ through their contact with the Mission.

Secondly, it is becoming more and more evident that the balance of our financial resources is likely to change. For many years we have been greatly helped by the money that has followed referrals from Social Services, Health Authorities and other statutory bodies. It now seems inevitable that the balance between such support and the help given to us by churches and individual subscribers will swing more and more in the latter direction. If you and your people believe that the West Ham Central Mission has something worthwhile to offer, and that the work is worth maintaining, then the support we receive from our fellow believers will need to increase dramatically.

I know how difficult it is for many of our friends to spare even what they now give. It is nevertheless true that if we are to keep a balance between evangelism and service, and that between church and state support, we can only do so in co-operation with our many friends in the churches. If you think it is worth doing, please help us to do it!

Yours in His Service,
Trevor W. Davis,
Superintendent Minister

a feeling of being let down, or disappointment, sometimes even hurt and anger.

All this, as I see it, has much to do with the role and position of ministers. Many, if not most, of the people in our congregations would see the minister as offering the first kind of help, i.e. they see him as an expert, and to a certain extent will place him on a pedestal. We all know how the minister can be regarded as someone special, who has attained a level of holiness beyond that which any member of his congregation can reach. He is expected to make sacrifices that are not for other Christians. He is altogether a kind of super-Christian.

I believe that this is all symbolised by putting the minister up in the pulpit in church on Sundays. But it isn't only that the congregation think that they can see and hear him more clearly if he's up there. That may well be true, but there are other, unconscious motives at work as well. We all have heard the jokes about being "six feet above contradiction". The position of the minister up there in the pulpit reinforces in my view the idea that he is a different kind of animal from the people in the pew. It symbolises the distance that the congregation put between themselves and their minister, so that what he preaches is for the likes of him and not for the likes of them, so that they do not really have to take so much notice of what he says.

Much the same sort of thing could be said about the significance of wearing distinctive ministerial costume, such as the dog-collar. In this connection I would warmly commend the article "The Costume of the Clergy" in the journal *Theology* for September 1982. In that article the author, Martin Down, writes, "Every parish priest knows the relationship of childish dependence that can exist between himself and even intelligent adult members of his congregation. Even when he is not called Father, the parish priest can find himself in the role of a surrogate father to his parishioners. Some clergy and laity are anxious to preserve this dependence, even though it is a relationship between Christians expressly forbidden or discouraged by Jesus (Matthew 23:8-10). Such a relationship is encouraged by distinctive clerical dress.

There are other false expectations. The laity, especially the unchurched ones, often assume that the clergy are somehow immune from the sort of troubles and temptations that assail ordinary men and women... because he wears a peculiar collar what the clergyman has to say is taken out of the realm of ordinary realistic conversation, and becomes like him a part of some other unreal world which the clergyman alone inhabits. To wear the same dress as the laity is a way of asserting, with St. Paul, 'We also are men, of like nature with you' (Acts 14:15)".

In other words, the call to ministry has solely to do with task and function within the Body of Christ, and nothing to do with status. But our congregations do find it threatening and challenging when we come off our pedestal and place ourselves alongside our people. Of course, as fallible human beings, it is all too easy for us to want to remain on the pedestal that our congregations build for us, but many of us will want to refuse this kind of respect. But then, we do also have to cope with the feelings of people whose expectations of us have not been fulfilled. Yet when they can come to accept

us as people who do have weaknesses, who do make mistakes and can cause offence, then perhaps the opportunity arises for them to discover some hidden strengths within themselves.

So I see the role of the minister as offering the second kind of help that I have written about, not telling people what to think or how to behave, but rather helping Christians to discover and experience for themselves the spiritual riches and resources held out to them in Christ and which they already possess by virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit given by God to every believer. The minister certainly needs an expertise but it is an expertise in offering this kind of help, and not the first.

At last we come to the scriptural and theological justification of this kind of approach to ministry. The letter to the *Hebrews* calls Jesus Christ “our great High Priest”, which is only another way of saying that he is the chief minister in the church, so that all other ministry is exercised under Him, by this authority and, especially, after his example. *Hebrews* 2:17 says “Therefore he *had* to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God..” (emphasis mine). The language here appears very strong. Christ was under an obligation, even a necessity, to become like us. There can be few statements in the whole of the New Testament which put more strongly the real humanity of Jesus. Likewise, verse 14: “he himself likewise partook of the same nature...”

So why did Christ have to become like us? Because that is the only way in which he could help us. *Hebrews*, of course, as well as speaking of the humanity of Jesus also helps us to see His greatness, and there could be no healing or salvation if Jesus was not God and did not come from God. But he did not come in such a way as to override our reason or take away our responsibility for our own lives and actions. If Jesus was not truly human as well as being divine he could not be our Saviour and Redeemer. So, as one of the early Church Fathers put it, if he did not fully assume our human nature he did not save it. We would not know that it is possible to meet temptation if Jesus did not meet and overcome it in the power of the Spirit. We could not believe in the transfiguration of pain and suffering if Jesus did not truly suffer in his person. We could not know that death is defeated and overcome if Jesus did not face and accept death for himself. There is, in fact, nothing that Jesus experienced in his life that he did not experience in his human nature. Certainly the love of God was mediated by his presence, and the power of God was manifested in his works, but there is no reason why anyone else should not be as open as Jesus was to the power of God to work in him and through him. Did not Jesus say that his followers would perform greater works than he? (John 14:12).

The point I am trying to make is that Jesus is a Saviour on our level. As the gospels record, Jesus set himself up on no pedestal. He rides a donkey, not a war-horse, so that his eyes are no higher than ours. He shares our condition and speaks to our condition. And yet the gospels also record how difficult his contemporaries found it to accept him and handle him. They were looking for a problem-solving kind of Saviour-Messiah who would instantly and magically solve their problem of being ruled by the Romans

rather than directly by God. Jesus did indeed come to establish God's rule over human life, but not by force. Because he came in the way he did, people saw him as a threat, as a disturber of their peace, and so they had to get rid of him. He came to lead them to salvation as one of their number; they wanted a Saviour who would relieve them of their responsibility for their own lives. And so they crucified him.

Jesus still cannot help us if he is nothing but a problem-solver and a miracle worker. As Bonhoeffer wrote in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, "It is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us, but by his weakness and suffering... God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross... God is weak and powerless in the world and that is exactly the way in which he can be with us and help us... the Bible directs us to the powerlessness and suffering of God. Only a suffering God can help."

Now, the implications and ramifications of all this for the work of ministry and for the training of ministers are immense, and I have tried to draw some of them out in this paper. We can see that it has implications not only for the relationship of the pastor to his people, but also for the relationship of the church to society. The incarnation can and must be a guide (amongst others) for our pastoral care and evangelism alike.

Philip Clements-Jewery

The Genesis Question

May I weep in public?

Fraternal of January 1983 has just arrived, with its article by Nicholas Mercer on 'Preaching Genesis I-XI.' He speaks very charitably and gently to those who cannot accept his position, unlike some others in his camp whom he chides as aggressive. He confesses that he has come reluctantly to his position over the last fifteen years. I am still terribly sad.

Four days ago I did preach on Genesis I. Also, that very afternoon I watched on TV the programme, '25 Years in Space'.

If, to quote the article, 'Science has been wrong, or only partially right, for most of its history', isn't it extraordinary that it has managed to transport man to the surface of the moon and back again? (Saying that, is not to deny that Galileo and Copernicus were wrong in many of their detailed statements; and the edifice of Newtonian mechanics has indeed 'tottered under new theories...coming from the secular world'.)

Less than 25 years ago there was a perfectly serious 'Flat Earth Society', doubtless arguing that 'the majority of the Church for the most part of the Christian Era has understood' that the Bible teaches the flat earth, at the centre of the solar system and of the stars. I doubt if that Society still exists, and I doubt if any Fraternal member has known anyone lose his faith through discovering that scientists are right and that the world really is round. I doubt if many today lose their faith through feeling compelled, with modern scientists, to believe that the earth does go round the sun. We Christians have managed to take that on board and somehow digest it.

Yet only 350 years ago the Church fought that doctrine bitterly and forced Galileo to recant (though legend says that he muttered under his breath, 'But it does move'). Doubtless at that time the great majority of believers accepted what the Church told them, that Galileo's teaching could not be reconciled with Christian belief; many would have reviled Galileo for undermining faith in God. But it was the *Church* that undermined faith in God.

And this is the first reason that I weep: multitudes of thinking people must have said, 'I am convinced by Galileo, therefore I give up my faith'. The Church had *told* them that this was the choice. This is surely one of the main reasons for the tragic and often bitter gulf between the Church and the modern world, and the Church was so greatly to blame.

Now we are doing it all over again, although Mercer generously concedes that there are two sides to the fence. However many mistakes we, and modern scientists, may find in Darwin's original theory (no more than with Galileo and Newton) our approach is wrong. Even if Darwin's theory falls, our line of attack on science is forcing many to think that they cannot believe in God (at the same time as we are leading some, reluctantly, to reject science).

After I preached, someone who had taught in Tanzania came up to me and said, 'That's exactly what I saw happen so often: students went to University believing in Creation in Six Literal Days; they gave that up, and we lost them altogether'. And it is *our* fault.

The second reason why I weep is this. Few readers of *Fraternal* would be prepared to believe in a *completely* literal reading of Genesis 1, with the whole of Creation complete with all the fossils of the rocks in six literal days. Common ways round this are to see a vast interval of time between verses 1 and 2 (although this contradicts Exodus 20:11); or to point out that the word 'day' can often mean 'era' (but surely not, as here, when 'evening and morning' are specified). There are also great problems in reconciling the literal reading of Genesis 1 with the literal reading of Genesis 2, though doubtless it can be done.

But however it is done, literalism is preserved by sacrificing the *plain* meaning of the words, the meaning which the original writers understood themselves to be expressing. And this is a very dangerous art to teach: if the plain meaning is too difficult to cope with, there are always ways out! If the plain teaching of Jesus is too hard to take, you can always find ways round it.

That way, the Bible is no longer a Book that 'he who runs may read', no longer a Book that simple folk can trust in its plain meaning, but it becomes a happy hunting ground for Artful Dodgers.

Yes, it is altogether right to *dig down* below the surface meaning of words to find deeper truths, that perhaps the original writer did not even perceive himself. But it is altogether *wrong* to *dodge around* the plain meaning of the Bible, and it is endlessly harmful to demonstrate such methods even when the ostensible reason is to defend the Bible. And so I weep again at what we are doing.

B.M.F. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 1982
(with comparative figures for 1981)

GENERAL ACCOUNT:

Income:		
Home subscriptions	1885.82	(2011.14)
Overseas subscriptions	79.68	(292.32)
B.M.S. subscriptions	12.00	(10.00)
Fraternal Revenue	783.85	(917.73)
Interest:		(1212.34)
2440.25		(-327.86)
less trans.		(884.48)
to life A/Cs	1015.00	
	4186.60	(4115.67)
Expenditure		
Committee fares/lunches	256.93	(335.71)
Fraternal: Printing	2510.68	(2099.08)
Postage	696.64	(474.49)
Stationery	193.09	(-)
Library	-	(20.00)
Pastoral Session	50.00	(54.50)
Whitley Lectures	-	(5.00)
Survey	36.30	(-)
Postage and expenses of Officers	180.08	(117.89)
Sundries	28.00	(-)
	3951.55	(3106.61)
Balance on the year to transfer to General Reserve:	£235.05	(1009.00)

GENERAL RESERVE:

Balance @ 1.1.1982	1082.65	
Surplus from 1981	1009.00	
	2091.56	
Transfer to Benevolent Fund:		100.00
Balance @ 31.12.1982		1991.65

BENEVOLENT ACCOUNT:

Balance @ 1.1.1982	108.36	
Offering at Pastoral Session	165.64	
Transfer from Reserve	100.00	
	374	
Payments made during 1982		295.00
Balance @ 31.12.1982		79.00

LIFE ACCOUNT No. 1.

Balance @ 1.1.1982	5405.00
Donation	5.00
Interest added to capital	790.00
Balance @ 31.12.1982	6200.00

LIFE ACCOUNT No. 2.

Balance @ 1.1.1982	850.00
New subscriptions	675.00
Interest added to capital	225.00
Balance @ 31.12.1982	1750.00

Summary of Balances:

General	235.05	(1009.00)
Reserve	1991.65	(1082.65)
Benevolent	79.00	(108.36)
Life No.1	6200.00	(5405.00)
Life No.2	1750.00	(850.00)
	10255.70	(8455.01)

Held in following accounts:

Bank current	612.04
Bank deposit	47.49
NSB Investment	645.53
Government Stock	8950.00
Cash in hand	0.64
	10255.70

Audited and found correct. J. Gartside. 29.1.1983.

MEN'S MOVEMENT

Baptist Housing Association LTD

During 1982 seven additional blocks of flats were completed and occupied, thus bringing nearly 250 senior citizens within the care of local Churches.

During 1983 another eleven schemes providing accommodation for a further 250 elderly persons are scheduled for completion.

This tremendous work continues, under the hand of God, to expand.

If there is not a scheme connected with your Church please be involved by asking your members to pray regularly for this ministry.

The Official Openings planned for 1983 are given below. A warm invitation to come is extended to you and any from your fellowship.

Date	Scheme
12th February	Bedminster
5th March	Wolvercote
26th March	Dartmouth, Townstal
23rd April	Whitchurch
7th May	Resolven
14th May	Buckhurst Hill
4th June	East Greenwich
11th June	Barnwell
17th September	West Gorton

The General Secretary,
Baptist Men's Movement Housing Association Ltd.,
4 Southampton Row,
London,
WC1B 4AB.