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Fearless for Truth[1]

Paul Beasley-Murray

Earlier this year I made the long journey from Chelmsford to Carlisle and back again all for the sake of ten minutes. In those ten minutes I was given the opportunity of convincing a group of salesmen that my biography of my father was the best thing since sliced bread! I began by acknowledging the difficulty of the task.

First of all, biographies are not normally the most gripping of books. It was the British biographer Philip Guedalla who said, "Biography is a region bounded on the north by history, on the south by fiction, on the east by obituary, and on the west by tedium."

Secondly, biographies written by relatives or friends can often be sickly sweet. For that reason Arthur Balfour, the former Tory Prime Minister, said "Biography should be written by an acute enemy." Thirdly, in Christian circles biographies which sell tend to major on the miraculous and the dramatic. People will buy *The Cross and the Switchblade*, but a biography of a theologian seems to have the kiss of death on it before it has even seen the light of day.

So why on earth was Paternoster publishing the biography of George Beasley-Murray? Indeed, as far as the ordinary punter is concerned, who was George Beasley-Murray? Billy Graham we've heard of, Martin Luther King we've heard of, but who was George Beasley-Murray?

1. This lecture was delivered at the Baptist Assembly in Plymouth on Sunday, 5 May 2002.

I answered that question in various ways. I stated that my father was one of the greatest Baptists of the twentieth Century. Not for nothing did lengthy obituaries of him appear in *The Times* and *The Independent*. I went on to say it was thanks to my father's courageous stand that the Baptist Union of Great Britain retained its cutting evangelical edge and so was saved from the continued decline experienced by all the other mainline churches in Britain. I mentioned his more than twenty books on the New Testament; I drew attention to the fact that long before Bill Hybels had drawn his first breath, my father was into seeker-services with a vengeance. What's more, he conveyed his passion for communicating the gospel to generations of students at Spurgeon's College.

But these facts of themselves do not sell a biography. Indeed, "worthiness" bores most readers stiff. Rather, I suggested, that the secret of this biography lies in its title: *Fearless for Truth*.[2] It was my father's courage and his passion for truth which makes this biography stand out from others. It is this aspect of my father which I wish to highlight in my lecture this afternoon. Needless to say, if you want the full story, then you must buy the book!

The title of the biography was my mother's idea. I believe that she was absolutely right. No title better sums up my father's life than this. For one of his essential characteristics was his passion for truth, wherever that may lead. Not surprisingly, more than one person wrote to me and likened him to Bunyan's "Valiant-for-Truth." Throughout his life my father was concerned for gospel truth, however costly that search might be. Although an unashamed evangelical, he refused to be bound within any one particular evangelical mould, but rather sought to allow the Scriptures to mould his thinking.

To what extent he would have recognized "fearless for truth" as a description of himself, I do not know. For in many ways my father was not a self-conscious person. Indeed, it was precisely this lack of self-consciousness that enabled him to speak and act without worrying how this might affect his standing with others. If he believed something to be right, then he would happily speak and act accordingly, even if those words and actions were to complicate life for him. His approach to life is well-summed up in a short prayer he wrote based on Matt 14:1–12: "Lord, help me to grow into your likeness, *to stand fearlessly for your truth*, to love the unlovely and to forgive those who treat us spitefully."[3]

2. Beasley-Murray, *Fearless for Truth*.

3. To be found in Beasley-Murray, *Matthew*.

So, with that general introduction, let us now look at nine examples of his fearlessness for truth.

His Decision to Follow Jesus

My first example comes from a mission to Leicester by two Spurgeon's students, when my father resolved to follow Jesus Christ. My father described his feelings as a fifteen-year-old boy coming from a nominal Roman Catholic home.

> One evening the preacher took the theme of the meaning of Christ's death. For the first time in my life I, who had seen crucifixes since I was a child, learned that the cross was for my sake; that the love of Christ shown on it embraced me as truly as it did anyone, and that I personally could know forgiveness for ever and eternal life. When that dawned on me it was like the coming of day. I could not hold back from Christ. I went forward to express my desire to receive Him—and went home walking on air.[4]

It took courage to decide to follow Jesus and then stand by that decision, for he received no support from home. Not only was there a lack of understanding on the part of his family, there was a good deal of mockery on their part too. And when it later became clear that this decision to follow Jesus entailed giving up a promising career as a concert pianist in order to respond to a call to ministry, there was consternation and opposition. It took a good number of years before their attitude began to change. For my father following Jesus involved being cut off from his family. Reflecting on that experience he wrote:

> The words of Jesus to his disciples after the refusal of the rich young ruler to become a disciple struck me very forcibly: Mark 10:29–30: "I tell you that anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel, will receive much more in the present age. He will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and persecutions as well." I learned, in fact, what Jesus meant in teaching us that God was our Father with the corollary that the church was our family.

4. Beasley-Murray, "My Call to the Ministry," 37.

Life between Death and Resurrection

My second example relates to his views about life between death and resurrection, the so-called intermediate state. In an article for *Young Life*, my father wrote,

> Such references as we have to the condition of the departed do not favour the idea that they are in a state of unconsciousness. The latter conception is largely due to taking literally the metaphor of sleep as a figure of death. An example of intense and joyous activity in the world of spirits this side of the Second Coming is the preaching of our Lord to "the spirits in prison," which, I am persuaded, has to be taken as it stands and not made to refer to the preaching of Noah to people once living but now dead. And this preaching was done by our Lord before His spirit was clothed in resurrection![5]

My father repeated these views in an evening lecture course he was giving during the summer of 1947 for the newly formed London Bible College. Unfortunately his view did not find favor with the Council of the China Inland Mission, and so his lecturing career at that stage was brought to an abrupt halt. It would appear that, in this particular lecture my father, on the basis of Peter's reference to the preaching of Jesus to "the spirits in prison" (1 Pet 3:19), speculated on the possibility of a second chance of repentance after death. Present at the lecture were some candidates of the China Inland Mission (CIM), who on their return to the CIM hostel reported my father's comments to some influential laymen who just happened to be there for a meeting of the CIM Council. Although none of them had any theological training, they were alarmed by this "heresy" and immediately got in touch with Dr. Ernest Kevan, the Principal of the London Bible College, to tell him so. Ernest Kevan, conscious of his dependence on these men, for several were on the Council of the new London Bible College, pleaded with my father to withdraw what he had said. My father was astonished and said that these views were ones which he felt were true to Scripture, and were therefore not ones to be discarded lightly. In the end he told Ernest Kevan that he would quietly withdraw from lecturing at the end of the session, so that the members of the CIM could be assured that they would have no need for further disquiet.

5. Beasley-Murray, "After Death—What?" 74.

Whether or not my father was right theologically is a moot point. What is not open to question is the cost which my father was prepared to pay for what he regarded as truth.

Jesus and the Future

From student days my father had on his desk a framed text bearing the words: "His coming is as certain as the dawn." Mark 13, with its eschatological discourse, was therefore a natural choice for his area of research for his London PhD. Described by A. M. Hunter as "the biggest problem in the Gospel," this chapter is quite a challenge to any budding scholar , and not least to a budding scholar from the evangelical wing of the Church. One of the most difficult of verses in that chapter is Mark 13:30: "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." Of this verse my father wrote: "In no section of our study is courageous thinking more required than in this."[6] After weighing all the options my father took courage in his hands and argued that Jesus was referring to "a speedy coming of the End." He went on: "Undoubtedly the immediate sense of the saying defines the limits of Jesus' knowledge of the time of the end: it does not say that he knows nothing at all as to its coming; it affirms that it does not lie in his power to define it more closely."[7] "We believe . . . that his conviction of the nearness of the victory was due to the clarity of that vision in his soul."[8]

Not surprisingly such exegesis caused consternation amongst many evangelicals. But my father was not afraid of what others might think. He was concerned for what he deemed to be the truth. F. F. Bruce later commented that it was because "young men like George Beasley-Murray were willing to risk their reputation for conventional orthodoxy by saying what they believed" that there has become increasing openness within the world of evangelical scholarship.

Interestingly, forty years later, in his *magnum opus*, *Jesus and the Last Days*, my father indicated that he had changed his mind, believing that the saying of Jesus in Mark 13:30 relates primarily to the prophecy of the destruction of the temple in Mark 13:2. The factors for this change of mind do not concern us. What is significant is that he was not afraid

6. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future,* 186.
7. Ibid., 189.
8. Ibid., 190.

to say publicly that he had made a mistake. Here we have yet again more evidence of my father's fearless pursuit of truth.

Baptism in the New Testament

For many Baptists it was not his views on Mark 13 but rather his views on baptism which proved controversial. Indeed, Anthony Cross has called my father's essay on baptism in Paul contained in a collection of essays entitled *Christian Baptism* as "the most controversial work on baptism by any Baptist this century."[9] "Baptism in the Epistles of Paul" proved to be so controversial amongst Baptists because of the overtly sacramentalist position my father adopted. It offended those for whom baptism was primarily an act of witness. The key passage in the essay comes in the conclusion:

> With his predecessors and contemporaries, Paul saw in baptism *a sacrament of the Gospel*. Behind and in baptism stands the Christ of the cross and resurrection, bestowing freedom from sin's guilt and power, and the Spirit who gives the life of the age to come in the present and is the pledge of the resurrection at the last day.[10]

Such a conclusion smacked of baptismal regeneration to some, who wrote letters of protest to the *Baptist Times*. In a subsequent article my father made it clear that in no way did he and his fellow contributors to *Christian Baptism* believe in baptismal regeneration. However, were they to be asked, "Do you believe that baptism is a means of grace?" the answer would be,

> Yes, and more than is generally meant by that expression. In the Church of the Apostles (please note the limitation) the whole height and depth of grace is bound up with the experience of baptism. For to the New Testament writers baptism was nothing less than the climax of God's dealing with the penitent seeker and of the convert's return to God.[11]

The same position was adopted in *Baptism in the New Testament*. Just before it was published my father commented that he would have no friends when it came out, as it was too Baptist for the sacramentalists, and too sacramental for the Baptists!

9. Cross, *Baptism and the Baptists*, 227.
10. Gilmore, *Christian Baptism*, 148.
11. Beasley-Murray, "Baptist Controversy," 8.

As a result of persistent requests to produce a non-technical version of *Baptism in the New Testament* my father wrote *Baptism Today and Tomorrow*. Particularly in the chapter on "Baptism in Baptist Churches Today" my father refused to pull any of his punches:

> For where the cry goes out, "Only a symbol," emphasis is placed on the obedience and witness expressed in baptism. But this obedience is for the carrying out of a rite with virtually no content—and what is that but ritualism? And even the confession is robbed of its significance, for in Baptist Churches baptism is commonly administered *after* confession—and that a confession made in public! The rite then becomes a public ratification of a confession already publicly made. This problem is rendered yet more acute by the methods of mass evangelism that none are so forward in supporting as Baptists; for the essence of the method is conversion by confession, which in the New Testament is expressed in baptism. Carefully handled, this appeal could prepare for baptism. Badly handled, and with a low view of baptism, it could render baptism superfluous.[12]

My father's final contribution to the subject of baptism came in a paper titled "The Problem of Infant Baptism: An Exercise in Possibilities," written for a collection of essays in honor of Günter Wagner,[13] which was perhaps even more controversial than anything that he had ever written. There my father revealed that he had softened his attitude to recognizing in certain circumstances the "possibility" of acknowledging the legitimacy of infant baptism.

> I make the plea that churches which practise believer's baptism should consider acknowledging the legitimacy of infant baptism, and allow members of the Paedobaptist churches the right to interpret it according to their consciences. This would carry with it the practical consequence of believer-baptist churches refraining from baptizing on confession of faith those who have been baptized in infancy . . . It [this position] is at least in harmony with variations in the experience of baptism among the earliest believers recorded in the New Testament (cf. Acts 2:37–38; 8:14–17; 10:44–48; 11:1–18; 18:24–19:6). The great lesson of those variations is the freedom of God in bestowing his gifts.[14]

12. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism Today and Tomorrow,* 85–86, see also 91.
13. Beasley-Murray, "Possibilities," 1–14.
14. Ibid., 13–14.

My father ended the article with a reference to the appeal in the book of Revelation to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches!" (Rev 2:7 etc.): "I leave it to my fellow believer-baptists to ponder whether the 'possibilities' expounded in this article in any sense coincide with what the Spirit is saying to the churches today."[15]

Ecumenism

A convinced evangelical as also a convinced Baptist, my father was also persuaded that neither evangelicals nor Baptists had a monopoly of the truth. Right from the beginning of his ministry he abhorred what he termed the "pharisaism" of the "orthodox." He had a breadth of vision which at the time was unusual amongst evangelicals. In an address given to the College branch of the Theological Students' Fellowship he declared:

> The attitude adopted by many Fundamentalists towards the World Council of Churches is nothing short of scandalous. It is regarded as the first stages of the church of Antichrist. The worst motives are imputed to its enthusiasts; all are tarred with the same brush, and all are tools of the devil, including Karl Barth, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Dr Percy Evans! One is reminded of Hitler's attitude to the Jews; he gained unity by rousing indignation against them; and some Christians evidently find it easier to unite on the basis of hate than love.[16]

All this was well illustrated in what was later known as the "Ipswich affair." On Tuesday 24 January 1967 my father participated in a meeting in Ipswich with the Anglo-Catholic Bishop of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich and Father Agnellus Andrew, a Roman Catholic priest on the staff of the BBC. The Protestant Truth Society felt impelled to protest that such a meeting should be held and issued a leaflet headed "Ipswich Heroes Betrayed!" The reference was to nine Protestant martyrs who were burned more than 400 years ago by the Roman Catholic Church for their faith. The leaflet continued: "A meeting has been arranged in Ipswich, at the Baths Hall, to seek to unite the Protestant Churches under the Church of Rome." My father was incensed and took issue with

15. Ibid., 14.

16. Beasley-Murray, "Vulnerable Points in the Christian Armoury," 4. (Dr. Percy Evans was the much-loved and irenic Principal of Spurgeon's from 1925 to 1950).

the Protestant Truth Society. His sermon notes for that evening contain the following statements:

> Here is the ground of the unity of the people of God: We are sinners for whom Christ died. We have confessed our sins and have been brought out of our disunity with God in a unity of guilt into unity with Christ our Saviour, who makes us one in Him and with each other by his Holy Spirit. I differ from Mr Spurgeon. Spurgeon was a pessimist with regard to the Churches. And I'm not. I believe in the Holy Ghost! He believed the Church of England and the Roman Catholics as Churches alike to be manifestations of the spirit of Antichrist. Spurgeon was a man of his age, who shared its intolerance as well as its convictions. We keep the convictions and leave the intolerance.

As if preaching such a sermon were in itself not enough, he then published an article in *The Christian and Christianity Today* in which he repeated much of his sermon.[17] In this article my father did not mince his words:

> I'm not ashamed of the Gospel, No. But I confess to being ashamed of some of its defenders. In particular I find myself at a loss to comprehend the tactics of some preachers in their relations with other preachers of the Gospel. There appears to be a competition among Evangelicals to see who can vilify most effectively the people of Christ who believe it is the will of God to end the hostilities within the church.

He attacked the Protestant Truth Society for their "deliberate untruth" in pretending that the purpose of the meeting in Ipswich was "to seek to unite the Protestant Churches under the Church of Rome." "This kind of propaganda," declared my father, "has more in common with the propaganda of Mao Tse Tung than with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Needless to say the article provoked a flood of varying responses. The Protestant Newsletter for March/April 1967, issued by the National Union of Protestants, had as its main headline "The Menace of the Beasley-Murrays."

Today ecumenism is no longer an issue in many evangelical circles. But in the 1960s this was not the case. Many evangelical Baptists had deep suspicion of the World Council of Churches. Many an evangelical, and not least an evangelical who was Principal of a theological college,

17. 10 February 1967, 12.

which was dependent on churches for its financial support, would have perhaps kept their head down and avoided the whole issue. But not my father. He was in the business of truth—whatever the cost.

Bultmann's John

To many evangelicals it seemed extraordinary that the Principal of Spurgeon's College should be responsible for the translation of the commentary on John by Rudolf Bultmann, which was published in England in 1971.[18] Bultmann was viewed by them as the "high priest" of demythologization and therefore demonized accordingly. However, my father was unconcerned by their astonishment. In his search for truth he believed it to be important to look at every viewpoint. As he wrote in an article for ministers, "Investigation of the Scriptures which by hook or by crook reaches predetermined conclusions is a denial of the Spirit of truth who is behind them and does no honour to our Lord or His Gospel. The minister who is afraid of truth contradicts alike his calling and his credentials."[19] He was convinced that he could always learn something, even from those with whom he disagreed. Furthermore, he believed that those with whom one disagreed should always be treated courteously.

People would have been less surprised by his decision to head the translation of Bultmann's *John* if they had listened to a Third Programme BBC talk given by my father in 1955. On that occasion he had taken issue with Bultmann's approach to the gospel, and yet at the same time was prepared to acknowledge that Bultmann had made a very positive contribution to Christian thought, and not least in his emphasis on the Cross: "However absurd it may sound, in his desire to make men see their only hope of redemption in the Cross, Bultmann shares the evangelistic aim of a Billy Graham, even though the methods of the two men have no contact."[20]

Christology

Christology—the doctrine of the person of Christ—provided yet another area of contention, where once again my father proved to be "fearless

18. Bultmann, *Gospel of John*.
19. Beasley-Murray, "The Minister and His Bible," 14.
20. Beasley-Murray, "Bultmann and 'Demythologizing,'" 601.

for the truth."[21] The controversy in which my father was involved in a major way was sparked by an address given by the Reverend Michael Taylor, then Principal of the Northern Baptist College, at the Baptist Union Assembly of April 1971. On the Tuesday night of the Assembly Michael Taylor, at the invitation of Dr. G. Henton Davies, the newly installed president of the Baptist Union, gave an address which caused much consternation. In his adddress, titled "The Incarnate Presence: how much of a man was Jesus?" Taylor appeared to question the very basis of the Christian faith. My father, aware of the strong feelings which this address was already beginning to arouse and of the implications which it could have for the ministers and churches of the Baptist Union, at the Thursday afternoon meeting of the Baptist Union Council asked that a notice be put in the *Baptist Times* assuring people that the views of speakers at the Assembly were not necessarily representative of the Baptist Union Council. But Dr. Ernest Payne, the distinguished former General Secretary of the Baptist Union, argued that it was the wrong thing to do because that Council meeting was not a full Council—it was held simply for the purpose of co-opting new Council members. The Council was persuaded by Payne and other denominational leaders to do nothing. For the next few months my father made no public statement about the address, although he was involved in considerable correspondence and discussion with concerned ministers and laypeople.

The matter of the Assembly address came to a meeting of the Baptist Union Council held on 9 November 1971. In spite of my father's pleading to the contrary, the Council by a very large majority recognized the right of Michael Taylor to express himself in the way he did, while at the same time asserting its adherence to the Declaration of Principle contained in the Constitution of the Baptist Union in which Jesus Christ is acknowledged as both "Lord and Saviour" and "God manifest in the flesh." At this point my father felt that he had no option but to resign as Chairman of the Council because he could no longer associate himself with its position. In his formal letter of resignation he went on to comment that his resignation would now free him from "the restraint which I felt laid upon me since the Assembly." At the same time as sending this letter, he wrote a personal letter to Michael Taylor, with whom he had had a three-hour private conversation in his home at Spurgeon's College the previous Sunday. Two of its paragraphs read as follows:

21. See also the final chapter of this collection.—Ed.

> You and I have been placed in positions that are burdensome to endure. You will need great grace to forgive me for my apparent intransigence. It is a question of the Gospel being in my sight of greater account than either you or me. I hope that it may be possible speedily to dissociate discussions from your name and person. That may be difficult at first, but I shall do all in my power to see that it is achieved. You have set in motion forces that will continue to move for a long time. My concern will be to try to direct some of them at any rate in a right direction. If the end of it all is a greater understanding of Christ and the Gospel and a better communication of our message to the world, that will be a wonderful gain. But in the process there will certainly be hurt, for many feel that their faith and the Baptist Denomination in particular is threatened, and people in that situation are not used to quiet speaking. They feel above all that the honour of the Lord is at stake, and they must see that we give him his rightful place in our thought and message.

Over the months controversy continued to mount. In January my father submitted an article for publication in the *Baptist Times* titled "The Controversy Cannot End—Yet," which in essence urged the forthcoming assembly to confess its faith in Christ and to disassociate itself from any Christology which does not recognize his full deity as well as his complete humanity. The editor, the Rev Walter Bottoms, refused to publish the article.

My father thereupon turned his article into a booklet entitled "The Christological Controversy in the Baptist Union" and sent out the booklet together with an accompanying letter on 20 March 1972. In the letter he wrote: "The enclosed article suggests the seriousness of the theological issues involved and these require more prolonged consideration. Surely we shall not shirk to give this? If my interpretation of the issues is false, let it be shown by reasoned statements. I am always very anxious to learn!"

The sending of the letter caused scores of letters of support to be sent to my father. It also provoked strong reaction among the more liberal members of the denomination.

Probably the strongest letters of protest came from Ernest Payne. He accused my father of having misunderstood Michael Taylor, and went on: "You have spent a lot of time and energy translating Bultmann. What if I publicly criticized you for spreading the views of one who is regarded by many as being extremely arbitrary in his treatment of

evidence and who reduced the reliable information about Jesus and his teaching to a few verses only?"[22]

In response my father sent Ernest Payne a strong but courteous letter back:

> I wonder whether you have read his exposition of the Gospel of John. I wish with all my heart that Michael had it in him to declare the gospel in the kind of terms that Bultmann makes of John 3:16 and other related sayings within that gospel . . . Naturally I do not accept Bultmann's historical scepticism, but you ought to know Bultmann well enough to realize that he is an exponent of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith, despite his absurd limitation of the authentic teaching in the Synoptic Gospels. The extraordinary thing is what he does manage to make of the amount of the teaching of Jesus which he does recognize as authentic."[23]

Dr. Payne was not mollified. Instead he sent a second letter which ended: "You have been stirring up trouble instead of calming it, and have contributed therefore, more than perhaps any other single individual, to the very difficult and dangerous situation we now face."[24]

My father wrote back:

> I did my utmost to prevent a fire raging in the denomination. You will remember that on the occasion of the Council meeting that was at the end of the last assembly I pleaded with the Council members then present to issue a statement with regard to the address of Michael Taylor embodying the perfectly obvious observation that speakers at our assembly bear the responsibility for their utterances themselves, and that the Union is neither responsible nor implicated in them . . . You yourself were above all responsible for the Council declining that advice . . . I believe that you made a grave mistake, and that you thereby made possible the escalation of the discussion to a denominational controversy . . . If the Baptist Union were to be characterized by the theology uttered and implied by Michael Taylor I could have no part with it. That perhaps is of minor consequence, but so long as I am a part of our Baptist Union I feel it my duty to prevent the Union from moving in a direction away from essential Christianity.[25]

22. Letter dated 6 April 1972.
23. Letter dated 12 April 1972.
24. Letter dated 18 April 1972.
25. Letter dated 20 April 1972.

Matters reached a climax on Tuesday 25 April 1972. Delegates from the churches who had come for the debate packed Westminster Chapel from floor to ceiling as they debated and then voted upon the resolution, proposed by Sir Cyril Black, and seconded by my father. Great care had been taken in the drawing up of the resolution that Michael Taylor was not mentioned by name. The issue was about principles, not personalities. Of the several thousand delegates present, only 46 voted against it, and 72 abstentions were recorded. It was indeed a historic vote. There are those who see 1972 as the moment when the tide actually began to turn even though it was some years before the tide began to come in. The ethos of the denomination began to change. Evangelicals began to get more involved in Baptist Union structures. The ginger group, "Mainstream—Baptists for life and growth," was formed, and, whether consequentially or not, the Baptist Union began to experience new life and new growth.

The Battle for the Bible

Unlike many fundamentalists, my father welcomed the advent of Biblical criticism. His approach is well illustrated in a popular talk he gave on the overseas service of the BBC in 1963.[26] "Biblical criticism is as necessary for Fundamentalists as for every one else. For criticism of the Bible is not a process of pronouncing judgment on the Bible, but the investigation of the circumstances of its making—who its authors were, their time and place of writing and why they wrote."

Almost twenty years later my father elaborated on his view of Scripture in a closely-argued paper entitled: "Recovering the Authority of the Bible."[27] For him "the Bible may be referred to as the Word of God, namely in its function as witness to the Gospel." With Luther and Calvin he "affirmed the trustworthiness of the Bible as an infallible authority in matters of salvation and the life of faith"; and with them too he acknowledged that it "contains normal human flaws and failings" which can be sorted out by scholarly study. The final two paragraphs of the paper helpfully illuminate his understanding of the Bible:

26. "The Bible Comes Alive: 4: Through Great Argument." Broadcast on 3 and 5 November 1963.

27. Written in 1982 but not published.

> We should clearly recognize that the concept of inerrancy is concerned with the *form* of the Bible rather than its *message*. Those who formulated it were concerned with the grounding of faith in a rational concept of the Bible. Well meaning as this idea is, especially in connection with a formulation of Christian apologetics, the Bible gives us a different account of its function: it is to present the Word of God to the mind and conscience of the hearer, and by the Holy Spirit's operation to make it the means of salvation, whether entrance into it or continuance in it. The authority of the Bible no more depends on rational proof than the God of salvation does. That authority is self-evidencing to all whose hearts become open to the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit's operation the revelation of God was given initially (for the Spirit is God at work in the world), through the Spirit the revelation is grasped, and through him its truth and power are known. The Spirit of truth is the life-giving Spirit. The unbeliever who lets the Word of God reach his heart discovers the truth of the Bible by its power to convince and renew and such a one experiences the life.

Unfortunately this approach to Scripture, although common among many evangelical scholars in Britain and elsewhere, does not find favor everywhere. It does not, for instance, find much favor with the present leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention. Happily this was not the case in the 1970s when for seven years my father was teaching at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville and exercising a wide preaching ministry all over the States. Sadly in later years, however, he became *persona non grata* amongst many Southern Baptists—not that this troubled him one whit. To the end, he was fearless for truth.

Significantly, before he left the service of the Seminary, the Board of Trustees in their 1980 annual session passed a formal "resolution" in which they expressed appreciation to my father "for his insight, courage, and commitment in furthering the cause of Christ and the understanding of the New Testament." In the light of the title of my book, *Fearless for Truth*, it is surely noteworthy that the word "courage" features in the resolution.

A Confession of Faith

Even to the end, my father was never satisfied with the "status quo." His watchword was that of Luther's: *ecclesia reformata et reformanda*—the

Church was both reformed and to be reformed. At a Mainstream consultation he gave a paper on "Confessing Baptist Identity"[28] in which he urged his fellow Baptists to "pluck up courage and do for our day what our Baptist forefathers did for theirs, namely produce a contemporary Baptist Confession of Faith."[29]

The word "courage" was significant. Although Baptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been happy to produce confessions of faith, in the twentieth century the leadership of the Baptist Union had become very wary of producing a contemporary confession of faith, fearing that it might become divisive rather than unifying. My father begged to differ. Such a confession of faith, he maintained, was "desirable for God's sake, for our sakes, for the sake of other Churches, and for the sake of the world."[30]

It was desirable for God's sake, in so far as it would enable Baptists to "have an understanding of God by which their praise and thanksgiving may rise to genuine adoration." It was desirable for the sake of Baptists, because it "could transform the understanding of their faith which many people hold to be dead. It could also become an excellent basis for instructing new converts." It was desirable for the sake of other Christians, because "there are surprisingly few members of other denominations who have a reasonably accurate knowledge of what Baptists believe." And it was desirable for the sake of the world, in so far as it would help Christians to bear an effective witness to the gospel. "Mission is supposed to be in our blood: it needs to be in our head and in our heart."[31]

He drew his paper to a close with these words:

> A Confession of Faith for today . . . does not need to have negative effects. They could be wholly positive when slanted in the direction of vision for action. We are not wanting a ten point creed corresponding to the Ten Commandments, to which signatures will be demanded from those who camp around the Baptist Mount Sinai! We belong to the city of God. We celebrate with our fellow-citizens beneath an open heaven in the presence of the God of glory and Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant. We want to catch a fuller glimpse of the reality to which we belong. We need to let it inspire us to action in keeping with this new

28. Beasley-Murray, "Confessing Baptist Identity," 75–85.
29. Ibid., 78.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 78–81.

> world of God's kingdom. Theology is thinking and talking about God. It is dead only when it comes hundredth hand from dusty volumes that got it hundredth hand from even dustier libraries. Theology is done on our knees, our faces turned towards God, our ears attentive to hear from God's Word and what the saints have learned from it. From that mountain top we can see the needy multitudes below. When this is done, visionary theological thinking becomes possible.[32]

Conclusion

After my father's death Spurgeon's College held a celebration of my father's life.

I was given the opportunity to make a brief tribute. I honored my father as a man who loved his family, as a man who loved his Lord, and also as a man who loved truth. Today, I have been glad to honor again the memory of my father as a man who was fearless for truth.

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32. Ibid., 84.

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