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***Truth,  
faithfulness  
and zeal***

Congregational Studies  
Conference 2011





**Truth,  
faithfulness  
and zeal**

**Michael Plant  
Neil Stewart  
Digby James**

**Congregational Studies Conference  
Papers 2011**



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The papers are printed in the order in which they were given at the Conference; as usual the contributor is entirely responsible for the views expressed in his paper.



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*Photographs by Dr Digby L. James*

# Foreword

With this year's Congregational Studies Conference we were once again privileged to use the Orange Street Congregational Church in its strategic position in central London. We are grateful to the church there for their hospitality. As last year, some attendees took the opportunity to pop into the nearby National Portrait Gallery.

We learnt how the truth of Scripture affects our faithfulness and zeal for the Lord, with the examples of a church and a person.

Mike Plant ably laid out John Owen's teaching on Scripture and how to understand it. This was meaty stuff, and we were reminded how exhaustively Owen dealt with every subject on which he wrote. Neil Stewart gave a short illustrated paper on the history of Latimer Memorial Congregational Church, Beverley, an example of faithfulness and growth over many years. I delivered a paper on the founder of my own Church, Thomas Barnes, a very busy, wealthy man, who used his wealth for the good of others, and the spread of the Gospel.

If we all understood the Scriptures better then perhaps we would, in the future, be more faithful to the God's truth, would grow in grace and bring glory to God.

Once again we are grateful to Ian Densham for recording the lectures. Copies of the recordings are available from the EFCC office. Past years' recordings (from 1989 onwards) can also be found at [www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com).

Over the years the printed papers have built up a valuable resource, dealing with matters of Congregational practice, history and doctrine. I encourage all churches to use these in order that we may be better equipped to live godly lives and spread the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of an increasingly wicked world.

Next year's conference will be held on 19 March 2012 at Latimer Memorial Congregational Church, Beverley, and will remember the Great Ejection of 1662. Dr Garry Williams, director of the John Owen Centre, will deliver the first Alan Tovey Memorial Lecture, preceded by Neville Rees telling us about the life of Alan Tovey. We will be seeking to learn lessons for today from the past.

**Dr Digby L. James**

***Quinta Church, Weston Rhyn***

ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ:  
OR, A  
DISCOURSE  
Concerning the  
HOLY SPIRIT

WHEREIN  
An Account is given of his Name, Nature,  
Personality, Dispensation, Opera-  
tions, and Effects.

His whole Work in the Old and New Creation is  
Explained; The Doctrine concerning it Vindi-  
cated from Oppositions and Reproaches.

THE  
Nature also and Necessity of Gospel-Holiness; the  
Difference between Grace and Morality, or a Spi-  
ritual Life unto God in Evangelical Obedience and  
a Course of Moral Vertues, are Stated and De-  
clared.

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By JOHN OWEN, D.D.

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John 5. 39. *Search the Scriptures, &c.*

Ἐν τῷ 39ῳ βέλῳ γραφῶν διλογίζομεν, καὶ βέλῳσιν αὐτῶν ἐκθερεῖν, καὶ μὲν. Chrysolom.

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L O N D O N,

Printed by J. Darby, for Nathaniel Ponder, at the Peacock in Chancery-  
Lane near Fleetstreet, MDCLXXIV.

# John Owen on the Attestation and Interpretation of the Bible

Michael J. Plant

## Introduction

I open with apologies for a change of title and a narrowing of the subject to be covered. The previous title was over-ambitious in its scope, and would have been so even with far more time available. More positively, John Owen has a great deal to say on the subject I have narrowed the paper to cover and what he says is of great value, deeply challenging spiritually, and strikingly relevant to contemporary discussions.

Regarding the value of the subject Owen writes:

Our belief of the Scriptures to be the word of God, or a divine revelation, and our understanding of the mind and will of God as revealed in them, are the *two springs* of all our interest in Christian religion. From them are all those streams of light and truth derived whereby our souls are watered, refreshed and made fruitful unto God. It therefore concerneth us greatly to look well to those *springs*, that they be neither stopped nor defiled, and so rendered useless unto us.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding its contemporary significance, the Affinity Theological Conference for 2011 took the subject of Scripture because it is currently the subject of evangelical debate. Having taken part in the discussions at that conference it was fascinating reading Owen and finding him answering questions still raised in theological discussion in the 21st Century. Lest anyone imagine the contemporary significance is merely academic, I talked to a student at a church I was visiting recently, and his questions following my sermon dealt with his own assurance and two areas—how he could be sure that the Bible is the word of God and in evangelism, how he should set out to convince others that the Bible is the word of God. Owen tackles both questions.

For the purpose of this paper I will concentrate on discussions which are in volume 4 of Owen's works and are part of the very substantial Pneumatologia or Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit which occupies volumes 3 and 4 of Owen's works. The two sections are parts one and two of book VI and are entitled: The Reason of Faith or An Answer unto that Inquiry, 'Wherefore we believe the Scripture to be the Word of God' with The Causes and Nature of that Faith Wherewith we do so: wherein The Grounds Whereon the Holy Scripture is Believed to be the Word of God with Faith Divine and Supernatural are Declared and Vindicated. And Synesis Pneumatike or The

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–53; repr. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), iv. 121.

Causes, Ways and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in his Word, with Assurance therein; and A Declaration of the Perspicuity of the Scriptures, With the External Means Of the Interpretation of Them.

My method will be to let Owen speak for himself, however note that Owen didn't do 'sound-bites' and that he is often incredibly detailed in his argumentation. I have sometimes felt that where a modern writer would have a footnote Owen has an additional chapter. This means that sometimes I will leapfrog an entire section or chapter because it is not part of the logical outline of the book, at least as I see it, but is extraneous to it. I am also avoiding commenting on what he says, developed more fully in other writings, about the preservation of the text of Scripture and particularly concerning the antiquity of the pointing of the Masoretic text.

### **The context of the writings we are examining**

Firstly, we need to note that the doctrine of Scripture is being considered within the general subject heading of the Ministry of the Holy Spirit. Owen writes:

The principal design of that discourse whereof the ensuing treatise is a part, is to declare the work of the Holy Ghost in the illumination of the minds of men,— for this work is particularly and eminently ascribed unto him<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, we note that Owen in his writing is very aware of two dangers to his orthodox, Reformed position. These two dangers came from opposite ends of the ecclesiastical spectrum and were both clearly in Owen's mind as threats to correct and biblical understanding. One threat was from the Roman Catholic Church and, while volume 14 of Owen's works is specifically devoted to the controversy with Rome, concern about this threat is evident in the way in which he handles his subject. A principal issue of debate during Owen's day was Scripture's perspicuity and clarity and hence he is insistent that the authoritative and binding interpretation of the Church of Rome was both a false claim and was not a necessary provision for the church. The other threat was from the more radical Protestants, particularly but not exclusively the Quakers, for whom the inner light was more authoritative and necessary than the light of God's word. While we can sometimes deduce where Owen would have stood on such subjects as infallibility and inerrancy it is important that we realize that Owen's own focus is more likely to be on the perspicuity and clarity of Scripture, in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, and its sufficiency without additional revelation, in opposition to the Quakers.

### **An outline of 'The Reason of Faith'**

#### **Theological Foundations**

Owen describes his enquiry in 'The Reason of Faith' as being:

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2 Ibid. p. 7.

On what grounds ... we do believe the Scripture to be the word of God with faith divine and supernatural, as it is required of us in the way of duty?<sup>3</sup>

Illumination, which is the over-arching subject of discussion, is defined as:

that supernatural knowledge that any man hath or may have of the mind and will of God, as revealed unto him by supernatural means,<sup>4</sup>

He then makes a number of preliminary points which establish the theological basis for his discussion.

1. '*Supernatural revelation is the only objective cause and means of supernatural illumination*'.<sup>5</sup> In other words, we can receive no light on supernatural matters unless God gives it to us.
2. Originally the revelation was occasional and not written down but we know that: '*it did sufficiently evidence itself to be from God* unto the minds of those unto whom it was granted, and theirs also unto whom these revelations were by them communicated'.<sup>6</sup>
3. This means of revelation proving insufficient because of man's sinfulness: 'God have gathered up into the *Scripture* all divine revelations given out by himself from the beginning of the world, and all that ever shall be so to the end thereof, which are of general use unto the church, that it may be thoroughly instructed in the whole mind and will of God, and directed in all that worship of him and obedience unto him which is necessary to give us acceptance with him here, and to bring us unto the eternal enjoyment of him hereafter'.<sup>7</sup>
4. 'The Scripture is now become the *only external means of divine supernatural illumination*, because it is the only repository of all divine supernatural revelation'.<sup>8</sup> Owen goes on to condemn the 'pretences of tradition as a collateral means of preserving and communicating supernatural revelation'.<sup>9</sup>
5. Owen affirms that the Scripture acts in this way through the normal means of personal Bible reading, mutual instruction and the ministry of the word. 'The Scripture is the only means of illumination, but it becometh so principally by the application of it unto the minds of men in the ministry of the word'.<sup>10</sup>
6. He then affirms that for Scripture to function as 'a sufficient external cause of illumination unto us (it is required) That we *believe it to be a divine revelation*,—that is, the word of God, or a declaration of himself, his mind and will, immediately proceeding from him; or that it is of a pure divine original, proceeding neither from the folly or deceit, nor from the skill and honesty of men'.<sup>11</sup>

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3 Ibid. p. 7. 4 Ibid. p. 7. 5 Ibid. p. 7. 6 Ibid. p. 8. 7 Ibid. p. 11.

8 Ibid. p. 12. 9 Ibid. p. 12. 10 Ibid. p. 13. 11 Ibid. p. 13.



He then states his thesis concerning the attestation of the Scripture to be God's revelation, 'I affirm, that *it is the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to believe the Scripture to be the word of God*'.<sup>12</sup>

### **What kind of assurance may we attain as to Scripture being the Word of God?**

In Owen's own words:

What it is in general *infallibly to believe the Scripture to be the word of God*, and what is the ground and reason of our so doing;<sup>13</sup>

He quickly proceeds to further define the question and points out that concerning this faith two things should be considered namely, what we believe and why we believe it. His enquiry concerns why we believe and he comments that:

We do not in this inquiry, intend any kind of persuasion or faith but that which is *divine and infallible*;<sup>14</sup>

He explains what he means by: 'faith that is infallible' being conscious that he doesn't want to ascribe infallibility to us. Our faith may be infallible because it rests in:

divine revelation; which, being infallible, renders the faith that rests on it, and is resolved into it, infallible also.<sup>15</sup>

Bearing in mind the claims of the Roman Catholic Church, that we believe Scripture on the authority of the church, where the conclusion is correct but the reasoning wrong, Owen writes:

It was not enough that the things revealed ... were infallibly true, but they were to have infallible evidence of the revelation itself; then was their faith infallible, though their persons were fallible.<sup>16</sup>

Summarising Owen's argument, he states that the formal cause of our faith (= the reason we are to believe) is the authority and truthfulness of God. Any other authority on which we are to believe, coming between what is to be believed and our souls and consciences, overthrows the nature of divine (God-given) faith. He writes further, reasoning from the fact that we only know God's truth through Scripture as God's revelation:

It follows that our faith, whereby we believe any divine, supernatural truth, is resolved unto the Scripture, as the only means of divine revelation, affecting our minds and consciences with the authority and truth of God;<sup>17</sup>

The answer Owen gives to the attestation of Scripture as God's word then seems to be circular. We know Scripture is God's word from Scripture. So he writes:

*How, or on what grounds, for what reasons, do we believe the Scripture to be a divine revelation, proceeding immediately from God, or to be that word of God*

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12 Ibid. p. 15.

13 Ibid. p. 15.

14 Ibid. p. 17.

15 Ibid. p. 17.

16 Ibid. p. 18.

17 Ibid. p. 19.

which is truth divine and infallible? Whereunto we answer, It is *solely* on the evidence that the Spirit of God, in and by the Scripture itself, gives unto us that it was given by immediate inspiration from God; or, the ground and reason whereon we believe the Scripture to be the word of God are the authority and truth of God evidencing themselves in and by it unto the minds and consciences of men. ... (regarding) believing the Scripture itself to be the infallible word of God, ... we do it on *no other* grounds but its *own evidence* that so it is.<sup>18</sup>

This is what my student friend I referred to earlier is grappling with, particularly he was asking the question as to how, believing this, we can communicate to non-Christians.

### **Arguments for Scripture coming from God that are external to Scripture**

I am not aiming to go into this in any detail but these are arguments that concern Scripture's antiquity, preservation, internal structure, the testimony of the church (carefully distinguished by Owen from accepting Scripture on the authority of the Roman Catholic Church) and the good effects of the gospel in the lives of men and women. Owen writes:

although we plead that no man can believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, with faith divine, supernatural and infallible, but upon its own internal divine evidence and efficacy, yet we allow and make use of all those external arguments ... acknowledging the persuasion which they beget ... Only, we do not judge them to contain the whole of the evidence which we have for faith ... not that at all which renders it divine, supernatural, and infallible ... (however) it is but vainly pretended that their truth is superseded by our other assertions, as though, where faith is required, all the subservient use of reason were absolutely discarded, and our faith thereby rendered irrational. (these arguments give) a moral certainty. ... But this we assert, that there is an assent of another kind unto the divine original and authority of the Scriptures required of us, namely that of faith divine and supernatural.<sup>19</sup>

### **What kind of faith and certainty concerning Scripture being the word of God does God require of us?**

#### ***Firstly: It is not a merely Moral Certainty produced by Argumentation and Reasoning***

Therefore the chapter heading for chapter four reads:

Moral certainty, the result of external arguments, insufficient.<sup>20</sup>

Owen argues this from:—

1. *Scriptural Example.* The fact that throughout Scripture: 'divine revelation, formally considered, and as written, was left upon the old foundation of the authority of God who gave it. No such method is prescribed, no such

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18 Ibid. p. 20.    19 Ibid. p. 21.    20 Ibid. p. 47.

example is proposed unto us in the Scripture, as to make use of these arguments and motives for the conversion of the souls of men unto God, and the ingenerating of faith in them; yea, in some cases, the use of such means is decried as unprofitable, and the sole authority of God, putting forth his power in and by his word is appealed unto.’<sup>21</sup> Owen instances Paul as an example (1 Corinthians 2:1–4), ‘and I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of men but in the power of God.’

2. *The Redundancy of the Holy Spirit if this is True.* Because moral certainty comes from purely human reason and argument: ‘There is, therefore, on this supposition, no need of any work of the Holy Ghost to enable us to believe or to work faith in us ... (but the faith which Scripture speaks of) is “the gift of God,” and is “not of ourselves,” Eph. ii.8.’<sup>22</sup>
3. *The Limitations of External Evidences.* Because at best such arguments can only produce a highly probable opinion, the faith which it produces can only be human, fallible and capable of deception.
4. *The Illogicality of Resting in Such Faith.* If we are to believe what Scripture says with a divine and infallible faith it is illogical that we believe the Scripture with a lesser and fallible faith built upon human arguments.

**Secondly: God requires of us a divine, supernatural and infallible faith**

In his summary of the ground he will cover Owen wrote:

That, yet, moreover (that is despite the force of the external arguments), God requires of us that we believe (the Scriptures) to be his word *with faith, divine, supernatural and infallible*.<sup>23</sup>

So as he moves on to the positive aspect of his subject Owen writes:

Wherefore, that we may believe the Scriptures to be the word of God according to our duty, as God requireth it of us, in a useful, profitable and saving manner, above and beyond that *natural, human faith* and assent which is the effect of the arguments and motives of credibility before insisted on ... *there is and must be wrought in us, by the power of the Holy Ghost, faith supernatural and divine, whereby we are enabled so to do, or rather whereby we do so.* ... without it, ..., we cannot believe the Scriptures to be the word of God in a due manner, and as it is a duty required of us.<sup>24</sup>

He realizes that some may object that:

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21 Ibid. pp. 48–49. 22 Ibid. p. 49. 23 Ibid. p. 15. 24 Ibid. p. 55.

while we are inquiring on what *grounds* we believe the Scripture to be the word of God, we seem to *flee to the work of the Holy Ghost* in our own minds, which is irrational. (he continues) But we must not be ashamed of the gospel, nor of the truth of it, because some do not understand or will not duly consider what is proposed. It is necessary that we should return unto the work of the Holy Spirit, not with peculiar respect unto the Scriptures that are to be believed, but unto our own minds and that faith wherewith they are to be believed; for it is not the *reason* why we believe the Scriptures, but the *power* whereby we are enabled so to do, which at present we enquire after.<sup>25</sup>

He goes on to describe the work of the Holy Spirit by which we believe the Scriptures are the word of God:

The work of the Holy Ghost unto this purpose consists in the saving *illumination* of the mind; and the effect of it is a *supernatural light*, whereby the mind is renewed ... he irradiates the mind with a spiritual light, whereby it is enabled to discern the glory of spiritual things.<sup>26</sup>

It is this which enables us to overcome the power of the natural blindness of their minds together with the prejudices of our culture and upbringing.

He is very aware that:

the pleading of it is liable to be mistaken; for some are ready to apprehend that this retreat into a *Spirit of revelation* is but a pretence to discard all rational arguments, and to introduce *enthusiasm* into their room. ... But we must grant that a "Spirit of wisdom and revelation" to open the eyes of our understanding is needful to enable us to believe the Scripture to be the word of God in a due manner, or forego the gospel; and our duty it is to pray continually for that Spirit, if we intend to be established in the faith thereof.<sup>27</sup>

He is concerned at the Quaker, Religious Radical threat here and writes:

And if any pretend unto *immediate revelations* of things not before revealed, we have no concernment in their pretences ... this *revelation of the Spirit* consists in his effectual operation, freeing our minds from darkness, ignorance and prejudice, enabling them to discern spiritual things in a due manner.<sup>28</sup>

## **What is the Ground whereby we believe the Scripture to be the word of God?**

### ***Firstly: it is not the work of the Holy Spirit in us***

Owen writes:

If anyone (on the basis of his arguments so far) shall now ask us wherefore we believe the Scripture to be the word of God; we do not answer, "It is *because the Holy Ghost hath enlightened our minds, wrought faith in us, and enabled us to believe it.*"<sup>29</sup>

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25 Ibid. p. 55–56. 26 Ibid. p. 57. 27 Ibid. p. 59. 28 Ibid. pp. 59–60.

29 Ibid. p. 60.

This is not because we are asserting that we could believe without such an inward and subjective work of the Holy Spirit, but it is the means by which we believe rather than the reason we believe. He writes:

This reason must be something external and evidently proposed unto us; for whatever ability of spiritual assent there be in the understanding, which is thus wrought in it by the Holy Ghost, yet the understanding cannot assent unto any thing ... but what is outwardly proposed unto it as true, and that with sufficient evidence that it is so.<sup>30</sup>

The Spirit enables us to feel the power of the reality of the truths in the Scripture and fortifies us against temptation to disbelieve but this is not in itself a divine testimony to be believed but a divine work in our hearts.

**Secondly: Divine revelation itself (is) the only foundation and reason of faith<sup>31</sup>**

Owen states:

We believe Scripture to be the word of God, with divine faith for its own sake only; or, our faith is resolved into the authority and truth of God only as revealing himself unto us therein and thereby. ... And this we call the formal object and reason of faith.<sup>32</sup>

Owen assumes the limited validity of external evidences, the ministry of the church as the pillar and ground of the truth in declaring the gospel and the necessity of the internal effectual work of the Spirit in producing faith in us.<sup>33</sup> His scope of enquiry is not as to the validity of particular truths of revelation but as to why we believe: 'the revelation itself, the Scripture itself, to be divine; and this we do only because of the authority and veracity of the revealer, that is God himself, manifesting themselves therein.'<sup>34</sup> He writes concerning the fact that faith rests in Scripture alone:

1. *Scripture requires our assent to this.* 'It doth not require us to believe it upon the testimony of any church, or on any other arguments that it gives us to prove it is from God, but speaks unto us immediately in his name, and thereon requires faith and obedience.'<sup>35</sup> There is an obvious objection that any book might make such a claim but Owen points out: 'we are not now giving arguments to prove unto others the Scripture to be the word of God, but only proving and showing what our own faith resteth on and is resolved into.'<sup>36</sup> He instances the many times statements of Scripture begin: 'Thus saith the Lord'.
2. *Scripture authority is sufficient in itself.* He particularly instances the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:27–31 and points out that external attestation through a resurrected man preaching would not convince those

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30 Ibid. p. 60.      31 Ibid. p. 69 chapter heading for chapter V.      32 Ibid. p. 70.  
 33 Ibid. pp. 70–73.      34 Ibid. p. 73.      35 Ibid. p. 73.      36 Ibid. p. 73.

who do NOT believe ‘Moses and the Prophets.’ He also mentions that in John’s Gospel 20:30–31 we are told that: ‘These things are *written*, that ye may believe’ He also mentions 2 Peter 1:16–21 and points out: ‘that which the apostle teacheth us is, that we believe all other divine truths for the Scripture’s sake ... but the Scripture we believe for its own sake, or because “holy men of God” wrote it, “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”’<sup>37</sup> He mentions more testimonies to this effect and points out there were many more he could have brought forward.

3. *The New Testament attests itself and Old Testament Scripture to be the word of God.* ‘That which they universally insisted on ... was, that the word which they preached, declared, wrote, was not “the word of man,” came not by any private suggestion, or from any invention of their own, but was “indeed the word of God,” 1 Thessalonians 2:13, and declared by them as they were “acted by the Holy Ghost,” 2 Peter 1:21.’<sup>38</sup> ‘Under the New Testament, the infallible preachers and writers thereof do in the first place propose the writings of the Old Testament to be received for their own sake, or on the account of their divine original ... Hence are they called “The oracles of God,” ... and oracles always required an assent for their own sake, and other evidence they pleaded none.’<sup>39</sup>

### **Objections to the Self-Evidencing Power of Scripture**

If Scripture is self-evidently the word of God why does not everyone see it? Owen states that there are three ways in which we assent to anything proposed to us as being true. ‘By inbred principles of *natural light*<sup>40</sup>—in other words by what is self-evident to all men at all times, ‘By *rational consideration* of things externally proposed unto us’, and by *faith*. ‘... This is our assent upon *testimony*, whereon we believe many things which no sense, inbred principles, nor reasonings of our own, could either give us an acquaintance with or an assurance of.’<sup>41</sup>

My reaction to Owen’s analysis is that when he turns to applying this matrix he puts too much of our knowledge of God in category 2 when some factors, such as our response to creation, might be more properly put in category 1. However Owen seems to put the objections to the self-evidencing power of Scripture as being the result of people using categories 1 and 2, that is inbred principles and rational thinking, to contradict category 3, faith, when they have no proper power to do so. Owen then turns to how the testimony of the Spirit as to Scripture being the word of God is given to us:

1. *The Scripture in itself shows that it is the word of God.* ‘God, as the immediate author of the Scripture, hath left in the very word itself evident tokens and

37 Ibid. p. 77.

38 Ibid. p. 79.

39 Ibid. p. 79.

40 Ibid. p. 82.

41 Ibid. p. 83.

impressions of his wisdom, prescience, omniscience, power, goodness, holiness, truth, and other divine, infinite excellencies, sufficiently evidenced unto the enlightened minds of believers.’<sup>42</sup>

2. *The Scripture shows that it is the word of God through its effectiveness.* ‘The Spirit of God evidenceth the *divine original and authority* of the Scripture by the power and authority which he puts forth in it and by it over the minds and consciences of men, with its operation of divine effects thereon.’<sup>43</sup> He mentions particularly: ‘The principal divine effect of the word of God is in the conversion of the souls of sinners unto God’<sup>44</sup> and details conviction of sin, spiritual illumination, restraint of sin, and its ability to comfort in the deepest distress as further divine effects of the word of God.<sup>45</sup>

### **What follows from faith in Scripture as the word of God being based on Scripture itself?**

Owen lists three things:

1. *Uneducated believers can have as much assurance about Scripture as the most educated.* If the ground of our certainty is either information that is difficult to obtain or subtle and learned arguments that are inaccessible to most people then the uneducated would be at a disadvantage but Owen points out: ‘the things we have pleaded are of another nature: for those *characters* of divine wisdom, goodness, holiness, grace and sovereign authority; which are implanted in the Scripture by the Holy Ghost, are as legible unto the faith of the meanest as of the most learned believer’.<sup>46</sup>
2. *This produces greater assurance than we might obtain by other means.* Owen says that ‘this *ability of assent upon testimony* is the highest and most noble power or faculty of our rational souls (and) the testimony of God is the ... highest evidence whereof it is capable’.<sup>47</sup> Also that: ‘Unto the assent of divine faith there is required an *especial internal operation of the Holy Ghost*’<sup>48</sup> and finally: ‘the revelation which God makes of himself, his mind and will, by his word, is more *excellent*, and accompanied with greater evidence of his *infinitely glorious properties*,—wherein alone the mind can find absolute rest and satisfaction (which is its assurance),—than any other discovery of truth.’<sup>49</sup>
3. *The gospel not apologetics is the means by which unbelievers will be converted* Owen urges the apostolic example of gospel preaching to unbelievers, and says: ‘This is the way whereby men ordinarily are brought to believe the word of God, Romans 10:14, 15, 17; and that neither by external arguments nor motives, which no one soul was ever converted unto God by.’<sup>50</sup> Talking to my student friend, he was arguing that we needed to start with

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42 Ibid. p. 92.43 Ibid. p. 93. 44 Ibid. p. 94. 45 Ibid. pp. 96–99.

46 Ibid. p. 100. 47 Ibid. p. 102. 48 Ibid. p. 102. 49 Ibid. p. 102.

50 Ibid. p. 105.

apologetics so that people would accept that the Bible is the word of God, Owen I think proves him wrong.

## **Outline of ‘The causes, ways and means of understanding the mind of God’**

### **The importance of John Owen’s contribution to this subject**

This is highlighted in Richard L Pratt Junior’s helpful book on Biblical Interpretation: *He Gave Us Stories*. Pratt discusses two dangers to correct Biblical Interpretation. An overemphasis on the Spirit which may tempt the lay reader: ‘to think that the inspiration of Scripture eliminates the need for human study’<sup>51</sup> and an overemphasis on study, which means that: ‘Human efforts actually take the place of seeking help from the Spirit.’<sup>52</sup> He goes on to say that evangelical scholars don’t apply their convictions concerning the need of the Spirit’s personal ministry to their interpretation of Scripture, and comments: ‘To my knowledge the most recent work of substantial size was written over three hundred years ago by John Owen (1616–1683).’<sup>53</sup>

### **The subject matter of the book**

Introducing his subject Owen writes:

*My principal design is, to manifest that every believer may, in the due use of the means appointed of God for that end, attain unto such a full assurance of understanding in the truth, or all that knowledge of the mind and will of God revealed in Scripture, which is sufficient to direct him in the life of God, to deliver him from the dangers of ignorance, darkness and error and to conduct him unto blessedness.*<sup>54</sup>

So his enquiry is:

*How believers ... may attain a right understanding in their own minds of the meaning and sense of the Scriptures, as to the doctrine or truths contained in them, in answer with the design of God, as to what he would have us know or believe; or,—How they may attain a right perception of the mind of God in the Scripture, and what he intends in the revelation of it, in opposition unto ignorance, errors, mistakes, and all false apprehensions, and so in a right manner to perform the duties which by it we are instructed in.*<sup>55</sup>

He firstly considers the work of the Spirit as the principal efficient cause of our understanding before moving on the external and internal means by which we are to understand the word of God.

### **The cause of our understanding the word of God**

Owen writes:

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<sup>51</sup> Richard L Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Owen, Works, vol. 4, pp. 122–123.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 124.



the principal efficient cause of the due knowledge and understanding of the will of God in the Scripture ... is *the Holy Spirit of God himself alone*; for,—*there is an especial work of the Spirit of God on the minds of men, communicating spiritual wisdom, light, and understanding unto them, necessary unto their discerning and apprehending aright the mind of God in his word, and the understanding of the mysteries of heavenly truth contained therein.*<sup>56</sup>

While Owen strongly emphasizes the Spirit's work, it is very important to note what he means by it, for he writes:

It is the fondest thing in the world to imagine that the Holy Ghost doth any way teach us but *in and by our own reasons and understandings.*<sup>57</sup>

This eliminates the need of fresh prophetic inspirations and the need for the church to assume authoritative interpretation of the Scriptures. He summarises:

there is no safety in depending on enthusiasms, or immediately intended infallible inspirations, nor on the pretended infallibility of any church, so the Holy Spirit of God, enlightening our minds in the exercise of our own reason and understanding, and in use of the means appointed of God unto that end, is the only safe guide to bring us unto the full assurance of the mind and will of God as revealed in the Scripture.<sup>58</sup>

### **Scriptural Proofs of Owen's Assertions**

Owen is concerned to ground scripturally what he asserts and does so at such length we can only sample what he wrote. He writes:

The whole of our assertion is comprised in the prayer of the psalmist, Psalm 119:18, ... 'Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' The same request ... is repeated sundry times in the same psalm ... *Thus he prayed.* That it may be esteemed *our duty to pray in like manner* is the substance of what we plead for. What we pray for from God, that we have not in and of ourselves. ... Wherefore, our discerning, our understanding of the wonderful things of the law, is not of ourselves; it is that which is given us, that which we receive from God.<sup>59</sup>

Turning to the New Testament he quotes Luke 24:45, 'Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures' and comments:

If we need the *opening of our understandings* by an act of the power and grace of Christ, that we may *understand the Scriptures*, then without it we cannot do so, namely so as to believe and yield obedience according unto our duty. ... nothing but a *real internal act of grace*, in the illumination of their minds, can be intended thereby.<sup>60</sup>

Again he quotes Ephesians 1:17–19, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in

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56 Ibid. p. 124–125.

57 Ibid. p. 125.

58 Ibid. p. 127.

59 Ibid. p. 127–128.

60 Ibid. p. 133.

the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.’ He comments:

What the apostle doth here for others, it is unquestionably our duty to do for ourselves. We are then to pray that God *would enable us by his Spirit to know and understand his mind and will as revealed in the Scripture*. This, therefore, without especial aid and assistance from him by his Spirit, we cannot do. And the aid he gives us consists in the *effectual illumination* of our minds, or the enlightening of the eyes of our understandings.<sup>61</sup>

The revelation asked for is: ‘an *internal subjective revelation*, whereby no *new things* are revealed unto our minds ... but our minds are enabled to discern the things that are revealed already.’<sup>62</sup>

Owen then turns to, and makes some important observations on John 16:13, ‘When the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth’—time prevents developing this but one important pastoral point is that it is given as appropriate to individuals ‘It admits of a *limitation* with respect unto the diversity of subjects, or the persons unto whom this truth is to be communicated. They are not all of them, as to the *degrees* of light and knowledge, *equally* to be led into all truth. Every one unto whom he is thus promised shall be so far led into the knowledge of it as is necessary unto his own estate and condition, his duty and work; for “unto every one of us is grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ,” Ephesians 4:7.’<sup>63</sup>

### **How the Obstacles to Our Understanding are Removed**

Owen writes:

The supposition we proceed upon in this discourse is, that *God hath revealed his mind and will unto us, as unto all things concerning his worship, with our faith and obedience therein, in the holy Scripture*. Thereon do we inquire by what means we may attain the *saving knowledge* of the mind of God so revealed; and my principal design is, to show what aid and assistance we receive of the Holy Ghost unto that end.<sup>64</sup>

Owen proceeds by dealing with the causes for ignorance of God and his truth and how they may be overcome. He admits that this may not be the most helpful and logical approach because he has not yet spelt out his teaching on this subject in a full way. I agree with him wholeheartedly.

He mentions two main causes of ignorance and misunderstanding of God’s truth:—

1. ‘The natural vanity and darkness with which the minds of all men are deprived’<sup>65</sup> This prevents the mind from, ‘*discerning the glory and beauty*

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61 Ibid. p. 133. 62 Ibid. p. 134. 63 Ibid. pp. 142–143. 64 Ibid. p. 174.

65 Ibid. p. 176.

of spiritual, heavenly truth, and from being sensible of its power and efficacy.’<sup>66</sup> Owen says this should move us to humility at our own condition, pity and compassion towards others and gratitude for God’s deliverance and preservation. Only regeneration by God’s Spirit can deliver us for: ‘The revelation itself is plain, perspicuous, and full of light; but this “light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.” ... this darkness is removed and taken away by the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit in our illumination’.<sup>67</sup>

2. *Corrupt affections prevalent in the minds of men.*<sup>68</sup> Owen mentions, ‘Pride, or carnal confidence in our own wisdom and ability of mind for all the ends of our duty towards God.’<sup>69</sup> ‘It is the meek, the humble, the lowly in mind, those that are like little children, that God hath promised to teach. This is an eternal and unalterable law of God’s appointment, that whoever will learn his mind and will as revealed in the Scripture must be humble and lowly, renouncing all confidence and trust in themselves.’<sup>70</sup> Hence wide knowledge even of Scripture itself together with great abilities will mean for those who have it that: ‘they know nothing as they ought, nothing unto the glory of God, nothing to the spiritual advantage of their own souls.’<sup>71</sup> Under this heading Owen also instances: ‘The love of honour and praise among men’;<sup>72</sup> ‘adherence unto corrupt traditions and inveterate errors’<sup>73</sup> which deals with both traditionalistic and modernistic errors; ‘Spiritual sloth’<sup>74</sup> which is frequently warned about in Scripture, ‘a love of sin (which causes men to) hate the truth’;<sup>75</sup> and finally Satan’s temptations and snares for, ‘The God of this world blindeth the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them’ (2 Corinthians 4:4).<sup>76</sup>

The removal of these causes and misunderstanding is: ‘the work of the Spirit of God alone.’<sup>77</sup> And Owen lists what he does to remove them:

1. *Illumination.* ‘He alone communicates that *spiritual light* unto our minds which is the foundation of all our relief against those obstacles and oppositions unto a saving understanding of the mind of God.’<sup>78</sup>
2. *Moral Cleansing (negative).* ‘He freeth, delivereth, and purgeth our minds from all those *corrupt affections* and prejudices which are partly inbred in them, partly assumed by them or imposed on them; for the artifice of Satan, in turning the minds of men from the truth, is by bringing them under the power of corrupt and vicious habits, which expel that frame of mind that is indispensably necessary unto them that would learn it.’<sup>79</sup> Although it is our

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66 Ibid. p. 176.

70 Ibid. p. 179.

74 Ibid. p. 181.

78 Ibid. p. 184.

67 Ibid. p. 178.

71 Ibid. p. 179.

75 Ibid. p. 183.

79 Ibid. p. 184.

68 Ibid. p. 178.

72 Ibid. p. 180.

76 Ibid. p. 183.

69 Ibid. p. 179.

73 Ibid. p. 180.

77 Ibid. p. 184.

duty to cleanse ourselves yet is by the grace of the Holy Spirit that we actually do so for the task is beyond the power of our natural abilities.

3. *Moral Cleansing (positive)*. 'He implants in our minds *spiritual habits and principles*, contrary and opposite unto those corrupt affections, whereby they are subdued and expelled. By him are our minds made *humble, meek* and *teachable*, through a submission unto the authority of the word, and a conscientious endeavour to conform ourselves thereunto.'<sup>80</sup> Owen is not denying the value of learning in understanding Scripture but he is underlining that the work of the Spirit is indispensable to understanding Scripture. 'Now all these graces whereby men are made teachable, capable of divine mysteries, so as to learn the truth as it is in Jesus, to understand the mind of God in the Scriptures, are wrought in them by the Holy Spirit, and belong unto his work upon our minds in our illumination. Without this the hearts of all men are fat, their ears heavy, and their eyes sealed, that they can neither hear, nor perceive, nor understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God.'<sup>81</sup>

### **How the Holy Spirit in Inspiring Scripture fitted it to aid our understanding**

This continues Owen's explanation of how the obstacles to our understanding are removed. The Holy Spirit of course inspired Scripture by inspiring the writers of Scripture who wrote in many different ways and at many different times, and this is relevant to Owen's point:

the Holy Spirit of God hath prepared and disposed of the Scripture so as it might be a most sufficient and absolutely perfect way and means of communicating unto our minds that saving knowledge of God and his will which is needful that we may live unto him, and come into the enjoyment of him in his glory.<sup>82</sup>

He then takes up points that stem from this:

#### ***Firstly: the nature of Scripture as we have received it***

Specifically that it comes to us in a non-systematic form and as many varying types of literature. Owen believes that, if God gave us Scripture in that form, we ought to assume it is the best way but goes on to give some discerning arguments for this:

1. *It is more powerful* 'Truths have their power and efficacy upon our minds, not only from *themselves* but also from their *posture* in the Scripture. There are they placed in such *aspects* towards, in such *conjunctions* one with another, as that their *influences* on our minds do greatly depend thereon.'<sup>83</sup>

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80 Ibid. p. 185. 81 Ibid. p. 187. 82 Ibid. p. 187. 83 Ibid. p. 189.

2. *It is universally useful* 'In the writing and composing of the holy Scripture, the Spirit of God had respect unto the *various states and conditions of the church*. It was not given for the use of one age or season only, but for all generations,—for a guide in faith and obedience from the beginning of the world to the end of it. And the state of the church was not always to be the same.'<sup>84</sup> There is massive insight here for the universal value of the Scripture to the church in a variety of times, cultures and settings.
3. *It best serves its own principal end* This is not the systematic setting out of truth but: 'to beget in the minds of men faith, fear and obedience, and reverence of God,—to make them holy and righteous'.<sup>85</sup>
4. *Additional Considerations* It makes the ministry of the word necessary and useful. It means Christians have to search it for wisdom that aids the fear of the Lord and prepares them for the variety of experiences involved in the Christian life.

**Secondly: What we need to know savingly is clearly revealed in Scripture**

Things we are to believe must be revealed in Scripture and what is indispensably necessary for us to believe must be clearly revealed in Scripture:

There is that *plainness* and *perspicuity* in it which become the holy, wise God to make use of; whose words are to be received with reverence, with submission of mind and conscience unto his authority, and fervent prayer that we may understand his mind and do his will ... Every thing in the Scripture is so plain as that the *meanest believer* may understand all that belongs unto his duty or is necessary unto his happiness; yet is nothing is so plain that but that the wisest of them all have reason to adore the depths and stores of divine wisdom in it.<sup>86</sup>

Why then do people protest that Scripture is obscure? One: because it is opposed to their prejudices, affections and interests and, rather than confirm them in them, seeks to destroy that frame of mind. Two: because they do not seek the help of the Spirit of God so the problem regarding the Scripture is: 'not for want of *light in them*, but for want of *light in us*.'<sup>87</sup> This does not mean that some parts of Scripture are not hard to understand and interpret because some doctrines, such as that of the Trinity, are beyond our comprehension. In other things the manner in which things are revealed may be hard because typology and allegory are difficult to interpret. Owen states as a truism: 'Whatever is so *delivered* in any place, if it be of importance for us to know and believe, as unto the ends of divine revelation, it is in some other place or places *unveiled* and plainly declared.'<sup>88</sup>

Owen talks helpfully about the fear we may have of misinterpreting the word of God and so in some way misrepresenting him:

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84 Ibid. p. 189.    85 Ibid. p. 190.    86 Ibid. p. 193.    87 Ibid. p. 194.

88 Ibid. p. 196.

The Holy Spirit hath given us a relief in this matter, by supplying us with *a rule of the interpretation of Scripture, which whilst we sincerely attend unto we are in no danger of sinfully corrupting the word of God*, although we should not arrive unto its proper meaning in every particular place; and this rule is the *analogy* ... of faith. (Romans 12:6)<sup>89</sup>

He explains how this works:

Wherefore, although a man should miss of the *first proper sense* of any obscure place of Scripture, which, with all our diligence, we ought to aim at, yet, whilst he receiveth none but what contains a truth agreeable unto what is revealed in other places, the error of his mind neither endangereth his own faith or obedience nor those of any others.<sup>90</sup>

Having looked at the cause of our understanding we know look at—

### **The means by which we are to understand the word of God**

Owen divides this into two parts and the opening part is very straightforward. We are to read and to study the Bible so that we know our way round it, we think deeply about it in terms of its truth and its practise, and so we become heavenly minded and live under the influence of divine truth.

He then divides the means for the profitable use of Scripture into Spiritual, Disciplinary and Ecclesiastical.

#### ***Firstly: Spiritual Aids to Understanding the word of God***

Owen lists these:—

1. *Prayer*. This is intensely challenging and particularly for those of us entrusted with the ministry of the word of God. Owen comments generally about our praying: ‘I shall, therefore, fix this assertion as a sacred truth. *Whoever, in the diligent and immediate study of the Scripture to know the mind of God therein so as to do it, doth abide in fervent supplications, in and by Jesus Christ, for supplies of the Spirit of grace, to lead him into all truth, to reveal and make known unto him the truth as it is in Jesus, to give him an understanding of the Scriptures and the will of God therein, he shall be preserved from pernicious errors, and attain that degree in knowledge as shall be sufficient unto the guidance and preservation of the life of God in the whole of faith and obedience.*’<sup>91</sup> He also points out we should pray specifically over particular texts we may find hard to understand: ‘But shall we think it strange for a Christian, when, it may be after the use of all other means, he finds himself at a loss about the true meaning and intention of the Holy Spirit in any place or text of Scripture, to betake himself in a more than ordinary manner unto God by *prayer*, that he would by his Spirit enlighten, guide, teach, and so reveal the truth unto him? Or should we think it strange that God should hear such prayers, and instruct such persons in the secrets of his covenant?’<sup>92</sup>

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89 Ibid. p. 198. 90 Ibid. p. 199. 91 Ibid. p. 204. 92 Ibid. p. 204.

2. *Spiritual Sensitivity and Experience*. ‘To seek after mere *notions of truth*, without an endeavour after an *experience of his power* in our hearts is not the way to increase our understanding in spiritual things. He alone is in a posture to learn from God who sincerely gives up his mind, conscience and affections to the power and rule of what is revealed unto him.’<sup>93</sup> Our concern in studying Scripture must be firstly its impact on ourselves, not how skilfully we may teach it to others. How often do we content ourselves with grasping a concept without a sense of the power of the truth that the concept conveys?
3. *Practical Obedience*. The gospel is (Titus 1:1), ‘the truth which is according to godliness’ and true understanding, intellectual and spiritual stability, and continued growth in understanding rest on the truth we know being translated into practice.
4. A desire and fixed intention to grow and progress in knowledge. Some people become satisfied with what they already know but the proper desire for growth comes from: ‘love to the truth and experience of its excellency’.<sup>94</sup>

**Secondly: Disciplines which aid us in the understanding of Scripture**

Owen notes that these are: ‘as consisting in the due use and improvement of *common arts and sciences*, applied unto and made use of in the study of the Scriptures.’<sup>95</sup> These may be properly used and so receive a blessing from the Spirit of God.

1. *Knowledge of the Original Languages*. Owen writes at length on this and says: ‘This *skill and knowledge*, therefore, is of great use unto them who are called unto the interpretation of the Scripture; and the church of God hath had no small advantage by the endeavours of men *learned* herein, who have exercised it in the exposition of the words and *phraseology* of the Scriptures, as compared with their use in other authors.’<sup>96</sup> However he also writes: ‘But the sense and substance of the Scripture being contained entirely in every good *translation*, (amongst which that in use among ourselves is *excellent*, though capable of great improvements), men may, by the use of the means before directed unto, and under the conduct of the teaching of the Spirit of God in them, usefully and rightly expound the Scripture in general unto the edification of others; whereof many instances may be given amongst ancient and modern expositors.’<sup>97</sup>
2. *General Knowledge—for example of history and geography*. Owen regards these as important in defending the faith, defending the Bible from its critics, and in seeing how the prophecies of Scripture are fulfilled historically.

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93 Ibid. p. 205.    94 Ibid. p. 206.    95 Ibid. p. 209.    96 Ibid. p. 216.

97 Ibid. p. 216.

3. *Reasoning Skills*. These are generally helpful in understanding Scripture but may be abused. The limitations of reason are that i. Our reasoning about any one text is always subservient to the analogy of faith, to the whole body of truth which we believe. ii. Many truths of Scripture are deeply mysterious and go beyond our capacity of reason and iii. Reasoning ability can all too easily make us self-sufficient and reluctant to rely on the help of the Spirit of God.

**Thirdly: Helps Ecclesiastical**

Owen lists those which are put forward under this heading as:

1. *Catholic or universal tradition*; 2. *Consent of the fathers*; 3. *The endeavours of any persons holy and learned* who have gone before us in the investigation of the truth, and expressed their minds in writing, for the edification of others whether *old* or of *late*.<sup>98</sup>

The first two are dealt with by Owen and quickly dismissed. Regarding any universal tradition, and this would not be doctrinal but as to how specific passages are to be interpreted, Owen says that:

This pretence hath been abundantly and sufficiently disproved, though nothing seems to be so to the minds of men fortified against all evidences of truth by invincible prejudices.<sup>99</sup>

Regarding the consent of the fathers, Owen writes:

The *joint consent of the fathers* or ancient doctors of the church is also pretended as a rule of Scripture interpretation. ... But the pretence of the *authoritative determination* of the *fathers* in points of religion hath been so disproved, and the vanity of it so fully discovered, as it is altogether needless farther to insist upon it.<sup>100</sup>

Regarding previous expositors Owen states a general rule and makes specific recommendations:

And it is easy to discern from them all, by the diversity of their gifts, ways, and designs, in the exposition of Scripture, that the Holy Spirit divided unto them as he pleased; which as it should make us reverence his presence with them, and assistance of them, so it calls for the freedom of our own judgments to be exercised about their conceptions. And (as) for those of *latter* days, though the names of the principal and most eminent of them, as Bucer, Calvin, Martyr, Beza, are now condemned and despised by many, ... yet those who firmly design to grow in the knowledge of God and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, both do and always will bless God for the assistance he gave them in their great and holy works, and in the benefit which they receive by their labours. These are the outward means and advantages which are requisite, and to be used as any one's calling, opportunity, ability and work do require, as helps to attain a right understanding of the mind of God in the Scripture.<sup>101</sup>

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98 Ibid. p. 226. 99 Ibid. p. 227. 100 Ibid. p. 227. 101 Ibid. pp. 228–229.



## Closing Thoughts from Owen

He raises two questions and asks, firstly, how non-believers without the Spirit may understand the Scripture, in particular details, better than believers, who do have the Spirit. His answer is much of Scripture is open to reason and can be understood without spiritual illumination but:

The knowledge of the truth thus to be attained is not that *illumination* which we are enquiring after, nor doth it produce those effects of renewing the mind, and transforming it into the image of the things known, with the fruits of holy obedience, which are inseparable from saving illumination.<sup>102</sup>

Secondly, why is it that:

many who are *truly enlightened* and sanctified by him do yet fall into sundry *errors* and mistakes, which the differences and divisions among themselves do openly proclaim; and the Scripture itself supposeth that there may be *diversity of judgment* about spiritual things among those who are truly sanctified and believers.<sup>103</sup>

## Owen answers cogently and helpfully:

That the promise of the Spirit, and the communication of him accordingly, to *teach, instruct*, guide and lead us into truth, is suited into that *great end* for which God hath made the revelation of himself in his word, -namely that we might live unto him here according to his will, and be brought into the enjoyment of him hereafter unto his glory. ... unto this end it is not necessary that we should understand the *direct sense and meaning of every single text*, place, or passage in the Scripture, nor yet that we should obtain the knowledge of every thing revealed therein. It sufficeth, in answer to the promise and design of the work of the Holy Ghost, that the *knowledge of all truth necessary to be known unto that end be communicated unto us*, and that we have so far a right understanding of the text of Scripture as to learn that truth by the use of the means appointed unto that end. ... We are not hereby *absolutely secured* from particular errors and mistakes, no more than we are from all actual sins by the work of the Spirit in our wills;<sup>104</sup>

## My own closing thoughts

In contrast to modern authors I am impressed that Owen sees these two subjects in a very pastoral and practical way. His understanding of both is deeply linked with, and interwoven into, his doctrine of salvation. To illustrate this, my paper closes by repeating my first quotation from Owen:

Our belief in the Scriptures to be the word of God, or a divine revelation, and our understanding of the mind and will of God as revealed in them, are the *two springs* of all our interest in Christian religion. From them are all those streams of light and truth derived whereby our souls are watered, refreshed and made fruitful unto God. It therefore concerneth us greatly to look well to those *springs*, that they be neither stopped nor defiled, and so rendered useless unto us.<sup>105</sup>

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102 Ibid. p. 230. 103 Ibid. pp. 229–230. 104 Ibid. p. 230–231.

105 Ibid. p. 121.

JOHN OWEN

It is in that spirit that Owen wrote and it is in the same spirit that we should read and consider his writings for the issues are no less personal and important to us today.



John Owen



*Latimer Memorial Congregational Church, Grovehill Road, Beverley, East Yorkshire*



*Cottage where meetings were held in the kitchen*

# History of Latimer Memorial Congregational Church, Beverley

## Neil Stewart

The work of God which is now Latimer Memorial Congregational Church on Grovehill Road in Beverley, can be traced to the coming to Beverley of Rev. Robert Shepherd, who was called to the pastorate of Lairgate Congregational Church, the oldest free church in the centre of Beverley in 1871.

Robert Shepherd was described as a genial and fatherly personality, with a great concern for the poor of the town and children. On the outskirts of Beverley, just where the river Hull flows its way to the Humber, there was a small locality called Grovehill. Here by the riverside was a convenient site for building barges and later trawlers for North Sea fishing. It was here that Robert Shepherd turned his attention as he thought of the shipbuilders, many of who travelled from a distance.

Permission was sought and granted to begin services in a workshop at the shipyard during the men's lunch break, where some would gather to be addressed by Rev. Shepherd. These services led Rev. Shepherd to become concerned for those living in the nearby cottages. There were no non-conformist churches in this part of town and a Sunday School meeting was begun in the home of a wheelwright. This man and his wife were members of Lairgate Chapel in the centre of town. The wheelwright's son was invalided and gave himself to praying for the work of God. Gradually adults began to attend the Sunday meetings and soon the room became too small.

A nearby disused apple store was rented and furnished to accommodate those attending, soon being filled to capacity. It was in the apple store that Herbert Abba, a chaplain with the Mission to Seamen in Hull first preached at a Harvest Festival. One dying man whom Mr Abba visited said, 'tell the men of Grovehill not to wait until they come to die before getting ready to meet God. Oh! I have had such a struggle to find peace.'

Over the next few years the work began to grow steadily



*Apple Store*

and a piece of land was rented from the Beverley Corporation. An iron church was erected at a cost of £300 and opened in 1904, by the Rev. Ambrose Shepherd, the brother of Rev. Robert Shepherd.

In 1906 Rev. Herbert Abba was appointed as Assistant minister at Lairgate chapel and given oversight of the work at Grovehill.

Under Rev. Abba's ministry the work progressed and grew. The small congregation which started life in the iron church was now bursting at the seams. There was a flourishing women's meeting, soon followed by a men's service on Sunday afternoons. The Sunday School also flourished as more and more families from the area began attending. Alongside its work amongst the shipyard workers, the church also took an interest in a hostel for inebriated women called Albion House. Extra extensions were made to what had become known as 'The Tin Tabernacle' eventually being able to accommodate some 300 people.

In 1918 the Tin Tabernacle was becoming too small and concern was expressed over its condition. So the church sought to build a new building. This was a daunting prospect as the church was situated in the predominantly working class part of town and had no wealthy members. The projected cost for a new church would be £5,000. Where would the money come from?

A local site was secured for the princely sum of 200 guineas, which was raised sacrificially in six months. A sign was quickly put up declaring the news to the Grovehill area: 'Site for new Congregational Church'. There was still a great sum to be raised, and over the coming years the congregation made great efforts to raise the remaining amount necessary.

The Lord's leading became clear when it was learned that a former church in Hull had closed and had left a sum of money for church buildings in the area. A gift from that sum of £1,000 was granted to the building costs of the new church



*Herbert Abba & Family*



*Site for proposed new building on Grovehill Road*

on condition that the name Latimer be retained. Hence the name of the new church would become Latimer Memorial Congregational Church.

Thus it was that in October 1934 the local paper ran the headline 'New Beverley Church—Stone Laying. Years of Effort rewarded.' The ceremony attracted a large crowd including the local mayor, council members and ministers from around the area.



*New Building*

During the construction of the building, bricks were installed with the initials of Sunday School children whose pennies sponsored them stamped on to them. There are just a few today who can see their initials in those bricks up the side of the building. Mr Abba commented on the building of the church: 'Faith in Jesus Christ had laid the foundations, and sacrifice for Christ had erected the walls and furnished the interior.' There were many gifts, 'given at the cost of considerable sacrifice.' One elderly lady, laid aside with illness heard of the availability of a large organ for sale and covered the cost from her own meagre means.

On 20 June 1935 Sir Angus Watson, the Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales performed the official opening ceremony. The church was packed to capacity for the occasion. A choir sang the 'Hallelujah Chorus' and 'And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed' from Handel's Messiah. During the service Rev. Abba remarked: 'This building will ever stand, not only as the Latimer Memorial, but the memorial of a few faithful, united, enthusiastic people ... it will ever be dear to our hearts, and when we are called to a higher service, we trust it will be the house of God to generations that will come after us.'

From its opening the new church building attracted more attenders and the work continued to flourish.

An essential element of the life of the church was prayer. They were a praying community. Prayer meetings were held on Sunday mornings before the service as well as midweek. Mr Abba commented: 'Show me a church where the services are weary, stale, unprofitable and I will show you a church that is prayerless ... spiritual work is only accomplished by spiritual means to spiritual ends.'

Coupled with prayer, the other essential emphasis of the church was on biblical ministry. The church found its life and vigour in the faithful

exposition of the scriptures, and kept the Bible at the centre of all its activities. Visiting ministers found a congregation eager to hear and learn more of the great truths of the Bible.

Herbert Abba was minister of Latimer Memorial Congregational Church for 45 years until 1951. In his time he had seen the Lord increase the work from an apple store to a large 'modern' building full of people 'Bursting at the seams with an energy equal to maintaining two churches its present size.'



*Induction of Rev. Brian Dupont*

In September 1952 Rev. Brian Dupont was inducted into the Ministry at the church. Then he was young man, newly married, facing the daunting prospect of following a 45 year ministry. Mr Dupont's ministry was characterised by a godly zeal and deep humility, a rich harvest followed as people responded to his preaching of God's Word and the deep love and concern shown by both minister and his wife.

One of the major changes to transpire under Mr Dupont's ministry concerned the direct giving by the Lord's people to the advancement of the Lord's work. Up until then fund-raising events would supplement the church's work, such as the sale of Harvest produce. This all stopped. The first year the Harvest produce was distributed to the needy rather than being sold, the weekly offering was £10 more than the amount gathered by the previous year's sale!

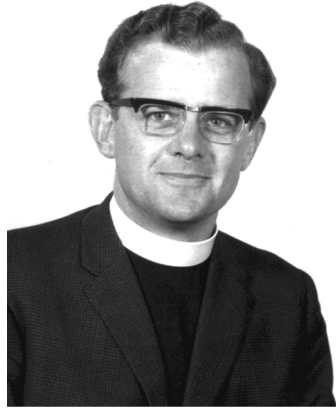
During this period the children's and young people's activities mushroomed with established Boys' and Girls' Brigades. A children's mission was held in 1953 which led to Holiday Bible clubs continuing twice annually up to the present day, alongside regular weekly clubs for all ages. Concern for the spiritual needs of those in the local Westwood hospital in Beverley led to the commencement of a weekly service in the wards in 1955, which continues today over 50 years later. Every week a small team leads a simple service for any patients and staff who are able to join them.

In May 1958 an Irish singing evangelist called Victor McManus was invited to lead an evangelistic campaign at the church, which saw much encouraging fruit with members years later tracing the working of God in their hearts to that mission.

There was recognition that members of the congregation could not always attend all the services and activities because of pressing family or work commitments. Hence the expression 'Come when you can, go when you must' was born and is regularly used today.

In 1962 the congregation learned of the call of Rev. Dupont to the pastorate of Staines Congregational Church. There was great sadness when he conducted his last service as minister on 8 July 1962.

On 3 February 1963 Paul Davis who was studying at Cheshunt College, Cambridge, preached and was subsequently asked to preach again with a view on 10 March. The next day at a special church meeting Mr Davis was invited to become the new minister. However, his ordination could not take place until after he had completed his studies. So on 4 September, Rev. Paul Davis began a four-year ministry.



*Rev. Paul Davies*

During his time evangelistic endeavours continued with the distribution of evangelistic material, local visitation and a mission all bathed in prayer.

A Drop-in Coffee bar was opened in the centre of town, where young people were encouraged to meet informally and to hear the gospel message. There are some in the church today who were converted through this venture and who continue to seek to proclaim the gospel.

It was during this period that great changes began to occur within Congregationalism. In February 1967 it was proposed to establish the Congregational Church in England and Wales, in preparation for the union with the Presbyterian Church in England and Wales. On 7 June 1967, the church meeting was also informed of the closure of the Congregational Evangelical Revival Fellowship and the formation of an Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches, bringing together those churches who were concerned to maintain an evangelical and congregational position. The following month the church meeting overwhelmingly carried the motion not to covenant with the Congregational Church in England and Wales, deciding rather to affiliate with the newly formed Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches.

In January 1967 Rev. Paul Davies had informed the church of his decision to vacate the pastorate and stepped down in August of that year.

On 27 August 1967 Mr Joe Greenald preached at Latimer with a view to a call to the ministry. This was subsequently confirmed by the church and Joe Greenald was ordained and inducted into the ministry at Latimer on 21 October 1967. During the coming years a hall was added to the rear of the church to replace the old Tin Tabernacle which had been used for children's and youth work.



Joe's ministry came to a close at the end of 1972, and after an interregnum of 18 months the church invited Alan Tovey to become its new Pastor. Owing to his commitments to the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, for which he was a travelling secretary, his Ordination and induction did not take place until July 1974. Rev. Alan Tovey served the church for 28 years as Pastor, alongside serving the Fellowship in the role of General Secretary before his home call in November 2002.

In 1991 the church ordained one of its serving deacons, Dr Arthur Fraser to work alongside Alan Tovey. Thus began a 10 year partnership during which a solid biblical foundation for the continued work of the church was laid.

During this period the church continued to reach out to the community with various missions and activities. Added to the youth work was the Latimer Soccer School. This venture was commenced with the help of an organisation called Ambassadors in Sport, which was led by a former member of Latimer, Graham Stamford, who had been converted under Brian Dupont's ministry.

This work is carried on twice monthly throughout the year with a week's event during the summer holiday.

After serving as Pastor for ten years Arthur Fraser informed the church of his plans to retire. In September 2001 Rev. Neil Stewart was inducted into the pastorate to work alongside Arthur for a year. Arthur retired from full-time ministry in July 2002 and now lives in Drumnadrochit where he is still active in gospel ministry.

So the work and witness of the Congregational Church on



*Rev. Joe Greenald*



*Rev. Alan & Lucy Tovey*

HISTORY OF LATIMER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Grovehill Road continues to this day. Born out of gospel concern for this part of the town, built upon sure foundations, seeking to carry on with the emphases of prayer and bible-based, Christ-centred practical Christian living, the church works in the community to bring the message of God's love for his world through the unchanging message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

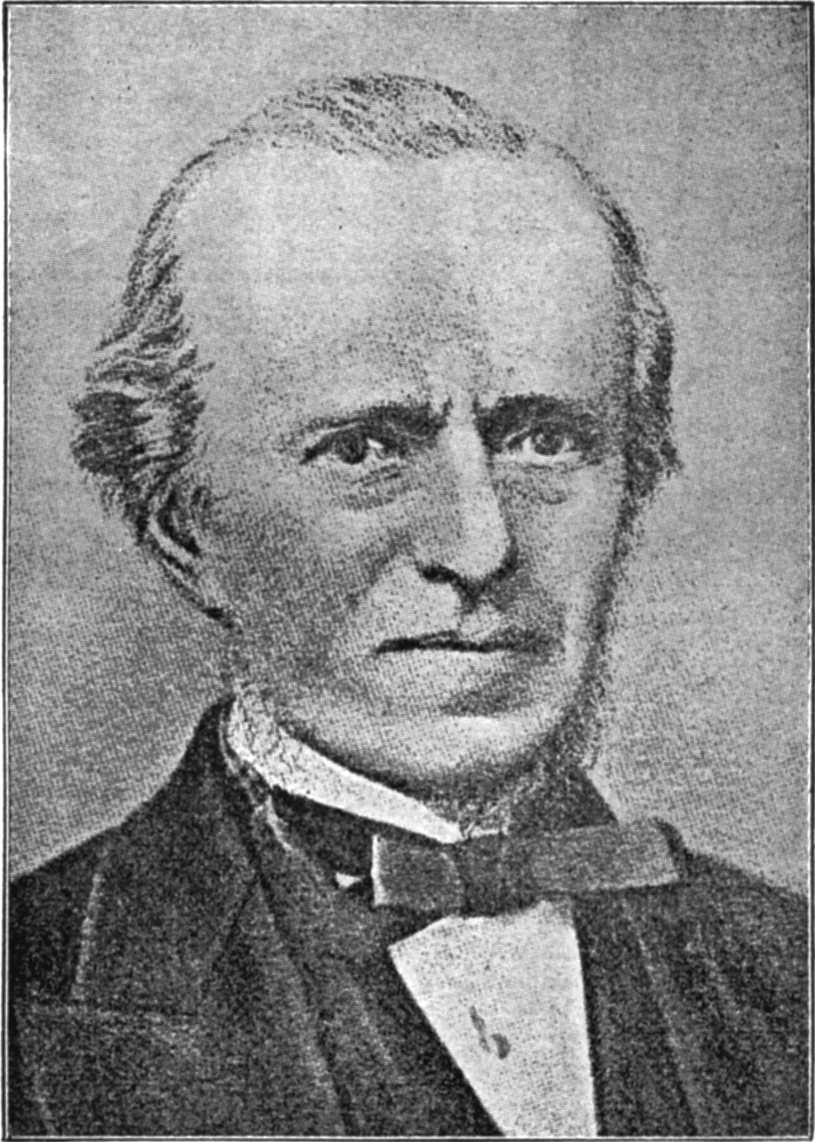


*Revs Arthur Fraser & Alan Tovey*



*Induction of Rev. Neil Stewart*

*Back row: Rev. Derek Swann, Anthony Harrison, Rev. Mike Plant  
Front row: Rev. Dr Arthur Fraser, Rev. Neil Stewart, Rev. Alan Tovey*



*Thomas Barnes*

# Thomas Barnes

## Background

Nonconformists suffered from the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Liberty to meet and practice contrary to the Book of Common Prayer was prohibited by law. The Act of Uniformity, the Corporation Act, the Five Mile Act, the Conventicle Act and the Test Act made life difficult. Persecution was the order of the day for those who wanted to believe and practise in accordance with the Scriptures and their consciences. Fines and imprisonment were common. One imprisonment, of John Bunyan, did, however, have a positive benefit in giving us *Pilgrim's Progress*.

The Glorious Revolution of 1688, when the Roman Catholic King James II fled after Parliament had asked William of Orange to invade. This resulted in most of the persecuting laws being either repealed or coming under the Toleration Act of 1689. But non-Anglicans were merely tolerated. The Act of Uniformity was still in force, though not imposed on nonconformists. So also was the Test Act. The Test Act required a person to state, on oath, that they had taken the Lord's Supper according to the rites found in the Prayer Book before they could take any position under the Crown or attend either of the universities. In spite of these suppressions of civil rights, nonconformists knew blessing from God. The Baptists and the Independents knew some blessing. It being difficult to operate a presbyterian system without state support, the English Presbyterians succumbed to rationalism. Those Presbyterians who sought to maintain the Gospel usually became independents. The rationalistic Presbyterians transmogrified into Unitarians.

The middle of the 18th century saw the amazing work of God known as the Evangelical Awakening in Britain and the Great Awakening in America through the preaching of the Anglican ministers George Whitefield and John Wesley and others. Although the fires of revival dampened in the latter part of the century they blazed with greater heat at the end of the century and into the 19th century. This period, which saw much greater growth of church membership than during the Evangelical Awakening, is less well known about, and has been referred to as 'the forgotten revival'.

The latter part of the 18th century and 19th centuries saw major changes in society. The period is known as the Industrial Revolution. Technological changes, such as the seed drill, invented by Jethro Tull at the beginning of the 18th century, made previously labour intensive tasks much more efficient and effective. The Newcomen steam engine allowed water to be pumped from mines allowing various minerals deep underground to be mined. James Watts and Matthew Boulton further improved the steam engine, which, by the end of the century, meant that steam became the main form of motive power,

taking over from flowing water power. Richard Arkwright (who built Willersley Castle) developed (but probably didn't invent) the spinning frame which mechanised the process of cotton spinning. The Abraham Darbys (three generations with the same name) in Coalbrookdale in Shropshire, began the smelting of iron using coke instead of charcoal, thus making large-scale iron production possible, as evidenced by the Iron Bridge. This was an essential element in the Industrial Revolution, providing the basic raw material, iron, which was used in so many innovations.

All of these many developments resulted in fewer people being employed working on the land or in cottage industries. It led to the development of the factory system and what Blake called the 'dark Satanic mills'. The loss of traditional employment led some to riot and smash up some of the new machines in the name of King Ned Ludd, and were thus known as Luddites. But instead of creating unemployment these new machines led to economic growth and prosperity. Most wealth was still in the hands of a few, but the few was greater in number than previously. Wealth began to spread.

As a consequence, wealth ceased to be based only on the ownership and exploitation of land, but also upon the exploitation of ideas. Thus the rise of the self-made man, the entrepreneur who made his fortune without the benefit of wealthy ancestors.

In 1828 the Test Act was repealed, giving nonconformists the opportunity to take a full part in public life and attend university. No longer was an oath required stating that a person had taken communion according to the rites of the Book of Common Prayer. This was followed in 1829 by Catholic Emancipation when similar laws against Romanists were repealed. Even so, the Anglican Establishment still held Nonconformists in contempt, and the term Nonconformist or Dissenter were still terms of abuse in the mouths of many Anglicans.

## **Ancestry**

This paper is about lessons from the life of Thomas Barnes. It is not a detailed mini-biography, so many things will be left out. It is concerned primarily with his moral and religious beliefs and practices.

Thomas Barnes was born on 9 September 1812, in Farnworth, near Bolton, the second of three sons (the others being George and James respectively) of James Rothwell Barnes and his wife Elizabeth. James Barnes was a self-made man. He started working in his mother's business, the Golden Lion public house, but after a few years he set up a cotton spinning business. He was a Congregationalist and one of the founders of a chapel in the town. He married in 1809. The business had its ups and downs, but improved when his sons George and Thomas began working in the business. James, the third son, died at a young age as a result of an unfortunate accident in his father's

factory. There were also three sisters, Jane (b. 1811), Mary (b. 1814) and Sarah (b. 1820). The culture of the day dictated that these were bound for marriage and so not considered for running the family business.

Thomas was educated privately till the age of 14, first by a tutor and then at a private grammar school. There was still the attitude at the time amongst the members of the Establishment that education was for the rich. The poor had no need of it. One of his grammar school teachers was the Independent minister of Bolton, Mr Cover, who later became a missionary in the South Sea Islands. According to Ernest Elliot, Thomas Barnes

[Received] parental training of an exemplary Christian character, he became in early youth a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and was received as a member of the church at Farnworth, then under the pastoral care of the Rev. D. Dyson. He was soon elected a deacon and superintendent of the Sunday School, efficiently filling both offices for several years.

When his education finished Thomas became involved in the family business, often taking finished goods into Manchester for sale. It was during one of these trips to Manchester that he lost about £2 in gold. This was as a result of being overly thrifty with regard to buying new clothes.

Went to Manchester at 8 o'clock, found a hole in my pocket which had let out all my gold. I have lost one or two pounds. Money will go. I thought of saving something by wearing out my clothes. I might as well have had a new pair of trousers as have lost my money.

George, the eldest brother, was being brought up to inherit the business, but he died suddenly in 1835 and Thomas took over that position, running the business jointly with his father. After the death of his father in 1849 Thomas had sole responsibility for the running of the business until he handed over day to day control to his son in the 1860s.

Thomas became Liberal MP for Bolton in 1852. he was delayed in taking his seat by complaints that he and his fellow Bolton MP had been elected as a result of corruption. The hearing lasted two days but the petition was considered 'frivolous and vexatious' and the case was abandoned. Most politicians would have been euphoric at being elected. The following Sunday Thomas Barnes was at Farnworth Congregational Church teaching in Sunday School. He lost his seat at the next election as a result of too many people 'plumping' for one candidate, the Conservative, instead of voting for two candidates, as they were entitled to. He was persuaded to stand again in 1861 when he was returned unopposed (this was in the days before universal suffrage, and elections involved only a few thousand electors) and sat until the 1868 election.

He was a local magistrate in both Bolton and Denbighshire, and was High Sheriff of Denbighshire in 1876 (Denbighshire is just across the Welsh border

from Weston Rhyn, and a large area of the Quinta estate was located in that county. Charles Surman, in his index of nonconformist ministers, incorrectly says that the Quinta Church was incorrectly in the Shropshire Congregational Union as it was, he says, in Denbighshire.).

As if all this was not enough he was also Chairman of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway for many years, first before his election and then again from 1868 to 1883. It covered a period of great railway expansion when enormous profits could be made. He was criticised during his period of office because dividends were not as high as that of rival companies, especially the main competitor the London and North Western Railway. Part of the reason for this was the need to build defensive lines, to keep out competitors, and partly because of safety measures that were introduced. Interestingly the LYR and the LNWR merged in 1922, and the following year were forced by legislation into forming, with other railway companies, the London, Midland and Scottish Railway Company, one of the 'Big Four' that lasted till nationalisation in 1948.

He was a member of the Anti-Corn Laws League, becoming a member of its Council in December 1845. He was linked with the Bank of Bolton and in 1853 was a director of an insurance company, the Industrial Life Assurance and Deposit Company based in Wrexham.

He was involved in education for the common man. He was treasurer of the Queen Street Seminary School, a non-denominational school set up in 1838 by his father and other local manufacturers. He supported Luke Boardman's Ragged School in Bark Street in Bolton. He was treasurer of Blackburn Academy before it moved to Manchester and became the Lancashire Independent College where men trained for the Congregational ministry.

This was a busy man!

## Marriages

The name Thomas Barnes is not an uncommon name in the Bolton area. This led the *Bolton Evening News* to state, in its obituary of Thomas Barnes, that he married Elizabeth Howard Knowles in 1850 at Bolton Parish Church. But the marriage licence shows that this was a different Thomas Barnes. Our Thomas Barnes married Sarah Richardson on 29 January 1834 at St Mary the Virgin in Prestwich. This may or may not indicate that Sarah was an Anglican. Marriage was still considered to be something that could only properly be done within the confines of a Church of England building by a 'properly' ordained minister. The marriage was short. Their daughter Emily Barnes was born in September 1835 and died five weeks later. Sarah died on 3 December 1835. Mother and daughter were buried together in the burial ground of Halshaw Moor Independent Chapel in Farnworth.

Not long after his bereavement Thomas Barnes married his sister-in-law Ann. Details of the marriage cannot (yet) be found. In 1835 an Act of

Parliament was passed, the Marriage Act. This enshrined Anglican Canon Law into statute law. Lists of related persons who are forbidden to marry according to Canon Law are found in the Book of Common Prayer. Why marrying one's deceased wife's sister is wrong appears odd in the light of Scripture which specifically commands a deceased man's brother to marry his sister-in-law if there have been no children. The Book of Ruth gives a specific example. After 1835 marriages had to take place abroad to be legal. The Deceased Wife's Sister's Marriage Act 1907 removed the prohibition, but it was not until 1921 that the Deceased Brother's Widow's Marriage Act was passed. The Marriage (Prohibited Degrees) Relationship Act 1931 extended the operation of the 1907 Act to allow the marriages of nieces and nephews by marriage as well. Whatever the legality of the marriage, it lasted until Ann, never, it seems, a strong woman, died in 1880 at the age of 78.

Towards the end of his life Thomas married for a third time. His bride was the housekeeper of his Farnworth home, Limefield. The marriage took place at Cartmel Priory, near Grange-over-Sands, by special licence. This marriage does not seem to have been widely known about, and when she died in 1886 the death certificate has her maiden name and occupation. Nonetheless her name appears on his gravestone.

### **Moves to Quinta**

In 1852 Thomas Barnes purchased a country estate in north west Shropshire called The Quinta. As well as a large house, set in large grounds, the estate



*Quinta Hall*



included numerous farms. It was purchased from Frederick West who was related to the Middleton family of Chirk Castle. Thomas Barnes first action was to demolish the existing house and build a large house, now known as Quinta Hall, in Gothic style. There is some reason to believe that Augustus Pugin, the apostle of Gothic revivalism, had a hand in some of the design. Local residents complained that it was out of character for the area, though it would have suited Bolton. His subsequent behaviour towards the people of the area won them over.

There is a local rumour that Thomas fell out with the local vicar, and it was because of this that he built his own chapel. But he already held to anti-establishment, Independent principles. The village of Weston Rhyn was, at that time, part of the parish of St Martins, which lies to the east, across the main London to Holyhead trunk road. It was not until 1870 that Weston Rhyn and Bronygarth became separate parishes and a Church of England building, St John's, was built in 1878. I teasingly say that the Anglicans are the interlopers and late arrivals in the village when speaking to the vicar. It is also rumoured locally that attendance at the Quinta Church was compulsory for Thomas's workers and tenants. But this is unlikely as it would have been contrary to his principles of non-sectarian voluntarism.

It was in 1858 that the Quinta Congregational Church was built and opened. In a speech given at a dinner celebrating the opening of the church, reported in the local newspaper, Thomas said:

I do not know whether I shall be able, with any degree of propriety, to acknowledge the very kind manner in which my highly esteemed friend has brought my name, and the names of my wife and son, before you, and in which you have responded. He has expressed more than I know how to reply to, and I can only say that I feel extremely obliged to him, and that we are all glad to see him here. We have been enabled to open this house, and the other house in which we worshipped this morning. I am glad that the first party here has been one of Christian friends, assembled to upon a building dedicated to the service of God. It is my wish that this should be a house entirely devoted to the service of God and the promotion of true religion. I wish it to be the home of Christian principle. I can aspire to a higher state of things than I can ever hope to reach; I should like to make it the home of intelligence and piety. We are not our own, and all we do should show that we think of this, and that we are endeavouring to make all things converge to this one point—God's glory on earth and man's good. I am very glad that my esteemed friend Dr Raffles has introduced the conversation as he has, for it relieves us from proposing toasts and then calling upon persons to respond. I must offer to you our thanks for honouring us with your presence to-day; and there are some to whom I am under special obligation for their services in connection with the church. I must mention Dr Raffles, Mr M'Gregor, Mr Thomas, and Mr Martin, of Westminster, who all responded instantaneously and cordially to my request that they would preach at the



*Quinta Congregational Chapel*

opening; the architect, Mr Barry, and the builders, Mr Hughes and Mr Yates, to whom I am obliged for the very rapid manner in which the work has been accomplished; for the beauty of the design, and the excellence of the workmanship; and the Oswestry Old Chapel—who, though I name them last, are by no means least;—by the readiness and heartiness with which they have rendered their services, I feel exceedingly gratified: concerning the goodness of their singing I need not say one word. We have erected a building, for the worship of God, and have called it a church. This, I know, will be looked upon as an invasion of an old custom, which designates all places of worship not exactly connected with the Church of England, as chapels. I mean to break through that rule (Hear, hear). I do not understand why the name of ‘Church’ in England should be confined to one denomination. In other countries it is not so; in Scotland and America, and also in those parts of the Continent where more than one denomination exists, every place of worship is called a church, and why England should be an exception to this rule I do not know. It can only be a relic of those bygone times when oppression and persecution existed, and I see no reason why we should not break through it. And we have called the building a Congregational Church. I need not say why I have done so, because all who know me know, that if I did build a church, I should build for that form of worship which I practise. I have called it a Congregational Church because I think the congregational style of worship the simplest and most in accordance with that practised by the early Christians; I call it so because I like the congregational form of worship and government best. I do not say it must be the most scriptural; I know there are various opinions on that point, and all we

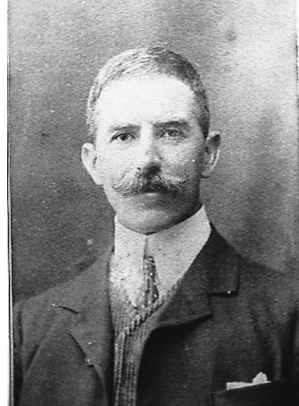
can do is to have our own opinions and go on in peace. I hope the pure gospel will be preached in the church as long as it stands, and I desire that it shall not be shut to any other denomination. It must have a name that we may be known who and what we are, but I do hope it will be open to preachers of any denomination whatsoever who preach the gospel. I should like to see a clergyman of the Church of England there (Hear, hear). One reason I can mention why I call it a Congregational Church, if it were an Episcopal Church, its doors would be closed against every other denomination. I would leave it to any man, whether my plan is not the best—to have as broad a platform as possible. Unfortunately it has been the opinion in this country, but I hope it is now dying out, that the building of any other church is an attack on the Church of England. I think that a great error. I look upon all the orthodox denominations as strong buttresses outside the Church. We feed the Church, we sustain it, and I believe it has, for the last hundred and fifty years, been greatly indebted to other churches. I believe it is better than it would have been if there had been no dissent. I consider the Church of England as an integral and very important part of the Protestant Church; we cannot dispense with; we must, as Christians, try to purify it, and make it more valuable. I believe there is not one denomination of true Christians which can be dispensed with without doing harm to Protestantism. I will say no more, but merely again thank you for being our guests, and thank Dr Raffles for the service which he has rendered; it would be out of place for me to say anything concerning his sermon, but I feel thankful that the first discourse in the church has been one so calculated to exalt our Saviour, before whom I hope that all of us may cast our crowns.

Interestingly, though he named his chapel The Quinta Congregational Church the church that met in the building was not formally constituted until 1862. In the first minute book, which has a preface of Congregational principles printed inside it, Thomas and Ann Barnes are listed as members three and four on the members' roll. The first two were the new minister, J.D. Riley and his wife. It appears that Barnes did not want to constitute the church until there was a minister to lead and teach it. The first minutes of the Church report:

February 27th, 1862. On Thursday evening, February 27th, 1862, at 7 o'clock, nine persons, professing themselves Christians, met in the Quinta Congregational Church and joined in solemn covenant and Christian fellowship, thereby constituting themselves into an independent church, on Congregational principles. The names of those thus entering into a mutual covenant and fellowship are: John Dobson Riley, minister, Judith Riley, his wife; Thomas Barnes, Anne Barnes, his wife; John Thomas, John Williams, David Ellerker, John Broughall, Robert Salmon. The Rev. John D. Riley opened the service, as presiding minister, by reading the Scriptures from Ephesians ii., and engaging in prayer, after which the Rev. John Lockwood, of Oswestry, gave an address on 'The principles and discipline of a Congregational Church.' The Rev. F.B. Brown, of Wrexham, then gave an address on 'The requirements for Church Membership,' after which the

Covenant as prefixed to the roll of Church members in this book, was read by Rev. J. D. Riley, as also the 'twenty principles of religion,' and thirteen 'principles of Church order and discipline,' as declared by the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and prefixed to the beginning of this book. Assent having been signified to these by holding up of the right hand, the Lord's Supper was then partaken of by the above-named persons, as a pledge of the covenant into which they had entered with each other and with their God. The service closed with singing and prayer.

Though the Chapel and accompanying sizeable manse were his personal possession, and he paid the minister's salary in full, he was clearly a humble man. His concern was that the minister should be faithful to the gospel. No conflicts were recorded between the minister and his benefactor. A consequence of this generous arrangement was that the church was able to use its offerings entirely in the support of missionary labours. Its first missionary in 1891 was W.E. McFarlane who laboured in Mongolia. His health failed and he had to return and the Church then supported T. Cochrane, an ordained doctor, in the same field. Thomas Barnes's generosity



*W.E. McFarlane*

spread wider too, as he expressed his view that part of his reason for purchasing the Quinta estate was 'that he might be able to give his ministerial friends an opportunity of pleasant and profitable relaxation when, by overwork, they had become exhausted, and needed rest'. He had earlier in life considered entering the ministry himself, but decided against it.

Barnes was concerned about being non-sectarian, illustrated by his support of the Methodist chapel in Chirk, to which he contributed towards the cost of the building and laid the foundation stone (indeed, there are many non-Anglican chapels which have his name on the foundation stone). The feeling of the local Anglicans was not reciprocated. The building of the Chapel caused great annoyance to his Tory neighbours. The local press had responded positively to the opening, but this was followed by a series of negative letters. Richard Stokes was the Master of the National [Anglican] School in the neighbouring village of Selattyn. He had been appointed by the vicar, John Husband, on the basis that he was a member of the Church of England. On 15 November 1858 Mr Husband wrote to Mr Stokes.

I now find you are a dissenter, and in the habit of attending dissenting places of worship. I cannot continue to employ you as a schoolmaster beyond the end of the present quarter.

Stokes and his wife had attended the opening of the Chapel and some of the services. He replied thus to Mr Husband,

I am not ashamed to confess that I have on several occasions attended the Congregational Church at the Quinta, and I unhesitatingly affirm, I have never heard anything contrary to the pure and unbiased Gospel of our blessed Saviour, such as I believe to be the rule and faith of the Evangelical section of the Church of England.

This reply did not go down well with the vicar, who wrote back on 17 November

I do not take the Oswestry paper, or I should have warned you immediately on seeing that you and your wife had taken a prominent part at the opening of a Sandemanian meeting house.

Mr Stokes's name had not been included in the article in the *Oswestry Advertiser*. Someone had informed on him. Sandemanianism is named after Robert Sandeman, who taught that a person becomes a Christian by the mere intellectual assent to certain basic doctrines and not by having a felt change of heart and trusting in Jesus Christ which most nonconformists held to. It was designed to be a slur and probably a reference to nonconformists not practising 'ritual'.

Mr Stokes brought the correspondence to an end with a letter on 19 November,

One final word regarding dissent. I believe that *if* there be any *sin* in dissent, it rests entirely on the head of the clergy of the Church of England, who by their apathy and indifference to the flock over which they have been made overseers, have compelled the people to seek out more faithful pastors.

He closed his letter by saying that he had had legal advice and claimed a full quarter's pay from the date he was given notice. He then wrote to the paper to ask them to publish the exchange of letters.

In January 1862 Thomas Barnes was speaking at a meeting in Bolton to raise money for a new chapel (he contributed £500 and laid the foundation stone in April 1862. The new chapel opened in 1863). Speaking of the contrast between the American and British methods of chapel building he said

In America we are told that some persons will raise up a splendid church, at a cost from £5,000 to £10,000, appoint a minister, and ask nobody for a shilling. They don't give the money, but let the building to the congregation at a rental,—the seat rents going towards the payment of the rent, and the surplus to keep the building in repair. They never think of paying the minister out of the seat rents, but levy a voluntary tax for his support.

In Britain pew rents were paid, and if the church was poorly supported the minister suffered.

The chapels are never filled, and if you make inquiries as to the cause—inquire whether the ministers are good preachers, you will learn that they are excellent speakers, and that the thinness of the congregations is attributed to the bad system of renting the pews. Is that system right which allows our chapels to be sometimes only even a third full? Do we build chapels in order that some man may occupy one pew himself? That is the case in many places, and it is a system that should at once be corrected, for not until it is shall we see our chapels full.

At the same meeting he spoke also about his Nonconformist principles.

[T]he anniversary of that day when an immense number of our Nonconformist forefathers went out to maintain their independence in another land,—nay, not went out, for they were forced out—and we as Nonconformists and as Dissenters should bear this in mind, that we are Dissenters because we were forced out of the Church of England. There is a feeling that the Dissenters are a set of people who *don't* go to the Church because they *won't* go; but I object to the words Dissenters, as I don't go to the Church because I dislike it; and I don't think anybody living has a right to call me a Dissenter, for this reason—that I have as much right to keep up my standard of state, and say that every man who does not profess my faith is a Dissenter. [...] These men went out because they would not bow to the will of the Church; and from that circumstance we owe all our privileges—our liberty of conscience—our liberty of worship—and our very freedom. We have to thank and bless those patriotic and noble-hearted men for the privileges we are enjoying at this moment, of being allowed to utter what thoughts we like upon this subject and others of vital importance. I wonder what those barbarous men of the Church would have done to me, if I had said the things in the year 1662 which I have said this evening. I fancy that I should have been in a dungeon before another night.

In 1882 the Quinta Congregational Sunday School was opened. It had been Ann Barnes's desire for such a school but she had not lived to see it. The building was probably much grander than she had anticipated. This was before the start of universal state education, and so was not just used for teaching Sunday School, but also as a day school. The building of the county primary school removed the need for it to be used for regular education. There was already a school based on similar principles in Bronygarth. This school continued until 1956 when pupil numbers fell to an unsustainable level. It was a British and Foreign Schools Society establishment. Joseph Lancaster, a Quaker, in 1808 formed 'the Royal Lancastrian Institution for Promoting the Education of the Poor' which subsequently received the title of the 'British and Foreign School Society'. Through his own personal exertions, and the aid of the society, schools of an unsectarian character were soon established in all the principal towns in England. Lancaster's principle was that education ought not to be made subservient to the propagation of the peculiar tenets of any sect. It was founded upon the broadest and most unsectarian principles. In response, in 1811 the 'National School Society' was founded which made it a condition



*Quinta Congregational Sunday School*

that all children should be instructed in the liturgy and catechism of the Church and be compelled to attend the public worship of the Established Church on the Sunday. The founders of this Society advanced the principle that if any education was to be given to the poor, the Established Church alone had the right to give it.

### **Edward Miall and the Liberation Society**

As a consequence of Thomas Barnes's views on religion, it is not surprising that he was associated with Edward Miall. Miall was born in Portsmouth, 8 May 1809 and died at Sevenoaks on 30 April 1881. He was a Congregational firebrand. A Congregational minister in Ware and then Leicester, he turned to journalism and politics. In 1841 he founded the weekly newspaper *The Nonconformist*. He reasoned that the repeal of the Test Act in 1828 was insufficient for the Nonconformist cause to make progress. The balance was too heavily weighted in favour of the Anglican establishment. Nonconformist marriages and burials were not considered by the state to be adequate. Church rates still had to be paid to the parish church. Thomas Barnes complained in Parliament that bailiffs would sometimes seize the possessions of the poor to pay this tax. The only hope for true religious freedom was complete disestablishment. Miall thus began a lengthy campaign that involved publishing, politics and persuasion. He found the British Anti-State-Church Association in 1844. Recognizing the name as too negative he changed it to

the Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control in 1853. It became known by its shortened title, The Liberation Society. Meetings were held up and down the country to argue in favour of disestablishment and electing Liberal MPs who were sympathetic to disestablishment. Miall became MP for Rochdale (1852–1857) and then Bradford (1860–1874). In 1852 forty Liberal MPs were elected as a result of this campaign, one of whom was Thomas Barnes. A degree of success came in 1868 with the abolition of compulsory church rates, and then in 1870 with the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, though much of the reason for that appears to have been a sop to the Roman Catholic majority. (The Church of Wales was disestablished eventually in 1921, but Scotland and England remain established.) Partly because of the parliamentary time taken up with the issue of Ireland, time for pushing the disestablishment cause was limited. Numerous other issues concerned the Liberationists, especially the subject of state funded education. The Anglicans were insistent that education should be according to the Book of Common Prayer. Miall et al insisted that state funded education should be non-sectarian. Eventually the Liberationists won their case. It was probably against this background that Thomas Barnes, who was treasurer of the Liberation Society, built the Quinta Congregational Sunday School, the Trust Deed of which is entirely non-sectarian.

### **Shropshire Congregational Union treasurer 1861–1887**

It was during his tenure as treasurer that some progress was made in chapel building, mainly as a consequence of a challenge he issued to the churches,

As to the funds of the Association, soon after Mr Thomas Barnes of the Quinta, was appointed treasurer, a challenge was given by him that if the churches would double their contributions, in other words raise £200 instead of £100, he would give £100, thus raising the income to £300 a year. Whether this was taken up or not I am not able to make out. In several of the balance sheets there is no mention of this special amount, so the churches would appear to have failed to take up the challenge.

### **Ownership of local coal mines and local tramways**

Included as part of the Quinta estate were the Trehowell and Quinta coal mines. Thomas Barnes built tramways (which explains some of the odd bridges and tunnels in the area) to transport coal and bricks to the railway and canal. The Glyn Valley tramway, which ran from slate quarries at Glyn Ceiriog to Chirk, were used initially, but when a new route came into use he extended his own lines. The mines became worked out by 1889 but the Quinta Colliery continued to produce clay from which bricks were made until the turn of the century. The environmental impact of the mines was minimal. Instead of the usual spoil heaps, spoil was taken



Thomas Barnes is noted as an early environmentalist, having carefully obliterated any unsightly traces of his works by removing the spoil and transporting it to the river Ceiriog near Pont Faen where it was tipped into the river at times of high water, and so dispersed without trace. Legend has it that he built the tunnel under the Pont Faen-Weston Rhyn road as a route for the spoil, but this is highly unlikely since he had ensured that the old G.V.T. track was available—probably mainly for this purpose.

It is connection with the mines that a slur is often repeated locally. Hurdsmen reported the story of an aged miner

Another unlikely legend, although reported as a factual account by a former employee of the Trehowell Colliery, one George Jones of St Martin's (aged about 70 when he told the tale in about 1950), related how, in 1895, as office boy in charge of the powder magazine keys, he was sent with workmen to get explosives for use in the mine. For this purpose a pony and tub running on rails was used: the noisy clatter of the pony and tub as they approached Trehowell Wood disturbed game birds just at the moment when Mr Barnes and a shooting party arrived—to find their targets already flown! The story tells how Barnes was so angry about his ruined shoot that he swore to close the colliery and brickyards, and level them, so that no one would know they had ever existed. This he allegedly did, dismissing between 350 and 400 men in the process, to the great indignation of the raconteur (and of a gullible left-wing journalist reporting the interview). As Barnes was a leading Congregationalist and an outstanding philanthropist, to say nothing of the fact that he was far too good a businessman to close any enterprise in a fit of pique, I think the story has to be taken with several pinches of salt although I do no doubt think that it must have earned the author many a free pint over the telling! The 'levelling' mentioned in the story to add verisimilitude was, of course, true and verifiable as an environmental factor mentioned earlier.

As Thomas Barnes was ill and in decline at the time of the alleged incident and virtually housebound it may be meant as a slur on his son. But there is no evidence that this ever, in fact, happened. The collieries had been worked out by the alleged date, and care was taken to minimize the environmental impact, so that there is virtually no evidence remaining that the collieries were ever there.

### **Latter years and death**

Not long after his third wife, Elizabeth's death in 1886 his health began to decline markedly. He had already suffered the amputation of a foot after a carriage accident in Manchester in 1851. The *Manchester Times* report of this event said

On Monday forenoon last, an accident occurred by which Thomas Barnes, Esq., of Farnworth, met with a most serious accident and two men were also much hurt and bruised. It appears that about half past eleven o'clock, Mr Barnes was proceeding up Deansgate, with his servant man, in a gig; and when at the top of White Lion Brow, the horse suddenly became restive, and reared and plunged most violently, becoming quite unmanageable; and having knocked down two

men in the street, ran against the shop of Mr James Yates, general dealer, and was completely thrown over, and Mr Barnes and his servant were dashed to the ground, but the latter was not much hurt. One of the men knocked down had his forehead severely cut, and the other was wounded in the legs, and Mr Barnes received a most serious fracture in the leg. He was immediately conveyed to Mr Mallett's, surgeon, and from thence home, followed by Mr Mallett, Mr Snape and other surgeons, who found it necessary to amputate the leg above the ankle joint. After the horse had recovered its legs, it dashed off at a furious rate up Brinks Brow to the top, where it stopped, no other accident occurring on the road. From inquiries made by our correspondent yesterday, Mr Barnes appears to have somewhat recovered from the shock, and is considered to be in a favourable state.

He appears never to have made reference to the accident or the amputation, except, perhaps, obliquely when giving his last speech to his constituents as an MP in January 1868. 'People don't know what they can do until they try. As long as people walk upon crutches, they never will walk without them.' He appears to have taken the same attitude as Douglas Bader, that he would not allow amputation to alter in any way the manner in which he lived his life.

He suffered a series of strokes which brought most of his activities to an end. He took up permanent residence at the Quinta living with his son and daughter-in-law. He died of influenza on 24 April 1897. Several memorial services took place in chapels he had supported in the area. His body was taken back to Farnworth for burial where large crowds attended the funeral on 28 April.

### **Subsequent history**

Thomas Barnes's gravestone included the names of his three wives. It has in recent years been removed by the council for safe keeping as a consequence of vandalism of the graveyard. Plans have been drawn up, but not yet implemented, for re-siting the gravestone, probably in the park which he had gifted to the people of Farnworth in memory of his father and the coming of age of his son.

Thomas Barnes's property passed into the ownership of his son James Richardson Barnes, who only survived him by two years. Property passed to his wife Ellen. Ellen Barnes wrote a will in 1913 detailing the distribution of her assets. The Quinta Congregational Chapel (no longer called the Quinta Congregational Church) and manse were to become a separate trust with locally appointed trustees. Ellen died in 1921 and is buried next to her husband in front of the Quinta Congregational Chapel. She had previously erected a lych gate in memory of her husband. In 1929 the family chose to sell the Quinta estate. A large advert for the auction sale graces one wall of the Oswestry Library. Quinta Hall was purchased by Mr Charles Price of the McVitie Price biscuit manufacturers. Price never lived on the site and in his will left the site in trust for Evangelical Christian purposes. It was used for

many years by Dr Barnardo's as an approved school for 'bad boys' (as the villagers called them). In 1982 it ceased to be used in this way and Barnardos decided to sell the property. But one of the teachers, Peter Bevington, knew what the Trust Deed said and was able to negotiate a transfer of trusteeship to Cloverley Hall. The site became a Christian conference centre, a much needed headquarters for Operation Mobilisation (their offices in Danzig Street, central Manchester were in an appalling state), and a Cause for Concern (now known as Prospects) home for mentally handicapped people. Cause for Concern closed its operations there in the 1990s. In September 2010 the Quinta Estate celebrated 25 years of use in its current form.

The Quinta Church continued as a separate Trust until 1956. In that year it merged with another trust deriving from Ellen Barnes's will to form the Ellen Barnes Charitable Trust. The main reason for this I have not been able to fathom, but one of the bequests of Ellen's will was the building of almshouses on the land next to the Chapel, and these were built in 1956. In 1972, during the ministry of Roland Englefield, the Church voted with the majority of Congregational Churches in England and Wales to join in with the United



*Thomas Barnes's monument in Farnworth Park. On the front face of the monument is a relief portrait of Thomas Barnes. Engraved on the other three sides are:  
'In commemoration of my son's coming of age and in memory of his grandfather. I present and dedicate this Park to the people of Farnworth for their benefit forever.'*

*'This Park was presented by Thomas Barnes Esq. M.P.'*

*'Opened by the Right Hon. W.E. Gladstone M.P. Oct. 12th 1864'*

Reformed Church. It was during Mr Englefield's ministry that the trustees sold what is now known as the Old Quinta Manse (the six bedroomed house was getting to big for the Englefields to cope with) and the caretaker's cottage became the manse. Which was a pity as Mr Englefield's successor had eight children. In 1980 Derek Baines, a local man who had joined the police in Birmingham and then been converted and attended Birmingham Bible Institute, offered to become the new minister, Mr Englefield having retired in the late 70s. His one condition was that the Church withdrew from the URC, which the Church agreed to do. It was able to do this because the Trust Deeds were still held by the Ellen Barnes Charitable Trust. In 1993, at the instigation of Gordon Booth, John Bale was asked to approach the Charity Commission with a view to separating the Chapel and manse from the Ellen Barnes Charitable Trust, as none of the Trustees had any dealings with the Church except through the Trust. In his letter to the Charity Commission he quoted from the URC Act of 1972, that non-uniting churches had the right to appoint trustees of their own choosing, and that this is what the Church now wished to do. The Charity Commission responded by saying that he had completely misunderstood that section of the Act. In his reply John Bale insisted that his interpretation of that section of the act was the correct one 'because I wrote it! The Charity Commission grudgingly agreed and this led to the Ellen Barnes Charitable Trust being split, with a new Quinta Congregational Chapel Trust Deed being written, enshrining that statement in Ellen Barnes's will that the Chapel should be used for a 'free evangelical church'. The EFCC Trust Corporation Ltd was appointed by the church meeting as Trustees.

The Quinta Sunday School had not fared so well, having no income or liquid assets. It had been used for a variety of purposes as well as a Sunday School down through the years, including jumble sales, social events and an edition of the BBC radio programme Gardener's Question Time. By 1990 the Sunday School Trust had no money, just the Sunday School building and a caretakers' cottage. After a disastrous let to a couple who thought, as it was a charity, they could get away with paying no rent, the cottage was sold and provided capital which generates some income to keep the building in repair. It continues to be used for Sunday School work, albeit on a much smaller scale than heretofore, Church social events and for home-schoolers in the church. We are hoping that members of the church will be able (council permitting) to use part of the building to run their home schooling materials business.

### **Lessons from the life of Thomas Barnes**

'If you want a job done, ask a busy man to do it.' Thomas Barnes was such a man. We live in an age where the common culture thinks it unfair, even wicked, for anyone to be immensely wealthy. Nowhere does Scripture say such

a thing. It says that those who have more wealth have greater temptations and should consider the poor more. They should be generous. The principal is to give 'as you have received' (2 Corinthians 8). Thomas Barnes lived by this principal. He learned at an early age that money was not a goal in and of itself. It was only any good if it was used.

Went to Manchester at 8 o'clock, found a hole in my pocket which had let out all my gold. I have lost one or two pounds. Money will go. I thought of saving something by wearing out my clothes. I might as well have had a new pair of trousers as have lost my money.

Money is a difficult thing to manage, it is hard to get and hard to keep, and troublesome to have the direction of.

While I ought not to be covetous or filled with the cares of this world, I ought as a matter of duty to look after and take care of such property as God gives me. I ought to look upon it as an instrument of usefulness.

One gentleman only gave him £5 when he was collecting subscriptions for the Lancashire College. He wrote:

Felt sorry that a man with so much more than he spends should not see it his duty to give more to such an important object.

Frugality was not always the wisest choice. So throughout his life he sought to make wise use of his assets for the good of people in general, Christians in particular, for the good of the gospel and the glory of God. But where are the wealthy Congregationalists of today? How often do we give to the charities of the world, which affect only people's lives in this world, and neglect the eternal well-being of sinners? The world happily supports this-worldly charities. The world will not support gospel work, whether here or overseas.

Thomas Barnes illustrated the Protestant work-ethic. Work hard as to the Lord and not worldly masters, and our labours will be rewarded. Be slothful and we will find little of this world's wealth.

What are we doing with our lives? What lasting memorials with there be of us? Will a future Studies Conference have a paper on our lives and what we have done for the cause of the gospel?

## Sources

I am heavily indebted to Jenny Barnes of Poulton-le-Fylde for her extensive research on the life of Thomas Barnes (although she is not related to him). It is hoped that her researches will be published in the not too distant future.

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## Past Congregational Studies Conference Papers

### 1981

- Alan Tovey* Robert Browne: The Morning Star of Congregationalism  
*Derek O. Swann* The Church Meeting  
*Peter Seccombe* John Angell James

### 1982

- John Legg* Children of the Covenant (available as a booklet)  
*Dr Alan C. Clifford* The Christian Mind of Philip Doddridge  
*David Boorman* The Origins of the London Missionary Society

### 1983

- Hefion Elias* PT Forsyth—Prophet of the 20th Century  
*Michael Boland* Oliver Cromwell  
*Neville Rees* Prayer Life of the Local Church

### 1984

- Gordon T. Booth* The Hymn Writers of English Congregationalism  
*E. S. Guest* John Robinson (1575–1625)  
*Geraint Fielder* RW Dale and the Non-Conformist Conscience.

### 1985

- R. Tudur Jones* Walter Craddock (1606–1659)  
*R. Tudur Jones* John Penry (1563–1593)  
*Peter Golding* Owen on the Mortification of Sin

### 1986

- Peter J. Beale* Jonathan Edwards and the Phenomena of Revival  
*Derek O. Swann* An Earnest Ministry  
*Peter Collins* Thomas Wilson

### 1987

- Digby L. James* John Cotton's Doctrine of the Church  
*Michael Plant* Richard Davis and God's Day of Grace  
*Bryan Jones* Lionel Fletcher—Evangelist

### 1988

- Gwynne Evans* Richard Mather—The True Use of Synods  
*Alan Tovey* That Proud Independency  
*Gilbert Kirby* The Countess of Huntingdon

### 1989

- Gordon T. Booth* Josiah Conder—Hymn-writer and Compiler  
*John Legg* The Use and Abuse of Church History

*George Hemming* Savoy, 1833 and All That

### 1990

- John Semper* David Bogue—A Man for All Seasons  
*Leighton James* Griffith John—The Founder of the Hankow Mission  
*Ian Rees* Jonathan Edwards on the Work of the Holy Spirit

### 1991

- A. Kelly* What Makes Churches Grow  
*E. S. Guest* Joseph Parker—The Immortal Thor of Pulpitdom  
*Peter Seccombe* RW Dale—Standing Firm or Drifting Dangerously

### 1992

- Dr Arthur Fraser* When Evolutionary Thought and Congregational Thinkers Meet  
*David Saunders* Living Stones—Our Heritage, Our Future  
*John Little* John Cennick—Conflict and Conciliation in the Evangelical Awakening.

### 1993 Some Separatists

- Alan Tovey* A Reforming Pair—Henry Barrow and John Greenwood  
*R. Tudur Jones* John Penry

### 1994 Perseverance and Assurance

- Ian Densham* Sherwood, Selina and Salubrious Place  
*Norman Bonnett* John Eliot—Son of Nazeing  
*Guy Davies* Thomas Goodwin and the Quest for Assurance

### 1995 Ministers and Missionaries

- Peter J. Beale* The Rise and Development of the London Missionary Society  
*Derek O. Swann* Thomas Haweis 1734–1820  
*Brian Higham* David Jones—The Angel of Llangan

### 1996 Freedom and Faithfulness

- E. S. Guest* From CERF to EFCC  
*Digby L. James* Heroes and Villains—The Controversy between John Cotton and Roger Williams  
*John Semper* Edward Parsons—Influence from a Local Church

## **1997 From Shropshire to Madagascar via Bath**

- Robert Pickles* The Rise and Fall of the Shropshire  
Congregational Union  
*Philip Swann* William Jay—Pastor and Preacher  
*Noel Gibbard* Madagascar

## **1998 Eternal Light, Adoption and Livingstone**

- Gordon T. Booth* Thomas Binney, 1798–1874  
*Gordon Cooke* The Doctrine of Adoption & the  
Preaching of Jeremiah Burroughs  
Arthur Fraser David Livingstone

## **1999 JD Jones, Lloyd-Jones and 1662**

- Peter Williams* J. D. Jones of Bournemouth  
*John Legg* God's Own Testimony: Dr Martyn  
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*Mervyn Neal* The Great Ejection of 1662

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- Ian Harrison* John Wycliffe, Father of  
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*Bryan Jones* John Owen's Evangelical Theology  
*Kenneth Brownell* Robert and James Haldane and the  
Quest for Evangelical Union

## **2001 Grace 'tis a Charming Sound**

- Gordon Cooke* At One? A History of  
Congregational Thinking on the  
Atonement  
*John Hancock* Philip Doddridge 1702–1751:  
Missionary Visionary  
*Neil Stewart* Baptism in the Congregational  
Tradition

## **2002 Lovers of the Truth of God**

- Michael Plant* Congregationalists and Confessions  
*E. S. Guest* The Geneva Bible  
*John Semper* William Huntingdon

## **2003 Jonathan Edwards**

- Robert E. Davis* 'What Must I do to Be Saved?'  
Jonathan Edwards and the Nature  
of True Conversion  
*Robert E. Davis* A Father of the Modern Mission  
Movement  
*Robert E. Davis* Jonathan Edwards and Britain: 18th  
Century Trans-Atlantic Networking

## **2004 Revival!**

- Derek Swann* Congregationalism and the Welsh  
Revival 1904–05

- Cyril Aston* James Montgomery—Sheffield's  
Sacred Psalmist  
*Eric Alldritt* The Greater Excellence of the New  
Covenant

## **2005 Missionaries and Martyrs**

- Peter Taylor* John Williams, Apostle to Polynesia  
(1796–1839)  
*Brian Higham* David Picton Jones  
*Neil Richards* The faith and courage of the  
Marian Martyrs

## **2006 Challenge, Memories and Adventure**

- Peter Robinson* Congregationalism's Boom Years  
*Peter J. Beale* The Doctor—25 Years On  
*David Gregson* The Adventure of the English Bible

## **2007 Courage, Covenants and the Countess**

- Peter Seccombe* Gilmour of Mongolia  
*David Legg* Bringing up Children for God  
*Lucy Beale* Selina Countess of Huntingdon  
1707–1791

## **2008 Independency in Practice and Theory**

- Dr Arthur Fraser* Congregationalism and Spiritual  
Renewal in the Scottish Highlands  
*Joseph Greenald* Congregational Independency  
1689–1735: Standing Firm in an  
Age of Decline  
*John Semper* The Savoy Declaration of Faith and  
Order, 1658

## **2009 The Fruit of Faith**

- Dr Ian Shaw* Andrew Reed (1768–1862):  
Preaching, Pastoral Work, and  
Social Concern  
*Gordon Cooke* The Cambridge Platform (1649)  
*Dr Tony Lambert* Robert Morrison (1782–1834), first  
Protestant missionary to China

## **2010 Growing in Grace**

- George Speers* History of Congregationalism in  
Ireland  
*Dr Robert Oliver* Cornelius Winter of Marlborough  
(1741–1808)

Recordings of papers from 1989  
onwards can be found at  
[www.sermonaudio.com/efcc-uk](http://www.sermonaudio.com/efcc-uk)

# EFCC *publications*

## **Telling Another Generation**

This book contains a symposium of papers originally written to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of EFCC, and as a tribute to Stan Guest, who has been closely involved in the work of EFCC ever since its formation, and retired as secretary of the Fellowship in 1989.

## **Serving as a Deacon by John Legg**

‘Diaconates might find it useful to supply each member with a copy of this work’—*Evangelicals Now*.

## **Evangelical & Congregational**

A brief survey of Congregational history, church order, confessions of faith, the ministry, worship and sacraments. Includes *The Savoy Declaration of Faith*.

## **After Conversion—What? by Lionel Fletcher**

A reprint of the forthright and biblical advice to new Christians by Lionel Fletcher, one of Congregationalism’s foremost pastors and evangelists.

## **Children of the Covenant by John Legg**

The biblical basis for infant baptism.

## **Signs and Seals of the Covenant by CG Kirkby**

A biblical review of the doctrine of Christian baptism.

***EFCC also has available these books about  
Congregational church government***

## **Wandering Pilgrims by ES Guest**

A review of the history of Congregationalism from its formative years to the present day. The author was involved in the negotiations between those churches which joined the United Reformed Church in 1972 and those who did not.

## **Manual of Congregational Principles by RW Dale**

The definitive work of Congregational church government.

## **Christian Fellowship or The Church Member's Guide by John Angell James**

A practical manual for church members to learn their duties and responsibilities.

## **Visible Saints: The Congregational Way by GF Nuttall**

An historical study of the growth of Congregationalism in the years 1640–1660 by a highly respected scholar of church history.

*All these items are available from the Office Manager. The Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches, PO Box 34, Beverley, East Yorkshire, HU17 0YX*



