

Introduction

Reader, before you begin, there is something I would like you to understand. I want you to know what this book is not!

I do not pretend that my book is a learned treatise on church history, nor have I set out to produce a volume that is the last word on the subject. My purpose is far more modest, much less ambitious than that. Yet, perhaps, for a great many, far more useful simply because it is so modest.

Nor do I claim that my book is the fruit of original research. My debt to previous and better writers will be obvious to you, but often I do not acknowledge this as I go along because it would give the impression that I have tried to write an ‘academic’ book, and this is the last thing I want. I do not have the ability, in any case. But I do pay the warmest tribute to those who have laboured in this field before me. Without their efforts this volume would never have seen the light of day. In addition, I have supplied a list of my sources for those who wish to explore the subject in more detail. In this connection, it will be self-evident that I have not written with the idea of producing source material for authors. I have tried to be accurate, of course, but I respectfully ask those who wish to take the work further to consult original sources for themselves.

I have no illusions about the volume in your hands. I realise that I merely tell a tale which has been told before; but, I fear, a tale which has been largely forgotten. I have tried to give a simple but interesting account of a very important period in church history. In truth, the story is far more than ‘interesting’. It is thrilling and moving. And this is what I have tried to capture. I hope you find that I have succeeded, at least to a measure.

But wait a minute, do I hear you say? Church history... can that be interesting... thrilling? History! Why should I want to know about history?

Well... what is the answer to that? Why should present-day Christians want to know about the history of the church? Why should we bother our heads over the quarrels of far-off days, quarrels which some might say would be better forgotten? Should we not be up-to-date, getting on with living the Christian life now? Should we not be interested in the future, not the past? Why spend time looking back?

The answer is very clear. First and foremost, Christians must be interested in church history because God commands us to be interested in it. In his word, he speaks to us very often about his dealings with his people in past ages, and we are commanded and encouraged to keep alive the memory of his works. For example, the Hebrews were commanded to teach their children the facts and the significance of the history of God’s dealings with them (Exod. 12:26-27 and Josh. 4:6-7). Then again, when

Introduction

God was about to revive his people, and at other times (1 Sam. 10:18), he would remind them of his dealings with them in the past (Judg. 6:7-10; 1 Kings 18:36, for instance). Above all, we have the history of the early church recorded by the Holy Spirit in the Acts. I do not want to make this Introduction far too long, so I content myself with the mere reference to just a few passages from the Bible and let them speak for themselves:

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what deeds you did in their days, in days of old... (Ps. 44:1).

I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times... I will remember the works of the LORD; surely I will remember your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all your work, and talk of your deeds (Ps. 77:5,11-12).

I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength and his wonderful works that he has done... (Ps. 78:2-4).

I remember the days of old; I meditate on all your works; I muse on the work of your hands (Ps. 143:5).

One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts... All your works shall praise you, O LORD, and your saints shall bless you. They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and talk of your power, to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom (Ps. 145:4,10-12).

Surely the Bible teaches us that if, as Christians, we show no interest in church history then we are really saying that we are not interested in God's works. And so, if we show no interest in the history of the church, we are being disobedient to the commands of God's word. And apostasy is around the corner. The Hebrews failed to keep God's works in mind, with grievous results. We are warned about it:

We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers... did not understand your wonders; they did not remember the multitude of your mercies, but rebelled... they soon forgot his works... they forgot God their Saviour, who had done great things... wondrous works... awesome things... Therefore he said that he would destroy them... (Ps. 106:6-7,13,21-23).

When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which he had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers... (Judg. 2:10-12).

Note the connection: 'When... then'...

There is another answer to that question, Why should we spend time looking back? It is this: Without doubt that is the very thing which Christians must always be doing! We should always be looking back,

Introduction

should we not? Yes! Looking back to the Bible. The answer to every question in Christianity – yes, every question – whether of doctrine or duty, is found in the Scriptures, and only there. If a man is not looking back, in this sense, then he cannot be a Christian at all!

Very reasonably it might be objected that in this book I am only looking back four hundred years. But this would be a superficial comment. The fact is the men and women I write about wanted to reform the church in their generation. Why? And in what way did they want it changed? From what? To what? And how did they hope to change it? The one answer to all those questions was, and is, by going back to the New Testament. *They* were looking back! Times without number they referred their enemies to the Scriptures and the practice of the New Testament churches. But they turned back to *Scripture*, I stress. They did not look to tradition, custom or the Fathers. They did not trust the dreams and visions of the mystics. They did not go to the pagans for their ideas. No! They looked back to the Bible. This is what Christians must always do. And that is part of my purpose in writing this book. Reader, I am not only interested in the mere history of the church – I want to do what I can to take you back to the New Testament.

Nevertheless, the question remains: Why study this particular period of church history? Why should we be so interested in the events which took place, largely in England, during the years 1517-1644?

The point is, in 1517 nearly all the church throughout Europe, and in England in particular, was shackled in slavery to Rome and held in gross darkness. And yet just over a century later the scene was very, very different. Instead of one massive State Church – the Papacy – there were countless, separate, independent churches in all of Europe. Instead of a universal Church membership based on infant baptism and the citizenship of a particular country, many of these separate churches were formed out of baptised believers only; that is, those men and women who gave a credible witness that they were regenerate and who had obeyed Christ by baptism upon profession of their faith.

In other words, in 1517 the Church in England was a gross distortion of the revealed pattern and had become a monstrosity; whereas by the middle of the next century a glorious reformation had taken place. I freely admit that the separate churches were far from perfect, but they were so much closer to the New Testament order than the Papacy – it is not too much to say that a transformation had taken place which was little short of the miraculous.

Surely this is a story worthy to be recorded? I go further and say that it is sinful to neglect it.

Introduction

Then again, the consequences which followed from the struggle to recover the New Testament church in England during this period were very far-reaching. And not only for England. The Low Countries, for instance, were affected very much by the events which took place in these islands during this time. But not only Holland – all Europe was transformed. What is more, the modern history of Massachusetts, then New England in general, and eventually of all America, was formed out of the events which I write about. Who has not heard of the *Mayflower* and the Pilgrim Fathers? There can be no doubt about it – we ought to know something about these matters.

But why *Battle For The Church*?

I have called this book a record of a *Battle* because that is what took place, a battle for the church. The history of this period is not a mere political or social history. The one hundred and fifty years in question were not simply a time of exploration or trade or increased learning. The issue which was at stake during this period – *the* issue – was the church. Consequently, the history I write about is supremely an account of the struggle to regain New Testament church life in England.

And what a struggle it was! For more than a thousand years England had been shrouded in gross darkness, the darkness of the Papacy. The biblical church of Jesus Christ had been all but obliterated, not only in England but throughout the world. Yet during the 16th and 17th centuries, godly men and women were prepared to take up spiritual arms in a spiritual battle, even a battle to the death, to recover the New Testament teaching about the church. Now nothing could be more important than this. No! Not in the 1590s (read on!); nor in the opening decades of the 21st century. I am convinced that it is still a vital matter. Until the end of the age it will be so. One of the sad marks of the spiritual decline in our generation is that very often the church is not given her rightful place in the thinking of Christians. Frequently the church is no longer thought of in New Testament terms and many have largely departed from the revealed pattern. Some do not realise it – and some do not even care.

The truth is, the battle for the reformation of the church is not over. Just because I leave off my tale in 1644 I do not mean to give the impression that I think the history of the church stopped at that point. I do not pretend for a minute that the churches in 1644 had reached a state of perfection. The battle went on. It is still raging. For this reason the study of church history is not mere theory, suitable only for the curious or those with antiquarian interests. Certainly not! Whereas the antiquarian buries himself in the past, lives in the past, and the historian examines it to try to explain the present, the Christian has far bigger concerns. He uses the past to

Introduction

benefit the future. The study of church history, therefore, is a most practical matter and of the utmost relevance for us today. In every age the church of Jesus Christ is under attack. Our generation is no exception. I want to do what I can to advance the cause of Christ, however small and feeble my effort might be. Hence this book.

I say again, a well-ordered church life is essential. I am of the same conviction as that expressed by Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his exposition of Ephesians 4:13. He wrote:

Nothing... is more important for us, as nothing was more important for these Ephesian Christians, than to understand this picture and conception of the... church which the apostle places before us. It is our failure as Christian people to understand what our church membership means – the dignity, the privilege, and the responsibility – that causes most of our troubles. Our greatest need is to recapture the New Testament teaching concerning the church. If only we could see ourselves in terms of it, we would realize that we are the most privileged people on earth, that there is nothing to be compared with being a Christian and a member of the mystical body of Christ...

It is failure to realize this, and the privilege and the glory that is involved, that leads to the miserable position in which many pastors and preachers have to appeal to (the) people to attend church on Sunday and to persuade them to do various duties in the church. Such people have never seen themselves as members of the body of Christ. They think that they are conferring an honour upon the church by being even loosely attached to her and honouring her with their fitful attendance.

It is because the church is of such importance, and because reform is urgently needed, that I have written as I have.

Since I shall say a great deal about the reform of the church, at this point I want to explain exactly what I mean by it, because I do not wish to mislead you. By the reform of the church I mean the need to get our churches as close as possible to the pattern, the order and the life of the New Testament churches. This involves two things – one positive and the other negative.

First the *positive*. We must cultivate all aspects of New Testament church life. I am convinced that the New Testament churches were composed of members who were regenerate and who were baptised after coming to faith. These members willingly submitted themselves to the constant care and rule of their appointed elders who regularly instructed them in the gospel; they enjoyed spiritual fellowship among themselves; they observed the Lord's supper in an orderly way; and they engaged in prayer – both in private, and in public at church prayer meetings. And every member was devoted to this spiritual activity; indeed they were strongly, even constantly, addicted to it. Further, the New Testament churches disciplined any members who fell short of the high standard. When churches as a

Introduction

whole became disorderly – the church at Corinth, for example – apostolic reproof and instruction reformed them. Finally, the New Testament churches suffered for their separation from the world; so much so, suffering must be regarded as an essential mark of a true church (2 Tim. 3:12). Although they enjoyed periods of respite (Acts 9:31), their general course was one of suffering and persecution. That is what I mean by the positive aspect of the reform of the church. Our churches must be like that. Many passages could be quoted to verify these claims.

Now for the *negative*. By the reform of the church, I mean that we must avoid in our churches (or remove from them) all the things that were not in the New Testament churches. As Christ cleansed the temple (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:14-17), so we must cleanse our churches – though in a spiritual way, of course. We must remove worship which is man-centred; it must be God-centred. We must get rid of entertainment and get back to proper scriptural instruction in our services. Spiritual fellowship must be restored in place of the social chit-chat and fun, the round of carnal activities or the mere consumption of food and drink which is so common today. Mature behaviour must replace childishness. There is a gross lack of discipline and much indifference in many churches; it must be put right. The Lord's supper is often lax in its observance and 'tacked-on' to another service as a kind of afterthought. If not that, more and more it is becoming a central part of an inclusive assembly at which both believers and unbelievers, adults and infants alike, are all free to partake in an indiscriminate way. Instead of its proper regulation, woolly announcements inviting 'all who love the Lord Jesus to sit down' are deemed sufficient. Sometimes not even that. Some churches do not even know who is at the supper (or who is not). This must be reformed. Many churches try to be popular, there is little or no cost in being a disciple, and steps are taken to make sure that sinners find the services bright, cheerful and attractive to their pagan appetites. There is a gross lack of commitment on the part of many members, prayer meetings and the like being poorly attended. All this must be put right. For these reasons I say that many churches are in a poor condition. I go as far as to ask, In some cases are they churches at all?

Let me say at once, I realise that excellent churches exist up and down the land, with fine ministers preaching the gospel in them. I also know that many churches and ministers are, sad to say, weary, frustrated and disappointed, especially seeing that the hopes many of us felt in the 1960s and 70s do not seem to have materialised. I assure you, I would not say a word to harm or grieve my brothers and sisters who labour valiantly for the cause of Christ. Indeed, I pray that God will bless and encourage them in his service. Nor do I confine my prayers and good wishes to those churches

Introduction

which agree with me on church order. Contrary to the impression some may draw from my book, I realise that God blesses his people in many different sorts of churches, and I hope my words may encourage the faithful saints in all of them.

But, on the other hand, I cannot close my eyes to what is plain to see. I dare not! Many churches are far from excellent; all that is called preaching is not real preaching of the highest calibre, no – not even in Reformed circles; the life of every church is not above reproach. While I would not grieve the weakest of Christ's faithful people, neither would I want to encourage those who play fast and loose with the gospel and the church to carry on in their sinful ways. There is a great deal which is wrong in many churches and it needs to be put right as a matter of desperate urgency. One great concern, to me at least, is that not a few imagine things have greatly improved over recent years, and are getting even better. Frankly, I disagree, and disagree strongly. Hence my censures listed above.

I know that these criticisms will horrify many. Some will be angry with me. With respect, I cannot help it. I have written this book because it is my conviction that the vast majority of churches desperately need reform. At any rate I have stated my view openly and honestly. It is for you, reader, to decide whether or not you wish to read on. But if you do, you know what my basic argument is. You know what to expect. I am appalled at the state of the generality of the churches, and I want to do what I can to advance their reform. I realise my effort is poor, but it is that which comes to hand. The woman received commendation from Jesus because, as he said: 'She has done what she could' (Mark 14:8). The lad could only give what he possessed, five barley loaves and two small fish – 'what are they?' Even so Jesus took and blessed them (John 6:9-14).

I know I am not alone in my 'alarmist' views. Listen to these words. Who do you think said them? Listen:

At this moment we have sin rampant among us almost beyond precedent... those who dare walk our streets after sundown tell us that Sodom, in its most putrid days, could scarce exceed (London) for open vice. To our infinite disgust and horror, the names of certain of the greatest in the land are at this hour openly mentioned in connection with the filthiest debauchery... it is a hideous evil that the dregs of vice should be the chosen luxury of certain of our hereditary legislators and rulers. Woe unto you, O land, when your great ones love the (brothel)!... This is not all: a general indifference to all religion is creeping over the country... Ask those who visit from door to door... and they will tell you that never before in their lifetime were there so few persons attendant upon the means of grace. The [Lord's day] is no longer a day of worship with millions. What continual efforts are made to rob us of [it]; to degrade it into a common workday... Today the revelation of God is treated with indifference, or talked of as if it deserved no reverence or credit. Unbelief has sapped the foundations of the social fabric. Worst of all – I must not hold

Introduction

back the charge – many of the avowed ministers of Christ are no ministers of faith at all, but promoters of unbelief. The modern pulpit has taught men to be infidels... Among those who are ordained to be preachers of the gospel of Christ, there are many who preach not faith but doubt, and hence they are servants of the devil rather than of the Lord. Think not that I am aiming at the Church of England... So frequently are the fundamental doctrines of the gospel assailed, that it becomes needful, before you cross the threshold of many a chapel, to ask the question: ‘Shall I hear the gospel here today...?’ I know I shall stir up a hornet’s nest by these honest rebukes but I cannot help it. I am burdened and distressed with the state of religion; a pest is in the air... No signs can be more alarming than the growing infidelity and worldliness which I see among those who call themselves Christians... Are we to see again unbelief and luxurious sin walking hand in hand? If so, there be some of us who mean to take up our sorrowful parable, and speak as plainly as we can for truth and holiness, whether we offend or please. Be it ours still to thunder out the law of God, and proclaim with trumpet clearness the gospel of Jesus...

The most remarkable point about that statement is this: It was not made by a contemporary of mine. It was said nearly one hundred and thirty years ago! Charles Haddon Spurgeon made the just complaint in a sermon in 1885 – what would he have to say if he were alive today and witnessed our massive spiritual decline over the past hundred years? The sand is near the bottom of the glass, and it is running out at an increasing rate.

Ah! but wait a minute, says someone, are you not guilty of breaking the commands of Romans 14:1-13? You judge, you criticise, you write against other Christians because they do things differently to you. And just because other believers do not see eye to eye with you, it does not mean they are wrong and you are right, you know. Who gave you the authority to criticise? Are you not breaking the commands of Romans 14?

The answer lies in that very passage; it defines the relevant matters as ‘doubtful things’ (Rom. 14:1). Literally, ‘decisions of reasonings’. The Greek word gives rise to our ‘dialogue’. It means reasoning, an opinion, questioning, hesitation, doubting, hence doubtful or disputable. In areas which are disputable, a matter of opinion, about which there is some doubt, where it is not absolutely certain one way or the other – in those areas, differences of judgement and practice must be allowed without censure. Especially is this so in the context of local church life. But obviously – even from a common sense point of view – in matters which are indisputable, no dispute is allowed, no deviation is possible. The question is: What are the matters which are indisputable? Clearly it is something which must be established very carefully and beyond doubt – it is vital to do so. How can we find out?

The answer is plain. Where God has spoken in his word, where he has made his mind known through revelation, there can be no dispute in such matters. God’s commands must be obeyed; God’s promises must be

believed; God's declarations are the last word in all things. There can be no question about it. The whole structure of Christianity, its whole fabric, will tumble to the ground if this is not the case. It is the basis of Exodus 25:40 (Heb. 8:5); Isaiah 8:20; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 3:10 – 4:5; 2 Peter 3:16; Jude 3 *etc.* If this argument is not true, if it is not granted, there can be no Christian religion at all – at least, none which is worth the name.

My contention is that the things I have written about fall into this category. They are not doubtful matters. They belong to the things which have been revealed – the things which we must be careful to obey exactly. This book is about church life. I submit that church life, its pattern, its doctrine, its practice is spoken of very clearly in the New Testament. Church membership, baptism, the Lord's supper, prayer meetings, worship and all the rest are not disputable matters. They are not 'things indifferent'. Therefore, as a Christian and as a preacher of the gospel, I have the right, I have the duty and the responsibility to exercise my judgement on these matters. I must examine the Scriptures and learn the mind of God on such questions. I must speak about them. I must speak the truth in love, I know (Eph. 4:15). But I must speak the truth as I see it. Nor is the truth something vague or indefinable. It is fixed. It is truth! It is not a lump of plasticine to be moulded, pulled and twisted about according to the whims and fancies of all and sundry. We must 'hold' the truth. It is not something intangible. It can be gripped. It has to be!¹

What is more, if a preacher does not have the duty to discern, to distinguish and to make his convictions known in these matters, then we might just as well order a judge not to judge, a physician not to diagnose, an accountant not to audit or a detective not to investigate. And on the question of love – love to God and his truth comes before all other loves, does it not? At any rate, that is the approach I have tried to take in this book. I appreciate that my book may appear largely negative. I admit it. To explain myself: I have not set out to write a manual of biblical church life and order – there are many excellent books already written in that way and I can add nothing to them. What I have tried to do is to approach the subject from the other end, because when teaching it is necessary to say what is wrong in addition to saying what is right. Paul was often as negative as he was positive.

Reader, in the light of this, I want to *inform* you. I want to set out the facts of the period 1517-1644 in a simple and interesting way because I want to inform Christians who may not know much about them. I am grieved at the tragic ignorance of these stirring events among many

¹ See Lloyd-Jones: *Studies* pp161-165.

Introduction

present-day Christians. To speak frankly – far too many believers are not aware of the tremendous debt of gratitude we owe to the saints who lived and died four hundred years ago. Our church liberty was obtained at great cost, even with the blood and tears of godly men and women. It is a sin that this is forgotten. We are throwing away our heritage. Be warned! What we do not value today, we will not have tomorrow! Rome is ever eager, watching and waiting. She is prepared to strike back. And to strike hard! We must be on our guard. New enemies are waiting. Islam for one. Foes unknown to us are already sharpening their swords. New atheists mushroom. I am sure that the battle for the church is going against us during these days, and badly so. The watchmen are dozing, well-nigh asleep on many ramparts. Some walls are totally undefended. In some cases, the enemies are invited in – and given the chief seats! It is tragic. It is atrocious. I want to do something about it. I want to remind present-day believers of the great events of four centuries ago.

My words may be thought harsh and rash. After I had written the bulk of the book, I was interested to read the following:

Rashness is a more agreeable failing than cowardice, and, when to speak is unpopular, it is less pardonable to be silent than to say too much. Posterity has, perhaps, as much to learn from the whirlwind eloquence with which Latimer scourged... as from the sober respectability of the judicious Paley.

To my mind, there is no comparison between the two. I suggest that the vast majority have never even heard of ‘the judicious Paley’. Too few have heard of Latimer! I want to do some good. Please forgive me if I have been rash at times and clumsy. You see, I did not want to fail by being guilty of ‘sober respectability’.

Generous reader, I ask you to forgive me for my blunt, unpolished style. Please do not refuse any good you may find in these pages just because I have put it badly. Please do not be affronted because I have spoken in every-day English. When I say stern things about the views of good men, and do so in vigorous terms, do not think that I am casting aspersions on their character. I am not! But if, in my opinion, the statements of good men are sometimes nonsensical, I have said as much. It does not mean I have no respect for the men in question. Moreover, if I am not allowed to express my own views then there seems little point in writing the book in the first place. Please do not think that I regard myself better than the good men I criticise on occasion. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When my manuscript was complete – for the umpteenth time! – I came across the published diaries of Kenneth Macrae. I was much encouraged by what I read. Macrae published a booklet in 1934 in which he wrote about the defection from the Reformed faith in Scotland, and he was greatly

Introduction

concerned that the Free Church would be caught up in the apostasy. Though he did not relish controversy, he felt duty-bound to do what he could to prevent the rise and spread of corruption and abominations in the churches. Hence his booklet. As publication drew near he recorded his feelings, saying: 'I expect the book will make a bit of a stir and will make me the mark for many arrows, both without and within (the Free) Church, but the time for straight speaking has more than come'. Too big for my boots I may be, but this is exactly the way I feel about things today.

The editor of Macrae's diaries included a quote from James Begg who, in his pamphlet *Anarchy in Worship* published in 1875, wrote:

At all times in the world, but especially in the church at the present day, there is nothing so lacking as moral courage. Few men comparatively think for themselves, and still fewer dare to say what they think, or act independently. They go in crowds, and simply float with the tide. They are most unwilling to hold their faces to any wind of opposition. As the tide brings in bits of cork and driftwood, and carries them out again, or leaves them high and dry, so it is with many modern Christians, and even with not a few Christian ministers. They quail before obloquy – cry for 'open questions', and terrified by the idea of fashion, fear every thing and every body except him whom they should fear.

It is my conviction that these words, true in 1875, are even more true these days.

In the light of what I wrote earlier, it will come as no surprise to read that I want to do more than inform you. I want to *stir* you and *challenge* you. Christians, awake! Not only is there a great deal of ignorance of church history today; there is a great deal of apathy and complacency about it. This is a grievous wrong. Christian, you are now in the front line of the battle for the church. Being a Christian means you are engaged in a war. The men and women I write about have long since gone to glory, many dispatched at the hands of savage persecutors. In their generation those godly people faced Satan himself and came to grips with him. It could be said of them:

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death (Rev. 12:11).

The words of Hebrews 10:32-34 may aptly be applied to them:

You endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you... joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

Introduction

It cannot be denied that the story I write of is similar to the account of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, and that the people concerned may properly be thought of as part of the ‘great cloud of witnesses’ which speak to us today.

The spiritual sword has been passed on to us. We are now in the thick of the battle for Christ’s church – in truth we are in the front line! These saints being dead still speak. I want to challenge you by writing about the way they stood their ground and did their duty. I have already said that I am a preacher, and it is as a preacher that I write – not as a historian nor an academic. I write to *move* you. Therefore I let you know right from the start, I am not content merely to record historical facts for your interest. No! I try to stir you up by application of those facts. The present times are far too dangerous, the truth far too precious, that I should write for mere historical or romantic interest. I have far more important work to do than that. There is something much more stern involved in this business than mere nostalgia or sentiment!

In connection with this question of preaching, I address you, reader, in this book, and I do so in a direct manner. I use the word *you*. I do not mean that I do not need the instruction because I have reached the standard, or that I am handing down laws from on high. Oh no! I am a hearer in addition to being a preacher. I have to read my own books, too.² I have to be the first hearer of my sermons. But, as a preacher, it is my responsibility to speak to those who listen to me, and to use the word *you*. It is the only way to preach. (See Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 7:51-53 *etc.*). Preaching loses its power when preachers continue to speak in terms of *we* and *us*. It sounds more gracious, but it has lost much of its point. In truth, it then becomes lecturing and not preaching.

Again, you will find that various themes recur throughout these pages. I do not apologise for this – I frankly admit it. As I have just explained, I am a preacher, and preachers have to keep on reinforcing their teaching. The apostles felt the need for it. Peter said: ‘I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them’ (2 Pet. 1:12) Paul could say that ‘to write the same things to you is not tedious’ (Phil. 3:1); and ‘I say (or testify) again’ (2 Cor. 11:16; Gal. 5:3); or ‘Again I will say’ (Phil. 4:4). ‘As we have said before, so now I say again’ (Gal. 1:9) comes the very next verse after he said it the first time. ‘I want to remind you’, said Jude (Jude 5). Do we not all feel the need of Hebrews 5:12 – ‘you need someone to teach you again’? The practice of the unrefined preacher is not so very far from the truth, after all. ‘First, I tells ’em what I’m going

² As I said in the note to this edition, on re-reading my work, I have been rebuked. I do not publish this edition because I have reached the level God demands in his word. Far from it!

Introduction

to tell 'em; then I tells 'em; then I tells 'em what I've told 'em'. Perhaps more delicately put, but with the same point, are the words of the old preacher to the young Lloyd-Jones. 'I shall really be saying one thing, but I shall say it in three different ways'.

I have already said that the men and women I write about were not perfect; they made their mistakes. Certainly they did! Naturally all the churches they formed had their faults, and we must learn from them and avoid their mistakes. But having admitted their failures, it is only right and fair to state clearly that they tried to do much for God and his church. And with what success! Well might it be said of them:

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services! (Neh. 13:14).

We must remember these men and women and the good they did. And not only remember them. 'Go and do likewise' is their fitting epitaph. At the end of the book I shall ask you if you think *Battle For The Church* is a statement or an exhortation. Is it a record of facts, or is it a call to action?

Above all I want to write about these stirring events to the glory of God, not to the praise of the men and women involved. Of course not. They would be the first to say:

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to your name give glory (Ps. 115:1).

I do not want to elevate man. I want to lift up the name of Jehovah, the LORD our God, the one who enabled his people to accomplish so much.

* * *

As I explained in the first edition, the substance of this book was first delivered as a series of addresses on church history in the Lowestoft Reformed Baptist church. I want to record my thanks to those who encouraged me by their enthusiasm on those Saturday nights in the winters of 1993-5. The preparation and delivery of the addresses was of immense value to my own soul at the time, which the subsequent writing of this book has increased immeasurably. I publish the result in the hope that it might prove to be a blessing to many others. I pray it may be so.

I acknowledge with thanks the help given to me by Chris and Eileen Baynham. My thanks, also, go to Joe Sheetz who read the original manuscript and made many valuable suggestions. In addition, I do appreciate the consideration shown to me by John Denman who read and

Introduction

commented on the chapters on baptism³ from the point of view of one who held the opposite conviction to me. My late wife, Jean, gave invaluable help with the onerous task of meticulous reference checking and proof-reading, and my son, Simon, saved me from countless blunders by his frank and fair comments on the manuscript. That being said, the responsibility for the book, of course, is entirely my own.

Some may be repelled by my use of the word *Papist* and connected terms. I have thought about this. I could have used *Roman Catholic*, but these two words are mutually exclusive, besides being a mouthful. *Catholic* is a misnomer when applied to the adherents of the See of Rome, and *Romanist* is as offensive to some as *Papist*. So I have kept to *Papist*. I know this is often a hostile term – and I frankly admit I abhor papal doctrines and claims. But as for hostility, what of *Lutheran*, *Protestant*, *Calvinist*, *Separatist*, *Semi-Separatist*, *Independent* or *Baptist*; were they and are they, even to this day, never used in a hostile way? It all depends on who says the word, and how. Why, *Christian* was probably a term of opprobrium when first used. Reader, may I respectfully ask you to understand that by *Papist* I mean, ‘an adherent of the pope, his claims and doctrines; an advocate of papal supremacy; a member of the Roman Catholic Church’. Such a use has a long pedigree; it dates from 1534.

In conclusion, I fully and unreservedly acknowledge my literary shortcomings. Besides which I have already made it clear that I am no historian. Nevertheless, in the following pages I have tried not to leap to unwarranted conclusions, nor read the present into the past. I have, however, been prepared to use the historical episodes to make application to present-day church life. Indeed, that is the reason why I have written the work!

Above all, I have tried to speak plainly and vigorously to the point. And with good reason: ‘For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?’ (1 Cor. 14:8).

³ As I have explained, these are omitted from this second edition. Please see my two volumes, *Infant Baptism Tested* and *Baptist Sacramentalism*.