

realities of the Church of God. ‘No church, no confessional family, is today able to work alone or in isolation for the preservation and growth of its faith. It needs others. This is certainly a ‘sign of the times’. An ecumenical sign. *Ex tenebris lux*’ (page 202).

But it is only a glimpse. As Charles Hill says in his paper, ‘the trouble about route-planning the future ecumenical journey is that we don’t know where we want to go.’ It seems that we know the issues – and Charles Hill introduces the whole question of relating to people of other faiths – but where we are going with them seems to be shrouded in mystery. The best we have to offer is patience, a running with the different models – whether by agreements that reconcile the churches to one another while maintaining their confessional identities or by continuing to seek a more visible coming together of structures. It is to be hoped that out of the darkness will come the light of a convergence of vision, almost certainly brought about by the eventual acknowledgement that the recognition of elements of the Church in each other has consequence for how we organise ourselves in a world in which, as Mary Tanner says, we are called ‘to be a living and credible sign of reconciliation.’

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In the Footsteps of Saint Paul, Edward Stourton, London:
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In 1936 the travel writer H. V. Morton published his immensely popular and well written travelogue, *In the Steps of St.. Paul*. Copies of the original edition still show up in second-hand bookshops as the ageing widows of clergy get rid of their husbands’ libraries. Morton’s pursuit of the Apostle to the Gentiles is a cracking good read, but is spoiled by his naive and uncritical approach to scripture. Morton treats the Acts of the

Apostles as straightforward reporting by an eye witness and he notices no problems in reconciling the account in Acts with the letters of Paul himself. Furthermore Morton pays no heed to the evidence, long ago pointed out by New Testament scholars, that not all the letters bearing the name of Paul actually come from the pen of the apostle himself.

Now here is a breath of fresh air for those who would seek signs of Paul in the Mediterranean world and beyond. Edward Stourton, a BBC journalist, raised a Roman Catholic, and with all the critical instincts of an investigative reporter, sets out to explore the life and travels of Paul, and seeks to assess the enduring influence of the apostle on the world of today.

Like Morton, Stourton writes well, and also like Morton he is full of enthusiasm for the adventurous missionary and skilful writer whose path he follows. At times Stourton is an unashamed fan. As a writer he stands in awe of the communicator who can make the abstract concrete in such powerful phrases as ‘O death, where is thy sting?’ ‘Now! we see through a glass darkly,’ ‘Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap’ and ‘The peace of God that passeth all understanding.’ He is transfixed by the way Paul in just a few lines at the end of Romans (c.15:25-28) can mix theology, emotion, political acumen and practical determination.

Faced with problems of historical accuracy in Acts and problems of authenticity regarding certain of the letters, Stourton resolves to use his journalistic common sense. This leads him to accept only the seven undisputed epistles as genuinely pauline. In his appraisal of Acts, Stourton is doubtful that it can be taken as history in our sense of the word. He suggests that Saint Luke is not so much a doctor as a ‘spin doctor.’ He doubts the historicity of Paul’s sermon to the Athenians (c.17), because this is an ‘Oxbridge High -Table St. Paul, familiar with classical poetry, easygoing about big ideas, curious about comparative religion, open-minded and generous spirited in his approach to paganism and the kind of generalised view of God one might define as theism.’ Stourton finds the ‘Paul’ of Acts 17 hard to reconcile with the apocalyptic visionary of First Thessalonians.

It is a delight to follow Saint Paul in the company of such a master of words. Stourton admires Paul's brilliant turn of phrase, but he himself is no slouch when it comes to a vivid phrase or sentence. President George W. Bush reacted to the attacks of 'nine-eleven' with 'a pauline sense of destiny.' The church council that meets in Jerusalem in Acts 15 presents a compromise that Stourton calls 'Torah-lite.' The list of stamps that Paul would have on his passport today 'is long enough to make any foreign correspondent proud.' The conflict with the wizard whom Paul strikes with blindness (Acts 13), is 'a Harry - Potterish competition in sorcery.' Paul used his letters in the manner a senior executive uses a corporate e-mail - as a mechanism for 'cascading his message via the local line management structures.' In the letters we find Paul 'checking up on his churches like an anxious fisherman inspecting his lobster pots.'

Stourton does not dodge the controversies which still rage around the ethical teaching of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Was Paul antisemitic? Stourton takes seriously Hyam Maccoby's accusation that Paul has an anti-Jewish bias, but finds it incompatible with the Apostle's assertion in Galatians that in the church there is neither Jew nor Greek, but all are united in Christ. Did Paul support the subjugation of women? The overall message of both the letters and Acts is that Paul rejoiced to have female fellow-workers such as Chloe, Lydia and Phoebe. The passage in First Timothy c. 2, which puts women in a submissive position in the church, was written at a much later stage in history by a writer seeking to give his words authority by using Paul's name. Stourton concludes, 'he simply did not write the words which have been used to do so much harm in his name.' Stourton feels that, if Paul were around today, he would approve of women's ordination. Was Paul viciously opposed to homosexuality? He certainly was strongly opposed to the sexual licence of pagan society. But would he have been uncompromising towards committed, long term, same-sex relationships today? Stourton thinks not, because 'he was fierce and passionate, and sometimes sarcastic, but he was not cruel.'

While Morton in the 1930s travelled slowly by boat, train, taxi and on horseback, Stourton, a working journalist covering breaking news all

over the globe, jets in and out of the places visited by Paul. However, he always manages to interview the ideal person, the devoted guardian of a pauline shrine, or a shrewd professor of Biblical Theology. One advantage enjoyed by the globe-trotting Stourton is an ability to find Paul's footsteps in places that Morton would never have dreamed of visiting. Having witnessed a ghastly stoning in Haiti, Stourton could appreciate better the martyrdom of Stephen. Moreover, even Dublin appears on his itinerary, because the Chester Beattie Museum in Dublin Castle has the oldest existing manuscript of Paul's letters. (Visitors have been known to kneel before the glass case in prayer or burst into hymns of praise!) However, this book would have benefited from a few snapshots of Ephesus, Corinth, Jerusalem etc., as they are today. Morton's book has no less than twenty-four photographs!

This is a book that one can heartily recommend, especially to the intelligent layperson who wants to get to the heart of the great Apostle, but is put off by the heavy tomes that the theologians tend to produce when they approach Paul. With Stourton as guide the reader cannot help but be awe-struck at Paul's achievement. The idea that religion lies in your head and in your heart and not in a set of regulations is so familiar to us that we seldom pause to reflect on it, but it was perhaps Paul's greatest contribution to the history of thought.

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