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thinking faith

C. H. Spurgeon and prayer

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Introduction

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92), the evangelical Baptist pastor, was the foremost popular preacher of the Victorian age. His church, the Metropolitan Tabernacle in south London, was not only the largest in Britain but also the world. Indeed, thanks principally to the widespread circulation of his printed sermons, his reputation travelled far beyond his British base. As early as 1858, when he was only twenty-four years of age, the *North American Review* was reporting that Americans returning from a trip to England were invariably asked two questions, namely, 'Did you see the Queen?' and 'Did you hear Spurgeon?'¹ By 1875 his sermons had been translated into languages as varied as Welsh, Dutch, Telegu and Maori.² Soon to follow were some Russian editions of a few select messages. These were passed by the Tsarist censor and approved by the Orthodox Church for official distribution.³ A staggering one million copies were printed.⁴ C. H. Spurgeon was a figure of international importance in the nineteenth century.

Prayer is an aspect of Spurgeon's life and ministry that has rarely been examined or given its due weight. For example, Patricia Kruppa, in her biography of Spurgeon, hardly ever mentions the subject.⁵ Yet for him, prayer was 'as much a necessity' for his own spiritual life as breath was for his natural life. 'We cannot live', he insisted, 'without asking favours of the Lord.'⁶ This article seeks to evalu-

1 *North American Review* (Boston: Crosby and Nicholls, 1858), 275.

2 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Twenty Years of Published Sermons', in C. H. Spurgeon (ed.), *The Sword and The Trowel: A Record of Combat with Sin and Labour for the Lord* (ST) (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865–92), January 1875, 7.

3 One of these, published in 1880, is held in archives of Spurgeon's College. See 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (2G), Vol. 4, 58 b.

4 M. Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 155.

5 P. S. Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher's Progress* (New York: Garland, 1982).

6 C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Secret of Power in Prayer', *New Park Street Pulpit (NPSP) / Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit (MTP)* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1856–1917), MTP, Sermon Number (S. No.) 2002, Vol. 34, John 15.7, delivered 8 January 1888, 15.

ate this neglected but important dimension of his life and ministry. Analysis of Spurgeon's prayer life uncovers a diverse and complex set of influences. It also shows that he was consistently christocentric in his approach, and that he valued the corporate dimension of prayer highly.

Spurgeon's practice of prayer

It is helpful to establish Spurgeon's basic practice and rhythm of prayer. As to daily rhythm, his pattern was to have a set time of prayer early in the morning and another in the evening.⁷ As well as private, personal prayer this included, from at least the time of his marriage in 1856, leading morning and evening devotions for his own household. In these times hymn singing was included alongside scripture reading and prayer.⁸ Prayers were always extempore (indeed he had an aversion to liturgy of any kind, holding that the practice of reading prayers, whether in private or public, encouraged empty, 'formal' devotions).⁹ His commitment to 'family prayers' was strong. He told the students at his Pastors' College (which he founded in 1856) that it was essential that 'morning and evening sacrifice' should 'sanctify' their homes.¹⁰ Although he believed it was unwise to 'make family exercises long',¹¹ to neglect them was 'Eli's sin', and such an attitude would be likely to bring with it the judgment of God.¹²

Alongside this daily rhythm was a weekly one. Crucial to this were the weekly corporate prayer meetings which were part of the life of his church. There was a Thursday meeting and special times of prayer before Sunday services, but Spurgeon put special emphasis on the church's main prayer meeting, which was on Monday night. There were usually over a thousand people present at this, a level of attendance which he regarded as a sure sign of the health of the church.¹³ One of the church's elders, Thomas Cox, recorded what typically happened at these Monday night meetings. There was usually at least one hymn and what Cox

7 As shown by his books of daily readings, C. H. Spurgeon, *Morning By Morning...* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865); *Evening By Evening...* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1868).

8 Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 286.

9 Spurgeon, *Morning By Morning*, vii.

10 C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (3 Vols; London: Passmore and Alabaster, n.d.), Vol. 1, Lecture 3, 'The Preacher's Private Prayer', 40, cf. 41. See also C. H. Spurgeon, 'Intercessory Prayer', *MTP*, S. No. 1049, Vol. 18, Ps. 141.5, delivered 5 May 1872, 260; Preface, *MTP*, Vol. 11, 1865, vii.

11 Spurgeon, *Morning By Morning*, Preface to the section, 'Hymns for Morning Worship in the Family', n.p.

12 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Hindrances To Prayer', *MTP*, S. No. 1192-3, Vol. 20, 1 Pet. 3.7, delivered 13 September 1874, 506.

13 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Prayer Meetings; – As They Were, And As They Should Be', in *Only a Prayer Meeting: Forty Addresses at the Metropolitan Tabernacle and Other Prayer Meetings* (London, Passmore and Alabaster, 1901), 27; Spurgeon (ed.), ST, November 1883, 609.

described as an ‘impromptu’ message from Spurgeon, who would then ask different men to pray. Much of the praying was done from the platform, although sometimes Spurgeon would invite someone to pray while they were still in the main body of the meeting. According to Cox, Spurgeon was careful to keep out ‘cranks’ and only ‘call on those who could be heard’.¹⁴ He thus had considerable involvement in these times of corporate prayer.

Spurgeon often stated his belief that intercession offered by the church together was ‘more effectual’ than that offered by individual Christians praying on their own.¹⁵ As far as his own ministry was concerned, he believed he was dependent on the prayers of others, saying on one Monday evening that he craved ‘beyond all things’ the ‘constant prayers’ of God’s people.¹⁶ But prayer meetings were also crucial to him because he believed that during these times he (together with others who were present) consistently met with God. He once said,

I think that many of these ... meetings for prayer will never be forgotten by us who have been privileged to be present at them ... I know that, very often, as I have gone home, I have felt that the spirit of prayer has been so manifestly poured out in our midst that we have been carried right up to the gates of heaven.¹⁷

The corporate prayer meeting, as well as being crucial to his ministry, was a means of personally experiencing close communion with God. Such times were certainly vital to his prayer life; they were vital, too, to his overall spirituality – the way he related to God.

In addition to these daily and weekly rhythms of prayer, Spurgeon sought to integrate prayer into the fabric of his daily life and work. He told his students,

We cannot always be on the knees of the body, but the soul should never leave the posture of devotion. The habit of prayer is good, but the spirit of prayer is better. Regular retirement is to be maintained, but continued communion with God is to be our aim. As a rule, we ministers ought never to be many minutes without actually lifting up our hearts in prayer.¹⁸

The comment ‘the habit of prayer is good’ is important. Spurgeon wanted to assert the need for the sort of disciplines he himself observed and he could be scathing about Christians who had ‘no appointed time’ in the day set aside for prayer.¹⁹ But he also wanted to insist on the importance of maintaining con-

14 T. Cox, ‘Notes on C. H. Spurgeon’, Spurgeon’s College, Heritage Room (B1.17), 4-5.

15 C. H. Spurgeon, ‘Spiritual Knowledge And Its Practical Results’, *MTP*, S. No. 1742, Vol. 29, Col. 1.9-10, delivered 30 September 1883, p. 532; ‘The Importunate Widow’, in *Sermons on our Lord’s Parables* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1908), S. No. 856, Luke 18.1-8, delivered 21 February 1869, 105.

16 C. H. Spurgeon, ‘The Pastor’s Need Of The People’s Prayers’, 2 Cor. 1.11, in *Only a Prayer Meeting*, 201-202.

17 Spurgeon, ‘Prayer Meetings; – As They Were, And As They Should Be’, 31; 27.

18 Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students*, Vol. 2, Lecture 1, ‘The Holy Spirit in Connection with our Ministry’, 13.

19 Spurgeon, ‘Hindrances To Prayer’, p. 509.

tinued communion with God through prayer throughout the day. This involved quiet contemplation and wordless prayer, as will be shown, but it was verbal prayer – with words spoken either in the mind or out loud – which he was referring to as he addressed his students. Regarding his own practice he said, ‘Some of us could honestly say that we are seldom a quarter of an hour without speaking to God.’²⁰ Spurgeon’s friend and biographer William Young Fullerton recorded examples of his subject praying with others on walks and at railway stations and before and after reading books. He reckoned that ‘Spurgeon seldom wrote a letter without raising his heart to God for guidance.’²¹ Once again, it can be noted that communion with God in prayer was something Spurgeon often experienced together with others. This was so whether the context was a meeting with a thousand present or a walk with a friend. Overall, examination of his practice of prayer reveals the vital place of prayer in his life.

Different dimensions of prayer

Spurgeon’s approach to particular aspects of prayer – namely praise, thanksgiving and confession – can now be analyzed in more detail. A significant number of his prayers at Tabernacle services are extant. This was because it became his practice, from at least the early 1860s, to have stenographers take down his extempore prayers, apparently to enable him to reflect on the range of themes he was covering.²² Thus, analysis of his prayer life can be done with reference to his actual prayers (at least his public prayers), not just in relation to his preaching and writing about the subject. His approach to quiet contemplation is also considered in this section.

With regard to praise, the three main volumes of Spurgeon’s recorded prayers all contain a vast amount of material as the titles given to various prayers by the different editors, for example, ‘To The King Eternal’, ‘The Music Of Praise’, ‘Bless the Lord, O My Soul!’²³ and ‘Let All The People Praise Thee’,²⁴ indicate. One prayer of praise, ‘The Adorable Trinity’, begins with Spurgeon exclaiming, ‘O Lord, we feel as if we must just stand before you in adoration.’²⁵ His language throughout the ensuing prayer was emotional and earnest, showing how deeply the praise he expressed was embedded in his own experience. This praise was offered to the God who had revealed himself in ‘trinity as well as in unity’. Father, Son and Holy Spirit were directly addressed and praised in turn. The Spirit was praised

20 Spurgeon, ‘The Holy Spirit in Connection with our Ministry’, 13.

21 W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), 178-79.

22 C. T. Cook (ed.), *Behold the Throne of Grace: C. H. Spurgeon’s Prayers and Hymns* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott: London, n.d. [1934]), 10-11.

23 D. T. Young (ed.), *C. H. Spurgeon’s Prayers* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1905), Prayer 5, 25-31; Prayer 10, 55-59; Prayer 14, 79-83.

24 Cook (ed.), *Behold the Throne of Grace*, 101.

25 All quotations in this paragraph are from Cook (ed.), *Behold the Throne of Grace*, ‘The Adorable Trinity’, 99-100.

for 'condescending' to 'dwell in such poor tenements as our nature' and Christ was worshipped as the 'Lamb'. Scriptural language thus mingled with images drawn from the landscape of Victorian London. What is especially striking about this prayer is the way the Father was praised as the 'Father of Jesus' and the 'Father of all that we are in Jesus'. Because Christ had been sent into the world and had died on the cross those who had embraced the gospel had a new relationship with God and could call him 'Father' when speaking to him. This was a mode of address that even Abraham had not used. The intimacy of a Christian's relationship with God was all thanks to the coming of the 'Lamb'. Thus, although Spurgeon was praising the Father, the focal point of this prayer was still Christ.

When Spurgeon engaged in thanksgiving in prayer, this was similarly concentrated on Christ. Charles Cook included a short section entitled 'Thanksgiving' in his volume, *Behold the Throne of Grace* in which there are excerpts from eight separate prayers.²⁶ Interestingly, the first of these, entitled 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' contains a passage very similar to the one from 'The Adorable Trinity' just cited. Spurgeon spoke to God as 'Father', thankful that this was not an 'empty title'. Rather, this way of speaking was deeply meaningful for, through belief in Jesus and his atoning death, Christians had been adopted into God's family. Spurgeon asserted that not only he but also others present could 'feel' the spirit of adoption in them, enabling them to cry, 'Abba, Father'. God the Father was approached and thanked but again the fulcrum of the prayer was Christ and his work.²⁷

Another prayer in this section, 'The Blood-Besprinkled Mercy Seat', focused even more strongly on the atonement, as many of Spurgeon's prayers of praise and thanksgiving did. Giving thanks for 'the great expiatory Sacrifice' he declared,

[W]e [would] compass Thine altar, O God. We come sprinkled with the blood to a blood-sprinkled Mercy seat, and are not afraid to come when we can make mention of the righteousness of Christ and His Atonement. We feel that we are reconciled unto God by the death of His Son.²⁸

The themes covered here: namely approaching and experiencing Christ and his cross, were typical of Spurgeon.

As far as prayers of confession were concerned, I have been unable to find one which does not make reference to the sacrifice of Christ.²⁹ It was only through the atonement that confession and cleansing were possible. One example of a prayer of confession can be adduced,

26 Cook (ed.), *Behold the Throne of Grace*, 111-12.

27 Cook (ed.), *Behold the Throne of Grace*, 'Father, Son And Holy Spirit', 111.

28 Cook (ed.), *Behold the Throne of Grace*, 'The Blood-Besprinkled Mercy Seat', 119.

29 Passages of confession include, Young (ed.), *Spurgeon's Prayers*, 'Boldness at the Throne of Grace', Prayer 21, 118; 'The Look of Faith', Prayer 23, 132-33; [Anon.] (ed.), *The Pastor in Prayer: Being a Selection of C. H. Spurgeon's Sunday Morning Prayers* (London: Elliot Stock, 1893), 'Your Adversary', Prayer 18, 110-11.

‘[H]elp everyone here to make an acceptable confession of sin... here we stand, Lord, a company of publicans and sinners, with whom Jesus deigns to sit down. Heal us, Emanuel! (sic) Here we are needing that healing. Good physician, here is scope for Thee; come and manifest Thy healing power! There are many of us who have looked unto Jesus and are lightened, but we do confess that our faith was the gift of God. We had never looked with these blear eyes of ours to that dear cross, unless first the heavenly light had shone, and the heavenly finger had taken the thick scales away... Lord, maintain the faith Thou hast created, strengthen it, let it be more and more simple.’³⁰

Christ and the atonement were central. Conversion came through regeneration (being ‘lightened’) which enabled sinners to look to the cross and receive salvation; but it was necessary to continue to look to the cross in confession, and thus receive forgiveness regularly. This was ‘simple’ ongoing faith in the ‘dear cross’ of Christ, expressed through prayer. This extract is also worth noting for the way Spurgeon addresses Christ directly. In fact, he switches between addressing the Father (the first sentence) and prayer to Jesus (the second and third sentences [note the forms of address, ‘Emanuel’ and the ‘Good physician’]), before returning to the Father. Spurgeon’s prayers at the Tabernacle provide many such examples of his speaking to Christ, rather than to the Father through Christ. The first twelve prayers included in the compilation entitled *The Pastor in Prayer* (the one just cited is the first in the book) provide a sample of how he prayed in Sunday morning services. The prayers are from twelve separate services, all of which took place in the period 1877–78. In every service Spurgeon began by addressing God as ‘Father’ or ‘Lord’, but in ten of the twelve prayers there are unambiguous examples of particular petitions or outbursts of praise being offered to Christ directly.³¹ Spurgeon believed that the correct way to approach God was to address the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.³² But his love for Christ effectively led him to step outside his own theological framework for prayer. Indeed, his desire to address Christ could lead to some awkward grammar, as was the case in Prayer 15 in this volume, entitled ‘The Foot-Washing’. In this he prayed,

Oh Lord and Master, thou who didst wash Thy disciples’ feet of old, still be very patient toward us, very condescending towards our provoking faults, and go on with us, we pray Thee, till Thy great work shall be completed, and we shall be brethren of the First-born, like unto Him.³³

30 [Anon.] (ed.), *Pastor in Prayer*, Prayer 1, 8–9.

31 [Anon.] (ed.), *Pastor in Prayer*, Prayer 1, 8; Prayer 2, 14–17; Prayer 3, 22; Prayer 4, 27; Prayer 5, 34; Prayer 6, 39; Prayer 7, 41; Prayer 8, 50; Prayer 11, 67, 69; Prayer 12, 76. In Prayer 9 Christ is not directly addressed on his own, although there is prayer offered to the ‘triune God of Israel’, 54. In Prayer 10 there is no clear instance of a prayer being offered to Christ.

32 See, e.g., C. H. Spurgeon, ‘The Throne Of Grace’, *MTP*, S. No. 1024, Vol. 17, Heb. 4.16, delivered 19 November 1871, 673–74.

The reference to the washing of the disciples' feet (John 13.1-17) makes it clear that, at the beginning of this sentence, it is Christ who was being addressed. But by the end of the prayer Spurgeon had reverted to speaking of Christ in the second person, as he expressed his desire to be 'like unto Him [i.e., Jesus]', the 'First-born' (cf. Col. 1.15-20). Both theology and grammar were strained by his ubiquitous desire to concentrate on Christ. Analysis of Spurgeon's practice of public praise, thanksgiving and confession reveals a Christ-centred approach to each of these different dimensions of prayer.

As far as quiet contemplation was concerned, Spurgeon put a high priority on this and James Gordon is mistaken when he says that 'Spurgeon had no patience with the more passive forms of devotion.'³⁴ In a short meditation, 'Communion With Christ And His People', Spurgeon spoke at length of his own experience of silent prayer:

I like sometimes in prayer, when I do not feel I can say anything, just to sit still, and look up; then faith spiritually descends the Well-beloved, and hears His voice in the solemn silence of the mind. Thus we have intercourse with Jesus of a closer sort than words could possibly express. Our soul melts beneath the warmth of Jesus' love, and darts upward her own love in return. Think not that I am dreaming, or am carried off by the memory of some unusual rhapsody: no, I assert that the devout soul can converse with the Lord Jesus all the day, and can have as true fellowship with Him as if He still dwelt bodily among men. This thing comes to me not by the hearing of the ear but by personal experience: I know of a surety that Jesus manifests Himself unto His people as He doth not unto the world.³⁵

The quotation is revealing of the important place contemplation held in Spurgeon's regular experience of prayer. As he said elsewhere, silence was 'as fit a garment for devotion as any that language can fashion.'³⁶ In quiet contemplation he experienced close fellowship with God. Crucially, in 'Communion With Christ And His People' it is contemplation of Christ that is especially in view. Overall, Spurgeon's prayer life was made up of a number of different dimensions, of which adoration, thanksgiving, confession and contemplation have been considered in this section. Spurgeon's practice of prayer was, in many ways, quite diverse. For instance, it could be corporate or solitary, verbal or non-verbal. But there was a uniting emphasis on Christ, especially Christ and his cross ('Communion With Christ And His People' was, in fact, a Communion meditation, with

33 [Anon.] (ed.), *Pastor in Prayer*, 'The Foot-Washing', Prayer 15, 93.

34 J. M. Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality: From the Wesleys to John Stott* (London: SPCK, 1991), 168.

35 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Communion With Christ And His People', 'An Address at a Communion Service at Mentone', 1 Cor. 10.16-17, in *Till He Come: Communion Addresses and Meditations* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1896) 315.

36 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Prayer Without Ceasing', *MTP*, Vol. 18, S. No. 1039, 1 Thess. 5.17, delivered 10 March 1872, 134.

a strong focus on the atonement). Spurgeon's adoration, thanksgiving, confession and contemplation were christocentric and crucicentric.

Influences

If Spurgeon's prayer life is held together by some unifying themes it nevertheless shows evidence of a range of different, interconnected influences. The influence of sixteenth- and seventeenth- century Puritanism can certainly be discerned, for example, in the commitment to family prayers. He made explicit reference to the Puritans as he sought to encourage observance of regular family worship, declaring that,

In the good old Puritan times, it was said, that if you had walked down Cheapside you would have heard in every house the voice of a Psalm at a certain hour of the morning and evening, for there was no house then of professed Christians without family prayer.³⁷

His picture of Puritan London was idealized, but it was certainly true that Puritan preachers were committed to morning and evening family prayers as an important expression of piety.³⁸ Spurgeon also lauded the Puritan approach to prayer more generally, saying they were 'abundant in meditation and prayer', giving a priority to prayer that was rarely seen in his own day.³⁹ Again, it was an idealized version of Puritanism which was being invoked, but undoubtedly this spirituality helped shape Spurgeon's prayer life.

If the influence of Puritanism was important then that of eighteenth- and nineteenth- century evangelicalism was crucial. Indeed, the stress on family devotions (as well as being a Puritan emphasis) was, as David Bebbington states, 'a bastion of Evangelical spirituality'.⁴⁰ Daily family prayers were an example of the 'disciplined spirituality' which Cheryl Sanders notes has always been a 'characteristic feature' of evangelicalism.⁴¹ This stress also helped to define nineteenth-century evangelical spirituality over and against High Church spirituality which, whilst being correspondingly 'disciplined', tended to stress a daily service in a church building.⁴² Tellingly, Spurgeon contrasted his own advocacy of family prayers with the 'theory' that prayer was 'most acceptable in the parish church'. The latter approach to daily prayer took away 'the priesthood from the father of

37 Spurgeon, 'Hindrances To Prayer', 506.

38 See, e.g., H. Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans* (London: Dacre Press, 1946), 278-85.

39 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Only a Prayer Meeting', in *Only a Prayer Meeting*, 19.

40 D. W. Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 44.

41 C. Sanders, 'Disciplined Spirituality', in M. A. Noll and R. F. Thiemann (eds), *Where Shall My Wond'ring Soul Begin: The Landscape of Evangelical Piety and Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 61.

42 For the emphasis in the Oxford Movement on the need for 'daily opportunities for common prayer in church', see G. Mursell, *English Spirituality: From 1700 to the Present Day* (London: SPCK, 2001), 199-200.

the family' and made a 'vacancy for a superstitious priesthood'. Spurgeon's target was the growing influence of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement in the Church of England, a point which was reinforced by his description of family prayers as a 'bulwark of Protestantism'.⁴³ His relationship with High Church spirituality was more subtle and complex than has often been supposed, as I will seek to show. But here his prayer life can be seen to be distinctively evangelical, over and against the approach more commonly advocated by the Oxford Movement.

Spurgeon's emphasis on extempore prayer, in public and private, was also typically evangelical (whilst not being so typically Puritan).⁴⁴ Caution regarding the use of liturgy was one which regularly surfaced within evangelicalism. Whitefield, for example, lamented that when 'the spirit of prayer began to be lost, then forms of prayer were invented'.⁴⁵ The rejection of set prayers was certainly not uniform amongst evangelicals, who did produce books of prayers for use in family worship.⁴⁶ But even J. C. Ryle, the evangelical Bishop of Liverpool, cautioned against an over-reliance on written prayers in his widely read *Practical Religion*, published in 1878. The reasons given, namely that it was too easy to pray such prayers 'by rote' with little thought as to their meaning, were remarkably similar to those put forward by the nonconformist pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.⁴⁷ This is not to suggest any direct dependence, merely that Ryle and Spurgeon were part of the same evangelical milieu. Eighteenth-century evangelicals could also prize contemplation. John Wesley said that although a faithful believer would not always be 'on his knees', yet he or she would be 'praying without ceasing'. Crucially, this was not always with words, but, as Ian Randall states, through 'silence, groans, adoration and a constant sense of God's presence'.⁴⁸ Thus, many aspects of Spurgeon's approach to prayer were representative of the evangelical tradition.

More needs to be said, however, for when Spurgeon spoke of silence and contemplation he often referred to other influences. To the students at the Pastors' College, Spurgeon spoke of the importance of 'time spent in quiet prostration of the soul before the Lord'. Such practice was a reliable means to communion with God for, he declared dramatically, along the 'hallowed courts' of 'quietude' the King 'in his beauty deigns to walk'. This was of a piece with his thinking in

43 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Hindrances To Prayer', pp. 506-507. Cf. 'Family Reformation', *MTP*, Vol. 24, S. No. 1395, Gen. 35.1, n.d., 55.

44 Davies, *Worship of the English Puritans*, pp. 115-61, although Puritans certainly shared an antipathy to 'merely formal' religion. So M. A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards*, Whitefield and the Wesleys (Leicester: IVP, 2004), 48.

45 G. Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals* [Seventh Journal: 25 June 1740 – 11 March 1741] (London: Banner of Truth, 1959 [1741]), 483.

46 J. Wolfe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Leicester: IVP, 2006), 148-49.

47 J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Cambridge: James Clark, 1959 [1878]), 64.

48 J. Wesley, 'The Character of a Methodist', in T. Jackson (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd edn. (Kansas: Beacon Hill Press, 1978). Vol. 8, 404, as cited by I. M. Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), 77.

'Communion With Christ And His People': the importance of quiet contemplation was highlighted as a vital means to communion. But in speaking to his students Spurgeon linked this practice explicitly with the Quakers. 'Do you think me a Quaker?', he asked. 'Well, be it so. Herein I follow George Fox most lovingly'.⁴⁹ Fox, the most influential of the early Quaker leaders, had at one point sought spiritual guidance from a number of seventeenth-century Puritan separatist leaders, but had been disappointed by the counsel he received.⁵⁰ Although Quakers were linked with the Puritans therefore, and some very broad definitions of the movement include them with it,⁵¹ it seems right to distinguish them from Puritanism. Silence is described by Michael Birkel as a 'pillar' of Quaker spirituality. According to Birkel, worship in this tradition has always been 'fundamentally receptive and contemplative', as well as being 'mystical in orientation'.⁵² Spurgeon was willing to affirm this central aspect of Quaker spirituality, and his appreciation of Fox and the Quakers ran surprisingly deep.⁵³ A further influence on Spurgeon's practice of prayer can therefore be discerned.

As Spurgeon continued his lecture, entitled 'The Preacher's Private Prayer', he moved into even more surprising territory as he continued to speak of the value of silence and contemplation,

I notice that the Romanists are accustomed to secure what they call 'Retreats', where a number of priests will retire for a time into perfect quietude, to spend the whole of the time in fasting and prayer, so as to inflame their souls with ardour. We may learn from our adversaries.⁵⁴

Spurgeon's basic anti-Catholicism is hinted at by the phrase, 'We may learn from our adversaries'. But his willingness to recognize the note of authentic Christian experience, wherever he found it, is also in evidence. He also spoke warmly of the work of Madame (Jeanne) Guyon, the seventeenth-century Roman Catholic mystic, and included four of her hymns in *Our Own Hymn Book* (see Nos 777-779; 781).⁵⁵ These hymns are all in the important section, 'The Golden Book Of Communion With Jesus' (Nos 764-820) and they all express desires for continued and deeper communion with Christ and do so in mystical language. One hymn (No. 781) includes the lines,

49 Spurgeon, 'The Preacher's Private Prayer', 50.

50 M. L. Birkel, *Silence and Witness: The Quaker Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), 18.

51 Quakers are sometimes viewed as being on the radical wing of Puritanism. See B. C. Lane, 'Puritan Spirituality', in P. Sheldrake (ed.), *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM, 2005), 519.

52 Birkel, *Silence and Witness*, 38, 15.

53 See, especially, Spurgeon's lengthy and appreciative review of F. E. Budge, *Annals of the Early Friends: A Series of Biographical Sketches* (London, Samuel Harris, 1877), in Spurgeon (ed.), ST, October 1877, 484-85. For another appreciative reference to Fox, see C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Personality Of The Holy Ghost', *NPSP*, Vol. 1, S. No. 4, John 14.16,17, delivered 21 January 1855, 30.

54 Spurgeon, 'The Preacher's Private Prayer', 51.

55 C. H. Spurgeon (ed.), *Our Own Hymn Book* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1866).

All hearts are cold, in every place,
 Yet earthly good with warmth pursue;
 Dissolve them with a flash of grace,
 Thaw these of ice, and give us new!

All of Guyon's hymns included in *Our Own Hymn Book* are in translations by William Cowper and so had more claim to be part of the common coinage of evangelical worship.⁵⁶ But Spurgeon's appreciation of Guyon went beyond his appropriation of her hymnody and surfaces regularly in his works.⁵⁷ It was Guyon's approach to contemplation – her spending 'many a day and...month in the sweet enjoyment of the love of Jesus'⁵⁸ – and the experiential, mystical way she expressed this which particularly attracted Spurgeon. She was, he said, a 'very mother of the mystics'.⁵⁹

Similarly, High Church works could be commended if they encouraged contemplation and communion with Christ. In *Commenting and Commentaries*, Spurgeon recommended a work on the Song of Songs by John Baptist Elias Avril-lon which, he informed his readers, was one of a series of reissues of 'Romish authors' by E. B. Pusey. It was, Spurgeon stated, 'a deeply spiritual work', after the manner of the mystics. Indeed, he noted, 'it might have been written by Madame Guyon'. Spurgeon commended it because, despite its 'occasional Popery and sacramentarianism', it contained 'much choice devotional matter'.⁶⁰ Another work on the Song commended by Spurgeon was by John Mason Neale, the nineteenth-century Anglican High Churchman. Neale's printed sermons on the Song, said Spurgeon, smelt of 'Popery'. Nevertheless, he continued, 'the savour of our Lord's good ointment [cannot] be hid'. Many a 'devout thought' had come to Spurgeon whilst reading these sermons which, as the title of Neale's work announced, had been 'preached in a religious house'.⁶¹ Again, a distinction was being made between ecclesiology and 'sacramentarianism' (which Spurgeon regarded as superstitious nonsense) and devotional writing which emphasized

56 Cf. Mursell, *English Spirituality*, 22. Guyon was also read by John Newton.

57 See, e.g., C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Church's Love To Her Loving Lord', in *The Most Holy Place: Sermons on the Song of Solomon* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1896), S. No. 636, Song 1.7, n.d., 72.

58 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Better than Wine', in *Most Holy Place*, S. No. 2459, Song 1.2, delivered 2 June 1872, 3.

59 Spurgeon (ed.), ST, 38.

60 C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (London: Banner of Truth, 1969 [London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1876]), 111. Spurgeon was commending J. B. E. Avrillon's *The Year of Affections; or, Sentiments on the love of God, drawn from the Canticles, for every day of the year* (London and Oxford: Parker, 1847).

61 Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, 115. J. M. Neale's work was *Sermons on the Canticles, preached in a Religious House. By a Priest of the Church of England* (London: J. Masters, 1857). Cf. the comments Spurgeon made on another work, R. F. Littledale's *A Commentary. From Ancient and Mediaeval Sources* (London: J. Masters, 1869), in *Commenting and Commentaries*, 115. Littledale, said Spurgeon, was a close follower of Neale and had to be read with caution. Nevertheless, if 'discretion' was used, 'jewels' of 'silver' and 'gold' could be extracted from Littledale's work.

contemplation of and communion with Christ.

Mark Hopkins states that Spurgeon 'had long recognized spirituality in the High Church when he had come into contact with it', but contends that Spurgeon's 'last years' of illness and 'controversy' (Hopkins is thinking particularly of the Downgrade Controversy), 'brought something more'. Hopkins' contention is that, as Spurgeon turned his sights on theological liberalism, he became more eirenic towards High Churchmen, and generally more 'catholic' in tone.⁶² Thus, speaking at the close of 1891, Spurgeon declared, 'During the past year I have been made to see that there is more love and unity among God's people than is generally believed... We mistake our divergencies of judgment for differences of heart; but they are far from being the same thing... For my part I believe that all spiritual persons are already one.'⁶³ Hopkins is perceptive, and undoubtedly there was a development in Spurgeon's views along the lines suggested. But my contention is that he did more than just 'recognize' spirituality in the High Church in his earlier years of ministry. From at least the mid 1860s he could be warmly appreciative of such spirituality, and, crucially, influenced by it, although the nature and extent of that influence was limited and can be defined with a good degree of precision. Some High Church practices and, especially, some mystical, High Church figures, through their writing and example, helped Spurgeon affirm and practice communion with Christ. Conversely, Anglo-Catholic and Roman Catholic ecclesiology, sacerdotalism and ritual all, in Spurgeon's view, obscured Christ, trapping people in superstition and interposing other things (whether inappropriate symbolism or priests acting as 'mediators') between people and Christ: such practices were to be rejected because they militated against communion with Christ. The overarching issue then, was whether a dimension of High Church spirituality was an aid to such communion or a bar to it.

As already noted, Jeanne Guyon used mystical language as she expressed her devotion to Christ. Consideration of Spurgeon's prayers shows him speaking in a similar way. Indeed, the passionate 'love language' he used when speaking of Christ in prayer was, at times, startling. For example,

Oh to love the saviour with a passion that can never cool... Oh to delight in God with a holy overflowing rejoicing that can never be stopped, so that we might live to glorify God at the highest bent of our powers, living with enthusiasm, burning, blazing, being consumed with the indwelling God who worketh all things in us according to his will.⁶⁴

Numerous other prayers in this vein could be cited (together with similar passages from his preaching). In another prayer, Spurgeon expresses his longing for an increased devotion to Christ and focuses on the cross as the place where Christ's love for people is supremely shown.

62 Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*, 160.

63 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Breaking the Long Silence', *ST*, February 1892, p. 52.

64 [Anon.] (ed.), *Pastor in Prayer*, Prayer 1, 4 November 1878, 10.

Oh, were there not a stone in our hearts we should melt in love to thee... Give us more tenderness of heart, give us to feel the wounds of Jesus till they wound our sins to death. Give us to have a heart pierced even as his was, with deep sympathy for his griefs, and an all consuming love for his blessed person.⁶⁵

A mystical strain is clearly evident in these prayers. Gordon, in his book *Evangelical Spirituality*, comments on an extract from one of Spurgeon's addresses on the Song of Songs, 'The Well Beloved', in which Spurgeon expounded the phrase, 'Yea, He is altogether lovely', from Song of Songs 5.16. Gordon, in his treatment of Spurgeon in *Evangelical Spirituality*, points out that this sort of language and imagery – 'burning', 'blazing', 'being consumed with the indwelling God', and melting – was 'the standard vocabulary of the mystic.'⁶⁶ Similar language can be identified in Guyon's hymn, quoted earlier, and also in the extracts cited from Spurgeon's public prayers. With regard to Spurgeon's prayers, such words and phrases as 'burning', 'blazing', 'consuming', 'being consumed with the indwelling God' and 'melt in love' are all indicative of an essential mysticism. Indeed, it was passages like these just quoted which led J. C. Carlile to devote a whole chapter of his biography of Spurgeon to his subject's 'mysticism'⁶⁷ and William Robertson Nicoll, the editor of the *British Weekly* from 1866, to bracket Spurgeon with Bunyan as one of the two greatest 'Evangelical mystics'.⁶⁸ This facet of Spurgeon simply has to be recognized if a true estimate of his prayer life is to be held. Devotion to Christ was expressed in distinctly mystical vein.

Robertson Nicoll's comparison of Spurgeon and Bunyan is helpful in that it reminds us that there is a mystical strand running through Puritanism. Along with Bunyan, Samuel Rutherford could be regarded as an exemplar of this tradition. Spurgeon's regard for Rutherford, especially his *Letters*, was great.⁶⁹ Indeed, in the same sermon on the Song of Songs in which Spurgeon commended Guyon's experience of communion with Christ through contemplation he also enthused about Rutherford and for the same reason.⁷⁰ It is important to emphasize that I am not suggesting that Spurgeon's mysticism was influenced by High Church spirituality alone, or even that it was primarily influenced from this direction. The Puritan mysticism represented by Bunyan and Rutherford was a much more likely primary link, one that can be demonstrated from Spurgeon's own writings.

65 [Anon.] (ed.), *Pastor in Prayer*, Prayer 2, 18 November 1878, 14.

66 Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 162. See Spurgeon, 'The Well Beloved', in *Till He Come*, Song of Songs 5.16, 'A Communion Address at Mentone', 101-102.

67 J. C. Carlile, *C. H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1933), 268-86.

68 T. H. Darlow, *W. Robertson Nicoll: Life and Letters* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925), 402.

69 See Spurgeon's review of Andrew Bonar's *Letters of Samuel Rutherford, With a Sketch of his Life, and Biographical Notices of his Correspondents* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1891), in *ST*, June 1891, 342.

70 Spurgeon, 'Better Than Wine', 3.

But the connection between Spurgeon and High Church mysticism, although secondary, can also be demonstrated. Spurgeon's mysticism locates him within a broader stream of spirituality than Puritanism alone.

Examination of Spurgeon's prayer life thus shows that his spirituality was moulded by a range of factors. Puritanism was certainly one of these, but eighteenth-century evangelicalism was also important and, crucially, other influences, namely the Quakers and Roman Catholic and High Church writings, can also be identified, thus adding to the picture of a complex and diverse set of shaping factors which helped fashion his spiritual life. This diversity of influence is further demonstrated by analysis of his approach to intercession.

Spurgeon's view of intercession

In line with the mystical strain in Spurgeon, and his stress on the importance of contemplation, we need to note that not all of his intercession was verbal. He believed that, 'We may cry into God's ear most effectually, and yet never say a word.'⁷¹ Indeed, *in extremis*, prayer might be incoherent, consisting of, for example, groans and broken cries. He spoke of the value of this sort of praying in *The Treasury of David*, his multi-volume commentary on the Psalms. Whilst expounding Psalm 119.82, 'Mine eyes fail for your word, saying, when wilt thou comfort me?', he wrote that there was an experience in prayer which was an 'intense longing', a time of 'waiting and fainting'. This sort of prayer was well known by 'full grown saints' and it was an experience that was not satisfied 'to express itself by the lips'. Rather, said Spurgeon, it 'speaks with the eyes'. He continued,

Eyes can speak right eloquently; they use both mutes and liquids, and can sometimes say more than tongues... A humble eye lifted to heaven in silent prayer may flash such a flame as shall melt the bolts which bar the entrance of vocal prayer, and so heaven shall be taken by storm with the artillery of tears.⁷²

Spurgeon's personal intercession was not always verbal.

Having made this point, it is important to emphasize that Spurgeon's normal method of intercession was to vocalize his petitions. Yet these requests were still brief and to the point and one gains the impression that the fewer words used the better. In a message included in his book of prayer meeting addresses, *Only a Prayer Meeting*, he declared that he believed in what he termed 'business prayers'. These he described with the help of the following illustration:

We should not think of going to the bank, and then coming away without the coin we needed; but we should lay before the clerk the promise to

71 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Pray Without Ceasing', *MTP*, Vol. 18, S. No. 1039, 1 Thess. 5.17, delivered 10 March 1872, 134.

72 C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Containing An Original Exposition Of The Book Of Psalms...* (7 Vols; London and Edinburgh: Marshall Brothers, n.d. [London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1869-1885]), Vol. 6, 202.

pay the bearer a certain sum, tell him in what form we wished to take the amount, count the cash after him, and then go our way to attend to other business. That is just an illustration of the method in which we should draw supplies for the Bank of Heaven. We should seek out the promise which applies to that particular case, plead it before the Lord in faith, expect to have the blessing to which it relates; and then having received it, let us proceed to the next duty devolving upon us.⁷³

Fullerton noted that Spurgeon often used this image, that of cashing a cheque at a bank, to describe his method of intercession.⁷⁴ In the analogy the cheque was the prayer offered in faith to God who presided over the 'bank of heaven'. Because the guarantee that the 'cheque' would be accepted was the 'honoured name' of Christ and the relevant biblical promise, believers could be confident as they presented their requests. The point Spurgeon made about pleading biblical promises in prayer is important.⁷⁵ He was not advocating a form of intercession which consisted of bringing peremptory demands to God on an arbitrary range of subjects. In a prayer meeting address entitled 'Why We Have Not' Spurgeon stated that using Christ's name and authority in prayer meant, amongst other things, that believers 'ought not to pray anything' they could not imagine Jesus praying.⁷⁶ Intercessory prayer was to be tied to the character and will of God, as well as to the specific promises in the Bible (which he believed were all fulfilled in Christ).⁷⁷ Believers were to seek out these promises in the scriptures and present their petitions accordingly. As he told a Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) prayer meeting, although personal, temporal concerns were a proper subject for intercession, a Christian's prayer life, viewed in the round, should be 'proportionate'. For him, this meant that the primary focus of a Christian's intercessory prayers was to be the concerns of Christ and his Kingdom.⁷⁸

Given all this, Spurgeon believed a Christian should pray bold, blunt, faith-filled prayers that were focused on Christ's Kingdom and then wait for the answer. His own stated aim was to avoid 'beating about the bush' in intercessory prayer.⁷⁹ There was no need for excessive and lengthy 'pleading' in prayer for 'the name (of Christ) itself' pleaded.⁸⁰

This approach to intercession is illustrated by his own prayers in the Taber-

73 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Business Prayers', in *Only a Prayer Meeting*, 32. Cf. *The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith: Being Promises Arranged for Daily Use With Brief Experimental Comments* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1895), v.

74 Fullerton, *Spurgeon*, 179.

75 Cf. C. H. Spurgeon, 'Growth In Faith', MTP, Vol. 59, S. No. 3384, Luke 17.5, delivered 12 December 1867, 597.

76 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Why We Have Not', Jas. 4.2, in *Only a Prayer Meeting*, 218.

77 [Anon.] (ed.), *Pastor in Prayer*, 'Keep In Mercy's Way', 161-63.

78 C. H. Spurgeon, 'The World For Christ', address delivered 'at the BMS Prayer Meeting at Bloomsbury Chapel', as reported in the *Christian World*, 28 April 1885, 'Spurgeon's Scrapbooks, Numbered Volumes', Spurgeon's College, Heritage Room (2G), Vol. 12, 108-109.

nacle services. Intercession for unbelievers was a regular feature of these recorded prayers.⁸¹ As befitted Spurgeon's 'business' approach to intercession, many of his prayers appear brief to the point of terseness. On occasion he simply listed a whole range of different concerns in quick succession, particularly when focusing on the multi-faceted work of the Tabernacle. Prayers such as, 'Bless all the agencies – the Sabbath School, the City Mission, the Bible women, street preachers and tract distributors...' were not uncommon.⁸² Sometimes he could deal in generalities, as in a prayer for God to bless 'all the thousand and one things which constitute the activities of the churches at large'.⁸³ This was in spite of advice he gave elsewhere about avoiding 'hackneyed prayers for everything in general and nothing in particular'.⁸⁴ But more often he was specific. On 4 November 1877, within the space of a few minutes, he prayed for the Pastors' College, that 'every brother sent out be clothed with power', for the boys' at his Orphanage, that all might be converted to Christ, and for the Colporteurs, that they might be 'graciously guided to speak a word for Jesus'.⁸⁵ The key feature that emerges is that Spurgeon's normal practice of intercessory prayer was congruent with the teaching he gave to others. Whether in public or in private, intercession was to be thoroughly 'businesslike'.

Influences on intercession

What were the factors which helped shape this 'business' approach to intercession? Certainly relevant was Spurgeon's astonishing speed of thought. He once confided to Fullerton that he could think of 'twenty things in five minutes'.⁸⁶ His quick mind and fertile imagination were important factors as he developed this model of intercession. An Enlightenment influenced, evangelical pragmatism can also be discerned, as can an evangelical activism. Time was at a premium. It suited Spurgeon to pray briefly and then move on to his next 'duty'. In addition, particularly in relation to the stress on 'pleading the promises of God', the Puritan strand can once again be seen as important. In a sermon entitled 'The Covenant Pleased' he spoke of the 'covenant of grace' that God had made

79 Spurgeon, 'Business Prayers', in *Only a Prayer Meeting*, 31.

80 Fullerton, *Spurgeon*, 179.

81 [Anon.] (ed.), *The Contemporary Pulpit Library: Sermons by the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon* (London: Swan, Sonnenschein, 1892), 'Intercession For One Another', Prayer 22, 137; 'An Evening Prayer', Prayer 25, 155; 'An Evening Prayer', Prayer 26, 159. This volume contains a number of Spurgeon's prayers, none of which are dated.

82 *Sermons by... C. H. Spurgeon*, Prayer 6, 130.

83 [Anon.] (ed.), *Pastor in Prayer*, Prayer 9, 5 May 1878, 57.

84 C. H. Spurgeon, 'Incense And Light', *MTP*, Vol. 29, Exod. 30.7,8, delivered 11 March 1883, 152.

85 [Anon.] (ed.), *Pastor in Prayer*, Prayer 1, 4 November 1877, 11. His Colportage Society (for the distribution and sale of Christian literature) was established in 1866; his Stockwell Orphanage was officially opened in 1869.

86 Fullerton, *Spurgeon*, 218.

with 'the second Adam, our federal head, Jesus Christ' and through him with his people. This covenant of grace emphasized the commitment of God to his people and the certainty of his promises to them. A particular stress he wanted to make in this message was on the confidence Christians could have in prayer as they pleaded the covenant promises and truly prayed in the name of Christ.⁸⁷ Enlightenment epistemology and Puritan covenant theology fused together to help shape Spurgeon's approach to intercession.

But the influence of the so-called 'faith principle' on Spurgeon's approach to intercession also needs to be considered. The faith principle was being advocated by a number of influential evangelicals, particularly those who had links with the Brethren, as Spurgeon began his ministry in London in the 1850s. Those who propounded this principle held that funds for Christian work should be sought, as Brian Stanley notes, 'primarily through the instruments of faith and prayer'.⁸⁸ When applied to overseas mission, as it often was, the faith principle involved a rejection of the pragmatism and 'prudence' which characterized the evangelical missionary societies which had been established at the end of the eighteenth century.⁸⁹ As Stanley shows, Edward Irving was significant in advocating this approach through a sermon given to the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1824.⁹⁰ The two best known exponents of 'living by faith' in the second half of the nineteenth century were probably George Müller (1805-98) and J. Hudson Taylor, both of whom put their principles into practice – Müller through his orphanage work in Bristol and Taylor, the so-called 'father' of faith missions, through his pioneering China Inland Mission (CIM).⁹¹ Müller's stated approach was to pray for funds without directly appealing for them, trusting that God would provide what he needed at just the right time.

Spurgeon enjoyed significant friendships with both Müller and Taylor. He first met Müller in 1855, when he visited Bristol to see the orphanages,⁹² and he met Taylor in May 1864, when Taylor came to the Metropolitan Tabernacle to hear him preach and the two spoke together after the service.⁹³ The 'principles of faith in God' upon which the CIM was conducted commended themselves to his 'innermost soul'.⁹⁴ Taylor attended and spoke at prayer meetings at the Tabernacle, for example in April and October 1883,⁹⁵ and his publications were always

87 C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Covenant Pleaded', *MTP*, Vol. 25, S. No. 1451, Ps. 74.20, n.d., 5-6.

88 B. Stanley, 'C. H. Spurgeon and the Baptist Missionary Society 1863-1866', *Baptist Quarterly* Vol. 20, No. 7 (1982), 320; cf. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 174-79.

89 Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 174.

90 Stanley, 'Spurgeon and the BMS', 319.

91 See K. Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1994), 32.

92 A. Cunningham Burley, *Spurgeon and his Friendships* (London: Epworth, 1934), pp. 103-104; I. M. Randall, "'Ye men of Plymouth...': C. H. Spurgeon and the Brethren", unpublished paper, November 2006.

93 A.J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century* (4 Vols; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982), Vol. 3, 390.

reviewed enthusiastically in the *Sword and the Trowel*, Spurgeon's 'house magazine'.⁹⁶ Taylor's commitment to the faith principle clearly impressed Spurgeon, but Müller, whom he had first met when he was only twenty-two, was the greater influence. Spurgeon described Müller as 'mighty in prayer' and believed that in this regard 'none of us are worthy to be placed beside him.'⁹⁷ The principle of praying in 'faith' and then waiting for the answer to come, which Spurgeon believed he saw exemplified in Müller, helped mould his own practice. A comment in the *Sword and the Trowel*, that Müller had 'tried and proved the promises of God', is especially suggestive when put alongside Spurgeon's own approach.⁹⁸ He believed that, like Müller, he had 'tried and proved' the promises of God as he prayed with faith. The faith principle, proved in his own experience of prayer, helped shape Spurgeon's approach to intercession.

Spurgeon's espousal of the faith principle reveals a connection with Romanticism (the cultural 'mood' which emphasized intuition, feeling and 'romance' in response to the rational and empirical approaches typical of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment). Irving, who was crucial to the development of this approach, was clearly shaped by the Romantic temper.⁹⁹ Relying on prayer and faith was idealistic and heroic when contrasted with the more 'enlightened' pragmatism which still characterized the BMS and the LMS, voluntary societies established at the end of the eighteenth century. A comment from Spurgeon, that Müller's work was 'a romance of Christian confidence in God in this prosaic, unbelieving, nineteenth century', is revealing in this regard.¹⁰⁰ The faith principle, and Spurgeon's attraction to it, were linked with the growing Romantic mood.

Reflecting back on material covered earlier in this chapter, we can see other aspects of Spurgeon prayer life which reveal affinities with Romanticism. His sympathy with some aspects of High Church spirituality is significant in this regard, with the influence of Romanticism on such spirituality as it was expressed in the nineteenth century generally accepted.¹⁰¹ Spurgeon's approach to contemplation and mystical communion with Christ was also tinged with Romanticism. Two quotations can help to show this. The first is from one of his Friday lectures to his students. In this, he declared,

I saw the other day in an Italian grotto a little fern, which grew where its leaves continually glistened and danced in the spray of a fountain. It was

94 C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Apostolic Work in China', in Spurgeon (ed.), *ST*, January 1869, 32.

95 Spurgeon (ed.), *ST*, May 1883, 247; November 1883, 609.

96 See, e.g., Spurgeon (ed.), *ST*, June 1869, 283; July 1875, 342.

97 Spurgeon, 'The Pastor's Need of the People's Prayers', 209.

98 Spurgeon (ed.), *ST*, October 1889, 576.

99 Stanley, 'Spurgeon and the BMS', p. 320, speaks of Irving's 'romantic idealism', a description that is also applied to Taylor.

100 Spurgeon (ed.), *ST*, March 1884, 141.

101 For further detail on the Oxford Movement, see G. Rowell, *The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001 [1983]).

always green, and neither summer's drought nor winter's cold affected it. So let us for ever abide under the sweet influence of Jesus' love. Dwell in God, brethren; do not occasionally visit him, but abide in him.¹⁰²

The second, longer, quotation is from a sermon entitled 'My Lord and My God', based on the words of the disciple Thomas in John 20.28, and preached in 1884. Spurgeon stated,

When we have been musing, the fire has burned... Though not after the flesh, yet in very deed and truth we have seen the Lord. On a day which I had given up to prayer, I sat before the Lord in holy peacefulness, wrapped in solemn contemplation, and though I did not see a vision, nor wish to see one, yet I so realized my Master's presence that I was borne away from all earthly things, and knew of no man save Jesus only. Then a sense of his Godhead filled me till I would fain have stood up where I was and have proclaimed aloud, as with the voice of a trumpet, that he was my Lord and my God. Such times you also have known.¹⁰³

Both these extracts are shot through with autobiography, and both, with the references to 'dwelling' and 'abiding' in God, and sitting in 'holy peacefulness' before the Lord, relate to the contemplative dimension of prayer. Both also have in common certain words and phrases that are both 'mystical' recognisably in the Romantic idiom. The quotation from *Lectures to my Students* with its nature imagery typical of Romanticism is particularly important in this regard. The quotation from 'My Lord And My God' is instructive in another sense, and helps to both define and limit the particular way the Romantic cultural mood impinged on Spurgeon. In this extract, he relates what can only be described as a mystical experience, but ends with a significant twist. This is the comment, 'Such times you also have known'. Spoken to the vast congregation at the Tabernacle, these words can seem surprising, indeed incongruous, particularly as earlier in this message Spurgeon had concluded that many true Christians were also 'weak in faith'.¹⁰⁴ But, crucially, it illustrates Spurgeon's view that such intense experiences of God's 'presence' were not the preserve of the few, but were in fact open to all believers. The remark, 'I did not see a vision, or wish to see one' is also significant. Spurgeon was careful to describe his experience in such a way that it did not seem out of reach of ordinary people. This approach was of a piece with his championing of the 'common man'.¹⁰⁵ The experience of close communion with God, described in mystical terms and with a distinctly Romantic tincture, was a possibility for all. This was not the Romanticism of high culture, or the mysticism of a few, experienced saints. Spurgeon's was a mysticism of the common

102 C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students*, Vol. 2, Lecture 2, 'The Necessity of Ministerial Progress', 35.

103 C. H. Spurgeon, 'My Lord And My God', *MTP*, Vol. No. 30, S. No. 1775, John 20.28, delivered 13 April 1884, 214.

104 Spurgeon, 'My Lord And My God', 207.

105 So D. W. Bebbington, 'Spurgeon and the Common Man', *Baptist Review of Theology*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (1995), 63-75.

people and his Romanticism was not that of high culture, but of the movement as it began to percolate down through Victorian society. This popular Romanticism did not displace all elements of enlightened thought but conjoined and intermingled with it.¹⁰⁶

Returning to Spurgeon's approach to intercession, yet further influences can be traced. Kruppa states that Spurgeon was, in many ways, an archetypal Victorian 'self-made man' who embodied the typical values of the dominant middle class.¹⁰⁷ Kruppa overstates her case, in particular presenting too simplistic an analysis of the multi-faceted Spurgeon. But undoubtedly he did reflect some of the entrepreneurial values which were highly influential in Victorian Britain. This was something Spurgeon shared with Hudson Taylor, who, according to Ian Randall, exhibited 'a faith-filled entrepreneurial energy that mirrored [Spurgeon's] own'.¹⁰⁸ As Kruppa notes, Spurgeon was an admirer of Samuel Smiles, whose hugely popular work *Self Help* had sold upwards of a quarter of a million copies by 1904. Smiles preached a gospel of thrift, hard work and perseverance in the face of adversity.¹⁰⁹ Spurgeon described Smiles as 'one of the ablest authors of our time',¹¹⁰ and it was quite natural that Spurgeon should commend him. Virtues which *Self Help* exalted included 'promptitude in action' and 'economical use of time'.¹¹¹ These are principles which certainly fit Spurgeon's 'businesslike' approach to the practice of intercession.

In fact, the language of Victorian business and industry regularly surfaced when Spurgeon was talking about prayer. In a message entitled 'The Golden Key Of Prayer', Christians were compared to 'spiritual merchantmen', who were encouraged to pray in the following terms, 'The market is high, trade much; thy profit shall be large'.¹¹² Elsewhere, Spurgeon compared the Tabernacle alternately to a great ocean steamer and a large factory. In both these analogies the prayer meeting was the engine, upon which the whole enterprise depended. Developing this image with the help of his considerable imaginative powers he declared,

If you visit a factory, you may see thousands of wheels revolving, and a host of hands employed. It is a wonderful sight. Where is the power which keeps all this running? Look at that slated shed! Come into this grimy place smelling with oil. What is it? It is the engine house. You do not think much of it. This is the centre of power. If you stop that engine every wheel will stand still.¹¹³

My contention is that Spurgeon's 'business' approach to intercessory prayer

106 Cf. Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*, 256.

107 Kruppa, *Spurgeon*, 146-47.

108 Randall, 'Ye men of Plymouth...'

109 S. Smiles, *Self Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002 [1859]), vii.

110 Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 7.

111 Smiles, *Self Help*, 229.

112 [Anon.] (ed.), *Pastor in Prayer*, 'The Golden Key Of Prayer', Jer. 33.3, 160.

was effectively a fusion of a number of quite complex and, at first sight, not especially compatible factors. These included Spurgeon's temperament and certain Puritan and evangelical emphases, and they also included the Romantic faith principle, as exemplified by George Müller (with Romanticism also seen to influence other dimensions of Spurgeon's prayer life). In addition, some of the language and values of the Victorian business world were important. Puritan covenant theology and evangelical activism were being reinterpreted and recast in ways which reflected the prevailing culture and the world of the Victorian entrepreneur. And yet, despite this complex matrix of influences, Spurgeon's focus in intercession remained clear. Certain themes predominate. Prayers are full of petitions that communion with Christ might be more deeply known, that Christians might be conformed to the will of Christ, and that more people might know conversion to Christ through his cross, enjoying communion with him for themselves.

Conclusion

Analysis of Spurgeon's prayer life has revealed significant diversity. The different influences which came together to shape his way of praying included the Puritan and evangelical, High Church spirituality, and different aspects of nineteenth-century culture, including Romanticism. Spurgeon is sometimes presented as the recrudescence of English Puritanism pure and simple. For example, in his biography of Spurgeon, subtitled *Heir of the Puritans*, Ernest Bacon states that his subject 'was completely moulded and fashioned by those spiritual giants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Puritans. He stood in their noble tradition, in the direct line of their theology and outlook.'¹¹⁴ Certainly, Puritan spirituality was important for Spurgeon. But this article has shown that other streams of spirituality and movements of nineteenth-century culture were important too. He was a complex and many sided figure.

Examination of Spurgeon's prayer life has also revealed much unity. Whilst solitary prayer was important to him, he tends to stress the corporate. Most of all there was a resolute focus on Christ, particularly the crucified Christ, which was maintained across all the different dimensions of prayer we have examined. Furthermore, there was a strong desire to know felt communion with Christ in prayer.

An from a prayer entitled 'O, for more Grace!' forms a fitting conclusion. In the course of the prayer Spurgeon declared,

[M]ay we know the Christ and have Him to be our all in all ... He is everything to us; more than all in Him we find. We do accept Thee, Lord Jesus, to be made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We will not look out of Thee for anything, for everything is in Thee.¹¹⁵

113 Spurgeon (ed.), *ST*, November 1889, 590.

114 E. W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), 102.

In this prayer Spurgeon's deep desire to know Christ experientially and more fully is laid bare. For all its diversity, it is this that is the dominant theme of the prayer life of C. H. Spurgeon.

Abstract

Prayer was a vital dimension of C. H. Spurgeon's life and ministry that has not been given the detailed, critical treatment it deserves. Analysis of his prayer life uncovers a diverse and complex web of influences. 'Spiritualities' which shaped Spurgeon include High Church alongside the more obvious Puritan and evangelical. Cultural movements such as Romanticism also shaped him through, for example, his espousal of the 'faith principle'. The article also argues that, despite this complexity, Spurgeon was invariably christocentric and crucicentric in his approach to and practice of prayer, and that he valued the corporate dimension of prayer highly. The complex strands were woven together to make a consistent whole.

115 C. H. Spurgeon, 'O, for more Grace!', in Young (ed.), *C. H. Spurgeon's Prayers*, Prayer 18, 101.

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