We used to call him ‘Prin’. J. Stafford Wright was Principal of Tyndale Hall, Bristol when Derek Osborne trained there for the Anglican priesthood - and he was still Prin for my first term there some years later. My ‘year’ felt ourselves very fortunate: Colin Brown taught philosophy and church history, Anthony Thistelton helped us to find a pathway through hermeneutics, J I Packer taught us doctrine. Denis Tongue travelled in to teach New Testament. Alec Motyer joined and taught us Old Testament and Hebrew; John Wenham, Greek. And what of ‘Prin’? In my term with him, he taught Old Testament, but also led a seminar on human biology and the Incarnation; he had critically explored his way into some of the teachers of the occult; he read scientific journals; he had written on baptism policy, on theological anthropology, on sects, on the date of Ezra’s return to Jerusalem. His pastoral preaching drew on philosophy and psychology. No area of knowledge seemed off limits. Prin’s great gift to us was to show us that, with the Bible in one hand and with modern scholarship in the other, there was nothing that could not be explored. God is truth - and all truth is God’s truth, wherever we may find it. ‘God’ – he was fond of quoting from Ecclesiastes – ‘has put eternity into our minds.’

Derek Osborne follows in Prin’s footsteps. Derek is a pastor of forty year’s experience, and still active in a long retirement. He does not claim to be a frontline theologian, let alone a professional psychologist, but with Bible in one hand and the writings of psychologists and therapists in the other, he explores a creative conversation between the two in a way that helpfully illuminates the pastor’s task.

Derek engages both with those who think that psychology and Christian theology are sworn enemies, and – at the other extreme – with those whose theology so dissolves into humanistic psychology that Christian identity is lost. He is willing to draw insights from wherever he can find them, and measure them in the light of the biblical Gospel. So he develops a rich conversation with ‘depth’ psychologists such as Freud, Adler and Jung; with ‘lateral’ psychologists such as Carl Rogers, Gestalt, and Brian Thorne, and with the great ‘height’ psychologist Victor Frankl with whose logotherapy Derek finds himself having considerable sympathy. Throughout Derek has the biblical Gospel centred in Jesus Christ firmly in his sights. The depth psychologists are explored particularly in relation to the biblical doctrine of regeneration; the lateral psychologists in conversation with the doctrine of redemption; the logotherapy of Frankl in dialogue with the doctrine of revelation. Derek has a warm, evangelical and joyous tone that culminates in his closing chapter, bringing all things together in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Illuminated by apt quotations from poets such as George Herbert and Gerard Manley Hopkins, verses from hymns and some contemporary anecdotes, Derek has walked fearlessly among some of the giants in the history of psychology, sometimes finding resonance and sometimes grounds for criticism, in the light of the biblical Gospel. His work will be an encouragement to other pastors in exploring God’s truth wherever we may find it.

David Atkinson