**J. I. Packer - a personal thank you**

As I have taken various steps forward in my ministry over the years, I have to my surprise sometimes found very large footprints in front of me. They are the footprints of a giant: an intellectual, theological and pastoral giant named J.I.Packer. He retired as a Professor of Theology at Regent College, Vancouver some years ago, when blindness stopped him working. He died, aged 93, on 17 July 2020.

I first met Packer in 1964 when I was a science student wondering about ordination. He preached at St John's Lewisham on something like 'why the Church of England needs more evangelicals.' Packer had trained for the ministry at Wycliffe Hall, where years later I was a part-time tutor. I went to Tyndale Hall, Bristol, and Packer became Principal there in 1970. We had to get used to hearing strains of Jelly Roll Morton from his clarinet. He was a good Principal, sweeping away unhelpful traditions (like wearing gowns to lectures), guiding the small college in our spiritual life, wisely helping reshape governance, and fairly quickly finding himself in negotiations with Clifton Theological College and Dalton House, as Trinity College was born and he became Associate Principal alongside Alec Motyer.

My second curacy (yes: we did two in those days) in the 1970's was at St John's Harborne, where - to my surprise - I discovered some of Packer's footprints: he had been curate there with William Leatham twenty years earlier. Before he came to Tyndale Hall, Packer had been Warden of Latimer House in Oxford, and I was appointed Librarian there in 1977, finding Packer's footprints everywhere. His first major book*, 'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* was published in 1958, sold 20,000 copies that year and is still in print. It established him as a major Evangelical Anglican leader. His second book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* made a huge impression on me as a student when it was published in 1961. In 1967, he was a leading player, with John Stott, in the first National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele, editing the congress publication *Guidelines*. His great book *Knowing God,* for which John Stott called him 'Packer the Pastor', came out in 1973 - the book for which I think he is best known. For the second NEAC in 1977, Packer invited me to act as minute secretary for the preparatory theological study group, and I was honoured to see him in action at close quarters in that setting. I was appointed Chaplain and Fellow of Corpus Christi College - and there again were Packer's footprints, this time from his undergraduate days reading 'Greats' (classics) at the college in the mid 1940s. He dates his conversion to a living faith in Christ to an OICCU meeting in 1944. His doctoral thesis was on Richard Baxter. His undergraduate discovery of the Puritans became a life-long passion, and his 1990 book A *Quest for Godliness: the Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* collected together many of his essays about Puritan giants. They informed his Calvinism - which he called Reformed Anglicanism - and for some years he was secretary (to Martin Lloyd-Jones' chairmanship) of the 'Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference', which I attended on occasion. Packer was saddened by Lloyd-Jones' criticism of his collaboration (alongside Colin Buchanan) with the Anglo-Catholic leaders E.L.Mascall and Bishop of Willesden Graham Leonard, in *Growing Into Union: proposals for forming a united Church in England (1970)*. He served on the C/E Doctrine Commission, and his wisdom was widely respected.

The Packers left the UK for Canada in 1979. They kindly kept in touch with our family - and when I had a sabbatical term in the early 1980's, teaching in the USA, we managed a trip to Vancouver, where Jim and Kit kindly provided a bed for the night for me and Sue and our (then) two young children. We exchanged Christmas letters for many years, theirs usually written on their behalf by their dog. In Canada, Jim continued to write prolifically, both at the academic level (and several collections of theological papers are now in print), and especially - and this is what I value most about his ministry - making Christian theology and the Christian life intelligible to 'ordinary Christians.' He was a deeply spiritual and prayerful man with a passion for Christ and the Gospel, a good leader, a careful theological thinker, a wise pastor and direction-finder for the Church. His influence among Anglican evangelicals in this country, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, and latterly more especially in the USA, has been immense. And for his various influences on my journey - even at those times when I disagreed with him - I am deeply grateful. His book *'Puritan Vision of the Christian Life'* appeared in the US with the full title *'Among God's Giants'*. I think J. I. P. could take his place among them.

David Atkinson