

Reviews

Paul Beasley-Murray, *Fearless for Truth: Personal Portrait of the Life of George Beasley-Murray* (Carlisle, Paternoster, 2002), pp 244.

George Beasley-Murray was one of the outstanding Baptist figures of the twentieth century. His writings on baptism, eschatology and the Gospel of John would alone qualify him for this assessment. He was one of the first wave of evangelicals to earn the respect of the wider scholarly world. Importantly his contribution went beyond scholarship. He was also a leader of marked integrity, who argued consistently for rigorous thinking, yet also stood firm on matters of Baptist essentials. His death in February 2000 marked the closing of a significant era.

The life of a figure of such importance clearly deserves attention. Beasley-Murray's son Paul has begun this process with this memoir. As a 'personal portrait' it exhibits all the limitations one expects of a son's account of his father. Criticism is not absent, but it is clear that Paul is an admirer of George and the book is in large part a tribute to his memory. This is a limitation, but hardly a weakness. The picture which emerges is an intimate portrayal of the struggles and triumphs of a hard-working family man, totally committed to his calling.

Born during World War One, George lost his father in an accident before he was old enough to remember him. His double-barreled surname derives from the fact that his mother subsequently remarried. George showed remarkable musical ability (piano) at an early age and achieved well at school. However it was not until after his conversion and sense of call to ministry that he turned his attention to academic study. In 1936, still only nineteen, he entered Spurgeon's College in

London. This institution would feature significantly through his and his family's life. After two church ministries George would return as tutor 1950-56, then Principal 1958-73. (Son Paul would also later serve as Principal.) After an initial false start on a doctorate George completed a PhD at King's College, London, on the eschatology of Mark 13.

During his Principalship Beasley-Murray helped establish the reputation of Spurgeon's as a leading English theological college. He also played a key role in denominational affairs. Indeed one of the most interesting sections of this book is the account of his part in the Christological controversy which galvanized the Baptist Union of Great Britain in the early 1970s. It is a measure of this impressive individual that, whilst he stoutly defended a conservative position on this issue, he also called Baptists to greater tolerance and involvement in the ecumenical movement.

From 1973 to 1980 George was a lecturer at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. The rising tide of fundamentalism among Southern Baptists was not to his taste and that he was content to leave that environment on his semi-retirement in 1980.

A full-length, critical, biography of George Beasley-Murray will hopefully appear in the future. This book does not attempt that task. In places it seems hastily written and there is perhaps too extensive quotation from the subject's own writings. Nonetheless, it is an interesting story, written in an accessible style, about an important Baptist.

Martin Sutherland