



## GRACE IN THE ARTS:

### F. W. BOREHAM: ESSAYIST EXTRAORDINAIRE

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

The name of Boreham only rhymes with the word *boredom*. At that point the similarity ceases. The popular preacher Warren Wiersbe said: “It amazes me that my favorite biographical handbook, *Who Was Who in Church History*, mentions Caesar Borgia...but contains not one line about Frank W. Boreham.”<sup>1</sup> In 1975 Ruth Graham aspired to read “one of F. W. Boreham’s books” that year, observing, “I have read all but two of his [forty-eight] books and read them for pure pleasure.”<sup>2</sup> Alas, “there arose up a new [generation who]...knew not” F. W. Boreham, to borrow the wording of Exodus 1:8. In a preceding generation the moderator of the Church of Scotland could introduce Boreham as “the man whose name is on all our lips, whose books are on all our shelves and whose illustrations are in all our sermons.”<sup>3</sup> When the young Billy Graham went to Australia to hold a crusade, he personally visited F. W. Boreham in what was to become the year of his death (1959).

This is the first article to appear under this section of this journal on the art form used by an essayist. An essay has its own characteristic contouring and fundamental features, so there is no reason that an essayist should not appear in this journal section, just as previously articles have appeared on novelists and on an opera singer.

<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Walking With the Giants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 153.

<sup>2</sup> *Eternity* (January, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, *Walking With the Giants*, 153.

Actually the precise genre of F. W. Boreham's artistic medium is something of a hybrid. In a single verse the author of Hebrews called his written masterpiece a "word of exhortation" (which is the same expression in Greek as a sermon in Acts 13:15) and a "letter" (Heb 13:22). Therefore, I coined the term *homiletter* for describing the textual nature of the book of Hebrews. Similarly, what F. W. Boreham wrote was ordinarily not a sermon (especially for those drilled in the presentation of expository sermons from Scripture) and he might not even have labeled it a pure essay. However, his writings partook of the nature of a hybrid (like the book of Hebrews) in being sermonic essays, replete with insights for biblical preaching.

## II. PERSONAL BIOGRAPHY

One afternoon when F. W. Boreham was still a baby, his nurse carried him along the trail of an English countryside when a gypsy caravan appeared. An old bent-over gypsy woman limped along. She hobbled over to where the baby was, and she said to the nurse, "Tell his mother to put a pen in his hand and he'll never want for a living!"<sup>4</sup> The prophecy was eventually to be abundantly fulfilled, for the baby was destined as an adult to write more than forty volumes.

Boreham wrote, "Salvoes of artillery and peals of bells echoed across Europe on the morning of my birth" on March 3, 1871, because it marked the termination of the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>5</sup> As a boy he once stood within a few feet of D. L. Moody as the evangelist preached to thousands outdoors in England, although it wasn't until Boreham was seventeen years old that he came to faith in Christ.

When he secured work as a young man in London, he frequently heard C. H. Spurgeon, Joseph Parker, and F. B. Meyer, whose Saturday afternoon Bible class became a regular treat for him. Boreham was once informed that he had been "the last student" C. H. Spurgeon had accepted into Spurgeon's College before the renowned preacher died.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>F. W. Boreham, *My Pilgrimage: An Autobiography* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1950), 29.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.



Boreham fell in love shortly before he was commissioned upon his graduation by Charles Spurgeon's brother, Thomas, to become a rural pastor in New Zealand. During that first pastorate Boreham sent back to England (a trip of 13,000 miles) to retrieve his sweetheart in marriage. Boreham's thirty-four years in the pastorate were divided between Mosgiel (New Zealand), Hobart (Tasmania), and Armadale (a suburb of Melbourne, Australia). Boreham received an honorary doctorate from McMaster University in Canada, and he wrote over 2,500 editorials in 46 years.<sup>7</sup>

### III. HOMILETICAL PEDAGOGY

Through his voluminous writing Boreham was a teacher of preachers. I would concur with the assessment of the eloquent preacher John Henry Jowett who penned: "I would advise you to read all the books of F. W. Boreham."<sup>8</sup> What was it that constituted the chemical compounding of F. W. Boreham's mastery? It was the immensity of his subject combined with the imaginativeness of his style. A professor of homiletics could practically teach Homiletics 101 by using F. W. Boreham's written materials as a paradigm.

Boreham was immensely conscious of immensities. In a telling use of language he spoke of Christ's cross as "the climax of immensities, the center of infinities, the conflux of eternities."<sup>9</sup> He communicated an infinite God with His unsurpassable love who sent an unxeroxable Savior with an unfathomable salvation. Through a mosaic of subjects Boreham conveyed the Subject of subjects.

Boreham once announced, "The world is full of sacramental things."<sup>10</sup> It was precisely this panoramic perspective that made him a theological transmutationist. This is why he could say, "And now, let's overhaul the universe, talking [about] planets, politics, potatoes, or on

<sup>7</sup> T. Howard Crago, *The Story of F. W. Boreham* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1961), 150.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>9</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Ivory Spires* (London: The Epworth Press, 1934), 157.

<sup>10</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Blue Flame* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930), 247.

anything that comes to mind!”<sup>11</sup> This is why he has book titles such as *Boulevards of Paradise* or *A Casket of Cameos* or *The Luggage of Life* or *Wisps of Wildfire*. This is why he has chapter headings such as “Mad Dogs and Mosquitoes” or “A Philosophy of Pickles.” Anything and everything was grist for his mental mill—and somehow it always (like a homing pigeon) headed instinctively higher toward those eternal immensities.

Poet John Dryden spoke of “the faculty of imagination...which, like a nimble spaniel...ranges through the field of memory.”<sup>12</sup> Boreham’s only filing card system was his memory (not recommended to us other mere mortals), and he filed away a welter of illustrative material from the thousands of books he read—with a fond penchant for biographies.

Boreham was imaginative in his descriptiveness. He spoke of “sleep, Death’s own twin sister,” embroidering passages such as John 11:11-13 or 1 Thess 4:13-15.<sup>13</sup> A phrase such as “incarnate thunderstorm” will now invade any sermon when I preach about the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17).<sup>14</sup>

He described a seaside scene viewed at sunset by writing, “Every wave was a heaving billow of molten gold.”<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes it is merely one of Boreham’s flashing insights that stretches the reader’s own imagination. For instance, in comparing the John the Baptist of the Old Testament (2 Kings 1:8) with the John the Baptist of the New Testament (Mark 1:6), Boreham noted that “they were alike in this—the birds fed the one [1 Kings 18:6] and the bees fed the other [Matthew 3:4]. For Elijah, God kept an *aviary*. For John,

<sup>11</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Three Half-Moons* (London: The Epworth Press, 1929), 7.

<sup>12</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 105.

<sup>13</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Golden Milestone* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1914), 197.

<sup>14</sup> F. W. Boreham, *Mushrooms on the Moor* (London: The Epworth Press, 1915), 90.

<sup>15</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Fiery Crags* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1928), 7.



he kept an *apiary*.<sup>16</sup> On another occasion Boreham remarked picturesquely: “[That Bible] text had done for my imprisoned mind what Noah did for the imprisoned dove.”<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, Boreham’s books are irradiated with quotable quotes. In speaking about Calvary’s cross he gets (literally) colorful by writing: “Love ever marches to its triumphs by way of pitch-black Gethsemanes and blood-red Golgathas. The footmarks on the track along which Love has gone always show the print of the nails. The love-letters of the kingdom of heaven are all of them written in red.”<sup>18</sup> Or, how’s the following quip to get you thinking? “A fool may easily mistake a mosquito in the telescope for a monster on the moon.”<sup>19</sup> With all the succinctness and paradoxicality of a writer like G. K. Chesterton, Boreham observed: “The best of men are only men at best.”<sup>20</sup>

Biblical preachers are always in need of forceful illustrations, and Boreham’s books are a storehouse of sparkling ones. Take the following one. A man was dying and he confronted the doctor with his terminal condition. Grasping at the doctor’s coat, he said (though apparently a believer), “I’m afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side.” At that moment the sound of scratching was heard on the other side of the door. It prompted the doctor to say as a Christian, “That dog has never been in this room before. He didn’t know what lay beyond that door because he’d never experienced it firsthand before. However, the dog was convinced of one thing: his master was on the other side of the door. Therefore, it could know with complete fearlessness that all would be okay on the other side of the door.”<sup>21</sup> Such an illustration is modifiable to fit the needs of a doctrine of assurance when teaching demands it, such as in reference to John 14:2b-3.

<sup>16</sup>F. W. Boreham, *A Witch’s Brewing* (London: The Epworth Press, 1932), 148.

<sup>17</sup>F. W. Boreham, *Faces in the Fire* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1919), 238.

<sup>18</sup>F. W. Boreham, *The Passing of John Broadbanks* (London: The Epworth Press, 1936), 36-37.

<sup>19</sup>F. W. Boreham, *The Silver Shadow* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1918), 164.

<sup>20</sup>Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 37.

<sup>21</sup>F. W. Boreham, *Shadows on the Wall* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1922), 115-16.



Here's another example which would work well with a broader passage, such as the hundreds of people's names found in 1 Chronicles 1–9 or the numerous names ensconced in Romans 16. A census-taker was working among New York tenements crowded with children. He inquired of one woman, "How many children do you have?" She started in, "There's Mary and Ella and Delia and Susie and Tommy..." And the "and's" kept on coming until the census-taker interrupted, "Just give me the number." To this remark the woman became incensed: "We ain't got to numbering 'em yet. We ain't run out of names!"<sup>22</sup> Ah, yes. Aren't there a lot of names in some sections of Scripture? But each one is precious to his or her Creator.

While Boreham's book chapters are not normally expository sermons, they do provide extensive filing fodder for the Bible expositor and are a treasure house of homiletic helps. He produced over 100 biographical chapters (revolving around Bible texts) encompassed in five volumes.

#### IV. GENERAL THEOLOGY

In this section we will survey Boreham's random comments which relate to salient subjects in systematic theology. However, first a word about his general theological position and perspective before tackling specific subject-areas. Boreham could be described doctrinally as generally orthodox yet irenic in approach.

F. W. Boreham (borrowing from John Watson) declared: "There are certain matters... on which the preacher can be absolutely positive—the facts of revelation, of the deity of the Son of God, of sin, of redemption, and of the power of the Holy Ghost."<sup>23</sup> The only real particularity in that credo relates to the deity of Christ. Boreham tends to speak summarily of "the more sublime and more profound phases of my spiritual pilgrimage—sin, repentance, faith, forgiveness."<sup>24</sup>

F. W. Boreham claimed that with reference to "adopting a theological phraseology" he considered himself "very much of an

<sup>22</sup> Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 165-66.

<sup>23</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Luggage of Life* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1918), 235.

<sup>24</sup> F. W. Boreham, *In Pastures Green* (Chicago: Judson Press, 1954), 32.



amateur.”<sup>25</sup> He once borrowed Dean Inge’s metaphor that “the philosopher and the theologian” are the examples of “spectacle makers.”<sup>26</sup> They are seeking to provide us with clear apertures for seeing God’s reality.

In his autobiography Boreham told about having a serious falling-out with another pastor. He regretted taking him to task over a social question in a newspaper controversy, which harmfully damaged the relationship of the two friends. They were eventually reconciled, yet out of that acrimonious contest Boreham crystallized his own determinative peace-pursuing perspective on many doctrinal debates.<sup>27</sup> Even though Boreham patched up the personal quarrel, it gave him a more irenic viewpoint where others might like to pin him down on various doctrinal stances.

With the preceding personal experience in mind, Boreham stated: “as a rule, a minister’s best work is not done by criticism, by attack, by negative methods.”<sup>28</sup> As a result Irving Benson would say, “With Fundamentalist, with High Church and Evangelical, with Roman Catholic and Protestant, [Boreham] had no discernible quarrel.”<sup>29</sup> Benson also characterized Boreham’s style: “He did not attack people, always maintaining that the best way of proving that a stick is crooked is to lay a straight one beside it.”<sup>30</sup>

#### A. THE BIBLE

F. W. Boreham doesn’t use terms in print such as “inerrant,” “infallible,” “verbal plenary inspiration,” etc. He lived before such theological terminology proliferated and branded one’s place on the theological spectrum, as well as the fact that he tended to steer away from doctrinal controversy.

Boreham did quote favorably American poet James Russell Lowell who said: “I have observed that many who deny the inspiration of Scripture hasten to redress the balance by giving a reverent credit to

<sup>25</sup> Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 228.

<sup>26</sup> F. W. Boreham, *When Swans Fly High* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1931), 264.

<sup>27</sup> Boreham, *My Pilgrimage*, 168-71.

<sup>28</sup> Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 259.

<sup>29</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Last Milestone* (London: The Epworth Press, 1961), 8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

the revelations of inspired tables and campstools.”<sup>31</sup> (The poet Lowell may be referring to people like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who were wrapped up in spiritualism and seances.) In another place Boreham wrote that “the Bible is essentially a revelation.”<sup>32</sup>

In his forty-eight book legacy there is little hermeneutically that the average Protestant Evangelical could fault—with perhaps the exception that Boreham employs a much heavier dose of imagination than most prosaic commentators would. Consequently the few glaring misinterpretations mentioned here are to be understood as a rarity rather than as the rule.

On one occasion Boreham quoted Luke 21:5-6. From these words about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, he drew the strange deduction: “the Founder of the Church Himself looks forward to the day when there shall be no Church!”<sup>33</sup> Such a comment merits a slack-jawed comeback, such as “How did you get that out of that?” By “no Church” does he mean the whole Jewish religious system as it then operated? His explanation would seem to require considerably more explanation—or better explanation.

There is one other place in the whole gamut of his writings where Boreham might be taken to task for interpretive issues—when he announced: “The essence of Christianity is charity.”<sup>34</sup> Other than these few instances, F. W. Boreham’s treatment of Scripture would not raise many eyebrows in his handling of texts.

#### B. GOD

Throughout F. W. Boreham’s writings a traditional orthodox treatment of the Christian doctrine of God is manifest. “There is one God and one Mediator... Only one God! Only one Mediator!” Boreham declared, launching from 1 Tim 2:5.<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere he pondered: “If I am out of my depth in contemplating the triune character of my own personality, is it any wonder that I am baffled and bewildered by the

<sup>31</sup> Boreham, *The Silver Shadow*, 233.

<sup>32</sup> Boreham, *When the Swans Fly High*, 258.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>34</sup> F. W. Boreham, *I Forgot to Say* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1939), 263.

<sup>35</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn* (London: The Epworth Press, 1933), 116.



thought of the Triune Personality of Almighty God?"<sup>36</sup> Although he wrote of "a certain reverent reticence in regard to the thought of the Trinity," he traced numerous mirrorings of threeness elsewhere throughout our universe, reflecting the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.<sup>37</sup> In another book he would write: "A conversion is the evidence of the mighty ministry of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost in the theater of the human soul. A conversion represents the enactment of the first chapter of Genesis all over again."<sup>38</sup>

Pimentoed throughout his books are allusions to various attributes of God. If God "is God," then He is "absolutely infinite."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, he reasons that "since He has fashioned me with a reverence for all good things, He must Himself be Absolute Perfection."<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere he speaks of such divine attributes as love, sovereignty, immaculate justice, supreme authority, wisdom, illimitable power, etc.<sup>41</sup> While Boreham speaks of his youth in London under the influence of "an evangelical clergyman,"<sup>42</sup> in other places he will speak about the non-necessity of fully understanding all doctrine.

### C. CHRIST

Wherever F. W. Boreham spoke in print about the person of Christ, he spoke within the parameters of evangelical theology. He has no hesitation about declaring that "Jesus is God; He is the pronouncement of the unpronounceable Word!"<sup>43</sup> After he quotes John 1:14 in another book, he writes: "God is Jesus, and Jesus is God! 'The Word was made flesh.'<sup>44</sup> (Of course, though Jesus is entirely divine, He is not all of the Godhead that there is, so to say, "God is Jesus" could be misleading.)

<sup>36</sup> F. W. Boreham, *Dreams at Sunset* (London: The Epworth Press, 1954), 117.

<sup>37</sup> F. W. Boreham, *A Late Lark Singing* (London, The Epworth Press, 1945), 14.

<sup>38</sup> Boreham, *I Forgot to Say*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> Boreham, *When the Swans Fly High*, 246.

<sup>40</sup> Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 270.

<sup>41</sup> Boreham, *I Forgot to Say*, 208-209.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>43</sup> Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn*, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Boreham, *Faces in the Fire*, 270.

Elsewhere Boreham refers to “the transcendent Savior! He is obviously divine; does not one clearly perceive from the very outset the object of his coming...to redeem this prodigal planet?”<sup>45</sup> Boreham was committed to “the eternal deity of Jesus Christ.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Boreham implicitly treats Christ as Creator when he speaks of “the Son of God, and the hands that were nailed to the tree were creators of both nails and tree.”<sup>47</sup> In another spot he clarifies with illustrations: “The Son is as really of the same essence with the Father as the heaven is with the light; and He is as full and complete a representation of the Father as the impression is of the seal.”<sup>48</sup>

Along with Christ’s perfect deity, Boreham subscribed to Christ’s full humanity. In his very first book he penned: “Christ is the Son of God and Son of Man.”<sup>49</sup> On the next page he coupled “His humanity [and] His deity.”<sup>50</sup> In another book Boreham averred: “The two greatest events in the history of this planet are the Incarnation and the Crucifixion.”<sup>51</sup> In one conjunction (similar to Acts 20:28) Boreham exclaims wonderingly: “that Deity should die!”<sup>52</sup> Referring to the atoning work of Christ in another place, Boreham quotes his mother’s “favorite hymn:”

“He saw how wicked man had been;  
He knew that God must punish sin;  
So, out of pity, Jesus said  
He’d bear the punishment instead.”<sup>53</sup>

<sup>45</sup> F. W. Boreham, *Ships of Pearl* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1935), 261.

<sup>46</sup> F. W. Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1926), 167.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>48</sup> F. W. Boreham, *Arrows of Desire* (London: The Epworth Press, 1951), 117.

<sup>49</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Whisper of God* (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1902), 76.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>51</sup> F. W. Boreham, *Rubble and Roseleaves* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1923), 234.

<sup>52</sup> Boreham, *The Ivory Spires*, 38.

<sup>53</sup> Boreham, *A Witch’s Brewing*, 107.

## D. EVOLUTION

There are other issues to which F. W. Boreham alludes where his precise theological stance is harder to pin down. It is this issue (evolution) in Boreham to which many evangelical Christians will take exception.

One of the characters interspersed throughout Boreham's books is a fellow minister named John Broadbanks. New Zealanders of that area knew of no such actual person or location specified in reference to a John Broadbanks.<sup>54</sup> As a result, it is presumed that "John Broadbanks" was a kind of alter ego for Boreham himself. In the books the neighboring John Broadbanks appears as Boreham's best friend for nearly twenty years, and one of Boreham's book titles is even *The Passing of John Broadbanks* (1936).

Even the name "Broadbanks" is suggestive of the capacious breadth to which Boreham stretched. Once Boreham wrote of this Broadbanks: "He could never be sure as to the part played by evolutionary processes in the creation of the world."<sup>55</sup> As we will see, the preceding statement apparently could be echoed in Boreham's writings. In one place Boreham raises the tantalizing questions: "Were the worlds created or evolved? Were the 'days' of Genesis literal days or vast geologic ages?... It is no good shelving the question, *What must I do to be saved?* In order to investigate the latest theory of evolution."<sup>56</sup>

Oddly enough, in a sermon on John 3:16, Boreham asserted: "The greatest controversy of the nineteenth century—almost the only controversy that has any vital interest for our time—is the controversy between Darwin and Drummond."<sup>57</sup> Henry Drummond wrote a counter-reply to Darwin in *Ascent of Man*. "With most of Darwin's conclusions he cordially agreed."<sup>58</sup> Yet Drummond saw the struggle in nature not as a cruel process, but as driven by the intelligent motive of love. In other words, Boreham here depicts a conflict between atheistic evolution and theistic evolution, but he seems to offer no proposal for a stricter creationist viewpoint.

<sup>54</sup> Crago, *The Story of F. W. Boreham*, 175.

<sup>55</sup> Boreham, *The Ivory Spires*, 145.

<sup>56</sup> F. W. Boreham, *A Tuft of Comet's Hair* (London: The Epworth Press, 1926), 236.

<sup>57</sup> Boreham, *The Passing of John Broadbanks*, 35.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

In one context he seems to rule out creationism by writing: “Life is a slow process of evolution. We begin as monkeys; we develop as machines.”<sup>59</sup> The alternation of the two metaphors (monkeys and machines) shows that he is speaking somewhat figuratively, yet the figure he uses has a different framework than the basic biblical one. By contrast, in a different setting Boreham could write: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth—and me! Especially me.”<sup>60</sup> We might presume Boreham adopted a purely creationist stance if that were the only statement we had to go on.

On numerous occasions Boreham referred favorably to Charles Darwin. He refers to “my later teachers—Darwin and [Richard] Jeffries...”<sup>61</sup> In another volume he spoke of “a true scientist, like Darwin” exhibiting “truthfulness.”<sup>62</sup> In *A Late Lark Singing* Boreham quoted the famed eight-line poem that concludes:

“Some call it Evolution  
And others call it God.”<sup>63</sup>

In a fashion that no atheistic scientist could swallow, Boreham asserted that “the separate hemispheres [for instance, of geology and religion] are the perfect counterparts, and natural complements of each other.”<sup>64</sup> His conclusion is “that the discrepancy [between science and Scripture]—if indeed, there be one—is not between the things themselves, but between the faulty interpretations of these things.”<sup>65</sup> Most Christians could probably buy his conclusion even if they do not accept his premise.

Once Boreham spoke of reading a journal controversy over Evolution, in which he observed: “I was amazed at the assurance with which many tabulated and detailed the things that happened millions

<sup>59</sup> F. W. Boreham, *Wisps of Wildfire* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1924), 141.

<sup>60</sup> Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 183.

<sup>61</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Crystal Pointers* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1925), 164.

<sup>62</sup> Boreham, *The Fiery Crags*, 85.

<sup>63</sup> Boreham, *A Late Lark Singing*, 137.

<sup>64</sup> Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn*, 50.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



of years ago—Personally, I have to confess that I simply do not know.”<sup>66</sup> Admittedly Boreham was just talking about past English history when he wrote the following: “The pageant is so impressive that we feel instinctively that the magnificent procession is being marshaled, that the evolution is an ordered and prearranged scheme, that there is an intelligence, a will, a heart behind it all. We discover God.”<sup>67</sup> True, here he is discussing recent historical “evolution,” but one feels (by comparing numerous other contexts in his books) that he could equally use such terminology concerning scientific beginnings.

Apparently F. W. Boreham came closest to espousing a form of theistic evolution, as C. S. Lewis did, yet he is not reticent to say: “Man is very like his Maker...in Whose image he was made.”<sup>68</sup> We have devoted more space to this issue because it is one of the rare places where F. W. Boreham seems to have differed significantly from many evangelical Christians.

## V. SPECIFIC SOTERIOLOGY

The *raison d'être* for this journal is to declare and defend the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. Therefore, the bulk of this article will be devoted to an appraisal of F. W. Boreham's stance on soteriology in his nearly fifty books.

### A. CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

“What if there were no Mediator, no Redeemer, no Savior?” Boreham asked.<sup>69</sup> In the hymn footnoted by note 53 Boreham implied that he believed that “God must punish sin” and Christ bore “the punishment [that we deserved] instead.” In one of his biographical essays Boreham referred to Andrew Bonar's observing that “Christ pleases the Father to the full, and...this is the ground of my acceptance.”<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Boreham, *When the Swans Fly High*, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Boreham, *The Three Half-Moons*, 189-90.

<sup>68</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Nest of Spears* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1927), 33.

<sup>69</sup> Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn*, 116.

<sup>70</sup> F. W. Boreham, *A Handful of Stars* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1922), 234.

While all that Boreham positively affirms in his scattered comments about the atonement would be deemed acceptable to the average Evangelical, he does declare more reticently: “I have no theory of the Atonement. I have neither the desire nor the ability to argue about it.”<sup>71</sup> Elsewhere he urges us to “tell a little child the story of the Cross; tell him of its unutterable love and anguish; tell him that Jesus died for him!”<sup>72</sup> However, if you “relate to an adult the same awful facts,...he will ask for a theory of the Atonement!”<sup>73</sup>

#### B. CONVERSION’S NECESSITY

F. W. Boreham acknowledged: “The human heart cries out for a personal Redeemer, and Nature cannot satisfy it.”<sup>74</sup> Boreham wrote that a human must “kneel in contrition to the Lamb of God. For, with all his fervor for the *Ethical*, he is a sinful man, he needs a Savior.”<sup>75</sup> He reiterated: “I am simply saying that there is nothing in the civilization of our cities that can save us apart from the gospel, and there is nothing in the beauty of the bush that can save us apart from the gospel. Jesus is the only hope.”<sup>76</sup>

#### C. REDEMPTION’S TRANSACTION

What happens at the point of the new birth? Boreham inquired: “How can I live the new life except by way of the new birth? How can I acquire...graces...except by becoming a new creation in Christ Jesus?”<sup>77</sup> Boreham also announced: “What is it to be saved? What must one do to be saved? The soul is saved when it is reunited with God. As soon as Christ enters the heart, bringing...divine grace, the new day has dawned.”<sup>78</sup> Elsewhere he wrote that a Christian is one “who has received through Christ the pardon of sins and the gift of eternal life.”<sup>79</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 96.

<sup>72</sup> Boreham, *The Crystal Pointers*, 200.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 126.

<sup>75</sup> Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 29.

<sup>76</sup> Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 129-30.

<sup>77</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Heavenly Octave* (London: The Epworth Press, 1935), 51-52.

<sup>78</sup> Boreham, *A Late Lark Singing*, 171.

<sup>79</sup> Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 209.



Twice in another book he indicates that this phenomenon means to be “born again.”<sup>80</sup> In a picturesque multiple metaphor Boreham wrote of someone: “Jesus the Sun of Righteousness arose, and burst in meridian splendor on her benighted soul.”<sup>81</sup> As a result of this transactional theology, “the preacher unfolds... the wonders of the everlasting gospel. He speaks of the Father’s love; he points to the Cross of Christ; he offers pardon and... peace.”<sup>82</sup>

Boreham can speak enthusiastically of “our gospel of free grace.”<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere he exults: “Give me the gospel of the grace of God!”<sup>84</sup>

#### D. FAITH’S ROLE

Boreham quotes approvingly Ruskin’s claim that “the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian Church has ever suffered has been the effort of man to earn rather than to receive... salvation.”<sup>85</sup> In his very first published book Boreham tells of asking an 80-year-old man, “Will you not trust the Savior?”<sup>86</sup> Boreham relates from George MacDonald’s book *Malcolm* how a schoolmaster meets with a dying marquis. The schoolmaster first tells him to keep the commandments, but the marquis says there’s no time for that. To this the schoolmaster announces: “There is one commandment which includes all the rest!” And he quotes Acts 16:31.<sup>87</sup>

In biographical fashion Boreham related the conversion story of John Fletcher who came into possession of John Wesley’s *Journal*. In it Fletcher learned that “salvation lies, not in feeling, but in faith.” Therefore, (Boreham quotes Romans 5:1): “Being justified *by faith* we have peace with God!”<sup>88</sup> In another work Boreham affirms that faith is

<sup>80</sup> F. W. Boreham, *The Prodigal* (London: The Epworth Press, 1941), 19.

<sup>81</sup> F. W. Boreham, *A Casket of Cameos* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1924), 220.

<sup>82</sup> Boreham, *I Forgot to Say*, 136.

<sup>83</sup> Boreham, *A Witch’s Brewing*, 38.

<sup>84</sup> Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 28.

<sup>85</sup> Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches*, 30.

<sup>86</sup> Boreham, *The Whisper of God*, 98.

<sup>87</sup> F. W. Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1920), 11.

<sup>88</sup> Boreham, *A Witch’s Brewing*, 140.



“the indispensable condition of salvation.”<sup>89</sup> He adds: “it depend[s] on my believing in Him.”<sup>90</sup> Boreham called 1 John 5:12 “the greatest of all ultimatums,” concluding that “everything depended upon my faith in the Savior.”<sup>91</sup>

Boreham quoted David Brainerd’s experience: “I was irritated because faith alone was the condition of salvation.”<sup>92</sup> He also quoted a pastor’s wife passing on her deceased husband’s evangelistic message: “Now is the day of salvation! What a day of days this day will be if it is recorded in heaven...that, this day, your redeemed soul entered by simple faith into the kingdom of God!”<sup>93</sup>

#### E. ROMAN CATHOLICISM

As we recall Boreham’s irenic perspective, we ask what position did he adopt toward Roman Catholicism? In handling Hudson Taylor’s biography, Boreham quotes James Proctor’s hymn (which Taylor had quoted):

“Cast your deadly doing down,  
Down at Jesus’ feet;  
Stand in Him, in Him alone,  
Gloriously complete.”<sup>94</sup>

Taylor also said: “The whole work [of salvation] was finished and the whole debit paid,” so “there is nothing for me to do but to fall down on my knees and accept the Savior” (in Taylor’s chapter entitled “The Finished Work of Christ”).<sup>95</sup> Since Boreham indicated that he held the normative Protestant position on the role of good works in relation to salvation, we are somewhat cued in as to what to expect in his treatment of Catholicism.

Although Boreham tended to be irenic, he was not without barbed critique at times on the Roman Catholic position. He quoted Macauley’s *History of England* which spoke of “a Church which pretends to

<sup>89</sup> Boreham, *The Passing of John Broadbanks*, 39.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 89.

<sup>92</sup> Boreham, *A Tuft of Comet’s Hair*, 79.

<sup>93</sup> Boreham, *The Drums of Dawn*, 183.

<sup>94</sup> Boreham, *A Handful of Stars*, 108.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.



infallibility” and of those who end up “worship[ing] a wafer!”<sup>96</sup> Ironically, however, Boreham quotes John Henry Newman (Anglican-become-Catholic cardinal) who wrote: “I have never disguised... that... we do not look toward Rome as believing that its communion is infallible.”<sup>97</sup> This seems to be a smokescreen, for admittedly not all of Catholicism claims infallibility, but there is a doctrine of papal infallibility that has never been revoked by official Catholicism.

In another place Boreham tells the story of a Cuban warrior named Hatuey who was to be burned at the stake by his Spanish conquerors. These Catholics tell Hatuey that “only by kissing the crucifix could his soul find admission into heaven.” Hatuey asks if the souls of these white men threatening him will go to heaven. The priest replies, “Most assuredly.” Therefore, the pagan Hatuey returns: “I will not be a Christian; for I would not go to a place where I shall find men so cruel!”<sup>98</sup> While all religious people ought to deplore cruelty, church history is pocked with incidents of horror on the part of both Protestants and Catholics (for which apologies are in order). Therefore, one attached to the Bible feels that the real core issue to be critiqued hasn’t been dealt with by Boreham. We would come closer to a centered critique by asking: will being a white Roman Catholic, or exercising devotion toward the crucifix, gain one’s soul’s admission to heaven?

There is one story Boreham relates about Roman Catholicism that bears more directly on the core issue of concern. Boreham records James Harrington’s journal entry in 1865 (who says):

I have been much tempted of late to turn Roman Catholic, and nearly did so, but my faith has been shaken by reading Cardinal Manning’s Funeral Sermon for Cardinal Wiseman. He said that Cardinal Wiseman’s last words were: ‘Let me have all that the Church can do for me!’ I seemed to see at once that if the highest [Roman Catholic] ecclesiastic stood thus in need of external rites on his death-bed, the system must be rotten, and I gave up all idea of departing from our Protestant faith.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Boreham, *The Silver Shadow*, 97.

<sup>97</sup> Boreham, *Faces in the Fire*, 105.

<sup>98</sup> Boreham, *Wisps of Wildfire*, 121.

<sup>99</sup> Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings*, 175.

While the preceding paragraph offers some stern words of critique, Boreham's bent is more often to build bridges where they can be built. He refers to St. Patrick's conversion when (Patrick wrote): "the Lord opened my hard and unbelieving heart to a remembrance of my transgressions and led me to turn with my whole soul to my Redeemer."<sup>100</sup> As Boreham talked to a lapsed Catholic, he "told him of my debt to Francis of Assisi, to Santa Teresa, to Francis Xavier, to Bernard of Clairvaux."<sup>101</sup> Then he quoted from a Frederick Faber hymn: "the pardon of sin is the crown of [God's] glory."<sup>102</sup> Boreham narrates talking with Dennis, "a sincere and devout Catholic."<sup>103</sup>

In another setting Boreham told of Lucy (a Catholic) whose mother had just died. "Where was she? Would they ever meet again? [Lucy wondered]. And, above all, was her mother happy? The sacraments of her church comforted her, but they gave her no solid satisfaction on this point."<sup>104</sup> Lucy went off to St. Mary's Cathedral in Sydney, Australia, and prayed to St. Teresa to give her a red rose to confirm her mother's heavenly blessedness. That afternoon Lucy's Protestant friend mailed her a red rose, so naturally she was joyous. Boreham concluded: "Was it purely a coincidence? Who shall say?"<sup>105</sup> From a biblical standpoint one feels sad that anyone's hope of assurance of heaven should rest upon a sentimental coincidence rather than upon the solid ground of biblical truth.

On the other hand, believing that one is doctrinally correct need not make one unloving. Boreham told of a Protestant who was bewailing the fact that her son was marrying a lovely girl who was a barmaid and a Catholic. The Protestants were cutting her off and refusing to attend their wedding, yet the charming girl magnanimously treated the Protestant parents (ironically) *with grace!*<sup>106</sup> When Protestants are so worried about correctness that they are discourteous to other religious

<sup>100</sup> F. W. Boreham, *A Temple of Topaz* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1928), 192.

<sup>101</sup> Boreham, *The Nest of Spears*, 153.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>103</sup> Boreham, *A Witch's Brewing*, 43.

<sup>104</sup> Boreham, *I Forgot to Say*, 102.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>106</sup> Boreham, *A Witch's Brewing*, 127-33.



people, they only confirm in such people the notion that the non-Protestants are right (for, after all, “if those Protestants are right, wouldn’t you know it by the way they act?”). Rightness never need be accompanied by rudeness. On this point Boreham had much to teach a lot of Protestants.

#### F. REPENTANCE’S RELATIONSHIP

How many conditions are there to salvation? Like many Protestant preachers, F. W. Boreham didn’t always speak with an absolutely ironclad consistency on this question. Under point D in this section we saw that he often did refer to salvation by grace alone through faith alone. However, like many Bible students, at other times he seemed to include repentance as a condition.

Boreham climaxed one chapter with two ten-letter terms: redemption and repentance. To explain repentance, he quoted a John Newton hymn about having a guilty conscience over “my sins.” This brings about “tearful contrition,” so that an awareness of Christ’s crucifixion “leads me to throw myself upon my knees in tearful contrition and to yield myself to him for ever.”<sup>107</sup> In speaking about the rich man in hell in Luke 16, Boreham noted: “Repentance suddenly became the supreme desideratum.”<sup>108</sup>

Boreham narrated a story by Michael Fairless about a poor dying man. A neighboring church minister visited and “spoke to him at some length of the need for repentance and the joys of heaven.”<sup>109</sup> In a biographical sermon on Thomas Chalmers, Boreham says Chalmers “urged his people with tears to repent, to believe and to enter life everlasting.”<sup>110</sup> Yet in *The Prodigal* a young minister asks Beatrice Haly, “Do you think that a deathbed repentance atones for a whole life of evil?” To this question Beatrice wisely answers “No, but Calvary does!”<sup>111</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Boreham, *The Blue Flame*, 134-35.

<sup>108</sup> F. W. Boreham, *Cliffs of Opal* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948), 139.

<sup>109</sup> Boreham, *The Golden Milestone*, 214.

<sup>110</sup> Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> Boreham, *The Prodigal*, 20.

## G. SECURED ASSURANCE

In regard to the question of assurance of salvation F. W. Boreham states unreservedly: “There is...such a thing as the assurance of salvation. A man may reach complete certainty as to his own interest in the Cross of Christ. He may be absolutely sure that his sins are all forgiven.”<sup>112</sup> In a biographical chapter, Boreham indicated that Charles Kingsley’s marriage precipitated a spiritual crisis that brought him out of doubt “and the tyranny of sin into the exuberant assurance and enjoyment of salvation.”<sup>113</sup>

Boreham also explored reasons for lack of assurance. He referred to Thomas Chalmer’s discovery that with a “system of ‘Do this and live,’ no peace can be attained.”<sup>114</sup> Consequently, Boreham commented upon the Roman Catholic John Henry Newman: “he derives no satisfaction from his lofty faith; he never enters into its enjoyment.”<sup>115</sup> Similarly, the Anglican Dr. Samuel Johnson said, “I am terribly afraid of death. I think I may be one of those who shall be damned.”<sup>116</sup>

Through the mouth of another person, Boreham offered one prescription to a perennial problem. “Frank Bullen said that he believed; yet his belief brought him no assurance.”<sup>117</sup> Mr. Falconer spoke correctively: “you are waiting for the witness of *your feelings* to the truth of Him who is the Truth... Your feelings... are subject to a thousand changes a day. You must *believe Him* in spite of your feelings and act accordingly.”<sup>118</sup>

It is clear that F. W. Boreham espoused a doctrine of eternal security. Boreham once met a man on a train who’d been converted previously through his personal witness, and now the man was handing out tracts titled *Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment*.<sup>119</sup>

Boreham used a familiar tale of a great American prairie fire where the oncoming fire couldn’t cover any more ground because the earlier counterfire had taken care of the problem. “Judgment has already fallen

<sup>112</sup> Boreham, *A Late Lark Singing*, 188.

<sup>113</sup> Boreham, *A Temple of Topaz*, 167.

<sup>114</sup> Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings*, 12-13.

<sup>115</sup> Boreham, *The Silver Shadow*, 97.

<sup>116</sup> Boreham, *A Faggot of Torches*, 196.

<sup>117</sup> Boreham, *A Casket of Cameos*, 16.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Boreham, *Rubble and Roseleaves*, 131.



[at the Cross], and can never come again. He who takes his stand at the Cross is safe for evermore. He can never come into condemnation. He is at perfect peace within God's safety zone!"<sup>120</sup>

Dr. John Brown of Haddington, Boreham relates, visited aged Janet on her deathbed. She was confident in Christ. Brown quizzed her: "But, Janet, what...if...God should let you drop into hell?" "If He does," Janet replied, "He'll lose [more] than I'll do."<sup>121</sup> In other words, God would lose His honor, for He has promised security to His own people.

## VI. SUMMATION

In this article we have not even surveyed Boreham's random comments related to such theological topics as the Holy Spirit, angels, demons, the church, last things, etc. Boreham tended to be traditionally orthodox overall and unsystematic in his treatment of such issues. We have concentrated on theological topics more germane to the subject of salvation. While Boreham showed a propensity for embracing theistic evolution, on subjects related to soteriology he tended to swim with the evangelical mainstream. He does quote another Christian as saying that "faith alone [is] the condition of salvation."<sup>122</sup>

While F. W. Boreham offers no thoroughgoing compendium of theology, he offers a treasure house of truth for preachers and teachers. In the bakery of theological libraries his nearly 50 books are the theological chocolate eclairs of richness. The vastness and versatility of his omnivorous reading made him a rare resource for the homiletically hungry. His creativity is virtually without equal. One of the saddest matters is that you'd have to turn to a bookstore that specializes in rare or used books in order to secure any of his works today. Yet they will repay the scavenger hunt. What a legacy F. W. Boreham left!

<sup>120</sup> Boreham, *A Tuft of Comet's Hair*, 229.

<sup>121</sup> Boreham, *The Three Half-Moons*, 31.

<sup>122</sup> Boreham, *A Tuft of Comet's Hair*, 79.

