

REFORM- ATION TODAY '76



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Owen and Kathleen Griffiths, shown above with Owen's parents, all of Auckland, New Zealand, have been visiting the U.K. At the Carey Conference (a report appears in this issue) Owen described the planting and subsequent growth of the Sovereign Grace Church in his native Auckland. There was no diminishing of interest during the absence of their pastor and upon his return Owen discovered that there had been a stream of visitors week by week. The church is blessed with diversity in as much as those of Indian and Vietnamese stock form part of the congregation.

Among other overseas visitors who enriched the fellowship at Nottingham were Bob Parker of Louisville, Kentucky: Pastor Ranero, church planter and free grace pioneer in Majorca: Cecil Siriwardene of Sri Lanka: Trevor Routley of the Argentine and David Ellis of Montpelier, France.

Editorial Note. Normally the magazine is 32 pages but an accumulation of material has constrained us to have a larger issue this time. We had hoped to include the first part of Ian Shaw's study of George Whitefield but hold this over until the next issue which is also to include material on Russia and Eastern Europe and the ministry carried on by some to encourage believers in Communist countries.

Editorial

South Africa, Common Grace and the Agony of Angola

A THUMBNAIL SKETCH OF SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY MAY BE HELPFUL TO OUR readers and assist their enjoyment of Jim van Zyl's excellent article on Common Grace as it relates to South Africa.

Nearly five hundred years ago in 1488 a Portuguese mariner discovered the Cape of Good Hope. But South Africa was destined to be Protestant rather than Catholic for it was a Dutchman, Jan van Riebeeck, who founded a settlement in the Cape on April 6, 1652. The good relationships which van Riebeeck established with the Hottentots, a nomad people of yellow skin and Mongolian appearance, can be seen as a portent of the complex racial situation that has always been characteristic of South Africa. Gradually the Colony grew, being strengthened by the arrival of Europeans such as the French Protestant refugees, or Huguenots, one hundred and fifty of whom arrived in 1688. My wife descends from this source (de Villiers) while my own can be traced back to German settlers in the Cape in the eighteenth century.

Expansion inland continued steadily, the first confrontation with black negro (Xhosa) people who were migrating South being in 1770 at the Great Fish river.

In 1806 the British occupied the Cape. Their policy of anglicisation exasperated the Calvinist Boer population who in desperation began to trek by oxwagon inland from 1834 onward. Their breathtaking heroism, enterprise and survival belongs to the epic events of history and is akin to the Pilgrim fathers of America.

Vast tracts of territory now known as the Transvaal and Orange Free State lay open before them, Moselekatse a ruthless renegade chief of Nguni (Zulu) stock having exterminated about a million inhabitants, destroying all in his path, burning captives alive and sparing only young people whom he might find useful. Moselekatse was defeated by the Voortrekkers in battles at Vegkop (1836) and Mosega (1837). By far the most powerful of the tribes migrating from the North was that of the Zulu of Natal led

The roar of traffic, the indifference of the public and the social habit of indoor TV entertainment conspire against open air preaching. Pastor Malcolm Watts of Emmanuel Evangelical Church, Salisbury, Wiltshire, is the preacher shown on the cover. The church which he leads engages in regular house-to-house visiting and in open air preaching, both of which have been fruitful.

by Dingaan. Piet Retief an intrepid voortrekker leader sought to make a treaty with Dingaan but he and his delegation were treacherously betrayed and brutally murdered in 1838 by Dingaan and his warriors who then set out in full force to destroy the voortrekkers. Dingaan's mighty army was however defeated in a closely contested and bloody battle which is annually commemorated in the Republic on December 16.

Despite hardship and poverty the Boers achieved their independent nationhood but in due course the discovery of gold in the Transvaal in 1886 brought renewed tension with the resented British. Ultimately war came and lasted from 1899 to 1902. Four hundred and fifty thousand British troops were eventually required to subdue Boer resistance which at the end numbered about twenty one thousand. A major factor often overlooked is that no less than twenty thousand Boer women and children died in appalling conditions in concentration camps. A member of our church witnessing to a well known elderly friend tried to prove the reality of sin by pointing to Nazi war crimes. 'Don't talk to me about Nazis,' he retorted, 'we are worse! In the Boer war I was commanded to pour oil over women and children and burn them. Their agonised cries ring still in my ears!'

During the war an extraordinary spiritual awakening took place among the Boers, especially in prisoner of war camps. In one such camp in Sri Lanka two thousand out of five thousand men were converted. But the wounds inflicted, farms destroyed and families bereaved, confirmed in many Afrikaners a burning desire and an iron resolve to gain independence one day.

In 1910 a union was formed and from then until 1948 the country was led by three Boer statesmen, generals Botha, Hertzog and Smuts. Hertzog is regarded by some as the father of apartheid. Radical Boers or Afrikaners regarded Louis Botha and Jannie Smuts as compromisers but they have been recognised universally as men of outstanding ability. Both showed remarkable breadth of vision and generosity by fighting on the side of their conquerors against Germany in the two great world wars.

1948 is a turning point in South African history. Afrikaans Nationalism had been unifying through the years and with the slogan of *apartheid* they won the election in 1948 by a narrow majority. This spelt the demise of Smuts and his United Party. From that day to this the National Party under leaders Malan, Strijdom, Verwoerd and Vorster has gone from strength to strength. They now have no less than one hundred and eighteen Parliamentary seats. Only thirty-two make up the opposition. *Apartheid* the main spear of their election contest in 1948 has become a cane with which the rest of the world now reproaches South Africa, and is caricatured in such a way as to be regarded as detestable by black and coloured people everywhere.

But separate racial development in non-legislated form is practised by the world at large. It is recognised in Northern Ireland where two peoples of the same colour and language bomb each other apart. Countries such as Israel, Cyprus, Nigeria, Vietnam and Bangladesh remind us of human complexities. Separate racial development is not unreasonable for South Africa. It would require a man of Churchillian calibre to convince the world today that there is a universe of difference between the aggravations of petty, discriminating, apartheid legislations and the peaceful and harmonious separate development of different races and cultures. There are many distinct language, tribal and cultural differences among the fifteen million blacks of South Africa. Nearly four million whites represent two cultures and languages. Two million of mixed blood form a decided entity of their own. Likewise six hundred thousand Indians in two parts, Hindu and Muslim, form a distinct grouping. The Indians view with concern the forced expulsion of their kin from Kenya. They remember too that in 1949 the Zulus set about to slaughter them but were restrained by the State (one hundred and nine were killed).

It is not separate racial development but the overtones of superiority and of arrogance that have stuck in the throats of black men. As in all nations there are terrible economic disparities. To make a living, black men have to leave their wives and children for long periods of time. Blacks in urban areas often have to set off from home at four in the morning to get to work and return late at night. Wages have often been disgracefully low. As in many other countries the book of James is most relevant, 'The cries of them which have reaped (your fields) are entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts!' But disparity of income is a fact of life and north of South Africa's borders exist conditions far, far worse. It is not the money so much as the appalling pride, superior attitude and despising condescension that sows in the black man the same kind of resentment that was sown in the Boers by the bestial treatment of British intruders. Men will forgive a great deal but to be regarded as inferior and to be denied the dignity of manhood, that is to breed a long-term enemy who will not easily be reconciled. Many Afrikaans and English speaking whites recognise the peril and hateful nature of racial contempt but far too little has been attempted to resist and rebuke the arrogance which is all too evident and which overseas visitors find repugnant in the extreme.

It is one of the Gospel's chief glories that it transforms haughty Sauls into humble Pauls. That God should create a diversity of race and culture and plan the unity of all these in Christ becomes a source of wonder and admiration for the believer. The Dutch Reformed Church has not only played a leading role throughout South African history but has been the subject of extraordinary revivals (1861 and 1902). She has produced outstanding missionaries whose love for the African people is

in total contrast to the arrogance just described. But this is to touch on the difference between those who are born again and those who are not. So long as men reject the Christ as Lord whether they be black, white or brown, enmity will predominate in their hearts.

Jim van Zyl's article was first delivered as a paper at Skoegheim, Natal, and then written for *Reformation Today* before the spectre of Angola. Now God has appointed a rod, a long rod, a rod that is stretching across the northern borders from Angola to Mozambique, a rod that speaks, as Micah prophesied, 'hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it' (Micah 6: 9).

Atheistic communism is a threat to the free world. South Africa is a very important part of the free world but propaganda about *apartheid* has made free countries, especially America, slow to ally with the Nationalist ruling party of South Africa. Yet the Russian advance continues as Mrs. Thatcher has been reminding us. Our Baptist brethren are suffering in Russian concentration camps and we have no illusions about what they would do to us. Atheistic communism threatens our Western culture and Western freedom. But what is Western culture? It had a Christian basis to it. Does it retain a Christian base? To us this is the greatest of all contemporary questions. The Christian Gospel is the key to everything, to culture, freedom, unity of peoples, peace on earth, eternal salvation! We are interested in the story of mankind, wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions but we do not entertain the slightest interest in perpetuating squabbles. For instance, West Germany not long ago reduced to rubble by American and British squadrons, is now a chief ally and bulwark against Russian Communism, the same Communism which has spread to Angola to form an ideal base on the West African seaboard to spread further Communist control and power. Angola necessitates the call-up of South Africa's sons. For what cause may they lie dead and broken in the sands of South West Africa? If the conflict spreads and our offspring are called up do we know the reason? Do we know what we are fighting for? Most readers of this magazine are Calvinists. The Dutch Reformed Church is Calvinist. We know what our Reformation heritage is about and we dearly love that heritage. The readers of this magazine are mostly those who have come recently to a fresh and new grasp of old truth and find it vital and vibrant (Jer. 6: 16). It would seem from what brother van Zyl says that the Afrikaans people who possess the key are in the process of losing it. Like other Western peoples they have been beguiled by materialism. Like America and like us here in the UK the people have become pleasure-loving, materialistic and complacent. But the Lord has his rod, a rod to make us think once more of basic principles. What shall it profit a man if he exerts his superiority, gets rich and even wins the whole world, if he then shall spend eternity in the lake of fire?

The principles enunciated and applied in the following article are germane to most nations. That our Western culture is disintegrating few would wish to contradict. The reason, we maintain, is the gradual removal of the teachings of the Gospel, and this is seen particularly clearly in South Africa. The issues involved, however, are the same in most countries where Christianity has been dominant. This article is relevant, therefore, to our readers.

Common Grace, God's Displeasure and South Africa

THE PROPHET HABAKKUK (2:1), IN ORDER TO DISCERN GOD'S WORK AND PURPOSE with Israel, determined to station himself on his watchtower 'and look forth to see what He will say to me'. This desire should characterise every Christian, and especially every pastor, anxious to discern God's dealings with the nation he serves, otherwise he may well miss either the seven fat years of God's mercy or the seven lean years of God's displeasure. Or, worse still, he may conclude that any unusual events are the accidents of history rather than the actions of the almighty ruler of history. God forbid that we, like the foolish virgins—although in another context—should be fast asleep if and when any changes occur in our nations with regard either to God's common grace, or to God's wrath in our midst. To wake up when the damage has been done would be tragic in the extreme, as well as culpable. My aim then is to study these two teachings of common grace and God's displeasure and apply them in a practical and specific manner to the Southern African situation.

Common Grace

If the unregenerate man is so fallen that sin permeates his entire personality, and if in consequence he is an enemy of God (Rom. 5:10), why then do so many unregenerate sinners exhibit apparent integrity, self-sacrifice and altruism? The mother-love of non-Christian and Christian is equally fierce! Many humanitarian, non-Christian organisations spend as much money and time as do Christian organisations on relieving human suffering. Do these facts make the Christian faith redundant? No! The answer lies in the biblical teaching of common grace.

Perhaps it will help to clarify our thinking if we distinguish between saving grace and common grace. By saving grace we mean that special ability given by God to his elect to turn to Christ in repentance and faith. It is not a grace men possess by natural birth, neither has God indiscriminately distributed it to all men. We cannot earn it or demand it, for then it would no longer be grace. In contrast, common grace denotes those blessings from God which all men, regenerate and unregenerate, have in common, such as education, civil government, family life, marriage, justice, music, the arts and science. It is crystallised by Christ (Matt. 5:45) when he says that God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Conscience is a further blessing of common grace (Rom. 2:14f). As a powerful monitor and restraint on the individual, conscience becomes by extension a general brake

upon society at large. The world would be bad beyond endurance without the restraints of conscience! When Paul says that ‘... God gave them up to dishonourable passions ...’ (Rom. 1:24,26,28) he presupposes that God had been previously keeping men in check, holding them back. Vast destructive forces of sin and evil have been held back not only by conscience but by the deterrent forces of civil government.

Common grace is thus two-fold: it acts firstly as a blessing seen in innumerable benefits bestowed upon mankind as a whole, and secondly as a restraint, largely through the workings of conscience but also through government and the administration of civil law and order.

Common grace is something observable. As Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the wall, so we also can see God’s handwriting of common grace on the walls of our society and culture. When Paul asks, ‘Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead to your repentance?’ he is implying that God’s goodness in and through common grace is something observable. Equally important, God’s wrath is also observable in a society. Amos chapter 8, verse 11 is a striking example, where God warns the people that ‘the days are coming ... when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord’. God acted in a judicial manner. He removed the highest blessing. This deprivation was something highly observable. The same thing has been happening in many countries of the West. A more important subject than this is hard to imagine.



God’s Displeasure and Wrath

Paul, in Romans chapter 1 verse 18 to chapter 3 verse 20, deals with the universality of sin and its condemnation. Both Jew and Gentile are under the power of sin, are guilty and must give account to God (Rom. 2:12, 3:9, 3:19). The consequence is clear. All men are now under God’s displeasure (Rom. 1:18, 24f).

There are three lines of thought presented in this early section of Romans, and these throw light on this awful condition of the sinner under God’s wrath.

God’s relationship to the unregenerate

After Adam’s fall God, in his grace, did not withdraw from mankind. He continued to reveal himself. Romans chapter 1 verse 18 declares this revelation to be ‘the truth’. Verse 20 defines this revealed truth. It is God speaking about himself and his essential nature. He is eternal; his power is eternal; his nature is that of ‘Deity’. How has God revealed himself? By making what was invisible to the senses, his invisible nature visible and perceptible as men gaze upon the grandeur of creation, the things that have been made.

Chapter two, verses 14 and 15 of Romans add conscience as a further aspect of God’s revelation. The unregenerate man’s conscience bears joint witness with God’s laws, which are indelibly inscribed and embedded in his nature as man made in God’s image. By native instinct¹ he marries, cares for his children,

establishes law and order, punishes evil doers and cares for the poor and sick. This is part of every man's God-given 'indestructible moral nature'.² Therefore, unregenerate man now has God's creation which speaks of God's nature outside him and surrounding him, as well as God's law and conscience within him, as part of his moral nature and personality.

Furthermore, it is important to grasp that this 'truth' and 'revelation' (Rom. 1:18) from God to the unregenerate man is never academic—in the sense of merely attempting to convey information and no more. God's revelation is purposeful. God has acted so that the unregenerate should 'honour', and 'give thanks to him', 'glorify', 'serve', and 'acknowledge' him. God's revelation, in other words, demands a responsible reaction from all men since all are placed within the circle of creation and conscience. What is more, God expects all men to live within the framework of his absolute laws, honouring him as Creator. Living like this will result in the restraint of all that is contrary to God's revelation. Thus, creation and conscience constitute the establishing of a framework of common grace within which the unregenerate are to live.

The unregenerate man's response to God's revelation

God has been cleared of any charges of injustice; no man can really call him the 'unknown god', pleading ignorance of his nature and demands. God has acted in common grace towards all sinners. But how do they react to this revelation? Romans chapter 1 portrays the reaction not only of citizens of the Roman Empire, but, by implication of all unregenerate men of all ages.

Paul charges sinners with 'suppressing the truth', that is the truth of this revelation in creation and conscience. The word 'suppress' in Greek can mean either to 'hold down' or to 'hold back'. The concepts are related. Instead of God's revelation holding unhindered sway over unregenerate men, they thwart and check it and prevent it from having its rightful place. Continuing, Paul asserts that not only do they not honour God (by offering him the devotion of their minds and observing his laws), but worse still they embrace empty, senseless, even evil speculations and philosophies. What they consider 'wisdom' is in reality darkened folly. In verses 23 and 25 of Romans chapter 1, he expands his accusations. Basically it amounts to man's making an exchange of God for mortal man, the Creator for the creature, absolute laws for relative views, the unchanging for the changeable, truth for non-truth, wisdom for folly and darkness, the framework of common grace, with all its attendant blessings, for God's displeasure and wrath. God's judgement, in Paul's thinking, is clear—if you exchange the Creator for the creature, then I will exchange common grace for wrath!

God's reaction to the unregenerate man's sinful response

Paul states emphatically that God's reaction is one of wrath or anger. This wrath, however, is not arbitrary, blind passion. Nor is it malignant in nature. It is rather the 'righteous outflow of divine disfavour upon the sinner'.³ Or, as Hodge puts it, it is God's 'punitive justice, his determination to punish sin'.⁴ Moreover, there is, to quote Hodge again, an inevitable and irrevocable link between 'sin and misery'.⁵

The misery Hodge speaks of is summed up in a pregnant and crucial phrase Paul uses in verses 24, 26 and 28, a misery judicially inflicted. The phrase points to the practical and observable nature of God's displeasure. This characteristic

of God's displeasure can be seen also in the breakdown of common grace. Now this phrase is stated three times, 'God gave them up . . .', and because of its vital nature a brief exposition will be helpful. (i) The Greek literally reads *paradoken autous o theos*—gave them up God. The emphasis is on the giving up, which indicates the serious nature of God's punitive action; (ii) The phrase reveals a definite act of God, not the attitude of an idle spectator allowing sin to take its 'natural' course in a deistic manner; (iii) The word *paredoken* is in the aorist indicative active tense, suggesting a final act such as a judge pronouncing judgement and delivering the guilty party over for judicial punishment; (iv) The word *paredoken* comes from a verb-form, *paradidomi*, which means 'to hand over, to consign, to hand over for justice'.

God's displeasure, then, has two sides. Firstly, it speaks of a 'judicial abandonment'.⁶ This is a permissive action of God, whereby he withdraws from the wicked the restraints of his providence and grace.⁷ Bringing this truth into line with our theme, God so withdraws his restraining grace as to, in effect, deprive the unregenerate of the framework and operation of common grace, with all its attendant blessings of law, order, morality, purity, civilisation, truth, and natural love. Secondly, God's displeasure reflects a judicial and positive infliction of punishment. Without expanding on the 'how', Paul simply states that God hands men over to the appalling misery of more and more sin, as well as the consequences which inevitably attend sin. It is as if God says: 'If you do not want my purity, have impurity; if you do not want my justice, have injustice; if you do not want my sexual standards, then I will hand you over to base, evil and unnatural ones; if you do not want man made in my image, have him as a naked ape, or a robot, or as a biological machine; if you do not want my absolute laws, then have relative, changing, unreliable ones.' The list of sins to which God handed over the men and women under his wrath in the Roman Empire is catalogued in Romans chapter 1 verses 14-32.

Before turning to the practical application of the preceding in South Africa, we must sum up. The appearance of elements in a society or culture which run contrary to God's laws, nature and framework of common grace, elements of increasing sin that gain momentum (especially in a society with a godly heritage) almost always indicates that that society and culture is in the process of abandoning God and that God is in the process of abandoning that society or culture. Such abandonment is evidence of his positive punishment and displeasure. Or, to put the principle slightly differently: the appearance of elements of sin in increasing momentum is evidence of an increase in God's wrath, and a corresponding lessening of the work and operation of common grace.



The Current Situation in South Africa

Both common grace and God's wrath are observable by man. It would, therefore, be a terrible indictment upon Christians in South Africa if God were already beginning to judge us, while we were blissfully unaware of it. It is important to examine the situation to ascertain whether or not South Africa is entering a period of moral collapse similar to what has happened to other Western nations.

Positive trends

Evidence suggests the continued exercise of common grace, both in the White and Black population groups. God has, in grace, restrained much sin and blessed the inhabitants. To give a few examples: South Africa compared with other nations has an excellent economy, relatively little unemployment and no raging inflation. Efforts by the authorities to humanise racial relationships are beginning. The abolition of some petty apartheid rules, attention to the urban African's plight, the trend toward multi-racial sport especially the multi-national games show a more realistic approach by the authorities to the enormously complex racial problems present in South Africa. The government is training diplomats for the different Homeland governments and these African men will be posted to South African embassies abroad. Such facts do *not* deny the crucial and long-term necessity for more to be done in improving race relations.

Further, the powerful Dutch Reformed Church acts as a strong moral glue and national conscience. Because the authorities are concerned with public morality, we are spared the worst films and dramas produced in Europe and the USA—which does not mean that all the films shown in South Africa are morally acceptable. A recent example has been the banning of the film 'Jesus Christ, Superstar'. Again, there is not yet the same complete indifference or hostility towards the Gospel as is found in Europe. The proportion of evangelical churches is much higher than in Europe. Some of the Provinces have an evangelical Religious Education syllabus, which states clearly that its purpose is to lead children to a knowledge of Christ as personal Saviour. It is significant that some parents are emigrating to South Africa in order to spare their children the appalling moral breakdown taking place in other lands.

Two questions are relevant at this point. Firstly, why has South Africa experienced such a high level of common grace and preservation? Secondly, are there signs that this common grace framework is breaking down?

Taking the first question, I suggest the following answer: South Africa has, over the last few decades, experienced a high degree of common grace largely because the Afrikaner has been outwardly, and in many instances inwardly, obedient to God's revelation in creation, conscience and the Word of God. Without idealising or exonerating his failures the Afrikaner has, in broad terms, sought to 'honour and acknowledge God' in the moulding of the affairs of the land, in public and private, in literature, family life, education and other fields. This is particularly true of the older generation. In the private and public sector his reverence for God's absolute laws has had a profound impact. Having honoured God, albeit imperfectly, God has blessed the Afrikaner, and through him South Africa as a whole.

The origin of this influence can probably be traced back to the spiritual awakening which occurred in South Africa from 1860's onwards, in which Dr. Andrew Murray played such a prominent role. That awakening was part of a general revival in America and the British Isles during that period. In South Africa it was largely this revival which established the Dutch Reformed Church and gave it its impetus. We can therefore draw a line from that revival and the establishing of the Dutch Reformed Church to the teaching, preaching and moral guidance which constructed the framework of common grace in which the Afrikaner operated, and has operated for many decades now. The Afrikaners, in turn, increasing in numbers, moral influence and rising to prominence in

crucial private and public sectors (education, to name but one) have had an enormous influence upon peoples and organisations outside their own immediate ethnic grouping. Thus, I suggest that the peace and prosperity which the English-speaking sector enjoys is a result of a stable common grace factor in South Africa, which has operated through the Afrikaner. Furthermore, I believe history will show that if there is a rise in living standards, education, medical facilities and housing amongst the Black population this will be a further by-product of common grace. This is not to say that the Whites, and in particular the Afrikaner because of his providential prominence, have done enough for the Black population, and can forthwith be exonerated! On the contrary, God having placed the Whites in a position to raise the living standards of the Blacks, may very well judge us severely for not doing much more. We now turn to the second question as to a possible breakdown in common grace in South Africa.

Negative trends

The Afrikaner, to repeat a foundational fact, occupies a key place in the role which common grace and/or God's displeasure will play in South Africa. Thus, the moral and spiritual direction he takes will affect himself and the English, African, Coloured and Indian communities. Tragically, there are symptoms of the beginnings of a serious departure from God's revelation in creation, conscience and the Word by the Afrikaner. A forsaking of God's absolutes for the relative values of the twentieth century. It does not take a prophet to foresee the Afrikaner drifting into the malaise of moral ill-health symptomatic of the West and consequently falling under God's judgement.⁸

These symptoms and trends take on a serious aspect when viewed in the light of Paul's phrase 'God gave them over'. Let us examine them.

The Afrikaner's roots are in the farming communities where he has been close to God's revelation in creation and nature. He has also shown a marked willingness to reverence God's Word via the Dominee (the minister of the local church). This situation has radically changed. Today more than 80% of Afrikaners live in the city-complexes. Exposed to the trends always present in large cities, the Afrikaner is under severe pressure to sell his heritage for a mess of pottage, and simply to drift with the crowds who care nothing for God. The shield and bond of a powerful church, and the cohesion of extraordinarily strong family ties is breaking under the hammer blows of humanistic, ungodly forces. Too many Afrikaners have discovered the worldly freedom of being with-it Westerners. This trend is more tragic than the devastation of the Anglo-Boer wars, at the turn of the century. A burnt farmhouse can be rebuilt, scorched land reploughed for planting, new stock purchased—but who can heal the cancer of spiritual degeneration?

The church is losing her authority

Some 80% of all members of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, by far the largest of the Dutch Reformed denominations attend church at least once per month; only 35-40% once a Sunday, and only 15% twice a Sunday.⁹ While this is brilliant compared to the U.K., it shows a decided decline.¹⁰ Of far more serious import is the fact that even when the Afrikaner does attend he is increasingly looking upon church attendance, communion participation, and infant baptism, as symbols of social acceptance and civilised behaviour, and

not as having any real, living religious significance.¹¹ A serious drift is therefore afoot from the once-vital impetus of the revival of Andrew Murray's day towards a self-perpetuating traditionalism. The important point here is that by becoming a traditionalist, revering the church as a social symbol, the Afrikaner is increasingly coming to the place where he no longer acknowledges the spiritual authority of the church. In consequence he no longer acknowledges the authority of God's Word when preached from countless pulpits. Rejecting God's Word involves rejecting it as the rule of his life. Having arrived at this point the spirit and mind of the Afrikaner, emptied of God's rule, is beginning to imbibe new, humanistic and ungodly views. These views are gradually beginning to alter his entire philosophy of life and attitude to pleasure, chastity, marriage, money, the Christian way of life, and what constitutes the truth.

I do not deny that many Afrikaners are still God-fearing, but I suggest there has been a very serious change of attitude. A striking example of this is the way in which many Afrikaners, in total defiance of the church's condemnation, are continuing to attend strip-tease acts like that of Glenda Kemp. In Volksrust her show was packed out, despite the opposition of the local Dutch Reformed Church. Such an attitude constitutes nothing less than a major change in moral direction.

Again, in defiance of the highest ecclesiastical courts, an Afrikaans Sunday newspaper was established, which is the equivalent of many Western Sunday newspapers with its high quota of semi-pornographic pin-ups, sensationalistic news, and astrology. In a recent issue there was an advertisement placed by a stripper offering her services and an article in favour of relaxing Sunday observance laws. Ten years ago this kind of newspaper, and this kind of defiance of the powerful Dutch Reformed Church would have been hard to envisage.

What about theological trends within the Dutch Reformed Church? Church history provides many examples of denominations losing their initial spiritual impetus given by God the Holy Spirit, and gradually lapsing into arid intellectualism-cum-scholasticism. In reformed circles such scholasticism often takes the form of Barthianism, which is a comfortable half-way house for those who no longer wish to be bound to the old Formularies (Confessions), yet are not prepared to accept full-blown Liberal theology. I do not believe it is my place as an outsider to make accusations against the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa, but I do not think it unfair to say that this is a danger which many of their godly ministers are concerned about, particularly in view of the appalling theological decline in the once conservative and Calvinistic churches in Holland. We need to pray with our brethren in the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa that this kind of blight will never gain a grip on them. Furthermore, I do not think it unfair to point out that the Theological Faculty of the University of South Africa has a very definite Barthian bias. Again, we need to pray that this faculty will not, through its students and publications, become a bridgehead into the Dutch Reformed churches.

Amongst modern Afrikaners a new snobbish upper-middle class is replacing the once homogeneous, single class. It is wealthy, complacent, self-centred, worldly and extremely status conscious. P. G. du Plessis, whose philosophy of life would not always be endorsed by evangelicals, has some telling comments to make about this new breed of upper middle-class Afrikaner. Questioned by a

reporter about the symbols of success in Pretoria (one of the hubs of this new breed), he answered: 'You must live in Waterkloof (a beautiful suburb overlooking Pretoria), be of good social standing, have the right paintings and a wrap-around Mercedes-Benz . . . one must eat at three or four select restaurants The non-U concentrate on changing their lounge suites every six months . . .'.¹² Those who have read Vance Packard's devastating analysis of American society will recognise in du Plessis's description the same pathetic attempts of pyramid building commencing amongst Afrikanerdom.

In view of Paul's description of God's displeasure, 'God gave them up . . .', and in view of the distressing symptoms of drift away from a godly heritage in Afrikanerdom, one is bound to ask whether the symptoms are not also signs of judgement? Are the 'fleshpots of Egypt' to which the Afrikaner is turning not also the very things to which God is giving him over in wrath? Thus, to verbalise God's judgement again: You are turning your back upon me. Very well, I will give you over to writers who will parade the sensual, the unchaste, the impure; to films, made by your own film-directors, but following the moral trend set by the declining West; to artists, who for all their brilliance will increasingly depict relative values rather than God's absolutes in Creation. Artistic pantheism, the absurd, black humour, Dada or Zen-Bhuddism will be depicted, in fact, a complete inversion of the values you once professed.

The Afrikaner, it seems, has come to the end of an era. If he turns away from the moral piety of his forefathers, God's judgement will fall upon both him and the rest of South Africa. The framework of common grace in the country will crumble and break down as it is in other Western nations. It is not a political judgement to add that such a break down of common grace may be accompanied by increased racial problems, and in this sense may be further evidence of God's judgement upon the Afrikaner for forsaking him.

It also bears repetition to point out how profoundly dependent the English and Black sectors are upon the Afrikaner in whose bosom, to a very marked degree, God's revelation has been placed. In many ways the peace, economy, morality and even the political survival of every person in South Africa is dependent on the moral and spiritual direction the Afrikaner takes.



Some Conclusions

Christians in South Africa should thank God for the remarkable display of common grace still in evidence in the country. Compared with most other Western nations the measure of morality is remarkable. The new 1974 Censorship Act declares baldly in Clause 1: 'In the application of this Act the constant endeavour of the population of the Republic of South Africa to uphold a Christian view of life shall be recognised'. In a recent crucial test case, 'Star Films' applied for the release of a banned film, *Jesus Christ, Superstar*. On the very first day their star witness was forced to concede that a sizeable proportion of the inhabitants would consider the film 'offensive' to their religious convictions or feelings' (Act, Clause 47, (2) (b)). The following morning Star Films abruptly

withdrew their application! In any case, it seemed evident that the case would have gone against them, ultimately. This would not have been possible without a strict censorship act. In view of our contention of a spiritual drift amongst Afrikaners, Christians should be concerned that an Afrikaans newspaper, reacting to the collapse of the appeal by 'Star Films', should take the opportunity not only to state baldly that the film should not be banned but also to criticise the Censorship Appeal Board as well as the censorship system as such.¹³ My point is not that a newspaper does not have the editorial right to say what it likes, it does. However, one is concerned because it indicates the kind of moral persuasion brought to bear upon a very large and influential readership in Pretoria, the administrative capital.

Considering 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 1, Christians in South Africa should pray earnestly that God will restrain the breakdown of common grace and hold back his judgement upon the nation. May he raise up men and women in the private and public sectors who will not hesitate to put their Christian beliefs into practise at the highest levels of government. Instead of vilifying the leaders and authorities in South Africa, we should rather pray for all those in a position of leadership, be they White, Black, Indian or Coloured. It is easy to criticise, and there are legitimate political channels by which to express disapproval. It is equally, if not more, important to bring such men and women to God, beseeching him to give them wisdom, integrity and a sense of moral justice in dealing with the complex matters of this land.

In the realm of racial harmony, we should thank God for some changes that have come about. However, we should continue to entreat God for deeper, more widespread racial harmony. That some Whites will be severely judged by God on the great judgement day for their callous indifference to the needs of Blacks, and for their ugly discrimination both in practise, and in attitude goes without saying.¹⁴ Likewise, it would be sheer folly to deny the presence of bitter antagonism in the hearts of many Blacks. The African equivalent of the White Dutch Reformed Church, the N. G. Kerk in Afrika, which until recently has had the closest possible ties with the White Dutch Reformed Church, has now virtually broken away and joined the theologically liberal South African Council of Christian Churches (the local W.C.C.). Again, one does not wish to question the desire of our African brethren to be independent; but what is of concern is the manner in which they—immediately upon gaining their independence—joined a body so far removed from their own Confessional heritage. Missionaries are finding the atmosphere in African townships harder and harder, while Black Christians are under acute pressure from non-Christian Blacks to eschew any relations with Whites. We need urgently to entreat God for a new era of social love and harmony, for his grace to be upon the leaders of all racial groups in South Africa, for increased tolerance, and respect for human dignity and justice.

Since the middle 1950s there has been a sharp decline in the stability of many African countries. This instability has led to a breakdown in common grace. In terms of political science, the instability of one country may seriously affect that of her neighbours. Whatever our political views might be, we should earnestly pray for the success of detente moves in Southern Africa, if for no other reason than that success in detente will increase stability and peace amongst these countries, and these are key ingredients in any common-grace structure (1 Tim.

2:1-4). Any man or organisation, whether White or Black, who either considers or desires revolution as an ultimate solution to South Africa's problems is morally irresponsible.

Our desire should be for men raised up of God to be powerful and biblical expositors of the Word, anointed of the Spirit. This need for expository preaching in a relevant manner is urgent. Because the Dutch Reformed Churches occupy such a strategic position, our hope is that they will be richly endowed with such men. But the English, African, Indian and Coloured communities are in equal need. We should also explore every possible way of closer cooperation and communication between evangelical and reformed churches of all races. I would make a personal plea to our Afrikaans brethren to stretch out the hand of fellowship to those in other racial and church groups of likemind to themselves. No one expects them to cooperate with liberals, but there are genuine, bible-believing Christians of an evangelical and reformed persuasion in other churches who sincerely desire closer fellowship with the Afrikaans brethren.

I have concentrated largely on the place of the Afrikaner, because he occupies a key-role. Space does not permit the very necessary analyses of other trends in South Africa. Neither is there space to deal in detail with trends in the English and Black sectors, which would necessitate a separate article. They, too, have profound responsibilities before God. May God be merciful to all men and women in this sub-continent. May we be spared violence, granted peace and given a mighty increase in Gospel preaching.

Prayer: O Lord, we worship thee as the only God and Creator, and thy Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only Son of God, of the same essence as thyself, the Saviour of sinners. Grant that through the Holy Spirit men may come to repentance of sin, and faith in Christ and his shed blood. And grant Lord, in thy sovereign mercy that reconciled to thee, men of all races may be reconciled to each other in the Gospel of Christ. Spare too—we beseech thee—the nations from war and bloodshed. Grant wisdom to all men in positions of leadership and authority to rule with compassion and justice—through Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

Note. The two symbols illustrating this article are the Union Buildings and the Voortrekker Monument, both of Pretoria.

¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans, p. 73.

² Ibid. p. 75, footnote 29.

³ G. B. Wilson, *Romans*, Banner of Truth, p. 24.

⁴ C. Hodge, *A Commentary on Romans*, Banner of Truth, 1972, p. 35.

⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

⁸ I am not unaware of the theological problem under discussion today, why, in the midst of such appalling moral and spiritual decline in the West, there is nevertheless a heightening of sensitivity to injustice, the refugee-problem, the needs of the underprivileged and dishonesty in public office. These are a few areas under discussion. In South Africa we have the extraordinary situation that many of the most 'liberal' Afrikaners are also the most sensitive to racial injustice and the needs of humanity. This problem would necessitate separate study and I do not believe it invalidates the argument up to this point. I might point out however (i) The rise of common grace in the midst of a morally decadent society could be simply a further indication that God acts quite sovereignly and in spite of circumstances, (ii) If 'liberals' show sensitivity then so do many conservatives, (iii) Such sensitivity is often plagued by double-standards. There is a perfectly correct sensitivity towards racial injustice with regard to one group, but not to another. This is true of White and Black (and other colour) groups.

Footnotes continued on page 37.



Geoff Thomas and Ferrell Griswold at Nottingham

The Carey Conference— Nottingham 1976

WHAT IS THE CAREY CONFERENCE? NOW MEETING ANNUALLY IN UNIVERSITY centres in Britain the Carey Conference for ministers is the British expression of a world-wide Reformed movement which, having begun in the early sixties, has been gaining momentum, slowly in some countries and more quickly in others.

As the name suggests, the Carey Conference is Baptist, representing a movement of Baptist ministers and their churches towards the doctrines of the Reformation. Allied to the ministers' Conference is an annual Family Conference, which by popular demand is increasing to two a year, one in Sussex and one in Bedfordshire.¹

The world-wide movement referred to is diverse in character yet common features are observable. There is the pursuit of systematic, expository preaching and a quest for effective, biblical evangelism in the place of entertainment, decisionist evangelism. There is a strong desire to learn as much as possible from the past but to reject firmly major errors such as infant baptism. Noisy, slogan-shouting Scofield-type fundamentalism is disdained. While being decidedly anti-Ecumenical the emptiness of a merely negative approach is realised as is the danger of dead orthodoxy

and mere intellectualism. There is a steady increase of desire, and ardent prayer for world-wide reformation in doctrine, and for an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit—the essence of true revival being truth on fire.

Diversity is also observable with regard to geography and language. Encouragement is reported from such unexpected quarters that an atlas is needed to locate places such as Ueda, Pabna, Tonga, the Virgin Islands and Guam. Organisers have not sat down to make this happen. The general bankruptcy of modern evangelicalism in contrast to the expository depth of reprinted Puritan literature is largely responsible for the springing up of what can only be described as movement with its own character, yet possessing diversity.

For instance, in the North American Continent there are at least five separate expressions of the movement each with its own distinctive flavour. Increasingly mindful of each other, there is also a growing sympathy, understanding and concern for those of like mind in other countries. One of these expressions is that in the Southern States of the USA where growth has been very significant. It is a task in itself to keep up-to-date about the different churches, pastors, leaders, literature centres and conferences in each Southern State. The South occupies a vast tract of territory from West Virginia to Texas and each State has its own expression of renewed interest in the doctrines of grace.

From Birmingham, in the heart of Alabama, came Ferrell Griswold as the main speaker to the sixth Carey Conference for ministers held at Nottingham University, 30th December 1975 to 1st January 1976, to handle the main theme of sanctification. Brother Griswold (Governor Wallace's favourite preacher!) came early to free grace and hence, from the commencement of his ministry, has built upon solid foundations. The Minor Heights First Baptist Church is now a body considerably larger than any equivalent church specifically dedicated to the same principles in the UK.

Some think that it would make little difference if no papers were read at the Conference, such is the warmth of mutual interest and fellowship as men gather to share their pastoral experiences and problems and discuss in particular the application of newly discovered truth to churches. These are very diverse in character, some in the Baptist Union, some Strict Baptist, some Brethren, others independent but evangelically Arminian by tradition and practice, and yet others wholly the result of pioneering and church-planting.

Even though the time for fellowship is inadequate, especially as numbers increase year by year, it is good that the great basic truths of the Gospel be re-examined in relation to the above-mentioned church situations.

The teaching of sanctification is interwoven and integrated with all that ministers are attempting in their work. False sanctification teaching in many different forms has long been rampant in evangelicalism. Do Baptists need to return to the Reformation in this area as well? Brother Griswold, with his pleasing drawl from the deep South (capable of thunder when emphasis is needful), left no doubt and no room for any other course but a whole-hearted return to Reformed teaching. Since that teaching has not been more clearly expressed than in the Westminster Confession of Faith and catechisms, and since no tutor has achieved greater clarity and power of expression on the subject than John Owen, we were directed back to these foundations without any apology whatsoever.

Brother Griswold is a most powerful, edifying and enjoyable preacher, as was discovered during his visit to churches in various parts of England and Ireland. Therefore, two or three present, of more advanced experience, felt that they might have preferred him to cut loose and present the Reformed doctrine of Sanctification in an *à-la-Alabama* contemporary style. The rank and file, however, confessed that the historical approach and form of presentation was better suited to their needs as they have never had the opportunity to study it in depth for themselves. I concur with them, not out of bias toward the Puritans, but because I have heard most able men 'cut loose' and now still retain Owen's approach while I have not been able to remember theirs! The four tape-recorded addresses by brother Griswold on sanctification make up an excellent presentation and form a very valuable part of the tape library.

An overview of the best literary contributions thus far on the subject of sanctification was most helpful, namely, The Westminster Confession and catechisms, Owen on *Sanctification*, *The Holy Spirit*, *Mortification* and *Ps. 130*; Professor Murray's *Principles of Conduct*, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, and his class notes, obtainable from Westminster Seminary; B. B. Warfield's volume on *Perfectionism* (starting with the last chapter and working back!) and the chapter in Ryle's *Holiness* where he compares Justification with Sanctification.

Geoff Thomas, in surveying modern perfectionism and modern holiness teaching, began by showing that a variety of deviations from Scripture has existed from the very beginning. The Gnostics confined sin to the body which developed into a kind of celibate, vegetarian, monastic holiness. Then in recent times we have had variations, the Wesley 'perfect love' holiness, the Oberlin teaching (which B. B. Warfield analyses so well), the Higher Life and the Victorious Life movement, the Keswick and the Charismatic movement—a bewildering array! How can we deal with so complex a subject? The answer is to pin-point the cardinal weaknesses and then in each case to lay down the biblical doctrine with such breadth and clarity that no place remains for shallow thinking. The lack of thorough, powerful, biblical teaching on sanctification and

related doctrines is the primary reason why there are so many casualties to the wide variety of movements that abound. The principal defects in holiness teaching are as follows:

1. Sanctification is viewed mainly in a subjective or man-centred way rather than having its whole origin in God himself.
2. Sanctification's essential, all-embracing standard, the moral law, is either compromised or by-passed.
3. Sanctification is confined to the will rather than the whole man.
4. Sanctification is regarded as a second blessing rather than the progressive work of a lifetime.
5. Sanctification is viewed as something passive and mystical rather than an active and continual exercise by the believer of discipline and continual mortification.

Ferrell Griswold, in four addresses, laid foundations which left no room whatever for the above errors. Three or four word-photographs of some of these foundations will have to suffice, whereas about twelve or fourteen would be necessary to do justice to the papers given.

The eternal spring of all holiness is God. Not an atom or shred of holiness springs from any other source whatsoever. It is God's will and infallible purpose to sanctify believers, and this is brought about not by the initial consent or willingness of man but by the sovereign will of God. As the Spirit is the sole author of regeneration so he is of sanctification. The good work of God in believers begins with a crisis and ends with a crisis. The first crisis is conversion or the new birth. As with physical birth, every organ, every faculty, every part is complete, though diminutive, so in spiritual birth every part of man is renewed—he is a new creature, albeit at the commencement of his spiritual life, an infant. Development and growth follow and these terminate in the second crisis which is the resurrection or the glorification of the body at the second coming of Christ. There is absolutely no other crisis between these two crises. *In other words there is no such thing as a 'second' blessing!* All experiences no matter how dramatic, or elating, no matter how exciting, no matter how revolutionary in character, but *all* spiritual experiences should be interpreted within the context of the two climactic crises—the new birth which marks the beginning of sanctification and the glorification which signals its consummation. It is not the sinner's decision nor the sinner's will that cause the first crisis and it is not the sinner's will that sets in motion and carries on sanctification to its conclusion. It is God who begins, carries forward and completes the work.

Tremendous emphasis was laid on the fact that in sanctification the Holy Spirit works in believers a gracious, supernatural habit, principle and disposition of living unto God. This is implanted in regeneration (Deut. 30:6; John 3:6; Col. 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 3:9). This holiness does not consist of any single act of obedience but consists of such a habit that it precedes all acts of holiness. By a habit is meant not an acquired habit

‘but a virtue, a power, a principle of spiritual life and grace, wrought, created, infused into our souls, and inlaid in all the faculties of them, constantly abiding and unchangeably residing in them which is antecedent unto, and the next cause of, all acts of true holiness whatever!’ The latter is a quotation from John Owen and if it is studied it will be seen that every word contributes to the establishment of the biblical truth of holiness as something totally comprehensive and which takes hold of the whole man in the entirety of his being.

This principle of holiness is nothing but a transcript of the law of God implanted and abiding in our hearts, whereby we comply with and answer to the whole will of God as expressed therein. The new heart given to us is a heart with the law written within it. Antecedent, therefore, to all acts of holiness there is given by the Holy Spirit a new spiritual principle, or habit of grace, which abides in us and by which we are denominated holy.

Pressed home with great power was the truth that the believer has died to sin once and for all. There has been a radical once-and-for-all separation from the whole world of sin so that the believer is now as really removed from the world as a physically dead man is removed from the present world. A week before the Conference, brother Griswold’s father died suddenly. With telling effect the point was driven home that as the one departed now no longer had any meaningful contact with all those things that made up his life and environment, even though temporarily he was surrounded by all those things, so the believer is brought away entirely from the old order of sin. He has died to that world once and for all and the whole basis of Paul’s appeal in Romans chapter six is based upon that fact.

This once-and-for-all deliverance brought about through union with Christ does not eliminate all sin from the heart and life of the believer. Sanctification is concerned precisely with this fact and has as its aim the elimination of all sin and complete conformation to the image of God’s own Son, to be holy as the Lord is holy. If we take the concept of entire sanctification seriously we are shut up to the conclusion that it will not be realised until the body of our humiliation is transformed into the likeness of the body of Christ’s glory.

Our readers will judge from this report that the expositions were ‘meaty’ indeed. The total work of sanctification as it affects the whole man in a progressive work was presented in exposition from the Word and pressed home by apt and telling expository quotations. As we would expect, not so much as a razor-blade’s width was permitted to separate Romans chapter seven and Romans chapter eight. The struggle depicted in Romans 7:13ff. was presented as being wholly consistent with the overall biblical picture of what sanctification is all about for the believer.

The place of the Christian’s effort was not compromised. His total

accountability to mortify constantly the deeds of the body was driven home as a nail in a sure place. He is to employ all the means of grace, applying the inscrutable standard of God's holy law in a lifetime of disciplined application. Those unacquainted with this teaching might well regard it as a grisly business, but to those who delight in God's law after the inward man, it is surpassingly grand.

A knowledge of Church history, especially when it is presented in a warm, devotional and biographical manner is most important as it keeps the churches in balance and gives them a warmer appreciation of the body of Christ, not only through the centuries but a love for the same body in all its diversities as it exists today. J. N. Darby and others, including some Baptists, would have done much better had they observed the lessons of history and so have avoided much exclusivism and isolation which has been perpetuated. An accurate knowledge of church history will prevent men from making blunders. For instance, men have been labelled Arminian for believing in common grace and the free offers of the Gospel, when in fact those same men have believed in the doctrine of salvation precisely as did John Calvin, who expounded common grace clearly and who constantly offered the Gospel to all men indiscriminately.

Robert Dunlop described the life and ministry of Alexander Carson (1776-1844). Endued with a brilliant intellect, Carson graduated with honours from the University of Glasgow at the age of eighteen. His entire life thereafter (fifty years) was spent in the little Irish village of Tobermore (population 2,000). The study of Scripture combined with pastoral experience convinced him of the Baptist position. This brought a storm of persecution and eviction from the Presbyterian church. He made a new beginning in a nearby field with sixteen men. Subsequently the baptised membership grew to five hundred, all of whom were local residents. Preachers were raised up and sent out from Tobermore, and other churches planted. Robert Dunlop (himself a pastor in a small village) proved in his address that Alexander Carson's life spent in such an insignificant place achieved a great deal. His writings were considerable. Not only did he write in his own name but devoted much time to assisting others. He aided Robert Haldane in the preparation and editing of Haldane's commentary on Romans. The paper concluded with practical lessons as follows:

1. The value of a theological rather than a pragmatic approach to church life and order.
2. The lasting benefits accruing from the implementation of the gathered church principle. Against great odds, Carson fostered the idea of independency and resurrected the concept of a local church as a Christocracy. His efforts live on in the form of the Carson Memorial Church at Tobermore, where a faithful ministry continues to this day.
3. As a reluctant controversialist, Carson delicately balanced the polemical and the clerical approach. He was careful to steer clear of personal attack when opposing his religious adversaries. The generous charitableness of his

spirit is illustrated in his attitude to those who failed to share his separatist outlook.

4. His life and ministry proved convincingly that a Calvinistic creed and an evangelistic zeal can beat in the same heart.
5. That proficiency in things spiritual necessitates incessant hard work and devoted study.
6. That intellectual keenness is not detrimental to warm spirituality. His outstanding learning was blended with a rich and fresh scriptural piety. Although awarded the LL.D. by two American institutions of learning, he never moved away from the childlike trust of a needy sinner.
7. Central in his ministry was his unbending appeal to the written Word alone as the final court of appeal in matters of faith and life. To a religious opponent he wrote, 'If you are able to establish Presbytery from the Scriptures I am ready to be your convert!'

A second historical paper, very different in style but no less helpful and inspiring, was given by Pastor R. T. Kendall of the USA, now studying at Oxford, who with a masterly touch delineated the finer distinctives of belief touching the matter of assurance and sanctification from Calvin to Cotton. With passionate conviction 'RT' described how John Cotton returned to Calvin's views of assurance, showing that William Ames was somewhat of a theological villain. Like Elijah of old who slew all the prophets, 'RT' may have been distressed that the nation (conference) was not converted—converted that is, as was Cotton to Calvin's views on assurance. Most of the men who were quoted exceed us in profundity of scriptural knowledge and it is necessary to have an overall grasp of all the implications before making any kind of reliable assessment as to who was right or wrong. One of the chief benefits of 'RT's' paper was to alert us all to more diligence in doctrine and its application.

Peter Lewis, in presenting to the Conference the teaching of the Puritans, gave excellent support and illustration to the expositions by Ferrell Griswold. He traced out the work of sanctification in believers as proceeding from Father, Son and Holy Spirit. With reference to the second person of the Trinity, sanctification was described as the fruit of Christ's death, the effect of mystical union with him and the communication of his fulness. One of the benefits of papers of this kind is the reminder given of the wealth of Puritan reading matter, so much of which we would like to see in print. For instance, Jeremiah Burrough's massive treatment on Christ's invitations to sinners (Matt. 11:28-30) was cited to advantage in displaying the purchase by Christ's death of our sanctification. Holiness was the purchase of the blood of Christ for all those for whom he laid down his life. 'So in love is Christ with holiness that he will buy it with his blood for us,' said Flavel. In this rich vein the author of *The Genius of Puritanism* edified the Conference. Happily, cassette tapes can be played relentlessly back and forth with no evident sign of wear. The material was in many places so profound that it requires several hearings.

Finally, the manner of Geoff Thomas's preaching on corporate sanctification represented much of what the Conference is striving to attain, namely, powerful, doctrinal, expository preaching suited to the average congregation.² Three simple points were opened up, expanded and applied. (1) The Church is the body of Christ. (2) The Church is responsible for the sanctification of her members. (3) Full provision has been made by the head of the Church for the sanctification of her members. 'There is no such thing as a believer outside the body of Christ'—'no man lives to himself'—was asserted with vigour, as was the individual responsibility of every member to every other member in the local church. When any opportunity is lost to encourage a member the whole body suffers. When there is failure to correct an erring member the whole witness of the body is impaired. Application of this kind was fulsome. In directing us to the all-sufficient provision made for us in Christ the preacher was so carried away that we expected any minute he would fly out of sight to the throne above.

Abuse of the concept of the *corpus Christi* by Roman Catholicism was adverted to by the speaker. That matter has much to do with the sacramentalism which remains a vexed problem in the professing church universally. This report commenced with an explanation of the cause of the Conference. It ends with the assertion, in keeping with the content of Geoff Thomas's sermon, that the pursuit of *corpus Christi*, reformed to the utmost extent of the pattern of Scripture, remains the Carey Conference's ambition and pursuit.

¹ This year the Carey Family Conference at Pilgrim Hall in Sussex will be held from 9th to 13th August and at Clarendon School in Bedfordshire from 16th to 20th August. See details below.

² In order to maintain this emphasis, the evening meetings are held in local churches. Hyson Green Baptist Church (Peter Lewis is the pastor) acted as an excellent host thus providing opportunity for the public to partake of some of the benefits of the conference.

CAREY FAMILY CONFERENCES

TWO SUMMER CONFERENCES HAVE BEEN ARRANGED THIS YEAR. AT EACH, attention will be given to practical, biographical and doctrinal subjects. Evening sessions, to which non-resident visitors are invited, will be devoted to preaching. Children of all ages are catered for with separate programmes during the morning when there will also be a creche. A variety of recreational activities are available during the afternoons. Pilgrim Hall, Uckfield, Sussex is the venue for the first conference 9th-14th August (almost fully booked). Clarendon School, Haynes, Bedfordshire is the centre for the second conference, 16th-21st August. Prices are less for a predominantly dormitory type accommodation mainly suitable for young people, but by no means exclusively so. Places of historical interest to do with Bunyan, Newton and Cowper are within easy reach of Haynes.

For details please write to John Rubens, 36 Langden Close, Northwood End, Haynes, Beds.

Reviews

Ideas for R.E. Specialists in Schools.

by Robin Pearce. Henry E. Walter Ltd., 174 pp., paperback (illus.), £1.25.

Robin Pearce's aim is to stimulate R.E. teachers suffering from a shortage of motivation and fresh ideas. He claims that, although religious education can and should cover a wide range of religions and sects, it is fundamentally about man's knowledge of God. The book is thus aimed at effective teaching of Christian doctrine, particularly in secondary schools.

The author writes unashamedly as a conservative Evangelical and in his final chapter (Religious Education, Grace and the Holy Spirit) he explains this theological standpoint. The teacher's aim should be, not to convert, but to state the Christian case, not as a neutral but fairly, and to be aware that grace can operate in the heart of the hearer in the classroom, especially when prayer is part of the lesson preparation. Even critics of Mr. Pearce's theology would admit from the tone of the book that he surely lives up to his description of an effective R.E. teacher as one who: 1. is a Christian. 2. has a sense of vocation. 3. is well trained and equipped. 4. is seeking to follow Christ faithfully.

The book argues that R.E. should be an exploration of basic questions about origin, purpose and destiny, not just moral and social problems. In this exploration the Bible holds a central position, but *all means* at the teacher's disposal should be used.

Some of these means are explained in Chapters 4 to 8, where teachers are encouraged to use a variety of aids. Not only are full details of operation or construction given, but also forewarnings about possible snags, an approach much appreciated by many teachers who expect disasters when experimenting with audio or visual aids! Chapter 9 (Books and Addresses) is a real mine of information about sources for material.

The first three chapters are examples of the usage of such material:

Chapter 1. God and Individuals—theological issues raised in the lives of Van Gogh, John Wesley, Beethoven etc.

Chapter 2. Sun worship in Egypt, Britain, America and the Roman Empire—showing the place of mystery, fear and fascination in worship by primitive man.

Chapter 3. Sixth Form Course (10 lessons) on world views of men in art, literature, religion and philosophy and their implications, leading on to the Christian evaluation of man and the doctrine of justification.

In all, a book which should stimulate most R.E. teachers to fresh ventures.

HUGH PARKINSON.

A Better Way

By Sir Fred Catherwood, IVP, £1.50, 157 pp., paper.

This is the latest, and in my view the best, of Sir Fred Catherwood's books. I do not know of a better treatment of the role of the Christian in modern society and the application of biblical principles to government, the economy, industry and human relations. Since the author, as the blurb tells us, is chairman of the British Institute of Management, chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board, director of several companies, and of much more significance had his theological grounding under Dr. Lloyd-Jones (not in the blurb!) there would seem to be few people better qualified to write on the subjects he does.

The whole argument is firmly grounded at the beginning in the theological bedrock of the creation and the moral law, but the deductions made are always practical and realistic, sometimes cruelly so. The chapter on the dignity of man, for instance, touches convincingly on subjects like vehicle production lines, racialism, the death penalty and

euthanasia. The discussion on the family does not follow the well-worn paths but faces questions such as, what should a person do if he or she is converted while living in a promiscuous relationship? Stresses on the family are most helpfully pinpointed. But Sir Fred does not dwell just on the gloomy side. The chapter 'Civil Order' shows the benefits of the welfare state—daringly described as being in accordance with the Christian principle of caring for the weak and needy. A case is made for the essential role of the State in economic planning, education, housing and employment. This need not deter anti-labourite readers, however! They will say 'Amen' to the view expressed that social security benefits should not be given to strikers. 'If anyone will not work, let him not eat' is a Scripture quoted which must compel us all to think hard. But too many Christians seem to subscribe to what Catherwood calls 'economic Darwinism', a rejoicing in the survival of the fittest at the expense of the weakest, 'which preaches that the weak should go to the wall and is perfectly prepared to see firms crash and thousands of people pour on to a labour market which cannot possibly absorb them'.

Much of this touches on politics, inevitably, but *A Better Way* will not be applauded wholly by any Party—indeed the whole party system is critically examined and the role of non-party advisors emphasised. A chapter is devoted to the pressing international issue of 'nationalism' and the Christian attitude towards it. Essential reading for some 'good' patriots who are really bad nationalists! In expounding 'Economic order' Sir Fred deals some lethal blows to the conventional wisdom of the conservationists. 'Motorways,' he says, 'have made drastic cuts in fuel consumption.' Again; 'The most appalling waster of human and material resources is not industrial expansion but war'. The Protestant work ethic is admirably restated and in the same section linked to the IMF and EEC. Dangers in shop-floor power are investigated at

length, and industrial democracy is recommended as a possible way forward. It is emphasised that solutions cannot be absolutely deduced from Scripture and must be only tentative. Nevertheless, this book goes far beyond mere common sense and the Christian framework is applied convincingly throughout.

The final two chapters show the relevance of the Christian church—where it exists as a true gospel church—and Christian freedom. My conclusion would be that few unbelievers honestly reading this book could fail to be impressed that the Christian church and its message, as shown here, are far from the out-of-date and superfluous things they once imagined. This is, therefore, a book not only for us to read and talk about, but to recommend and give away—perhaps sparingly at £1.50 a time! Make sure that your local MP has one, plus leading figures in local industry and government. Ask for it at your local library. If the contents are widely read and considered the effects could be far reaching.

IAN RANDALL.

Puritan's Progress

By Monica Furlong, Hodder and Stoughton, £5.50, 223 pp.

The sub-title is, 'A study of John Bunyan'. There is an attempt to set Bunyan within the context of the Puritan movement—which is caricatured rather than described. Like those who have taken a similar attitude (see 1 Kgs. 21:23-25) this secular authoress is hostile to Biblical, evangelical Christianity. The book is a sample of darkness being confronted with light. The authoress does not hesitate to be really crude in her contempt and classifies Bunyan as 'a man fixated at a fairly early stage of infantile development—the anal phase'. We would not waste time with this matter were it not important to alert all evangelical authors, bookshop-managers and book-buying people of the preparedness of the publishers to market a book of this kind. We are not obliged to patronise those who treat us in this way.

THE EDITOR.

The sixth article in a series by the editor expounds a subject which intimately touches experience.

Christian Experience— Assurance

ASPECTS OF EXPERIENCE SO FAR TREATED IN THIS SERIES HAVE BEEN humiliation because of sin, joy because of justification, love because of adoption, patience in tribulation and the baptism of the Spirit. In handling the last named it was said that the sealing of the Spirit has to do with assurance. The Holy Spirit who seals believers with a seal of ownership dwells in them as the earnest. This earnest is like a down-payment on a house that will finally belong to the owner. The very fact that we are indwelt by the Spirit who assures us (by his general work within us and by sealing us in particular) is proof or evidence that we are true believers and have eternal life.

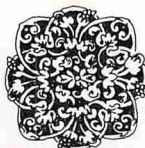
The subject of assurance of salvation belongs very much to the category of experience. Negatively, this can be seen when a believer is in doubt about his salvation. Such doubt can easily give way to depression, and even unhappiness or grief. What misery there is in not being sure that one will escape the fires of eternal torment! Positively, a well grounded and strong assurance can be attended with joy unspeakable, a peace which passes understanding and many sweet, spiritual comforts. This is especially the case when the believer is able to contemplate with confidence his inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him (1 Pet. 1:4).

William Guthrie regarded assurance as 'the Christian's great interest' and gave that title to his classic on the subject. This is an apt description for the attainment of certainty of our place in heaven is certainly our greatest personal interest in this world.

Now the Scriptures not only speak clearly on this subject but also urge the enjoyment of a well-grounded assurance. 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life.' And such is our assurance that we know that he hears our prayers and that he will answer them (1 John 5:13,14; John 15:7). On the other hand, a wavering man will receive nothing (Jas. 1:6,7). The attaining of assurance enriches Christian experience and will, according to Thomas Brooks, produce heaven upon earth, sweeten life's changes, assist communion with God, preserve from backsliding, produce holy boldness, prepare for death and lead to enjoyment of Christ.

The following outline should help us get to grips with this important subject.

1. Assurance defined
2. What the Scriptures teach about assurance
3. The effects of assurance upon our Christian experience
4. The teaching of the Reformers and Puritans.



1. Assurance defined

As the word suggests, assurance has simply to do with being sure. We believe in Christ and we are sure that he will save us. Scripture describes faith as 'assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen' (Heb. 11:1, A.R.V.). Abraham was fully persuaded (assured) that what God had promised, he was able also to perform. Assurance means confidence. It also means a full conviction, translated *full assurance* in the Authorised Version (1 Thess. 1:5; Col. 2:2; Heb. 6:11, 10:22). Assurance is a conviction for which reasons can be given. It concerns facts. Feelings and emotions about these facts enter into it but assurance is more than feelings. We can feel depressed and discouraged about our spiritual condition and yet know at the same time with certainty that we have eternal life. Assurance does not bypass the understanding. Paul speaks of a 'full assurance of understanding' (Col. 2:2).

The word assurance has always been used in the sense of our being sure about our personal salvation for the simple reason that no other word expresses more simply what is at stake. Most Roman Catholics reject the idea of assurance of salvation. Their entire system of belief and practice points to reliance upon the Church, priests, the Pope, the saints, the sacraments and upon good works performed, rather than on Christ who alone can save with absolute certainty and finality. The Roman Catholic might have a slender hope but the system discourages and even forbids an absolute certainty or the declaration of an infallible assurance. Arminians are unable to develop consistent teaching about assurance because they reject the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. If it is accepted that a person can become a true believer, that is regenerate, and then so fall away as to be unregenerate and lost, it follows that there can never be a well-grounded assurance of salvation. Those in the Reformation tradition claim biblical clarity with regard to regeneration. God alone is the author of the new birth. By his word he quickens whom he wills. Once regenerate the believer can never be unregenerate. The

good work begun by God will be completed by him (Phil. 1:6). However, allowance must be made for those called temporary believers, people who are subject to a work of the Spirit which falls short of the new birth. In defining assurance it will help to examine the relationship of assurance to hope, to faith and to sanctification.

Firstly, what is the relationship between hope and assurance? Hope may be defined as a gift of God whereby we are given the expectation of good to come. Hope is objective in that it is centred in God himself. The ground of the hope of eternal life is the same for the experienced Christian as for the beginner. We lay hold of the hope set before us, that is we lay hold upon Christ who is our hope (Heb. 6:18). When he who is our hope returns, our redemption will be complete. Hope will then be no more since it will have been realised (Rom. 8:24,25). The apostles themselves, during Christ's ministry on earth, were confused about the future state. The resurrection of Christ changed that and their hope became very clear, not of an earthly kingdom but of eternal glory. Believers are born again to a living hope which means that the contemplation of the hope imparts strength and life. It inspires discipline. 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself' (1 John 3:3). It inspires endurance in suffering too. 'Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection' (Heb. 11:35). While hope is objective, having its object in heaven, assurance is subjective inasmuch as assurance is the inward persuasion or conviction that that hope of glory is really possessed and that nothing can take it away.

Secondly, what is the relationship between faith and assurance? Saving faith is an action of belief and trust exercised by the understanding and will whereby the believer is joined to Christ in a state of reliance upon him. Assurance is a reflex act in which the believer stands back and sees himself to be in a state of happy union with Christ. Faith comes first and brings assurance in its wake. Faith can be likened to seeing Christ. By faith we see him and believe in him, and then, seeing and believing, we cannot but be assured of our union with him. If we believe in this way, how can we not have assurance? The answer is that in reality and experience faith is not always as clear or as vigorous as that. Dark clouds can hide the vision of the unseen world where Christ ever lives to intercede for us.

Thirdly, what relationship does assurance have to sanctification which is that work of the Holy Spirit within us to make us holy and conform us to Christ? Since the same Holy Spirit who sanctifies us also assures us, is it right to base assurance upon the observation that God is working in us both to will and do his good pleasure? The answer is yes, since both justification and sanctification are the gifts of God. A right discernment of God's gifts and of the Spirit's work within us strengthens assurance. Spiritual discernment is needed to make sure that our practice of truth, our loving the brethren and our doing works of righteousness are really inspired and motivated by the Holy Spirit and are not the product of

self-interest or self-righteousness. The discernment of such issues has much to do with a well-grounded assurance of salvation.

2. What the Scriptures teach about assurance

Old Testament believers expressed their assurance of salvation in a forth-right way. 'I know that my redeemer liveth,' said Job asserting his redemption, and 'in my flesh shall I see God' (Job 19:25,26). A strong personal assurance was encouraged by the words of God to the patriarch, 'Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.' What an astonishing statement! What doubt could remain about eternal life if God was Abraham's exceeding great reward. Consider expressions in the Psalms, 'For this God is our God for ever and ever' (Ps. 48:14) and 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory' (Ps. 73:24).

Statements about assurance are found in profusion throughout the New Testament. A verse which both defines and summarises the matter is 2 Timothy 1:12; 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.' In addition there are many passages which encourage assurance such as our Lord's promise 'And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand' (John 10:28). I regard the following Scriptures as foremost in their bearing on our subject, the order being significant inasmuch as we begin with the work of the Holy Spirit and then face the issue of the distinguishing between true and false assurance. Finally we consider the basis of a well-grounded assurance. (i) Our Lord's promise of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16,17) and Paul's exposition of life in the Spirit in Romans chapter eight. (ii) The problem of false assurance as portrayed in the epistle to the Hebrews. (iii) Factors to support a well-grounded assurance as expressed by John in his first epistle. These Scriptures I regard as providing the main New Testament data from which we may establish the doctrine.

(i) Our Lord's promise of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16,17) and Romans chapter eight.

Our Lord's brief physical presence on earth was unique. The privilege of seeing him and the comfort of being able to converse with him and receive counsel from him can hardly be over-estimated. Little wonder that the apostles clung to his physical presence and refused to receive or accept the clearest statements repeatedly made by him about his impending death and ascension to his Father. He told them plainly just before the event that he would be crucified but they did not want to believe it (Matt. 26:2).

In preparing them for the trauma of his humiliating death and to equip them for their ministries which would follow, he told them that the coming of the Holy Spirit would be better than his physical presence with them.

He and the Father would send the Holy Spirit to dwell in them for ever (John 14:16,17). The implications for assurance of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are enormous. Having implanted faith in the heart, the Spirit guides, teaches, comforts, prompts and assures the believer. In place of clinging to Christ's physical presence they were encouraged to depend on the Holy Spirit. The word rendered 'comforter' (paraclete) literally means 'one called to be beside another'. As an advocate stands beside his client to assure him, so the Holy Spirit supports the believer making his cause his own. If a person says that he knows he has eternal life because God's Spirit within tells him so, you have only his word for it. That person is giving witness to something within which others cannot test. But the Spirit does not only assure in that particular way. At the same time he teaches and inspires a holy life. He does not do the one without the other. The person testifying to an inward witness of the Holy Spirit should at the same time evidence the work of the Spirit in his general behaviour. Our Lord told his disciples that the Spirit would not only dwell in them as an advocate to assure but he would teach, instruct and assist them. The Holy Spirit did this work so well that the world was turned upside down by them. Whatever personal testimony was borne by the apostles to eternal life, it was supported by outward evidence of the reality of the Spirit dwelling within.

With that in mind we turn to Romans chapter eight. This chapter has been called the charter of Christian assurance. It begins with the assurance for those in Christ of *no condemnation* and ends with the assurance of *no separation* from Christ. But how can we know that we are 'in Christ'? The theme of the chapter is life in the Spirit. We know that we are in Christ because we live a spiritual life (8:1), have been made free from the bondage of sin (8:2), are spiritually minded (8:6), mortify the deeds of the body (8:13), are led by the Spirit (8:14), have received the Spirit of adoption (8:15), have the witness in our hearts that we are God's children (8:16), and are enabled to pray (8:26,27). All this, and the consideration of God's sovereign unchangeable purpose in Christ, results in a strong persuasion or assurance that nothing in the universe can separate from Christ (8:38,39).

If we examine the varying aspects referred to above we will see that there is that in which we are passive, 'the Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God'. There is also that which is active. The Holy Spirit works in believers to make them active in prayer, active in mortifying sin, and applying discipline to their daily walk and active in choosing paths of righteousness. Whatever the activities, there is always the passive element in which the believer bears in his heart at all times the inward testimony of adoption, that he is a son and an heir of eternal life. But this inward testimony should never in any way contradict, restrict or circumscribe the prompting of the Spirit to an activity of holy living. Indeed, the stronger the inward assurance of adoption

the more likely are the other aspects of experience to flourish, including mortification of the flesh. We can suspect a testimony of inward assurance to eternal life to be false if there is not a commensurate testimony of holy living. The possibility of self-deception and false assurance is very real.

(ii) *The problem of false assurance as portrayed in the epistle to the Hebrews.* Our faith, and hence our assurance, is bound to be tested and tried. The epistle to the Hebrews reveals that there were those who, having made a full profession faith, having been 'enlightened', having 'tasted of the heavenly gift', and having been 'made partakers of the Holy Ghost', were in danger of falling away (Heb. 6:4-6). C. H. Spurgeon in preaching on this took the 'if' of verse six in our Authorised Version and delivered the whole of his sermon on the basis of hypothesis. The 'if' is not in the original! Apostasy is a reality, it happened then and it happens today. There have always been some who, after having been set apart (sanctified) by the blood of the covenant (having been integrated into the life of the church), have trodden underfoot all that they professed before to be sacred and essential to their salvation (Heb. 10:29). The road to apostasy is a road taken gradually. It shows by a decline in assembling with other believers. Apostasy from faith in Christ is the burden of Hebrews, forsaking the assembling together of the saints being one of the main symptoms (Heb. 10:25). We are reminded of the reality of apostasy by such names as Saul, Judas, Balaam and Demas.

If, in what can be described as the two climactic passages of Hebrews (Heb. 6:4-11 and 10:22-39), we read of those who fall away, does not this underline our responsibility 'to make our calling and election sure?' In view of this fearful danger what is the safeguard prescribed by the author of Hebrews? In the first passage he commands diligence in attaining a 'full assurance of hope' (Heb. 6:11). In the second there is the exhortation to draw near in 'full assurance of faith' (Heb. 10:22).

Full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22) consists of firm, robust and unwavering persuasion that Jesus Christ is the King of glory, the prophet divine and the great high priest who ever mediates for us. The epistle sets forth Christ in a way designed to establish an immovable faith in him. This theme of faith, applied at the end of the tenth chapter, is illustrated in the famous eleventh chapter and finally driven home at the beginning of the twelfth chapter. The subject of assurance is asserted in verse thirty-five, 'cast not away your confidence' (*parrësia*). This confidence is a boldness—a strong prevailing persuasion or assurance of our acceptance with God.

The full assurance of hope (Heb. 6:11) to be diligently sought is a strong confidence that the hope set before us will be realised. The 'full assurance' (*plērophoria*) means an assurance which has been filled up with strength—a dynamic assurance! A little hope will preserve a man from

total apostasy but a 'full assurance', an unshakable confidence, an immovable conviction, will carry a man through flood and fire, through trial and tribulation.

It is significant that the attainment of such a powerful assurance, according to the Hebrew epistle, is not to be sought by a quest for indefinable mystical experiences but by diligence in the discipline attending our warfare (Heb. 6:11,12). As a soldier fights on the battlefield by relentless attention to fitness, discipline, watchfulness and care about his armour and weapons so must we be as watchful and disciplined in our spiritual warfare. The outcome depends on this.

The bond or union between faith, practice and assurance in Hebrews is apparent. The primary objective of the writer is to combat the temptation to forsake faith in Christ and faithful Christian practice and to return to trust in and practice of the Old Testament system. But Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament system and greater than Moses and Aaron. The stronger and clearer our faith in Christ, the more zealous will be our adherence to his teaching, obedience to his precepts and identification with his people. The stronger and clearer our faith and faithfulness in practice the stronger and clearer our assurance. How is faith in Christ strengthened? By diligent attention to the means of grace. Faith, practice and assurance are triplets, the best friends, always helping and strengthening one another. No place is found in Scripture and no quarter given to any kind of assurance which is divorced from faith and practice.

(iii) *Factors to support a well-grounded assurance as expressed by John in his first epistle.*

The understanding of what is otherwise a very difficult epistle is wonderfully facilitated when we grasp that John's aim throughout is to expose and refute Gnosticism, which in the event became one of the greatest forces ever to oppose the Gospel. The *Gnosis* or knowledge, by which the movement became known, points to its specific character. The Gnostics claimed an esoteric knowledge, that is a special knowledge possessed only by the initiated or an elite group. 'We know' was their boast, but they were destitute of spiritual dynamic and no equivalent moral virtue existed to support their specious and deceitful claim. Gnosticism was a form of intellectualism without holiness. As a philosophy it was similar to evolution, only in reverse. Present-day evolution starts with slime, and stage by stage from there goes up to higher forms and eventually reaches the apex in man. Gnosticism started with God as the highest point, then descended to the angels and the spirit world and finally arrived at the lowest form which was the flesh of man. To the Gnostics the flesh was essentially sinful. Jesus could not have been a man, they reasoned, because flesh is evil. They separated man into two storeys. The upper storey consisted of the spirit and the lower storey

that of the flesh. The flesh could break every law and indulge every lust because it was a separate entity from the spirit which could soar aloft. The spirit, they claimed, was without sin. Thus they were antinomian (anti-law, anti-moral) in practice.

With this devilish teaching threatening to undermine the churches (1 John 2:26) we can appreciate the decisiveness of John's approach when he repeatedly asserts 'we know'. They, the Gnostics, say, 'they know'. They claim a special knowledge, but 'we know', and our knowledge is a knowledge that stands up to searching tests. If any man claims to be sure of salvation he must at the same time be ready for tests. Let him prove his faith and verify his assurance with a consistent Christian walk (1 John 2:4-6).

John does not deny the direct witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer. Indeed an assurance of union with Christ and with the Father expressly by the Spirit dwelling within is foremost in John's teaching, as it is in Paul's. 'Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit' (1 John 4:13). To be in Christ and to possess the Spirit, in contrast to having a mere intellectual knowledge, is fundamental for the believer. Christianity is all about the life of God in the soul of man. We are partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). John links a knowledge of the Holy Spirit within us with the life which the Spirit manifests, namely, love for the brethren (1 John 4:12), and keeping God's commandments (1 John 3:24).

Such is the person, work and power of the Spirit dwelling in believers that they cannot but recognise him and know by his presence and work that they are in Christ. As Paul asserts, the Holy Spirit indwelling us is the earnest or guarantee of our adoption, our inheritance and eternal life (2 Cor. 1:22 and 5:5; Eph. 1:14). The Spirit himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God. John encourages believers to recognise the Holy Spirit who indwells them, but we ought to note very well that at the same time he refers to the effects of the indwelling of the same Holy Spirit, namely, respect for the commandments (1 John 3:24) and love for God's family (1 John 4:12). So important does he deem this principle (a holy life the evidence of the Spirit's work within) that he does not hesitate to repeat it in different ways.

The Gnostics said 'we know' and stopped at that. They were hostile to holiness, opposed to the commandments, were loveless, unbrotherly, carnal and denied the truth of the incarnation of Christ. John set to work and showed that in contrast to their 'we know', the Christian 'we know' is practical. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit must, without fail, be evidenced by love for what God loves. We should love his holy and inscrutable law. We should love his Son who kept and fulfilled that law for us and died for those who have transgressed it. We should love the Lord's people. If we do not we have no right to assurance of salvation.

A pretence to assurance of eternal life, therefore, which is unaccompanied by spiritual life flowing from the indwelling power of the Spirit within is spurious—it is mere head-knowledge—a form of gnosticism, empty, vain and delusive.

We must now face the question of whether it is valid to base our assurance on sanctification. In refuting the Gnostic heresy John insists that believers not only have the Spirit but they possess the life of the Spirit. This life of holiness can and must be tested. He applies three tests, the social, the doctrinal and the moral. The Gnostics say they know but 'we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren' (1 John 3:14). It is perfectly in order to deduce that we are part of God's family by the observation that we have been given a new nature, a nature which goes out toward and loves the communion of saints, the fellowship of heaven. We can remember the time when we detested and abhorred such company.

Loving the brethren, or the social test, features strongly in the epistle. There are also the doctrinal and moral tests, believing rightly and practising correctly. Faith to believe in Christ as 'God manifest in the flesh' is God's gift, a gift to be recognised and cherished (Eph. 2:8,9; Heb. 12:2; 2 Pet. 1:1). Likewise good works are the gift of God (Eph. 2:10).

The first principle of the Gospel is that we are justified by faith not by works. The second principle is that true faith results in good works (Jas. 2:24). Hence, Peter declares that if we are diligent to add works to our faith we shall never fall (2 Pet. 1:5-10).

A well-grounded assurance of eternal life, then, is based upon the free grace of God, his gift of the Holy Spirit, his gift of faith and his gift of good works which accompany salvation. We ought not to stress any one feature at the expense of another. We cannot afford to be negligent in any way. We cannot afford to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. We neglect the good works of faith at our peril. Does not dependence upon good works in this way encourage legalism? Undoubtedly there is always the danger of legalism, stronger in some than in others, but there is a world of difference between a disposition that serves God out of love and thankfulness for salvation (John 14:23), and a disposition of self-righteousness in the person who seeks to do good in order to earn salvation or prove that he is saved.

In my view a well-grounded assurance is based firstly on the inward witness of the Holy Spirit testifying to sonship. Secondly, and no less essentially, it is based on a spiritual life which is in harmony with sonship, not one or the other, but both together. If there is a deficiency in the heart or deficiency in the life then the believer should seek both the Lord himself and the means of grace to make good that deficiency. A whole area of counsel from Scripture opens up when we begin to deal with reasons for lack of assurance and remedies drawn from Scripture to meet

the lack. The Puritans excelled in giving counsel to those in difficulty, but that aspect deserves separate treatment.



3. The effects of assurance upon our Christian experience

What is man's chief end? Man's chief end is to know God and enjoy him forever. Justified and cleansed, with a true heart we approach God with a full assurance of faith. Such full assurance enables us to pray with boldness (Heb. 4:16, 10:19). When a believer can say, 'the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me', he has a sure foundation for communion. The love of Christ shown in his dying in our place must always be the spring of our love to him. That is our first love from which we must never depart (Rev. 2:4). The assurance of Christ's love sweetens communion, as illustrated in the Song of Solomon, 'I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love' (S. of S. 2:3,4). The assurance of spiritual union is 'my beloved is mine, and I am his' (S. of S. 2:16). Assurance enriches the enjoyment of our religion and enjoyment helps make us strong in the exercise and practice of our religion. The athlete who sets about his training with zeal and zest because he loves it is likely to progress more than one who does not. Likewise, a craftsman who adores and enjoys his craft is likely to excel. To take these illustrations a step further. Suppose that both the athlete and craftsman are gifted and know it, will that confidence help or hinder them? Providing it is assurance and not arrogance it will help them. Turning from the natural to the spiritual, if we are assured we have the gift of saving faith we will exercise that gift the more, will enjoy communion more, and enjoy our religion more, and thus be stronger in the practice of it.

As with the Son so with the Father, the assurance of his love helps communion. The Authorised Version (which is still to be preferred for its superiority in most respects) omits an important statement in 1 John 3:1. 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.' Some manuscripts include 'and so we are!' There is no doubt about it. We are the children of our Father and we love him and worship him in gratitude for he has loved us while we were yet sinners, sent his Son to die for us, and has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. These blessings of the Father include election, predestination, calling, justification and ultimately the completion of our redemption in the glorification of the body.

To lack assurance is to cast a doubt upon all these blessings as they apply to us personally. How can we enjoy the author of the blessings if we constantly doubt our personal interest in them? On the other hand the stronger the assurance of our union with the Trinity the better and richer will be our communion with the Trinity. Also, our fellowship with the fellow-heirs of so great salvation will be warmer by reason of the assurance we enjoy together. Our assurance is a confirmation to them of the reality of the Gospel.

The more assurance of the hope of eternal life among believers, the warmer, stronger and sweeter will be the sharing of that hope. Our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven. The better our assurance of that citizenship the more spiritual fellowship will be encouraged with increased love and tenderness and, to use the words of Thomas Brooks, 'the less noise, less contention, less distraction, less biting, and less devouring among the saints'.

When we experience tribulation assurance will enable us to view our present afflictions as light compared to the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which is ours (2 Cor. 4:17). Observe the assurance of Paul's language in the face of affliction, '*We know*', he says, 'that we have a house eternal in the heavens.' When physical weaknesses increase and when we are obliged, with sorrow, to lay aside the privileges of work and service which have given us much pleasure and fulfilment, even then the assurance of a better world, and of an inheritance incorruptible reserved in heaven for us, will comfort us and as Brooks aptly says, 'sweeten life's changes'.

If we are to be overrun, as other countries have been, and fall into the hands of persecutors, what then? Will not the assurance of eternal life and assurance of the promise that he will never leave us nor forsake us add to our strength and comfort?

We need to use the whole armour of God and have the assurance of victory when temptations assail us and we find ourselves wrestling with principalities and powers. The symbol of this is the helmet of salvation. In battle the helmet not only provided protection but it bore the regimental colours and army rank. If Caesar's troops attacked a city there was no doubt about the Emperor they represented and neither was there any doubt concerning discipline, loyalty and valour. Were they not the conquerors of the world? But the captain of our salvation has made conquest not only of the world but over sin, death, hell and the grave. Whatever cuts, bruises, scars and wounds we receive in battle, the helmet reminds us that Christ is our hope and he cannot fail. The helmet also assures us that, no matter how bloody the skirmishes, the war will be won. The captain of our salvation has secured victory. We are to be diligent therefore to attain 'the full assurance of hope unto the end' (Heb. 6:11). A full assurance of hope will strengthen the saint in death. As dying Stephen saw the Lord standing at the right hand of God, so a full as-

urance will enable the Christian to despise the pains of death, defy the fear of death and resist the accusations of Satan. He will see Christ in the Word as his justification and redemption. Confident and fully assured that the good work begun in him by God omnipotent will be completed infallibly, the assured believer will fight a good fight, keep the faith, finish his course and know that a crown of life incorruptible shall be given him in that great coming day (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:7,8).



4. The Teaching of the Reformers and Puritans

John Calvin, as we would expect, with characteristic clarity of expression expounded the doctrine of assurance. In so doing he was representative of the Reformers who repudiated in no uncertain terms the Roman Catholic idea that faith can be regarded as mere assent or notion. The Holy Spirit, author of the new birth, is the author of faith, a living faith which unites the believer to Christ. To the Reformers belief in Christ was to be joined to Christ. Faith was to see Christ with believing eyes. So to believe was in fact to be assured of Christ. Thus faith and assurance were brought into the closest possible proximity. To be assured the believer looked to Christ as the only source of all his blessing and the only source of eternal life. Assurance was not to be found by the believer looking within himself or looking to his own piety. Calvin deplored a man looking at his own holiness to conclude he had faith. He did not recognise any kind of faith that did not of itself assure. He saw a total reciprocity between the Spirit who imparts faith and Christ the object of faith. For Calvin faith was a direct knowledge of God. 'Christ, then, is the mirror in which we ought, and which, without deception, we may contemplate our election' (*Inst* 3. 24:5).

To the Reformers then assurance was of the very essence of faith. (*Calvin's Institutes* Bk. 3 chs. 1, 2, 13, 24. *Luther's works* vol. 36 p. 169.)

This teaching is reflected in the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), in the Belgic Confession (1561) (art. 23), and in the canons of Dort (1619) (5:9-13). The canons begin with a strong emphasis on the direct witness of the Spirit. But then, in telling how assurance can be strengthened the confession moves toward, and anticipates, the approach of the English Puritans who opened up the teaching in far greater detail.

Beza is thought to have been the first to give a major place to the reflection on one's works and grace in relation to assurance, *i.e.*, syllogistic practice (I do good works, the Spirit inspires good works, therefore I have the Spirit) (*cf.* article by John Bray on the place of Works and Grace in relation to assurance. *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, October 1973).

The syllogism just mentioned by no means does justice to the Puritan view but it is interesting from an historical point of view.

The Puritans in contrast to the Reformers while not denying the primacy of the direct witness of the Spirit taught that assurance is also to be based on the believer's sanctification (by looking to the holiness of the believer). The quintessence of their teaching as a body of divines is expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1643) and the 1689 Baptist Confession (cf. ch. 18). Goodwin, Rutherford, William Bridge, Thomas Brooks and Thomas Watson were among those who handled the theme with insight and penetration. When it came to self-examination they were fully aware of the dangers of legalism and introspection.

Mainly because of modern evangelistic methods which result in much false assurance and ultimate disillusionment we have need of discernment in this subject. The care and thoroughness exemplified by the Puritan expositions provide a rich source of material and guidance for us. Why did they deem the subject to be so important? How did they answer the allegation that assurance based on sanctification tends to legalism? Were they correct in believing that for wise reasons God withdraws assurance? Should or should we not challenge that idea with vigour? What counsel, and in particular, what remedies did they prescribe for those lacking assurance?

These are sensitive issues and relate to Christian experience in an intimate way. We hope to publish material exploring the Puritan teaching and answering the above questions in the next issue.

footnotes continued from page 14

⁹ Cornie Alant, 'Die Rol van die Kerk'. *Moderne Afrikanersamelewing-Identiteit en Verandering-Tafelberg* (1975) p. 109, footnote 5.

¹⁰ A recent report submitted to the Western-Transvaal Synod of the N. G. Kerk by her moderator, Dr. P. Rossouw, suggests a darker picture with regard to Church attendance. In the Western-Transvaal area some 65% of members do *not* attend Church services, and up to 90% remain away from the evening services. He also points out that many church officers do not attend at night. Absenteeism is due he says, amongst other factors, to week-end holidays away from home, materialism and growing industrialism. The report does however add that more young people are attending evening services than before, and that district prayer meetings in rural communities are well attended. Report in *Beeld*, 21.8.75.

¹¹ Cornie Alant, *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹² *The Pretoria News*, 16.6.1975.

¹³ *Beeld*, 11th August 1975.

¹⁴ I would not contend the possibility that God may be withdrawing his common grace from some Whites in South Africa, not only because of a moral breakdown, but also because of his judgement on them for inequality in treatment of, and lack of concern for, the Blacks. I might add, though, that it is grossly unfair to tar all Whites in South Africa with the same brush, as overseas liberals do.

Correspondence

The first letter, from Keith Davies, pastor of Tuckingmill Reformed Baptist Church, Cornwall, concerns church association.

Dear Erroll,

I am grateful to you for this opportunity to comment on the publication of the paper by Kenneth Matrunola on 'The Biblical Basis of Fellowship between Churches' published in this issue of *Reformation Today*. This was given at a meeting called to consider matters of fellowship between Reformed Baptist Churches in Dr. Johnson House, Birmingham on 18th October, 1975.

During the past few years, with the evident blessing of God we have experienced in this land in the rekindling of belief in the Reformed faith, the Lord has been blessing the faithful preaching of his Word in the reforming of Baptist churches and the establishing of new ones where the doctrines of God's free and sovereign grace are believed. In all this there has been a growing awareness of the importance of maintaining our distinctive testimony, and there also seems to be a growing concern that Reformed Baptist churches, as they come into being, should be helped and encouraged as much as possible. There is a real fellowship that exists among us, but it is largely on a personal level as we have occasional contacts with friends, visitors on holiday and visiting preachers.

Over recent years some have begun to feel that the Scriptures speak more in terms of churches in matters of fellowship than simply individuals. We discussed such things at the third Carey Conference in Liverpool in January 1973. Also, in recent years, concerns have been expressed about missionary support, and there has been a growing desire to support missionaries sent out by Reformed Baptist churches. But who are they? The need for the

circulation of news and information became apparent in the closing discussion session at the Fifth Carey Conference in Cardiff in January 1975. It was generally felt that something should be done.

As a direct result of that session, and the need expressed, three men sent out a letter raising the matter of the calling of a Conference to discuss fellowship between churches. A considerable correspondence ensued, and discussion took place with men representative of various interests. Ken Matrunola gave a paper at the Strict Baptist Assembly in May 1975 on 'The Dilemma of Independency'. The three signatories to the letter were urged to call a Conference to discuss the question.

It seemed to us all, as we were taking very small and careful steps, that the Lord was guiding us. The three men then sent out a second letter calling the Conference in October. Geoffrey Thomas of Aberystwyth agreed to take the chair and Kenneth Matrunola of Portsmouth presented the paper.

The three men who called the Conference (Dic Eccles of Hebden Bridge in W. Yorks., Russell Williams of St. Mellons, Cardiff, and I) are Pastors of three different churches with three different backgrounds—one is a Strict Baptist church, one has seceded from the Baptist Union, and the other is a completely new church only five years old. Yet we believed the same things and felt we belonged together. The Conference confirmed that feeling.

We were asking no one to commit himself to anything. All we sought was prayer, concern and participation in discussion to see whether the time was right for the fellowship which exists in measure between baptised churches sharing a common faith and belief in the doctrines of grace to be expressed in a more tangible form, consistent with the teaching of the Word of God.

About sixty men, representing some forty Churches, attended the Conference. After Ken Matrunola's paper, considerable discussion took place which was most searching, stimulating and profitable to all who attended. It was time of earnest seeking of the mind of the Lord as we sought to understand his Word, the present confused situation, and the way forward. No one came with preconceived ideas, and no proposals had been worked out beforehand. Yet, although those present represented a considerable mixture of opinion and viewpoint, it was good to see how, despite the differences in background and tradition, the men were able to speak openly and without reserve.

The large majority felt that some way forward was needed and the remarkable outcome of the Conference was that an Assembly of Baptised Churches believing the doctrines of Free and Sovereign Grace will be called for 1976. The Strict Baptist Assembly due to be held in London on May the 8th will not now be held, leaving the way open for the calling of the much wider Assembly of Particular Baptist churches, London having been decided as the venue on the 7th and 8th May. This as I understand it will be the first time such an Assembly will have met since 1693! The work of the three men who called the Conference in Birmingham last October ceased with the meeting of the Conference, so the work of the small group of men organising the Assembly for May 1976 will cease when the Assembly meets. No one is seeking a perpetuation of office! We are not seeking to create any new structure which will have to be kept in being at all costs. Our great concern is to establish a relationship between like-minded churches rather than to establish some new organisation.

Perhaps in this letter I might be permitted one or two further comments. In *Reformation Today* No. 17 you wrote in a letter addressed to me, 'My view and David Kingdon's in regard to the question of an Association accords with that expressed by Wayne

Mack in his study of this matter published in *The Ideal Church*. I welcome an association of likeminded Reformed churches and do not see that the existence of other bodies affects this in the least'. Yet in *Reformation Today* No. 27 your editorial appears to reject such a notion. This seems inconsistent to me. What is now your position in the matter?

I, personally, have no desire to see an Association (capital 'A') formed, but I do desire churches to associate together (small 'a') in fellowship, exchange of information, help for needy causes, and especially in prayer. To form yet another structured body which will have to be kept in being for its own sake fills me with horror! My great concern is that we should do nothing beyond what the Spirit of God is leading us into. I am sure you share that concern.

In these confused days we need to avoid further fragmentation. My prayer is that what is taking place at the present time will bring baptised churches who believe the truths we hold so dear into greater contact and relationship with one another for the glory of God and the furtherance of his kingdom.

Yours sincerely in the Saviour,
Keith.

To the preceding letter the editor replied as follows:

Dear Keith,

Thank you for your letter in which you review the present situation.

You ask about my own views. These are in fact the same as your own which you summarise in your penultimate paragraph, where you refer to the small 'a' as preferable to the large 'A'. If you make it a very big 'A' you will have full-blooded Presbyterianism, which prompts me to say that I have reservations about Ken Matrunola's article in this issue. It has grave inconsistencies which our Presbyterian readers will not be slow to detect.

Wherein lies the frailty of the article? Owen and Goodwin are quoted at length to support the need of fellowship between the churches. Who would disagree with that? It is obvious, and hardly requires proof. But where does formal association begin and where does it end, and what kind of association is it to be? On that question, where we need most guidance, there is silence. Ken talks about the word 'synod' not being acceptable and 'assembly' being better, but until these words are defined with precision and the exact nature of authority explained does it help to use them? Fellowship is one thing, formal association another. The churches we represent, yours tucked away in the South West and ours in a village, enjoy fellowship from the local level to the international level. No committee has to organise this for us. We are not exceptional. Most churches have fellowship in the same way. As led by the Spirit bonds of fellowship are forged with some near by and some further away. Churches are unlikely to appreciate their fellowship being dictated to by an external body or central committee.

The conclusion of Ken's article is confusing. Our brother is caught betwixt and between. He says in one breath that the churches can act declaratively against an offending church and yet in the next breath declares that this is 'not an act of power'. But it is an act of power! It reminds us that formal association does involve formal authority, an authority that can be wielded and felt, and that is something different from mere fellowship. Presbyterianism, whether we like it or not, is consistent. There are no half measures. Involvement is total and it includes discipline.

You refer to my editorial in Issue 27, which was designed not as an exposition but as comment to highlight the difficulties in forming a new association when one already exists. You mention the forty churches represented at Birmingham. Twenty-seven of those were Strict Baptists. To form a new

association would be to compete with the Strict Baptists who over the centuries have explored just about every square inch of the ground relating to associations. They have in the process developed organisations such as the S.B. Corporation, which has done excellent work in helping to finance newly-planted churches. There is the S.B. Mission. There is the Annual Assembly and the work of the '22'.

Sometimes the S.B.s have made astonishingly heavy weather of committee meetings with very little to show for their efforts. It is a wonder some of them have not expired through exhaustion or simply withered away through disillusionment. Yet we cannot but respect them and the experience they represent. You will understand, therefore, that to tread through all that again is a terrifying prospect. To swim the channel once is herculean but to have to turn around and immediately swim it again is to be superhuman.

We already have, then, an association with an 'A' of moderate size. To go back to what I said on p. 35 of Issue 17; do not forget that I qualified the possibilities of an altogether new association. I said the *over-riding factor* is revival. We have not had a revival and most of our resources need to be committed to the fulfilment of the great commission—outward in direction rather than inward and concentration on ourselves.

Turning from our particular field to the general scene in the United Kingdom is it not most instructive to observe that those (like Banner of Truth) who have set out in a positive way to recapture the great truths and power of the Reformation seem to enjoy much encouragement whereas those who concentrate on ecclesiastical manoeuvrings do not. Moreover fraternalists devoted to going over and over the grounds of ecclesiastical relationships are tedious and boring in the extreme. Rather than promoting unity they seem only to aggravate and accentuate differences, whereas fraternalists in which the men are edified by the thorough

exposition of biblical, pastoral, biographical or historical themes seem in a strange way to widen horizons and strengthen true unity. The proportion of time spent: ecclesiasticism v edification: should surely be 20:1, just as in our churches we seek to edify rather than spend our time feeling over each bone, muscle and sinew of the eldership. It functions not to be self consciously paraded but to edify. Pots and pans are needful but it is not the clanging of them or the display of them we relish, but the steak and kidney pie on the table!

But why publish Ken's article if critical of it? Our elders and some of our editors do not agree with it. Letters have been received which are hostile to the pursuit of this subject. Why publish it then? Because we do believe in the right of our brothers to their views and we do not feel that everyone should toe a certain party line. Moreover it is good that we all see that the subject is complex because of history and the present situation. It is also beneficial that we should be alert and ready should we see the Spirit's leading. From our studies of Scripture we all completely reject Episcopacy as a non-starter from Scripture, are wary of Presbyterianism, agree about eldership and differ about where the line would be drawn in association.

A difficulty related to a new association not raised in Issue 27 is this—surely our duty according to Ephesians 4:4-6 is to the whole body of Christ, especially where that body is found in any given geographic area where we might live? If we are going to confine our fellowship (association) increasingly to like-minded churches, what about our responsibilities towards other evangelicals and evangelical churches who may desperately need all the biblical conservatism, doctrines of grace and expository approach which we rejoice in? Surely, no matter how weak other evangelicals are, our attitude toward them must not be different from that of the Great Shepherd who gave himself for them? This is an area greatly neglected in all our deliberations about like-minded churches. In your area

do you forbid attendance at your local ministers' fraternal of those who are evangelical but associated with the Ecumenical Movement either as Anglicans or by being in the Baptist Union? With an eye on the broader scene, should we not seriously question an approach which automatically cuts off all fellowship with ministers who are in the Ecumenical Movement? Our rejection of the W.C.C. is total and uncompromising but how can we reject in totality brothers who are one with us in soteriology but confused about ecclesiology.

Nothing is more off-putting or more dangerous than the party spirit which so easily besets all groups, associations and denominations without exception. This does not mean to say that denominations are necessarily wrong, but a catholic spirit of the biblical kind together with a genuine love and jealousy to preserve our doctrinal and practical inheritance should be the ideal for which we will all strive, and for us in particular that is the body of truth as expressed in the 1689 Confession including the gathered church principle which to us is exceedingly precious. You and others know well that if we saw any real danger of losing that for which we have fought hard to retrieve; of losing our heritage in a fog of Charismatic confusion and mists of Arminian decisionism, perhaps in the name of evangelical unity—that nothing is more likely to galvanise us into closer union, and, if necessary, into formal association. So it is good that we have discussed the issues.

Most warmly in the bonds of free grace,
Erroll.

From the editor of The Adult Bible Reading section of the Scripture Union:

I was a little concerned by the correspondence in *Reformation Today*, number 28, about the Scripture Union Bible reading aids. I am sorry that your correspondent sees a decline in content and emphasis.

We are only too ready to receive, consider and, where necessary, act upon constructive criticism. If you

or your correspondent would like to support the general criticisms made in your columns with detailed examples I would be most happy to examine them carefully. It is only in this way that we can implement our policy of continual improvement.

Yours sincerely, John A. Grayston, 47 Marylebone Lane, London, W1M 6AX Tel.: 01-486 2561.

Finally we publish a comment from O. R. Johnston, director of the Nationwide Festival of Light.

Dear Editor,

I hope you will allow us some comment on Mr. Rod Badams's article in *Reformation Today*, number 26 which mentioned the Festival of Light several times. This movement did indeed begin in a socio-religious environment not unlike that which he sketched and described as a 'sub-culture'. However, much water has flowed under the

bridges since 1971 and the nature and direction of the work of the Festival of Light has been rather different since the beginning of 1974. Our aim now is to serve the church—and in particular those in churches whose allegiance is to scriptural truth alone—providing information and responsible evangelical comment concerning trends in contemporary society. In particular we are concerned to understand and to delineate the various attacks upon the moral standards.

Insofar, then, as the Festival of Light appeared to contain a large element of spontaneous, emotional, psychologically uncritical and clearly untheological attitudes, I think it is true to say that this pattern of Christian life and witness in modern society is no longer with us but has moved on.

Yours sincerely, O. R. Johnston.

The address of the N.F.O.L. is 37 Eastwood Road, South Woodford, London, E18 1BN. Tel.: 01-989 7073.

EXIT

THE SECOND IN THE SERIES OF EVANGELISTIC BOOKLETS BY THE EDITOR HAS NOW been published (the first was entitled *The Meaning of the World* and was based on the book of Genesis). This is called *Exit* (12 pence, trade terms and special terms for churches employing for evangelism). The story of Exodus is told in racy modern style with relevant application for unbelievers. Lawrence Evans has again provided superb visual display (photos on every page but one) to illustrate the text. A sample paragraph as follows:

You may be cynical about the Lord speaking. So was Pharaoh. When confronted by Moses with the request *Let my people go!*—Pharaoh's mouth turned down at the corners with contempt. 'Who is the Lord,' he spurted with disgust, 'who is the Lord that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord!—neither will I let the people go.' Such reactions to the claims of God are commonplace. 'Who is the Lord and what right has he over my life? I know not the Lord! Who is he to think he can interfere in my life? He can buzz off, as far as I am concerned!'

But when God comes to claim his own it is not a case of telling him to buzz off! Pharaoh was soon to learn this. For those who think they can take God's world for themselves and banish its owner there is one outcome and that is judgment! Plagues began to fall upon the country, upon the source of its prosperity, the Nile, upon its livestock, its people and finally upon life itself. The plagues served the dual purpose of breaking Pharaoh's power and at the same time strengthening the confidence of the Jews to the point where they were willing to undergo the discipline needed to make their exit from Egypt.

The one who was in contention with Pharaoh for what was his own is likewise in contention with every unbeliever. He who smote the Egyptians with boils strikes with diseases more deadly today. It is high time that we returned to the true God of the Bible and quit the idea that he is a sugar-daddy.

The Question of Association

by Ken Matrunola

The origin of this exposition and its implications are discussed in the correspondence columns.

1. The local church and authority

THE WORD 'CHURCH' IS USED IN SCRIPTURE IN TWO MAIN SENSES. FIRSTLY IT IS understood to mean the whole company of regenerate persons in all ages, in heaven and upon the earth. Secondly, it is used of the local assembly of believers uniting voluntarily under Christ's laws. The local church is the visible and temporal embodiment of the universal church. It is not a different church, it is not an inferior church from the universal church, neither is it institutional rather than spiritual. Scriptural evidence for the local church is abundant and can be easily ascertained as we see in the superscription to several New Testament epistles.

Since the local church is a manifestation of the universal church it is under the same authority, namely, the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the sole head of the Church, by virtue of his mediatorial work. 'He is the head over all things to his church which is his body the fulness of him that filleth all in all' (Eph. 1:22,23).

He is the head of the body and head of every constituent part of that body. For this reason every local church derives from Christ, 'All that power and authority which is in any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline which he hath instituted for them to observe' (1689 Confession, Ch. 26). Scriptural evidence for this would involve the careful exegesis of Matthew 16:13-19 (keys of the kingdom of heaven); Matthew 18:15-20 (local church discipline); John 20:21-23 (proclamation of the gospel); as well as exposition of the use of church power in the local assembly as seen in Acts chapters 1, 6, 11, 15; 1 Corinthians 5:4,5, and chapters 12-14; 2 Corinthians 2:6 and Galatians 6:1.



2. The communion of local churches

This authority of Christ and its implications implies the rejection of all outside jurisdiction over local churches, whether in the Episcopal or Presbyterian sense. The local church is independent and autonomous. But the local church is not to be conceived of as atomistic, as though no other churches existed, or as if their existence was a thing immaterial and indifferent.

John Owen strongly asserted the biblical doctrine of the independence of local churches yet in his chapter on 'The Communion of Churches', the last in his *True Nature of a Gospel Church*, published posthumously in the same year as the 1689 Confession, he emphatically relates the local church to the universal church. This emphasis is not just to the universal church mystically considered and

invisible, but to the universal church actually and visibly constituted in the aggregate of local churches. The scripturally ordered local assembly has a part to play in the edification of the body of Christ in general.

Declares Owen, 'This communion is incumbent on every church with respect unto all other churches of Christ in the world equally' (Vol. 16, p. 183).

Owen would not merely accept intellectual assent to this relationship of congregations each to the other because all are part of the universal church. He expected to see churches in proximity to each other, especially where the same language was spoken, and the same civil government was appointed, to have mutual 'actings toward each other with respect to the end of their institution and being which is the glory of Christ in the edification of the whole catholic church' (*ibid.*, p. 191).

By 'acting towards each other', Owen held to occasional mutual communion by synods. To Baptists with a distrust of ecclesiastical authoritarianism 'synod' has never been an acceptable word, and is better replaced by 'assembly' or 'association meeting'.



3. Biblical teaching

If there is explicit teaching on the autonomy of the local church, is it possible to find something on church inter-relationships and association? On the former there is no difficulty. There is consultation between churches as in the church meeting of the Jerusalem congregation, at which representatives from Antioch were present because of the trouble caused by certain Jerusalem teachers (Acts 15). New Testament churches were aware of each others' existence: Romans 1:8; 2 Corinthians 8:1,2; Colossians 4:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:3ff. etc.

There was co-operation in providing for the poorer believers in times of need (2 Cor. 8:9). There was co-operation in evangelistic work at least to the degree of sending out members of local assemblies to the larger work amongst many churches (Acts 13:1-3 cf. 14:26-28; Acts 16:1-5). Romans 16 begins with a commendation by Paul of Phebe, 'servant of the church which is at Cenchrea that (the Romans) receive her in the Lord as becometh saints and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you'. The same portion indicates that the Gentile churches had reason to thank Priscilla and Aquila for their labours on their behalf. Indeed the apostolic 'care of all the churches' (2 Cor. 11:28), while peculiar to the extraordinary office of apostles, and authoritative by the special investiture of Christ himself, cannot be conceived of as something solely apostolic and first century. It could be as absurd as dangerous to think that after the demise of the apostles, mutual interest and care forthwith ceased among the churches. Indeed the very abuse of independency and rise of the concept of the monarchical or territorial bishop, reveal that the inter-relatedness of churches survived the removal of the apostles.

Thus it is apparent that Scripture endorses the idea of interdependency of churches. But does it give any guidance as to the associating of churches in a more formal and definitive fashion?

The answer to this would be that the Scripture is silent on this subject as far as express statements are concerned. There is no explicit command to associate, neither is there any example of a meeting of associated churches. To those therefore whose view of the regulative principle in worship and practice is that only those things expressly stated in Scripture should be reproduced in local churches today, there would be no sanction for association or assembly meetings whatsoever. However, this was not the Reformers' view of the regulative principle, nor was it the view of those Baptists who in 1689 published their Confession of Faith. The Calvinistic Reformers held certainly that nothing should be introduced into worship or government but that which had positive warrant in Scripture. Yet they were not brought into bondage to think there could be nothing in the life of churches but that which had express assertion in Scripture. They believed in the sufficiency of Scripture apart from express statements to afford guidance by the enunciation of principles and general rules of the Word. They also believed that certain circumstances of our constitution as human beings and our social relationships, when subject to the consent of Scripture, are to be taken into account in the determination of right order. This is laid down in the 1689 Confession chapter 1, page 6. If this is taken into account there is a demonstrable case for association and one that cannot easily be dismissed. By this two things can be evidenced. The first concerns the association principle, and the second, the duties of associated churches.



4. The Association principle

On the principle of association, mutual communion between churches, we can see from the New Testament that apart from relationship to a particular local assembly of believers there is a mystical relationship to all believers. Inevitably then there must be duties incumbent on believers in relation to each other that over run the duties that are theirs by virtue of being covenanted together in the fellowship of a particular church. Just as common humanity imposes certain duties on men that are wider than the particular nation to which we belong, so spiritual unity in Christ will be larger than the unity of a particular church. For example we are to pray, and there is no limiting of our praying for those of our own local fellowship. We are to do good to all men and especially to the household of faith. We would have to admonish a fellow believer if we saw him in error whether he was of our local church or not. We would seek the edification of another also, as far as it lay within our power, and surely rejoice to receive edification from others. These 'are duties which one saint oweth to another, and one saint to many saints, and many saints to any saints' (Goodwin on *The Government of the Churches*, Vol. 11, p. 263).

The *ordinary, regular* way for such things as edification and admonition is to be undertaken in the local church, in the specified practice of such churches, but over and above this there are duties owed to every believer. Goodwin points out that if there were only two believers in the world they might not make a local church with its usual appointments but they would have duties to each other! Thus, several local churches in any one region would be bound to have union and communion together without the subordination of any one to another. 'And,' writes John Owen, 'the bond here is that special love

which Christ requireth among all his disciples, acting itself unto all the ends of the edification of the whole body' (*ibid.*, p. 190). 'This is that blessed oneness which the Lord Christ prayed for so earnestly for his disciples—that they might be one in the Father and the Son, one among themselves, and "made perfect in one"' (John 17:20-23) (*ibid.*, p. 191).

If we ask concerning the authority of churches in such association we are to hold without equivocation to the independency and autonomy of each particular constituent church. The consultations and conference are deliberative not legislative. To the objection that Presbyterians might make—that such deliberations and decisions of synod are valueless without legislative authority to enforce them, we would answer by denying judicial authority but not the persuasive authority which may be latent in these decisions. That is, if churches, scripturally constituted, confer by means of their representatives, desirous of knowing the mind of Christ on issues of common importance, with a desire to glorify God and to edify one another, then such conclusions as are reached in the fear of God, are to be treated respectfully and seriously by all the various local churches.

Since faithful elders and messengers are expected to exercise wisdom, discernment and restraint in their deliberations, clearly their recommendations deserve similar consideration by the separate local churches. Such recommendations, we should note, could not be issued in the name of the association or assembly but to the churches in the name of Christ. We mean that it would not be proper for a decision to be intimated as the 'Assembly's will' for the churches to implement, but that it should be intimated as the belief of the Assembly that Christ would have the churches examine and, if persuaded of its rightness, implement whatever the thing might be. It would then be for the local church to weigh the matter carefully and reach its own decision in its own church meeting.



5. The duties of associating churches

Turning to the second issue the duties of associated churches, several points should be noted. Owen lists five areas of practical communion between churches. (1) Belief in the same doctrine of truth which is according to godliness, that is, common articles of faith. (2) Belief in the institution and authority of the local church; a proper and high view of the rightness of the church. (3) Prayer one for another. (4) Inter-communion, administration of the same sacraments of baptism and the supper of the Lord. (5) Professed subjection unto the authority of Christ in all things, that is, performance by the churches of all things which are shown to be the mind of Christ for his people (*ibid.*, pp. 191-193).

Goodwin enumerates these duties most helpfully in the following terms.

- (i) To afford to other churches a share in spiritual blessings received by any one church, *i.e.* a sharing in edification, cf. Colossians 4:16.
- (ii) To afford participation in worship to those of other churches as they move about in the given area. Goodwin would extend this participation as far as the

Lord's Supper provided the transient communicant was known to be in good standing with his own church. He would not, as a member of one local church have rights in another church in terms of discipline, but would enjoy privileges of fellowship. He uses the analogy of two families brought together by friendship. One would be welcome to share in the other's comforts but not to intrude into the order and discipline of that home and family.

(iii) To afford brotherly communion between churches in that where one has had to excommunicate a member, all the others should take note and not lightly receive such a one into their own midst. Goodwin says that if a man is cast out of one particular church he is cast out of all like churches, at least till proper repentance is manifested. 'Hence, therefore, as we have communion with the whole universal church by having communion with a particular church, so we are cast out of all churches by virtue of being cast out of one, the trust being committed by Christ to particular churches: and the law of ecclesiastical society and brotherly communion between churches requires it, that if they be cast out by one they are rejected by all, for there is that sympathy and concordance between all the members of this body, as one body, and so between particular churches, as members of this whole, that as when one member suffers all suffer, when one member rejoiceth all rejoiceth, so whom one church casteth out all churches casteth out, and when one receives all receive by virtue of this communion' (*ibid.*, pp. 267ff.).

(iv) To afford help to weak churches by sending elders to help them, yet without jurisdiction, or the choosing of elders for them or putting elders upon them (*ibid.*, p. 268).

(v) To afford advice when there are difficult matters affecting particular churches—not that, for example, in advising excommunication of some offender they add authority to that church. 'Jesus Christ hath furnished the church with sufficient authority in itself: only they add counsel, and direction, and countenance: moral strength or countenance they add, but not power in the church itself to deal with its own members alone of itself, as in all the churches of the world put together' (*ibid.*, p. 268).

(vi) To afford help in temporal things, to send alms. One man may be chosen by several churches to administrate the collection and distribution as was Titus and another brother (2 Cor. 8:16-21). Does this not give some scriptural backing to an office like secretary, without jurisdiction over churches to superintend practical and administrative matters?

(vii) To afford opportunity to discuss together matters of common significance. Goodwin instances two 'res communes': (a) conference about matters of doctrine; (b) recognition of ministers chosen by the churches. In both instances authority is not in the hands of the confederated churches but in the local church involved. The recognition of a minister is *ex debito fraternal charitatis*, from the duty of brotherly love . . . it is but a giving the right hand of fellowship, it is not giving the right hand of authority (*ibid.*, p. 269). Goodwin uses the illustration of marriages—they are important enough to be recognised duly by the State but the power and authority to guide whom to marry lies in the parents and in the persons they are to marry (*ibid.*, p. 270). In addition to these acts of church communion, Goodwin mentions respect of the elders of other churches as elders. They are to be esteemed in all the churches, though their ruling

power is only proper in that local church which has received them. They have *potestas ordines non potestas jurisdictionis* i.e. power of order as to preaching and the conduct of public worship but not power of jurisdiction in other local churches. So a particular church may receive the leaders of other churches and receive them as elders in respect of some acts, as preaching and the like, but not in respect of acts of jurisdiction, which we believe our brethren themselves would deny to the elders of other churches (*ibid.*, p. 271).

Finally, Goodwin urges that churches in one nation have obligations to maintain a nearer communion one with another than what all churches separated by national distinctions are bound to by virtue of universal church obligation. He cites Paul's expression in 2 Corinthians 9:2, 'I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many', as evidence of many churches inter-related in different provinces. These have obligations to confer together from time to time. (1) To promote the evangelisation of their nation. (2) To unite in thanksgiving or prayer for the nation at certain times of deliverance or judgment. (3) To further the reformation of declining churches by counsel and prayer. (4) To co-operate, because of oneness of language in the production and spread of good books etc.

With one further practical matter we conclude. The concluding reference is to the problem of association discipline. Suppose one church is known, after proper enquiry, to have departed from the Confession of Faith accepted by all the associated churches, what can these churches do, lacking as we have seen legislative power? The answer is simple. They act together declaratively. They declare that, since the grounds of their common communion have been violated by the offending local church, they are unable any longer to hold communion with that church. This is not an act of power or of excommunication passed upon the offending church. It is an act of restraint placed upon the associating churches not to further communion with the church which has broken the terms of association. The same object as in local church discipline will however necessarily be sought, namely, the restoration of the offender by the sense of loss sustained, which by God's grace works shame and repentance. May the great head of the Church then assist us to profitable discussion and may these few observations be provocative to love and good works!

Communist or Christian ?

The Word of God repeatedly exhorts us to observe the times in which we live. We are urged to look out for seducers, 'wolves in sheep's clothing'. Recent events should alert us all to watchfulness and concern. For instance is it not astounding that a Russian leader, Metropolitan Nikodim, has been appointed as the new president of the World Council of Churches? This is a seven year appointment. Over the years Dr. Carl McIntre, leader of the International Council of Christian Churches, has exposed Nikodim as a KGB agent. The KGB is the dreaded secret police service in Russia responsible for a vast amount of ruthless persecution and torment of innocent people whose only desire is to worship God without being molested. Is it not staggering that such a man as Nikodim be appointed the president of the WCC? It is like Annas and Caiaphas all over again !

With such men as Nikodim at the helm it is not surprising that the WCC provides funds to promote the bloodthirsty violence of revolutionary forces in Africa, devoted to bringing such countries as Mozambique and Angola under Communist rule. Using similar methods to the IRA these revolutionaries murder indiscriminately and terrorise people into submission. The weapons for this gory business are paid for by so called Christian Churches through the WCC.

When we examine the WCC we see that this is an evil organisation consisting of the enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the major denominations of this country of ours are aligned with and support the WCC. There is the Anglican Church and the Methodists, the United Reformed and the Baptist Union. Is it not high time that the WCC be exposed as a disgrace? Is it not high time for us to return to Biblical Christianity in order to be clear about what it means to be a Christian and also what constitutes a Christian church? Let us be alert and watchful and let us make the Gospel known. Let us show people the difference between Communism and Christianity.

The above by Pastor Kingsley Coomber is quoted from the monthly newsletter of the Evangelical Church, New England Road, Haywards Heath. The reference to McIntre should not be read as an endorsement of the ICCC which has a negligible following in the UK. However the information about the WCC provided by McIntre's weekly 'Christian Beacon', 756 Haddon Avenue, Collingswood, NJ 08108, is helpful, no paper that we know of in the UK providing the documentation we need in order to keep abreast with the facts. One issue has a photograph of the WCC dialogue platform including Buddhists, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews and Christians.

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