REFORMATION TODAY

MAY-JUNE 1992

127

Contributors in this issue:

Bob Sheehan is pastor of the Evangelical Church, Welwyn, Hertfordshire and teaches Theology at the European Missionary Fellowship School of Evangelism.

Robert Godfrey is Academic Dean and Professor of Church History at Westminster Seminary in California and an editor for *Outlook* magazine.

John Palmer is pastor of Parbold Evangelical Church, Lancashire. The church has just celebrated its 100th anniversary.

Michael Bentley is minister of Great Hollands Free Church, Bracknell, Berkshire. Together with his wife Jenny he has just completed his ninth visit to Greece seeking information about the churches there and encouraging evangelical believers.

Front cover: Brian Darroll

It was a great relief to most South Africans that there was a resounding YES vote for the reforms of President de Klerk. The way forward will be extremely difficult which calls for much prayer for us all.

Brian Darroll edits a magazine called the *Evangelical Expositor.* He works as a full-time producer of programmes for *Radio Pulpit of South Africa* which is on the air from 5 o'clock in the morning till 9 at night. The example set by groupings such as this evangelical broadcasting consortium has provided an outstanding model of evangelical unity. Readers concerned for the future of South Africa are urged to pray that much good will come from the sound evangelical ministry provided by Radio Pulpit.

Editorial

To what church do I belong? I am an active member of a visible local church and in good standing with that church. Like the other members of that church, I also belong to the one catholic, universal Church of all ages. I profess membership with the one universal body of Christ, from Abel to the last to be redeemed at the end of human history when Christ returns. Catholicity is vital. It is arrogant for any one assembly to isolate itself and put to rights the Church of Christ of history. The Holy Spirit has been leading the Church into all truth throughout this dispensation. The Restorationists of the third wave (the first wave is regarded as the Pentecostal movement from about the 1920s onward, the second as the more recent Charismatic movement from about the 1960s onward, and the third the current Vineyard movement led by John Wimber from about the 1980s), claim that the Church has been misdirected from the beginning. It is true that the Church of Rome was overcome by corruption and heresy but we cannot ignore the fact that the Lord has never left himself without the witness of a faithful people. When I refer to catholicity I refer to the evangelical Bible-believing witness of this entire dispensation and especially to our Puritan and Reformed heritage. To bypass that testimony which includes the careful exposition and application of Scripture is to ignore catholicity. The claim that the restoration of miracles, signs, wonders and prophecies will restore the Church to her pristine glory has been made before, by the Montanists in the early centuries, and by the Irvingites of the last century, and has come to nothing.

Church history plays an essential role in our thinking. John Palmer has taken his local church through Church history from the time of the apostles up to 1517. In his article he contends for the importance of history and outlines how it can be taught in an edifying way.

Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation

Church history provides us with the early credal statements which represent the Church consolidating her ground on major issues such as the nature of God as Trinity, and the Person of Christ, perfectly divine and perfectly human. The 16th century Reformation forms a watershed. It was essential to bring the Church back to the Word of God alone. It was imperative to be rid of innumerable additions to that Word of God. In this way the Lord's people were delivered from the intolerable strain of human tradition and the soul-destroying heresy of salvation by human works. The Confessions of the 16th century are vital because they provide a definitive source of reference as to the doctrine of the Protestant Church.

Mark A Noll, Professor of Church History at Wheaton College, has brought together ten principal works in one handy paperback, *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (232 pages, Baker Book House, USA; IVP Apollos, England). The background and relevance of each contribution is clearly and briefly explained by Prof Noll for laymen.

The first two Confessions represent the Reformers in their struggle to get back to Scripture alone, *The 95 Theses* of Martin Luther (1517), and *The 67 Articles* of Ulrich Zwingli (1523). Then follows *The Schleitheim Confession* of the Anabaptists (1527). They make one outstanding point – the rejection of infant baptism which they correctly equated with sacralism, that is by implication, Christianising entire societies. Apart from that the Anabaptists are sadly side-tracked by secondary issues such as pacifism and the forbidding of Christians to be magistrates. Then follow Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* which reflects much progress on central issues, *The Augsburg Confession* (1530) and *The Genevan Confession* (1536), the relevance and importance of these documents being explained by Mark Noll. Melanchthon, whose life is described in the article by Robert Godfrey, was the principal author of the Augsburg Confession.

Next in order *The Heidelberg Catechism* is presented. For comprehensiveness and quality this fine declaration is on a par with the great *Westminster Confession* of the Puritans in England which came a century later (1643-47), and on which *The Baptist Confession of 1689* is based. I will refer presently to two important Roman Catholic responses to the Protestants which are included. This most useful and well presented reference book concludes with *The 39 Articles of the Church of England* (1571).

Why I am a Reformed Baptist

Since catholicity points to the whole history of evangelical biblical faith then within that heritage I embrace particularly and especially the achievements of the Reformers and Puritans. For me the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith comprehensively and lucidly sets out a threefold legacy: the Reformed doctrine of God's sovereignty and justification by faith; the Puritan doctrine of sanctification and assurance; and Baptist belief concerning the nature of the Church in new covenant terms.

We must not allow ourselves to be distracted by a false construction based upon the Abrahamic covenant in order to accommodate infant baptism. In an article *The Literature of the Covenants* (see *RT* 85), I urged that we should follow the example of Baptists such as John Bunyan, John Gill, Andrew Fuller, Alexander Carson, C H Spurgeon and A W Pink, in expounding the riches of the covenant of grace which I believe is the best way of exhibiting the glories of sovereign grace. (Any preacher worth his salt should discover that, if he sets out on a series of expositions on the covenant of grace from Noah to Christ). The whole land of

Pastor and Mrs Bardoutros and Michael Bentley outside the Free Evangelical Church in Corinth (see article, page 24)

covenant theology is ours to possess from Dan to Beersheba, including the territory of the Abrahamic covenant. That covenant anticipates the nationhood of Israel, and also points to the time of the new covenant as expressed in Hebrews 8:8-13. The new covenant is the covenant of spiritual regeneration, the writing of God's laws upon our hearts. Our children have privileges just as an unbelieving husband has privileges (1 Cor 7:14), but baptism is only for those who have a credible profession of faith (Acts 2:38ff).

If I may speak on behalf of many I would urge that the term 'Reformed' is important because it expresses our belief in our Reformation heritage. Without the 16th century Reformation we would be in grotesque spiritual darkness. The word 'Reformed' has in past times been used to differentiate between the Lutheran and Genevan, or Calvinistic, wings of the Reformation movement. With the passing of time the word has been used in different ways. Similarly the word Puritan has a long history. At one time it was used to describe Anglican clergy determined to bring reformation to the Anglican Church. Now it is used to describe the legacy of Puritan teaching. Hence Spurgeon and Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones are described as Puritans although they were light years away from being Anglicans. In Britain the term 'Reformed' is used to describe those who embrace the Reformed doctrines of salvation. There has always been concern about those who claim to be Reformed in doctrine but who do not seem to understand the implications of that in practice, especially in evangelism, since they continue to employ shallow methods of decisionism which fail to appreciate the true nature of regeneration.

The Passover and Reformation of the Communion Service

How did the Roman Catholics respond to the Protestant Reformation? From

1545 to 1563 their representatives held theological conferences at Trent. The outcome by way of a written response to the Protestants came in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent.* That document forms the eighth contribution in the above reviewed paperback by M A Noll. The ninth consists of *The Profession of the Tridentine Faith* (1564) which is a summary of the Roman Catholic doctrine in response to the 16th century Protestant Reformation. *The Profession of the Tridentine Faith* is only three pages and consists of a summary of the decrees of Trent. This is what it says about the mass:

> *I profess, likewise, that in the Mass there is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead; and that in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist there is truly and really, and substantially, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that there is made a change of the whole essence of the bread into the body, and of the whole essence of the wine into the blood; which change the Catholic Church calls transubstantiation.*

Taking up this issue we believe that we are saved, not by miraculous chemistry through our blood-streams but by faith alone, a faith which appropriates the righteousness of our Lord Jesus. His righteousness is put to our account (Jer 23:6; 33:16). The article, *How Then Shall We Live?* explains the role of faith in the appropriation of Christ's righteousness. That faith also appropriates all needful graces to live the Christian life.

The description by Michael Bentley of his travels in Greece includes a reference to the Greek Orthodox Church, a body which has not been subject to reform nor brought back to the touchstone of Scripture. It is not surprising therefore to find a similar state of darkness and superstition prevailing to that which we find in the Roman Catholic Church.

Included in the means of grace is the communion of the Lord's table. That communion is not a sacrifice but a remembrance and an understanding of the once and for all sacrifice made on our behalf. All the sacrifices ordained to be observed in the Old Testament time were types foreshadowing Christ's one and only perfect sacrifice which now saves us. It is noteworthy that while there were at least ten different kinds of offerings and sacrifices (see Leviticus chapters 1-7) it was the Passover sacrifice of the lamb that was chosen to be especially typical. Christ is our Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7). When we commemorate his sacrifice on Calvary we declare our faith in the efficacy of his blood to save us and we declare our catholicity with believers from the first Passover in Egypt to the universal body of believers today, in declaring the Lord's death as our salvation. The purpose of the article, *The Passover and Reformation of the Communion Service*, is to encourage appreciation of the ordinance as a primary means of grace the

benefits of which come through our minds (Rom 12:1,2) and not as the above Roman Catholic statement suggests through our digestive systems.

Theistic Evolution

Bob Sheehan in his article *A Self-Revealing God* uses the illustration of a child in an art gallery asking the question, 'Who painted that?' The same kind of question occurs again and again when we are brought to observe the wonders of creation. Those who present programmes on TV explain creation in terms of millions of years of evolution in which the creatures made themselves. Many Christians have been pressurised to accept what is called theistic evolution. According to this idea the days of the Genesis account of creation are taken to be periods of time which can be stretched at will to accommodate any number of millions of years. During these vast epochs of time God is supposed to have supervised the evolutionary programme until we arrive at what we see now. According to this theory, when progress reached a certain point, God chose out a creature and called him Adam, and likewise a female creature, and called her Eve.

Theistic evolution is in direct conflict with the following Scriptures: Genesis 1:26,27 (three times the significant Hebrew word for create, *bara*, is used in verse 27); 2:15-25; 3:1ff; Psalm 8:5-8; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Malachi 2:10; Matthew 19:4; Romans 5:12-21; I Corinthians 15:21,22; Hebrews 2:5-9.

In the article *How Then Shall We Live?* reference is made to Hebrews 11:3, 'By faith we understand that the universe was formed by God's command.' There is no need to compromise with the evolutionists. There are many reliable scientists who reject evolutionist claims root and branch. Let them debate the matter and deal with the scientific issues. There are areas of research in which amendments are always being made. Since God is omnipotent I have always found it logical to believe in creation exactly as it is described in Genesis. On the other hand I have always found it impossible to believe that immensely complex creatures virtually made themselves. To use the analogy of the painting, 'Did that painting paint itself?' The creation of the world is not only described in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. Spontaneous creation is the consistent testimony of Scripture whether we read of it in Psalm 33 or in 2 Peter 3. Bob Sheehan puts his finger on the real issue which is that fallen man resists the testimony of creation; he holds back that testimony and restrains it. In contrast to that, the author of Psalms 19 and 104 and 148 gives glory to our Creator: 'Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded and they were created' (Ps 148:3,4). Let us worship our almighty, holy, loving Creator. Let us give him the glory which is his due.

A Self-Revealing God

by Bob Sheehan

Theology is the 'study of the facts revealed by God about himself and his relations to all else' (*Aspects of Theology, Sheehan, RT 125 p.7*). The possibility of theology rests on the existence of God. But how do we know that God exists? Is the fact of God's existence to be proven; is it known intuitively or is it learned?

Scriptural examples

When we turn to the Scriptures we have a number of examples of preaching. It is evident that when the prophets, our Lord or the apostles addressed God's people, they made no attempt to prove his existence. This is to be expected because such a proof would be unnecessary. The same is true in preaching addressed to religious Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogues.

More significant, however, are the examples of preaching to heathen congregations. Here again there is no attempt to prove God's existence. In addressing the fanatical crowd at Lystra, Paul proclaimed the living God, the Creator, the Ruler of history, the long-suffering God who had left a witness to himself.[1] God was proclaimed in his works not proven as existing.

In the less frenzied context of his speech to the Athenian philosophers, Paul proclaimed to them the unknown God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things on whom everything depends, the forbearing God who demanded repentance of a world he would judge.[2] Again the acts of God were declared rather than the existence of God demonstrated.

When we consider the Biblical books themselves, the same conclusion is reached. In the Old Testament the existence of God is presupposed. In the New Testament it is assumed.

The *fact* of the presupposition of God's existence in Biblical preaching and writing can hardly be disputed. The *reasons* for it are variously understood and need to be considered. We shall consider three main interpretations.

1. Atheism was virtually unknown in Biblical times

It has been asserted that consistent atheism is a modern phenomenon with its rise in the seventeenth century and its widespread influence in the eighteenth

century, 'The Age of Reason'. Before then atheism was a minority interest. The Puritan, Stephen Charnock, reckoned that there were only about twenty professed atheists recorded in world history before his day. Everyone believed in God in Biblical times and in the centuries that followed. There was, therefore, no need to prove God's existence in the context in which the Scriptures were written and their message preached. God's existence could be presupposed because everyone accepted it.

There is, however, a fundamental flaw in this line of reasoning. It treats the ancient belief in *gods*, which cannot be denied, as synonymous with belief in *God*. To Biblical thinking this would have been a dreadful and blasphemous equation. It is also an entirely false equation. Why should a worshipper of the god Chemosh presuppose the existence of the God Jehovah? On what basis does a person believing in one god automatically accept the existence of another? Do Christians who believe in God the Father automatically presuppose the existence of Allah?

It is the constant concern of the Scriptural writers and preachers to set a distance between the one true and living God and the counterfeit, man-made gods who are created by men as substitutes for him. With what ferocity the Psalmist rages against idols of silver and gold and contrasts them with the Sovereign God of heaven. Isaiah unleashes an indignant tirade against idols which are 'nothing' and contrasts them with the only true God. With what clarity the Apostles call men from the worship of vain and worthless idols, 'so-called' gods, to serve the living and true God.[3]

The Biblical division between the true God and the counterfeit gods is clear. The Scriptural writers and preachers were concerned that their hearers and readers should leave the counterfeits and worship the true God. They did not suggest that all men worship the same God under different names, but that false gods should be forsaken for the true God. Those who did not know God and were without hope needed to come to a knowledge of him.[4]

The presupposition that God exists which pervades Biblical writing and preaching cannot be explained on the ground that all men believed in God in those days. They did not. Only a small minority believed in God in Biblical times, as in ours; the rest believed in gods of their own making.

2. The Bible was written to the believing community

A great change has overtaken the theory of Bible translation in the twentieth century. In some circles the Bible reader is now more important than the Bible writer. The reader whose attention the translator is concerned to win is the non-Christian. The Bible is viewed as God's message to sinful man.

In reaction to this, and in accordance with earlier theories of translation, other translators have felt it necessary to emphasise that the recipients of the original Bible books were not unbelievers but covenant communities: Israel and the churches. The Bible is God's message to saved men.

Both of these views affect our discussion. If the Bible is written to non-Christians then it would seem that under no circumstances did the writers feel it necessary to prove God's existence. They simply declared what he had done to an unbelieving audience. If, however, the Bible is written to Christians the writers would have felt no need to prove God's existence to believers.

Neither of these views is correct. Some parts of the Bible were evidently written to non-Christians, to encourage them to believe. John clearly states in his Gospel that his purpose was evangelistic.[5] Other sections, such as the Epistles, were addressed to believing churches, the saints in a particular place. Their purpose was to strengthen and establish the faith of believers.[6]

When a comparison is made of the didactic sections addressed to believers and the evangelistic passages addressed to unbelievers, no difference can be found in the presuppositions relating to God's existence. The Hebrew Epistle written to exhort believers to faithfulness begins with an affirmation of God's actions. The Gospel of John written to unbelievers begins by relating the Word to God. Neither seeks to prove his existence.

It may not, therefore, be argued that the Bible is presuppositional because it was written to people who already believed in the God of the Bible. Not all of it was.

3. All men have a sense of God in their hearts

There are in Scripture three strands of teaching that suggest that no man is *naturally* an atheist. He may choose to become an atheist or divert his knowledge of the true God so as to worship a substitute, but all men have a God-given sense of God. This God-consciousness is due to:

i. God's self-revelation as Creator (read Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-22)
The Psalmist declares that the heavens declare the glory of God. The Hebrew term he uses for glory contains the idea of weight or heaviness. The weight of something often gives it significance. No-one minds a snowflake falling on his head but few would be happy to be hit by a falling chimney-stack! Weight lends significance! The heavens declare God's 'weight'; they proclaim his significance. Why he is important has to be noted.

Of course, it is not just the heavens but everything that God has created which reveal his importance. Paul declares that God has been revealing himself through created things for as long as they have existed.

God himself is invisible, but, through the things he has created he can, and does, reveal some of his character and significance. He reveals his eternal power. Through my study window I see grass, trees, fields, a river, clouds, rain, horses, humans, dogs etc. All are very different, complex and varied, and all evidence the power of their Creator and require the conclusion that the Creator must have existed before the creation.

The sight of variety, colour, complexity, simplicity, the whole range of creation, not only reveals eternal power but divinity. God, not in essence, but in creative action, is awesome. So much is fearfully and wonderfully made! Here in creation is a call to worship, to bring glory, praise and honour to the Creator.

It is not, however, creation itself that requires man to acknowledge God's eternal power and deity. Creation, or much-praised 'Mother Nature', has no power to reveal God of itself. It is God himself who makes himself known. Through the things that are made God is continually and actively revealing himself. Creation is God's autobiography. Every day in nature's round is a new page of divine self-revelation.

God does not reveal himself obscurely but plainly. He makes clear what is known of God. The recipients of this revelation are *all* men. The sphere of the revelation is as all-embracing as the sun. Man is left in no doubt. God makes himself known to men in creation and they know God. They may suppress this revelation, deny it, distort it, re-interpret it or do whatever they will with it. However, God's self-revelation in creation means that no-one is naturally an atheist, nor even an agnostic. Human 'ignorance' of God is culpable not respectable! It is the rejection of revealed knowledge.

ii. God's self-revelation in man's nature (read Romans 1:32; 2:12-16)
None of God's creatures is more fearfully and wonderfully made than man. It is not, however, his physical attributes which are most astonishing but his moral powers. Unlike any other creature, man, male and female, is made in the image of God.[7] This image may well include his role of dominion over creation, his social nature and many other aspects of his essential humanity, but undoubtedly it includes his mental and moral faculties.[8]

Men who have never heard of the Bible, and know nothing about Moses or Christ, are not entirely ignorant of the will of God for them. They do not have the law as it was revealed to Israel, either in its longer forms throughout the Pentateuch, or in its summary form, the Ten Commandments, but they do have

'the work of the law written in their hearts'. In Jewish idiom 'to work the work of God' is to do what God requires.[9] Therefore, to have the work of the law written in the heart is to have the requirements of the law written there. All men, Gentile as well as Jew, have an inward knowledge of God's legal requirements.

We need not be in any doubt as to what these legal requirements are. Our Lord did not only tell us what the first and second greatest commands in God's law are but he also said that the whole of the Old Testament revelation hangs on them.[10] They are the foundational principles of this revelation and its supreme duties.

All men have an inner sense that they ought to love God. Men are 'naturally' religious. All men have an inner sense of duty towards their fellow humans. They have a concept of 'natural' justice, 'natural' affection. Even avowed atheists cannot help revealing themselves as theists sometimes. We recall the story of the atheist who avowed, 'I do not believe in God or any such idea. God is my witness!' We remember that Concentration Camp Commandants were often affectionate family men. Even cannibals usually refuse to eat close relatives and friends! There is an inner duty to God and man that is very hard to erase. We are not naturally irreligious and amoral.

God has given our inner religious and moral sense two allies: conscience and thoughts. Conscience works on our sensitivities and emotions creating fear of the consequences of wrong-doing and regret at evil committed. Our thoughts reason with us about the rightness or wrongness of our actions.

Some may wish to suggest that man is a highly developed amoeba, a refined ape, or the residue of a primaeval soup, but the Christian is required to address men as essentially religious and moral beings. They may loudly proclaim their atheism and liberation from the restraints of conscience but big claims are often ignorant and empty boasts.

iii. The fundamental fact of theism

If, as we have asserted, all men know that there is a Creator God, eternally powerful and worthy of worship and all men have a religious and moral sense of duty, why do so many claim to be atheists?

Firstly, it needs to be recognised that even as we approach the twenty-first century, vast numbers of human beings do not claim to be atheists. They claim to worship God. They do see themselves as religious and they do maintain a morality. Their problem is that the gods they worship are not gods at all.

Paul tells us that from their earliest days men with futile, foolish, wicked hearts turned from the worship of the invisible true and living God to worship gods

which were visible and acceptable to them. The abandonment of the true God for idols was accompanied by the rejection of morality for wickedness. As an act of judgement, God has at times handed over those who abandon him to their futile opinions and wicked ways.[11]

The Hindu, the Moslem, the animist etc. are all testifying to their basic sense of a need for God and his law. Their error is in seeking false gods to meet their need. The religious and moral sensitivities of such people, although wickedly misdirected, testify to the basic nature of man.

Secondly, we need to note how the Scriptures view atheism. In the Old Testament the atheist is described as a 'fool'.[12] Now the Hebrew concept of a fool is not someone who is intellectually naïve but a person who is stupid, impious, abandoned and wicked. The atheist's atheism is in the context of his moral corruption.[13] It is wickedness that makes men atheists not superior intelligence or rational progress!

How is it possible for the Scriptures to link atheism with wickedness? Paul tells us that atheism and the abandonment of the true God are an impiety and unrighteousness against which the wrath of God is directed. They are a product of a resistance to the truth that God has made clear to men about his existence and character. No man can be an atheist without rejecting God's self-revelation first.

There is a dispute as to whether Paul says that men 'hold down' and suppress the truth or 'hold back' and restrain it.[14] Scriptural parallels seem to me to favour the latter.[15] However, this dispute does not affect the fact that God's self-revealing in creation (and in our religious and moral sense) has to be resisted before false gods or no gods may be followed. This resistance takes place in unrighteousness.[16] It is evil resistance of God and his revelation.

Neither atheism nor agnosticism are neutral positions. They are certainly not respectable. They are rebellious opinions held in defiance of God's self-revelation. As such they are entirely unnatural positions for humans to assert. Atheism may be learned, taught and adopted but it cannot be neutral.

A simple illustration may help. Let us imagine you take a child to a city. You visit an art gallery. As the child looks at the paintings he asks numerous questions, including, 'Who painted that?' You move on to a science museum. Among his questions inevitably comes, 'Who invented that?' He is by nature a creationist. Paintings have painters; inventions have inventors. Which child (or adult) would *naturally* ask, 'By what process did that painting (or invention) evolve by chance?'! The question would be treated with derision and the child told, 'Paintings and inventions do not just happen; people have to produce them.'

Cross the road to a natural history museum and a child (and adult) would *naturally* respond in the same way. He would see in God's handiwork God's imprint. He would look for a Creator. How many parents have been asked by children, 'Who made the stars? Who made the grass?' However, a child (or adult) may be *taught* to restrain his natural questions and to ask, 'How many years ago did this evolve and from what?' Atheism may be taught but it is contrary to nature.

Conclusion

We began by asking why God's existence is presupposed in Scriptural writings and Scriptural preaching. The answer ought now to be clear. The Scriptural pattern is to presuppose God because God is constantly making himself and his will known to man through creation and his religious and moral sense.

We are not preaching to men who are naturally atheists, irreligious and amoral but to men who under all the veneer of godlessness *know* there is a God and *know* they have responsibilities towards him and his creatures. Their vaunted atheism is sin against knowledge. It is not our job to accept that their rebelliousness is respectable but to expose the shallowness and falseness of their assertion. They want us to relate to them in their wilful ignorance. Their knowledge of God and his will is under the surface of their professed atheism. A submarine may be forced to surface by a well placed depth charge. Similarly an atheist may be forced to acknowledge the truth about God and his will, hidden deep in his heart, by a preacher's insistence that he *does* know what he denies. There is no escape from God.

References

1 Acts 14:15-17
2 Acts 17:22-33
3 Ps 115:2-8; Is 44:6-20; Acts 14:15; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Cor 8:4-6
4 Gal 4:8; Eph 2:12
5 Jn 20:30-31
6 eg. Phil 1:1-2; 1 Jn 5:13
7 Gen 1:26-27
8 Eph 4:24; Col 3:10
9 Jn 6:28-29
10 Mt 22:37-40
11 Rom 1:18-32
12 Ps 14:1
13 Ps 14
14 Rom 1:18
15 2 Thess 2:6-7; Luke 4:42; Philem 13
16 Rom 1:18

The Passover and Reformation of the Communion Service

Were lost sinners to see for a moment the terror of the wrath to come, would they not appreciate the indescribable value of the redemption that is in the One of whom John the Baptist declared, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'?

The great day is approaching when every soul will be judged for deeds done, for words spoken, and for thoughts and imaginations. Then there will be the final sentence. What is at stake is eternal life or eternal woe. You will be judged for your thoughts, words and deeds. Will you be covered by the blood of the Passover Lamb? On that imminent day you will need the blood of the Son of God on the doorposts and lintels of your life. If the angels of execution are not to arrest you and throw you into the lake of fire that burns forever, you will need the Passover blood. The foremost question for you and for me is whether we are covered by the blood of the Passover Lamb.

In the Editorial reference is made to the Roman Catholic mass. Such is our need as sinners that it is imperative for us to be covered completely by an effectual sacrifice. It is useless to us to think in terms of going on time and time again in an endless repetition of sacrificing in the hope that there will be enough merit to meet our need in the end. Also we should note it is not by some mysterious intake of merit into our digestive system that we are saved but rather by a once and for all acceptable sacrifice. 'By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy' (Heb 10:14). It is precisely that once and for all perfect sacrifice that is at the centre of the communion supper instituted by our Lord. It is profitable for us therefore to digest spiritually the background and the teaching designed by our Lord for our good. To that we now proceed.

1. Christ Typified in the first Passover

The land of Egypt was in a state of rebellion toward God. Pharaoh mocked, 'Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go?' The judgements that followed demonstrated the absolute sovereign power of God over all creation and over Egypt in particular. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened. Pharaoh represented a rebellious and idolatrous people. The awesome and final judgement that came upon the Egyptians was death for the firstborn of every family. We must realise that sin is lawlessness. Sin is war against our Creator. Sin, given rein, would kill God. Indeed sin unrestrained murdered God's Son.

The Passover sacrifice was instituted to protect the children of Israel from the judgement on Egypt. Every household head was required to fulfil the specifications of the Passover. Central to everything was the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. 'The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood I will pass over you' (Ex 12:13). Paul declares, 'Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed for us' (1 Cor 5:7). We will note salient stipulations concerning the Passover lamb.

1. The lamb was to be selected from the flock. Christ was a man among men, a valid member of the human race, one of us.

2. The lamb was to be without blemish or fault. Christ was different from all men inasmuch as he was set apart from sinners. He was holy, blameless, pure (Heb 7:26), one in whom there was no sin (1 Jn 3:5), who committed no sin (1 Pet 2:22), who knew no sin (1 Cor 5:21).

3. The lamb was to be kept in the household from the tenth day to the fourteenth day of Nisan. Christ lived among men and was chosen by God to be the Passover Lamb.

4. The lamb was to be a full year old. In the full vigour and strength of his life Christ was sacrificed for us.

5. The lamb was to be slaughtered at sunset on the fourteenth day. Christ our Passover was given for us at the precise hour set by our sovereign God.

6. The lamb's blood was taken and collected in a bowl. The life is in the blood. Our Lord made it very plain that his blood was to be shed for us and our salvation.

7. The lamb's blood was to be taken and, with a bunch of hyssop, liberally sprinkled or smeared on the lintels and doorposts of the house. That vividly taught the Jews that the blood of the sacrificed lamb was effective to protect them from the judgement of death. Metaphorically speaking the blood of Christ must be sprinkled on our consciences (1 Pet 1:2).

8. The lamb was to be roasted whole by fire. This reminds us of the fiery afflictions to which Christ was subject in our place.

9. Care was to be taken that no bone of the lamb was to be broken. The apostle John carefully noted that not a bone of our Lord was broken through his ordeal or at the time when the bones of the two malefactors, who were crucified with him, were smashed. 'He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken' (Ps 34:20). In all his desperate tribulation Jesus was watched

over still. Concerning his decease we note that everything that could possibly be adverse for him was so throughout his trial and crucifixion, but from the moment of his decease forward, everything went right for him. His body was protected and placed in the finest tomb. His body was preserved from corruption (Ps 16:10). He rose in triumph; he ascended to heaven; he was and is exalted to the very highest place of authority and honour.

10. The flesh of the lamb was to be eaten by the household. In instituting the ordinance of his supper, our Lord said that his flesh was represented by the bread broken for us which we are to eat in remembrance of him. Union with Christ is the means of our spiritual sustenance (Jn 6:35-59).

There were other details to be observed as follows:

1. All yeast was to be removed from the homes on the day of the Passover. In writing to the Corinthians Paul refers to the exclusion of yeast at the time of the Passover as a symbol of evil. Immorality, lust, covetousness, all evil thoughts are likened to leaven which works through the whole batch of dough. 'Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed' (1 Cor 5:7). Only unleavened bread was to be eaten for seven days. We are to keep a guard on our minds at all times putting to death evil thoughts of hate, revenge, greed, or immorality.

2. The Passover lamb was to be eaten with bitter herbs to remind the Jews of the bitter bondage experienced in Egypt. The Passover was twofold, a salvation from death, and a deliverance from slavery. Whenever we partake of the Lord's supper we celebrate salvation by him and deliverance through him.

3. The final matter concerned readiness for the journey to be undertaken. Four details were to be remembered. Sandals were to be worn, a staff was to be ready, clothes were to be adjusted in readiness to leave, and finally there was to be no lingering: the meal was to be eaten in haste. This world is the realm of sin. We are on our way to a better world.

2. Christ's Institution of the Passover Meal

What we call the communion or the Lord's supper was instituted on the night of the Jewish Passover. Passover was a great pilgrimage festival for the Jews, the most important of the three annual festivals. We can imagine the crowds and the excitement of the feast, the packed guest-houses and camping grounds, even out as far as Bethany.[1]

Although it was the time of remembrance of deliverance from Egypt, it was also forward looking. There was a saying, 'In this night we were delivered, in this night we will be delivered!' In the face of Roman dominion there was the fervent hope of a deliverance. The Egyptian deliverance acted as a source of hope just as Pentecost and every subsequent powerful spiritual awakening engenders hope for revival again.

After the entrance into Canaan it was customary for the Passover lambs to be sacrificed at the Temple. Roast lamb would be part of the Passover meal without the attendant ritual of the sacrifice and blood being smeared on the lintels and doorposts. Families would gather collectively for the Passover meal. First the house was searched using candles (Zeph 1:12) to make sure there was no yeast. Then the family having gathered round low tables, the father or leader would give thanks for the Passover day and for the first cup of wine. Four times during the meal the cup would be filled and handed round. The first course of the meal consisted of bitter herbs dipped in a sauce of fruits and spices. Then followed the time of teaching when the leader would explain the Exodus story and its significance. This would be in the form of catechism, one of the sons asking leading questions. A hymn such as Psalm 113 or 114 was sung followed by a further passing round of the cup of wine.

After further thanksgiving, the main meal followed; unleavened bread passed round to all those present, roast lamb served with herbs and sauces, then the leader would give thanks for the third cup of wine, the so-called 'cup of blessing'. The meal would conclude with the singing of more psalms, possibly Psalms 115-118. There was a final cup of wine and then the prayer of benediction.

This background assists our understanding of how the communion was instituted.

At the point when the father of the household would have taken the unleavened bread to break and distribute it, our Lord took the bread and gave thanks and broke it and said, 'This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me' (Lk 22:19). Luke also records that our Lord passed the cup round both before and after breaking bread.

Why did Jesus say that he eagerly desired to share the Passover with his disciples? (*epithumia* – a strong desire, Lk 22:15). On a former occasion he said, 'I have a baptism with which to be baptised, and how overwhelmed with anguish I am until it is accomplished.'[2] In spite of the appalling ordeal ahead of him he longed to accomplish the work. Part of that was to institute the supper and so clarify the nature of our salvation. This desire can also be taken as his longing to share fellowship with his disciples during his anguish, just as he humanly desired to have their company and support in the garden of Gethsemane.

3. Christ our Passover Supper – Practical Conclusions

1. As we view the Lord's supper it is helpful always to have before us the principal New Testament passages: Matt 26:20-29, Mark 14:17-25, Luke 22:14-38, Jn 13:1-30 (cf.6:52-58), 1 Cor 11:23-26. If we do that we include the parallel in John's Gospel where our Lord washed the disciples' feet and in which context he concentrated on teaching them about the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. In the communion the Holy Spirit uses the central features of Christ's redemptive work on our behalf to consolidate and advance our sanctification. It is tragic that so much attention has been focused on the nature of the bread changing substance (transubstantiation). *It is not changing the bread but changing us inwardly that is the great work of the Holy Spirit at the communion table.*

2. The table of our Lord represents a salvation ordinance. The Lord's supper reminds us of the necessity of a blood sacrifice. You have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Pet 1:22). Our eternal redemption has been won. The angel of death passes over the trusting soul. Condemnation is removed from those united to Christ. The wonderful effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice is portrayed as the emblems are shared.

3. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' It is most suitable that Christ should be expounded at the communion. Jesus said that we should especially remember him in his sufferings for us. Central to the first Passover was the lamb. The Jews practised catechism at their Passover. The children present were asked questions designed to bring out the main points clearly. There is much that we can teach about Christ at the communion: the perfections of his human nature, the wonder of his sinlessness as he lived for us, the extraordinary meaning of his atoning death as *the* once and for all propitiation for our sin, the details of his anguish leading to his betrayal and crucifixion, his last sayings, the absolute effectiveness of his blood to cleanse from all sin which is repented of and forsaken (1 Jn 1:7-10).

4. The Lord's table deserves careful preparation both by those who lead and by those who attend. Do you look forward to the Lord's table and do you prepare suitably and derive benefit from it as you should? Reference has already been made to exposition. There can be participation in prayer by several at different points in the service. We should note that the Jews sang suitable psalms at the Passover meal. We should carefully choose appropriate hymns. If deemed appropriate a time of open prayer can conclude the communion.

5. The frequency of the Lord's table is important. The Passover came only once a year and was the subject of much preparation and care. If the Lord's table is too frequent, appreciation can be, and too often is, less than it ought to be. This

is shown when there is a lack of preparation and care. Every assembly needs to study this question and be ready to reform if necessary. There is much to be said for celebrating the Lord's table only once a month, but drawing attention to the ordinance and devoting much more care to it, also allowing sufficient time so that the communion is not rushed. If the communion is taken often but in a routine, matter-of-fact way, then its purpose is devalued. The practical details form a congregational issue for each church to decide.

The apostle Paul warns against unworthy participation in the Lord's supper (1 Cor 11:27). The communion is for those united to Christ by faith and in good standing as members of a local church. The merit of having a separate communion service rather than tagging it on to a Sunday service is worth consideration. If there are many visitors, no matter how well spelled out it is inevitable that there will be some who think they qualify to partake while in fact they do not.

6. Some assemblies use grape juice instead of wine since that does not offend those who abstain completely from alcohol. However fruit juice offends those who see that as a stricture on the wisdom of our Lord, as though we know better than he! Romans 14 and 15 tells us about the weaker brethren; it may be that in your assembly there are total abstainers who do not mind making the communion the exception and who would be glad to say that they never drink a drop except at the table of our Lord! It is for the leaders of the local church to consider these details.

7. The communion supper is a time of remembrance, of new covenant assurance of our salvation, of confirmed union with our Lord, of thanksgiving. We are to show forth his death until he comes. We look forward to his return when we will be able to eat and drink with him in his kingdom. All these and other themes are suitable subjects for exposition at the Lord's table. But the Passover theme is the historic framework through which the ordinance has come to us and it is surely with profit that we remember that.

Notes

1 For historical details see *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, IVP. David Wenham in his article, *How Jesus Understood the Last Supper: a Parable in Action*, provides a detailed historical description of the Passover in Jesus' day with sources of reference. See *Churchman*, vol.105, no.3, 1991.
2 I have quoted Hendriksen's translation from his commentary on Luke.

Philip Melanchthon

by Robert Godfrey

Many influential leaders of the Reformation are largely forgotten today. One of those – especially neglected by Reformed people – is Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560). Yet if we had asked Martin Luther in the 1520s who he thought would emerge as the great leader of the German Reformation, he would certainly have answered: 'Melanchthon.' He once said on theology, 'Luther has the content, but not the style. Erasmus has the style, but not the content. Karlstad has neither the content nor the style. Melanchthon has both the content and the style.'

Luther's praise for Melanchthon is not really surprising. Philip was Luther's colleague and close friend at Wittenberg University. He was brilliant, one of the greatest Greek scholars of his day. In 1521 he produced the first systematic theology of the Reformation, his *Loci Communes (Commonplaces).*

In many ways the high point of Melanchthon's leadership occurred in 1530. The Emperor Charles V was back in Germany for the first time since he had heard Luther at Worms in 1521. He summoned the Protestant princes to present their faith and to defend it at the Diet of Augsburg. Luther was not permitted by the Emperor to be present at the Diet so Melanchthon was selected as the theologian to draw up a summary of the Protestant faith and to advise the princes of Augsburg. The document that Melanchthon wrote is known in history as the *Augsburg Confession.* This Confession first states positively what Protestants believe and then specifies certain abuses in the life of the Roman Catholic Church that they reject. This Confession was presented to the Emperor in the name of the Protestant princes and continues to be the basic confessional standard of Lutheranism.

The Emperor gave the Confession to his theologian, John Eck, with whom Luther had debated in Leipzig in 1519. Eck wrote a *Confutation of the Confession* and Melanchthon responded with his *Apology for the Confession.* Melanchthon's Apology was so highly regarded by Lutherans that it is included along with the *Augsburg Confession* in the *Book of Concord* – the authoritative collection of orthodox Lutheran confessions.

Despite these great accomplishments, doubts began to arise in some Lutheran circles about Philip in the 1530s. There were several reasons for these doubts. First, Philip showed that he was too gentle and diffident to provide that strong leadership that the movement needed. Clyde Manschreck's modern biography underscores that point in its title, *Melanchthon, The Quiet Reformer* (1958). It was in response to Philip's tentativeness that Luther made one of

his most quoted comments. Philip was so worried about which way to act in a certain situation that he was immobilized. Luther impatiently called him to action saying, 'Sin boldly.' Luther meant that it was better to do something for God even at the risk of sinning than to do nothing for fear of sin.

A second reason for Philip's loss of influence in some circles was his movement away from theology. Melanchthon continued to write theology but it was not his prime interest. He returned to his Greek studies and wrote on philosophy, rhetoric and education. His reforming work on the school curriculum earned him the title in history of *Praeceptor Germaniae*, the Teacher of Germany.

The third and perhaps most important reason for doubts about Melanchthon arose from his theology. For some he was too gentle in his theological formulations. Two great questions have been raised about Melanchthon's theology: the matter of synergism and the matter of the Lord's Supper.

The debate on synergism arose because of changes in Melanchthon's understanding of conversion. While early in his career he had said that only the Word and the Spirit are the causes of conversion, later he said that the Word, the Spirit and the consenting will of man are the causes of conversion. He always insisted that he was not making the will of man meritorious in the process of conversion. Still his change surely moved him closer to Erasmus and away from the strong monergism of the Reformation.

Melanchthon's position on the Lord's Supper is of special interest to the Reformed constituency. Melanchthon showed willingness to tolerate a wider range of opinions on the Lord's Supper than Luther's strictest followers. After Luther's death and after Calvin became one of the dominant Reformation figures, Calvin and Melanchthon had a rather extensive correspondence on many subjects including the Lord's Supper. Calvin believed that he and Melanchthon really agreed about the Lord's Supper. He repeatedly urged Philip to state his agreements with the Reformed publicly. Calvin believed that Melanchthon's support would greatly advance ecumenical relations between the Reformed and Lutherans. Philip probably was correct in believing that the only effect of such public statements would be to reduce his influence further with strict Lutherans.

Estimates of Melanchthon vary greatly. Luther never ceased to love and praise him. Philip is buried near Luther in the castle church in Wittenberg, his marker identical in size to Luther's. But in Concordia Seminary's library in St. Louis, USA, among the many portraits of Lutheran worthies there is no portrait of Melanchthon. Perhaps Philip was too gentle. But in comparison with Luther (whom Philip called 'a violent physician for a violent age') he encourages us to be careful and temperate as well as faithful.

Dr Godfrey is Academic Dean of Church History at Westminster Seminary in California. This article first appeared in Outlook *October 1990.*

Church History for All

John Palmer

A people that ignores its past has no future. If this is true, it is so in the case of God's people. A cursory reading of the Old Testament makes it abundantly evident that it was when Israel forgot just who they were, and why they were in the land of Canaan, that they went astray. Moreover, their tragic history, where they needed continual chastisement from God, shows their inability to learn from the past.

The Church of Christ has often fared no better. We labour under the additional disadvantage that our history is not recorded infallibly by God as a part of his Word which we continually study. Therefore it is possible for even mature, godly Christians to be almost totally ignorant of any events that have taken place in the Church since the days of the apostles. What little they do know has often been remembered from history lessons at school, taught by those with no understanding of, nor sympathy for, the motives of Christians in different ages.

This was certainly the author's experience of the church of which he is pastor, and this article aims to encourage others to remedy this deficiency, for the spiritual health of the Lord's people.

Why teach Church history?

1. This is God's method

Fully half of the Scripture instructs us how we should live, through showing right and wrong examples from the past; but even more, in describing to us the way God himself has acted. In the final analysis the history of God's people is the history of God's workings, and the more we know of history, the better we are able to understand him. Inspired recording of God's actions may have ceased, but the actions themselves have not.

2. Christians face the same problems in all ages

The world constantly hates the Church. Satan is continuous in his efforts to lead Christians astray, in times both of peace and persecution. False doctrines and wrong moral standards are not a new thing in the life of Christ's Church. We commit a great sin if in our pride we think we are immune to such wrong thinking today.

Yet at crucial times God has raised up leaders in revival and reformation; preachers, theologians, pastors whose lives can teach us much. Besides which, the ordinary Christians of past centuries had to cope with the same problems as we do, and by the Lord's help we can emulate their faith and obedience, being encouraged by their example.

3. We should be aware of our place in the history of redemption

Our view of unfulfilled prophecy may colour what we expect to happen in the future; but we should all be agreed on the basic truth that we live in the New Covenant, or 'gospel', age and throughout this time God is causing his gospel to spread to all nations, despite all the forces of evil ranged against it.

How is it that our land came to have the gospel while others still do not? Why is the cause of Christ languishing, comparatively, in lands whose greatness was built upon it, but making rapid strides in the 'third world'? These are questions which can be answered much more correctly with a knowledge of history. We need a world-view which is not only geographically but historically as complete as possible.

How to teach Church history

1. Be brief

The author's personal experience is that of dividing history into six main periods; ending in 1215, 1560, 1660, 1740, 1865, and the present day. (The dates are approximate and need to vary by a few years for different countries' histories). No series is more than 20 lectures; and no lecture more than 45 minutes (usually about 35). We are not trying to make every Christian a potential university professor! The main issues can be dealt with within this framework. Again, allow a reasonable length of time between series (over a year).

2. Be interesting

Church history is about God at work, causing his truth to be proclaimed and defended, and sinners to be saved, and churches planted. An in-depth study of the lives of all the medieval popes, though perhaps morally instructive, is likely to become turgid; as is dealing with the Reformation in Iceland at the same length as that in Germany (although the former is worth part of a lecture).

As in Biblical times, so since, God has worked through people; and history is best taught through their lives. The doctrinal issues are clarified, not obscured, by this method, as we see men gripped by truth, or error, and acting accordingly. On this last point, the life of, say, Archbishop Laud, is just as useful as that of Cromwell, to illustrate the issues involved in their conflict.

3. Be honest

The Bible describes God's people, 'warts and all'. So should we, as we consider God's way of using his people in more recent times. It is the Marxists who have tried (but failed) to rewrite history to their own aggrandisement. We must not do that. Truth is not served by glossing over the parts of history we particularly wish hadn't happened.

The benefits of teaching Church history

1. It engenders a thirst for more

The author's personal experience is that far more books on history and biography are borrowed from the church library than formerly. A secondary advantage is that prominent men such as Whitefield can be mentioned from the pulpit or in conversation with some well-grounded hope that at least most of the listeners know to whom one is referring. The characters of history gradually become real people, who have paved the way for us to be where we are today; and thus the Lord's people want to know more about them.

2. It encourages Christians to stand for the truth

In their daily lives most Christians are talking with some Roman Catholics, deists, syncretists, pantheists, Socinians, Pelagians, etc. Doctrinal teaching will enable them to identify the point at

which these people go astray from the truth. Historical knowledge helps in furnishing the believer with the right understanding of the importance of these errors, the arguments historically used to refute them, and the courage to stand up for God's truth.

3. It stimulates prayer for revival

The more that the Lord's people see how God has worked in the past to vindicate his truth, and extend his Church, and thus to glorify his name, the more they truly desire, and believe, that he both would, and can, so act in our own time. The history of the Church is the history of revivals and reformations, and we need both today.

Objections answered

1. 'I don't know enough history to teach it'

If the above arguments are valid reasons why Christians need to know more about what God has done in the last two millennia, they are doubly so why the leaders of his Church ought to have this knowledge. If the objection is true, it points to a serious gap in any pastor's knowledge; one which he should urgently rectify. Nor is a great amount of knowledge needed; and all that is, and more, is easily available in historical and biographical works. Finally, the argument holds here, as elsewhere: if you can't teach all Church history, teach some.

2. 'In the limited opportunities available, teaching the Bible is more important'

The author teaches history in the midweek meeting at his church; the amount of time spent on it is under 20% of the total. Moreover, to teach Church history, is to illustrate and apply doctrine; it is to show how men in the past lived, or have opposed, the truth, and why, and with what result. This we need to teach to equip Christians 'to do and to endure' in our own day.

3. 'The people are not interested; they find Church history boring'

This objection has of course no validity unless one has made the attempt to teach Church history. Several in our congregation who found history boring at school find the account of God's work in and through his people extremely interesting (the author's wife among them)! Those who think history is a pointless list of dates and battles should perhaps be encouraged to read a simple account of Church history, perhaps of a particular period. Examples would be, *From Christ to Constantine* by M A Smith (IVP) or, *The Great Reformation* by R Tudor Jones (also IVP).

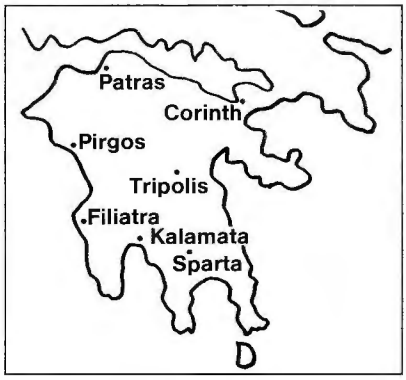
Conclusion

If we believe in 'Reformation Today' as a valid motto, we must show the need for, and the possibility of, such ongoing reformation. Church history shows us how the Church began so blessedly; how and why it declined spiritually; how Christians ended by being persecuted in the name of the Church; and how God intervened in an as-yet-unfinished work, to revive and reform, and cause the gospel to spread to all nations. We have our part to play in doing the will of God in our generation; and we need every tool we can find to help us to do this. A thorough understanding of the Lord's dealings with his Church is not the least of these tools.

Ten Days in the Peloponnese

by Michael Bentley

Greece was the first European country to receive the gospel. Acts 16:11 tells us that Paul was called from the Province of Asia to a river-side at Philippi. But how many readers of *Reformation Today* know that recently a small group of believers have begun meeting in a house at Philippi; and that this meeting is encouraged by the elders of the 60-strong evangelical church at Kavale (the Neapolis of Acts 16:11)? How many of us have even wondered whether the gospel is still preached in Philippi today?



The Peloponnese

The Greek Orthodox Church

For many hundreds of years, until the middle of the last century, Greece was under Turkish rule. During this time Islam dominated the land and Christianity and Greek culture were pushed underground. When the Turks were eventually driven out the Church again came out into the open. But what emerged was the Greek Orthodox Church. This 'Church' has far more ritual than Roman Catholicism, and all that its adherents know about the gospel is that it is a richly gilded book which is carried into the church and kissed by priests. Passages from it are read each Sunday but the language is so archaic that few understand its meaning. No call to evangelical repentance is ever made and there has never been any kind of reformation in the Greek Orthodox Church. Furthermore, the ordinary village priest is forbidden to preach. Great power belongs to the bishops and most of the people, certainly in the country districts, give superstitious obedience to their rule over them.

Evangelicals

Towards the end of the last century some American missionaries visited Greece and converts were made. As a result, the Evangelical Church of Greece was founded. This is organised on Presbyterian lines and an annual conference is held each year at Katerini on the east coast between Thessaloniki and Athens. Dr Lloyd-Jones preached there in 1956 to some 500 people (according to Vol. 2 of Iain Murray's biography – Banner of Truth) and other evangelicals from Britain have ministered at this gathering in recent years.

However, there is also a baptistic group of churches called the Free Evangelical Churches; and it was some of these that my wife and I visited in February of this year. The Free Evangelical Churches are indigenous to Greece and their first church was founded in 1918. According to the FIEC 'Briefing' for 1992, this fellowship has forty-two local churches, 2,000 members, sixteen pastors and four other full-time workers. Our hosts, Pastor and Mrs Sakis Makris, confirmed that these figures are right. Sakis has been based at Kalamata in the southern Peloponnese since 1955 and spends much of his time travelling vast distances to minister to the needs of the believers who are scattered around the south and west of the Peloponnese.

From left to right: Pastor Sakis Makris (Kalamata), Mrs Angelike Bardoutros and Pastor Nikos Bardoutros (Corinth), Michael Bentley

So far as I can find out, the Greek Evangelical Church is of similar size to the Free Evangelical Church. In addition there are also some charismatic groups in certain areas, but neither the Greek Evangelical Churches nor the Free Evangelical Churches have anything to do with them.

With evangelicals probably totalling far less than 1% of Greece's ten million population it seems to me a very sad thing that these two main evangelical groups have little to do with each other. However, I understand that in recent years each group has sent a representative to the other's annual assembly.

While there are a few churches with congregations of several hundred each in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, the country districts have far fewer and much smaller churches. The Peloponnese is one area where the believers probably account for less than 0.5% of the total population. This part of Greece is the 'hand' which hangs down from the rest of Greece. It is separated from the mainland by the Corinthian canal and has a geographical area in excess of Wales. However, it is much more mountainous, and its villages are less accessible than those in the Principality. There are few bus services and villagers often travel no more than a few miles away from their homes.

Throughout the whole of the Peloponnese there are only eleven buildings used for evangelical worship, and three of these are tiny rented rooms. There are only three full-time pastors for the whole of this 'island'; and other preaching is done by a few local elders. At Sparta, where I had the privilege of preaching to eight of the ten believers, there is a service held each Sunday. However, the brother who takes this travels all the way from Athens, some four hours away by car; then almost every Monday since 1955 my friend Sakis has spent about three hours driving over the mountainous zig-zag road, and back, to preach to these few believers.

In the beautiful Mani peninsula (the middle 'finger' of the Peloponnese) there are only two believers at Kardimili, and one family at Areopolis, about 2 and 4 hours drive from Kalamata respectively. On the eastern peninsula there are three or four families which are scattered a long way from each other. Even in Tripolis, the town in the centre of the Peloponnese which has a population of over 21,000, there are only two or three evangelical believers.

The only churches of any size are at Kalamata (about 40 members), Patras (about 80 members) and Corinth (about 30 members). All of the other congregations number between 6 and 15 people.

As well as at Sparta, I had the privilege of preaching to three different groups in Kalamata, at a small church built on one member's own land at Filiatra; in a home

at Pirgos; and in the church building at Corinth. However my preaching always had to be in very simple English. Also I had to take very great care not to explain the meaning of any Greek words! My sermon was translated into Greek by Sakis who sometimes helpfully amplified the message, and on one occasion a Polish brother whispered to his wife and mother a further translation of the Greek into his own language. I did wonder whether this was a little like the game 'Chinese whispers'; but such was their hunger for the Word of God! In all of these churches I was the first Englishman to preach, and, in some of the churches, no one could recall any previous visitor from Britain.

The needs of the believers

What can we do to help these brethren? They desperately need more preachers of the Word, but foreigners need a translator; I myself have difficulty in carrying on a fairly simple conversation in Greek. When I asked how many young men there were in the ministry I was told that the youngest minister was in his mid-forties. For some years money to pay for a young evangelist has been promised from Greek believers abroad, but, despite regular appeals to the 360 young people of the Free Evangelical Churches, no one has come forward.

Outside the big cities there is still much superstition among the people. The Orthodox Church teaches that all other churches, including the Roman Catholics, are wrong. The priest 'in charge of heresy' in the Corinthian area lives very near to the Free Evangelical pastor Nikos Bardoutros. This priest saw a programme on local television in which Nikos gave an evangelistic message; he promptly had it stopped. One day when Nikos was giving out tracts near an Orthodox Church stall in the market place, he saw several people pointing to the Orthodox stall and saying, 'God' and then to him and shouting, 'The Devil'!

This pastor at Corinth is very faithful to the Lord. He is often stopped from open-air work by the authorities who are more frightened of what the bishop will say than what the Common Market will legislate. It was a joy to preach to the small week-night meeting in Corinth. On Sundays the congregation numbers about 30-40. Often a priest stands outside telling people that it is a Jehovah's Witness group and warning them that if they go in they will end up in hell.

When I asked Nikos what we should pray for in connection with his work, he replied, 'Do not pray that we will be kept from persecution; pray that we will live holy lives and be faithful to the Word of God.' I offered him some good Christian literature but he said that he was too busy to spend hours trying to understand English with the aid of a dictionary! I noticed from some Greek church bookstalls that certain of Spurgeon's books are available in the Greek language; and, with the help of my wife, I managed to decipher the title of a book by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones; it was a Greek translation of *Spiritual Depression.*

Each preacher's study that I went into contained some English books but only a few of the preachers who live in the Peloponnese are fluent in our language. There is a need for more sound evangelical literature to be translated into their own tongue.

When we left Kalamata airport we were encouraged by the happy fellowship that we had enjoyed, but we also had a great longing that the Lord would raise up many more preachers of the Word in this delightful land which is spiritually so barren.

According to the 1986 edition of *Operation World* there are about eighty foreign missionaries working in Greece, but the sad thing is that less than half of them work in the Greek language!

May God himself give us a burden for this beautiful land where the Lord's people are so few and far between.

Simo Ralevic

Yugoslavia and Albania

Simo Ralevic, is pictured above displaying Christian literature on the plinth where the statue of Enver Hoxha, atheist, communist and former dictator of Albania used to stand.

For a number of years Simo has been writing evangelistic and expository materials in the Serbian language with several of these being translated into Albanian. This literature has had a profound impact by way of conversions. Speaking by phone, Simo reported that a young man of 20 has been converted in Tirana, the capital city of Albania as a result of reading the literature. Simo says that he knows of at least 6 churches in Albania. Now that there is freedom the door is open for church planting and we need to pray for labourers to be provided in this field.

Simo spends every second week away preaching in his native Serbia. He is helped by his sons Timothy and Robert to move a tremendous volume of literature to a variety of locations. They have just posted 23 2kg parcels of Albanian literature to Albanians in Greece.

Australia

During March, the bi-annual Banner of Truth Pastors' Conference took place in Sydney, Australia. This is a significant conference as it is one of the foci for the Reformed faith in a land in which regrettably Reformed unity is weak.

Some 70 men of different denominations attended. The overseas speakers present were Andrew Davies of Bridgend, Wales who spoke on *The Love of God* and Iain Murray who is now resident in Edinburgh, Scotland. Iain gave addresses on Baxter, Finney and Spurgeon. Keith Morris of Perth spoke on *The Biblical Doctrine of Sin and its Bearing upon Preaching* and on *Our Unity and how it is to be Strengthened.* Ray Minniecom, an Aboriginal leader with World Vision took up the issue of *Culture — Aboriginal, Australian and Biblical.* Matthew Murray, originally of Ulster and since 1988 settled in a church in south Sydney concluded by preaching on *Keeping the Heart.*

There is presently much turmoil in Australia. The Anglican Church is in crisis over the issue of women ministers and the Presbyterians and Baptists are having their own divisions and difficulties. There was a general consensus at the conference that ministers should not allow matters of controversy to divert them from the supreme need, namely, the recovery of powerful gospel preaching and true biblical evangelism.

Russia

One of the most recent translations into the Russian language is the *Catechism for Boys and Girls*. This *Carey Publications* booklet has been widely used among the British Reformed Baptists and continues to be in demand so that parents who were brought up on it are now thinking in terms of teaching it to their children!

It has been translated into other languages including Pidgin English (used in Papua New Guinea). We are heartened now by a fine production in the Russian language produced and distributed by *Roundwood Trust*. Enquiries or orders should be sent to them at: 24 Roundwood Lane, Harpenden, Herts, AL5 3BZ.

A New Reformed Baptist Church

Hope Reformed Baptist Church has been formed by a group of evangelical Christians who have been required to leave premises in Valley Drive, Gravesend, Kent, following the appointment of the Roman Catholic Cardinal Hume and the introduction of a major new policy document by the Shaftesbury Society (Trustees to the *Church in the Valley*) and a breakdown in discussions between the members of the church, who sought to uphold their Protestant Evangelical heritage, and the trustees.

All the existing members of the *Church in the Valley* are founder members of *Hope Reformed Baptist Church* which will remain committed to showing Christian care to people of all creeds, but without allowing its own allegiance to the Bible as the authoritative Word of God to be compromised in the process.

Agreement has been reached with the Strict and Particular Baptist Trust to use Zoar, the historic Particular Baptist chapel on Peacock Street in Gravesend, as their new home. The group is led by Rev Simon Bowkett, 29 Lingfield Road, Gravesend, Kent DA12 5AH.

How Then Shall We Live?

Habakkuk who ministered during the intense period of impending judgement during the reign of Jehoiakim (608-597 BC) was required to live by faith, that is by his trust in Jahweh. As we do today, the prophet Habakkuk deplored the fact that there was no justice. Injustice and conflict abound today as they did in his. 'Therefore the law is paralysed and justice never prevails' (Hab 1:4). No nation today represents God as a theocracy in the way that Judah did. Nevertheless we are constrained to deplore the tragic circumstances and unrighteousness that vex nations and destroy peoples. Also we grieve over the pitiful state of the professing Christian Church.

When Habakkuk complained, the Lord revealed to him that judgement was impending. The nation was due to be purified in the fires of affliction. The instrument of judgement would be the Babylonians, notorious as a violent and impetuous people, who swept across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They were dreaded for their ruthlessness, a law to themselves (Hab 1:6,7). In Habakkuk's mind this revelation of impending calamity raised an even greater problem than the unrighteousness of his own people. How could a holy God whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil allow an ungodly nation to swallow up the people of promise? To Habakkuk this was the demise of God's purpose. He was bewildered. He complained bitterly and took himself up to the ramparts of the city with the express purpose of hearing the Lord's reply (Hab 2:1).

Jahweh's answer came with absolute authority and clarity. Yes, the Babylonians would execute Jahweh's justice on Judah but they in turn would be judged for their cruelty and unrighteousness. The Babylonian leader epitomised his people. He was arrogant, puffed up. 'His desires are not upright.' In contrast to pride and self righteousness the righteous have integrity for 'the righteous shall live by his faith'. How do the righteous live? Answer: by faith. Here we have the most basic biblical principle: the way of salvation in both Old and New Testaments: the cardinal criterion of the Christian religion.

God's answer to Habakkuk is quoted three times in the New Testament, firstly as part of Paul's introduction to the Romans, secondly as part of

his argument as he reasons with the Galatians about grace versus works, and thirdly we find the quotation at a turning point in the letter to the Hebrews.

1. For the justified faith is their way of life – Rom 1:17
2. For the justified faith safeguards salvation as a free gift – Gal 3:11
3. For the justified faith is the way of perseverance – Heb 10:38

1. For the justified faith is their way of life – Rom 1:17

The NASB translates Romans 1:17, 'For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.' The capital letters point to the citation from Habakkuk and the word *man* is inserted to give the sense. From faith to faith (literally out of faith to faith).[1] The believer is justified out of or through the exercise of faith and thereby he comes to live the life of faith. To support this truth that the justified live by faith Habakkuk is cited. As Habakkuk was required to live by faith so we who trust in Christ must live by faith. The Hebrew word for faith (*amunat*) used by the prophet can be taken as a faith of integrity, a faith which Calvin in his commentary describes as 'stripping us of all arrogance and leads us naked and needy to God, that we might seek salvation from him alone'.

Romans 1:16,17 serves as an introduction to the thesis which follows in which Paul first expounds justification by faith (Romans chapters 1-5), and second, sanctification, that is how the righteous live (Romans chapters 6-8).

True faith unites the believer to Christ who is the source of his justification and sanctification. The faith that justifies is the same faith that sanctifies yet the two, justification and sanctification must never be confused. Justification is legal, external, perfect. Progressive sanctification is internal and always imperfect.

2. For the justified faith safeguards salvation as a free gift – Gal 3:11

'Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live by faith' (Gal 3:11). The context is important. The Galatians having begun in faith were now being tempted to think that faith was inadequate on its own and they needed to have circumcision in addition to secure salvation. The apostle contends for justification by faith as the only way of salvation. Believers, he contends, are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, and not

for their own works or deservings. Paul points to Abraham and shows that before ever the Mosaic law appeared Abraham was justified by faith alone. He believed and was justified before he was circumcised. Abraham is a prototype for justification. All who believe as he believed have God's righteousness imputed to them just as he had. To drive home the truth that salvation is by faith alone and by grace alone he refers to God's declaration to Habakkuk, 'The righteous will live by faith.'

Can faith be counted as a merit? This raises the question, What is faith? True faith is not only a certain knowledge by which I accept as true all that God has revealed in his Word, but also a wholehearted trust which the Holy Spirit creates in me through the gospel.[2] True faith embraces Christ. True faith not only receives Christ's righteousness by way of imputation but also derives life from Christ to be obedient, to be spiritually fruitful, to be zealous for good works, to grow in grace and advance in sanctification. All this is by derivation from Christ and so can never be esteemed as human merit. And nor can faith be accounted as a merit since faith is merely the instrument of receiving grace and faith itself is God's gift (Eph 2:8-10; 2 Pet 2:1).[3] Salvation then is a gift received by faith. Nothing additional to faith is required. This simple principle is a safeguard of the central truth of justification by faith.

3. For the justified faith is the way of perseverance — Heb 10:38

The writer to the Hebrews quotes the full text from Habakkuk, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith.'[4]

The meaning of the text in Habakkuk is understood by the author of Hebrews to mean that the one accounted righteous by God is the one who lives by faith. Such a one does not renounce his faith. He perseveres. He does not turn back. If he renounces his faith he will prove himself to be a reprobate, one who never had the root of the matter. To renounce the life of faith is to lose God's good pleasure. The principle of the righteous living by faith provides the *motif* for the passage which follows, namely the great eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

How Then Shall We Live?

When there is grievous discouragement and temptation to relinquish our devotion to Christ, then we must live by faith. We must hold fast to him as our Saviour, Prophet, Lord, and as our presently active High

Priest able to save to the uttermost all who come to the Father by him (Heb 7:25).

When we are told that the Bible is a fairy story, that God never created the universe or this world, but that it made itself, then we are to live by faith. 'By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command' (Heb 11:3). Does this mean that we put our heads in the sand as far as science is concerned? Certainly not! But we should note well that popular evolutionary theory is hocus pocus and not scientific at all. It is pseudo-science. Is it really credible that random processes could have constructed the ribosome, the protein factory of all living cells, yet this is a thousand million million times smaller than the smallest piece of machinery ever constructed by man? There is a great deal about evolution which is mere make-believe. While the issues are debated I live by faith. I see increasingly the marvels of creation and ascribe that to God's wisdom and power.

When there are inexplicable agonies and disappointments in our lives we live by faith knowing that while we cannot make it tally the Lord is working everything for our ultimate good (Rom 8:28).

When the cause of Christ is in tatters we live by faith. Habakkuk was required to do that for the Israel of his day. His faith was boosted by the promise, 'The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea' (Hab 2:14).

When we suffer pain either through persecution or through illness we live by faith, faith that he who begins a good work in his people will carry it on to completion.

From first to last, from the moment of initial justification to the moment when we breathe our last, we, the justified, will live by faith, to the praise of his glorious grace in Christ Jesus.

Notes

1 *ek pisteōs eis pistin*, out of faith to faith. A great deal of discussion is found in commentaries about the precise meaning of Romans 1:17, not only concerning the above phrase, but whether it is: the justified shall live, that is shall live and not die? Or: the justified shall live by the exercise of faith. Professor Murray points out that Habakkuk cannot naturally be interpreted in any other way but the sense of how the righteous must live, namely, by faith, by faith through present troubles and by faith through any trials to come. He suggests that the Massoretic inter-punctuation favours this view. Commentary on Romans, p.33. For a discussion of the textual problems see among others Leon Morris, Hendriksen and Godet.

2 Heidelberg Catechism, question 21.

3 See article 'Saving Faith in the 20th Century' *RT* 121.

4 The Septuagint is cited in which it is not the vision that is awaited so much as the Person of the Lord who is coming. 'For yet a little while' echoes the language of Isaiah 26:20. There may be delay but the coming of the Lord is certain.

Editor ERROLL HULSE, 75 Woodhill Road, Leeds LS16 7BZ
Associate Editors DAVID KINGDON, UK, JIM VAN ZYL, SA,
TOM NETTLES, USA, JOHN CAMPBELL, AUSTRALIA
DON GARLINGTON, CANADA

Rates	Subscriptions	Agents
1 year £8.50 — 2 years £15.00	BRITISH ISLES	**Lyn Hulse** *75 Woodhill Road, Leeds LS16 7BZ.*
1 year £8.50 — 2 years £15.00	IRISH REPUBLIC	**Matthew Brennan** *116 Willow Heights, CLONMEL,* *Co Tipperary*
1 year $14.00 — 2 years $22.00	AUSTRALIA	**Ray Levick** *27 Coven Avenue, Bayswater North,* *Victoria 3153.*
1 year $14.00 — 2 years $22.00	NEW ZEALAND	**Sovereign Grace Books** *P.O. Box 62-159, Sylvia Park,* *Auckland 6.*
1 year $15.00 — 2 years $24.00	USA	**Great Christian Books Inc.** *229 South Bridge Street,* *Box 8000, ELKTON, MD 21922.* **Tom Lutz** *Edgewood Baptist Church,* *3743 Nichol Avenue,* *Anderson, IN 46011.* **Bill Ascol** *PO Box 552, Clinton LA 70722*
1 year $13.00 — 2 years $22.00	BRAZIL (USA $)	**Richard Denham** *CP81, CEP 12201,* *São José dos Campos, SP.*
1 year $15.00 — 2 years $24.00	CANADA	**Max Latchford** *6020 154A Street, Surrey, B.C.,* *V3S 7H6.*
1 year R14.00 — 2 years R22.00	SOUTH AFRICA	**Patrick Palmer** *Box 33226, Glenstantia 0010.*
1 year f20.00 — 2 years f33.50	NETHERLANDS	**D. H. Gritter** *Laaghalerstraat 12* *9414 AK Hooghalen.*
1 year $20.00 — 2 years $35.00	SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA (Singa $)	**Peter Ong** *Serangoon Garden, PO Box 426,* *Singapore 9155*

Single copies one-sixth the above in each case which includes postage.
For airmail add £4.50 sterling equivalent p.a.
Gifts are welcomed and those who wish to support the Magazine should make out their cheques to "Reformation Today".

Bound volumes available: 71-90 £18 or $30, 91-110 £22 or $35, post free

— — — — — — — — — — cut here — — — — — — — — —

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please send to:

Name:
Address:

		Tick
Reformation Today	1 yr	
	2 years	
Bound Volume	71-90	
	91-110	

I enclose..... Your name and address:
Please enclose gift card Yes/No
Please send me a receipt Yes/No

Photoset and printed by Stanley L Hunt (Printers) Ltd, Rushden, Northants

RT 1992

No 127 May – Jun

CONTENTS