

REFORMATION TODAY



MAY/JUNE 1998

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Carey Family Conference

15-22 August 1998 (Saturday to Saturday or Friday to Saturday).

Cloverley Hall, Shropshire. The main speaker is to be Dr Ray Evans from Bedford, theme the book of Hebrews. Programmes for all age groups. To avoid disappointment book now. Camping facilities. Details from David Jarrett phone 01633-866214. Address Penglais, 6a Soar Close, Croesyceiliog, Cwmbran NPP 2PD.

Carey Conference for Ministers

6-8 Jan 1999. The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire. Speakers Drs Mark Dever and John Currid of the USA, Geoff Thomas and other speakers to be announced.

Carey Conference for Ministers

11-14 Jan 2000. The Hayes Conference Centre. 30th anniversary. International emphasis. A review of our history and looking to the future.



Peter Parkinson (see front cover) recently celebrated his 25th anniversary as pastor of Leeds Reformed Baptist Church which began in 1972. It was in 1976 that adequate progress had been made to form a church of 25 members. Growth has been slow and steady until the present time of 130 members. In February this year severe restriction of space compelled a move away from the building owned by the church in Cottage Road, Headingley, to West Park School which is now being hired for Sunday services. A vigorous

outreach into the surrounding housing estates has been maintained. Shown above are Judith and Peter Parkinson, and David and Robert Thomson. Of the four elders three (Brian Beevers, Robert Thomson and Peter Parkinson) have served since 1972. The fourth elder is the editor who joined the eldership ten years ago. David Thomson is one of five deacons. The work Caring for Life was initiated by Peter Parkinson ten years ago and is constituted as a charity trust which has twelve full time workers.

Editorial

Missionary work at home and abroad

In essence missionary work is the same whether it takes place in Western countries like the United Kingdom, the USA or Australia or in remote countries like Irian Jaya. It is imperative that a missionary understand the philosophy or mindset of the people to whom he is sent. In the latter country it will be animism. In some nations it will be Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism. In Western nations it is post-modernism. In the last issue Bob Letham expounded PM and this time he explains how we are to react to it.

The challenge of missionary work

The challenge of missionary work viewed internationally is that the lowest number of missionaries are available for the areas of greatest need. Huge unreached populations have hardly any missionaries. Uttar Pradesh is an example. Uttar Pradesh is a northern province of India with a population of 139 million and is only .08 percent Protestant. It must surely be a matter of deep concern if our churches are not involved in some way to redress the scandal of so many areas of neglect. In addition to that there are still about 3,000 unreached people groups, mostly small groups made difficult to reach because of geographic remoteness.

The most unreached part of the world is located in the '10/40 Window', between the 10 degree to 40 degree latitudes of the Northern hemisphere across Africa, the Middle East and Asia. A 120 page paperback, *The Unreached Peoples*, is packed with information.¹ What can we do? Practical suggestions are made.

Does your church have a missions policy?

A start can be initiated by adopting a policy. For this to mean anything that policy must be implemented by an active and effective missionary secretary. Practical support needs to be organised. Information on a regular basis is required and stirring calls to prayer should be made. To that end *Operation World* is a wonderful resource for information and is designed to prayer for world-wide evangelisation.² David Earl's review of the book, *A Task Unfinished*, sums up the theme of this issue of RT.

Notes

- 1 *The Unreached Peoples – Praying through the Window III*, edited by Patrick Johnstone, John Hanna and Marti Smith, Kratos Publishers, South Africa, 1997. P O Box 750, FERNDAL 2160, South Africa. ISBN 1-874977-25-9.
- 2 Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World*, 660 pages, Publishers: OM, Carlisle, UK; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, USA. A description of the 230 nations of the world from an evangelical perspective with the purpose of prayer and missionary action.

Post-Modernism and the Christian Faith

Dr Robert Letham, Senior Minister, Emmanuel Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, Delaware, USA

Part 2

In the last issue (RT162) we explored the subject of how to present the gospel in the post-modern world. Here we explore further the way post-modernism (PM) is reshaping our everyday life. By doing this we will be in a better position to ask how we can combat PM effectively.

The world of PM is a world of instability, diversity and fragmentation

Since PM allows no objective truth there can be no fixed point of reference to determine what we should believe or how we are to act. This lack of fixity entails a total lack of stability in day to day life. No basis exists for a commonly agreed morality. A politician can say or do one thing today and another quite different, even contradictory, tomorrow. Any criticism of that politician will not stick since it will be based on an old, obsolete worldview, where objective meaning, absolute truth, fixed values and moral standards existed. This obsolete worldview was, in reality, an attempt to manipulate. Thiselton cites the Cambridge atheist theologian Don Cupitt who has written at least a book per year for the last twenty or more years, often saying different and apparently incompatible things in successive volumes. When challenged on this point, Cupitt refuses to answer his critics, replying, 'By the time they have come in, I have moved on.'¹

In part, this world of constant flux fits a situation in which today's technology is dated within six months. The computer on which I write this was bought by my church just under two years ago. It received an Editor's Choice award in the computer magazine published the same month we bought it. It is now a virtual museum piece. The catchphrases new Labour, new Britain, new Europe, new world order, new this, new that are made for this world of flux every bit as much as the claim to no ideology (as much an ideological claim as anything). In the corporate climate in the USA, constant change is programmed in to management policy. The nineties have seen systematic downsizing by large corporations in an attempt to compete with the economic

In this concluding exposition Dr Letham suggests that vast numbers who call themselves 'born again' Christians are in fact governed by PM thinking. He shows that PM bears within itself the seeds of its own demise. In the meantime PM is set to cause tremendous damage. We all need to study the best ways in which to apply the gospel to the PM society around us. The guidelines provided here are valuable.



challenge from the developing world. One leading pharmaceutical giant in our area was renowned in the old world order for its care for its employees, sometimes bordering on paternalism. In recent years its workforce has learned to define an optimist as one who arrives in the morning bringing his lunch with him. Many in middle management are sometimes surprised to come to work and see their nameplate still on their desk.

In large American corporations diversity is the name of the game. The workforce is taught to accept people of different ethnic backgrounds, and of alternative lifestyles. Since there is no absolute truth and no fixed moral standards, anything goes. Senior management then manipulates the workforce to accept this, with seminars led by top management gurus featuring diversity training. In part this is the consequence of the extreme competitiveness of American culture, where very few are good team players. Corporate America has put pressure on educators to reform the school system to encourage co-operation rather than competitiveness. However, these trends go beyond this. In Britain, the Conservative Party annual conference in 1997 saw its new young leader, William Hague, announce that the Party, traditionally a bastion of family values, was to become open to those of alternative lifestyles and would present a welcoming face to all sorts and conditions of people, in contrast to its previous public image.

In politics we are witnessing the fragmentation of large states formed during the modern era, when unity was rationalistically imposed on diverse peoples. The USSR contained upwards of 150 ethnic groups, with a monolithic unity

clamped down by a ruthless, oppressive central bureaucratic dictatorship. Now it has split into some of its component parts. A rigid unity has gone, a splintering diversity replacing it. Yugoslavia was created in 1918, imposing a common government on a number of ethnic groups previously at violent odds with one another. While Tito governed, the conglomerate held together but now diversity has come into its own and the behemoth has splintered - with a vengeance. In less violent manner, Czechoslovakia underwent the velvet divorce, forming the Czech Republic and Slovakia in its wake. Before our eyes, Canada is unravelling, its politics dramatically regionalised with the Liberals concentrated in Ontario and Quebec, the Reform Party in Western Canada, the once mighty Conservatives a rump on the Atlantic fringe, and the Parti Quebecois (as the name tells us) confined to Quebec. Only the small New Democratic Party can lay any claim to straddle the country. The United Kingdom too was formed in the age of the Enlightenment, with central government imposed from Westminster on four nations, but now devolution is creating representative assemblies in Scotland and Wales, possibly also in the English regions, while the long term continuance of the union is increasingly problematic. As for the USA, there are few Americans left, for everyone is a hyphenated American, a black-American, Italian-American, native-American, Jewish-American, Korean-American - the list is endless. Someone even suggested a new category - necro-Americans (dead Americans). The pressure is towards polarisation there too, whether ethnic or of other subcultures. In each case, the stress on reason and imposed unity of the modern age is being replaced by the diversity and fragmentation of PM. A major exception is the EU but there the bureaucratic rationalistic push towards a federal super-state significantly does not command popular support even in Germany, the country most obviously behind it, and with its increasing size due to new members from the east it is unlikely to achieve its goals. In this brave new world there is but one heresy - the claim to absolute truth. Historic biblical Christianity, wherever it appears, is and will be the arch enemy, for it opposes the idea that anything goes, insists that there is right and wrong, and preaches that Jesus Christ is the truth to the exclusion of all others.

Unfortunately, some sections of the Christian community are in the process of embracing PM. Nothing could be more hateful to them than the claim that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, and the only truth, for this entails that someone else is wrong, desperately so. Post-evangelicalism embraces PM, while elements in the charismatic movement adapt to it and are inevitably changed by it. The programmatic change enforced by abandoning the hymnology of the Church for newly composed choruses, the cyclical and repetitive nature of these choruses replacing the linear and progressive tradition of Judeo-Christian psalmody and hymnology, the high stress on

emotional states over rationality, the programmatic change affecting even the content of what the Church confesses - these are some of the hallmarks of PM influence.

How can we combat PM?

In terms of objective meaning and absolute truth

If there is no such thing as absolute truth, who is to say that your insights are any better than those of Adolf Hitler? If all is a giant language game, we have removed any basis for rejecting ideas that are morally repugnant. If there is no basis for morality, the immoral does not exist. Any discrimination between the apostle Paul's ethics and Hitler's is groundless, reduced to a purely arbitrary decision.

Indeed, the world of PM is entirely arbitrary. If the emotions are preferred to reason we have no rational grounds for anything. Life is then reduced to the level of ukase (an arbitrary command). In the recent murder trial in the USA of a British au pair, Louise Woodward, one American TV commentator suggested the possibility that the jury's controversial decision may have been influenced by the way Miss Woodward moved her eyelids while answering a question. That the PM world prefers the emotions over reason and self-control was obvious in the public reaction, in Britain and beyond, after the death of Princess Diana. It was evident not only in the attitude of many towards the more traditional mourning of the royal family but also in the generally enthusiastic response to Earl Spencer's funeral oration, in which he was held to have spoken from the heart, with little attention given to the content of his speech, its veiled attacks on others, and the suspect character of the source.

It is also riddled with inconsistencies. Recently, Jacques Derrida was a featured speaker at a conference on PM at Villanova University, Philadelphia, not far from where I live. I wonder, did he accept payment for his participation? Was there an objective world then, to enable him to earn money? What if a member of the audience went to the podium and punched him in the face, giving him a bloody nose? Would there be an objective world then?

*There was a faith-healer from Deal,
Who said, "Although pain isn't real,
When I sit on a pin
And it punctures my skin,
I dislike what I fancy I feel." (Source unknown)*

In short, PM cannot stand the test of everyday life. It does not work and it will not work. It fails the test of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who insisted that language and philosophy must have 'cash-value' in terms of the real world in which we go about our business from day to day. To do that we assume there is an objective world and act accordingly. If there were not, life could not go on. Wittgenstein himself compared such a situation to someone buying several copies of the morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true!² Moreover, the way people conduct themselves in ordered societies can only be explained on the basis that they assume there to be standards of conduct that hold true across the board, in times and places other than one's own.

Moreover, PM asks us to accept for it what it denies to everything and everyone else. It denies and deconstructs absolute truth claims yet its own claims are absolute, excluded from the relativism it foists on those of others. It claims that all human language refers only to itself. This is an absolute claim, applying across the board to all human discourse, spoken or written. It is also reductionistic, reducing the whole of reality to one form, in this case a particular theory of language. Such reductionism is not a claim about language so much as a philosophy, a worldview, a fundamentally religious worldview. It elevates one branch of human activity and knowledge above all others and claims for itself an ultimate reference point (almost divine status). But by its own reason even that cannot exist. Its claims are self-destructive, rebounding upon itself. It also fails the test of Godel's theorem, which asserts that no system can be enclosed on itself. In reality human beings cannot live without objective meaning or absolute truth. Life disintegrates without it.

In terms of instability and diversity

The PM world of constant flux is seeing insecurity, breakdown, and the rise of various forms of terrorism. As diversity rules, sub-groups are divided against sub-groups, tribe against tribe. With suspicion fuelled by a deconstructionist mentality, each competing fragmentary unit looks to blame the other. A cult of the victim develops and, with it, responsibility declines. This is a recipe for social breakdown, instability and the unravelling of any cohesion that once existed. Thiselton argues that the post-modern self is predisposed to assume a stance of conflict.³ Or as W S Gilbert put it in *The Gondoliers*, 'When everyone is somebodee, then no one's anybody.' [nb this is the correct spelling]

The problem with Enlightenment rationalism was that it sought unity without diversity. Its glorification of human reason led it to impose order and unity. But set free from the authority of the Word of God it failed to recognise the diversity God has placed in creation.

PM stresses diversity but without unity. Fragmentation is built into its programme. This is where all forms of unbelief go wrong. Christianity maintains unity in diversity, and diversity in unity. God our creator is triune. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are in eternal and undivided union as the one triune God. Gregory of Nazianzen, in his Oration on Holy Baptism, put it this way:

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of him as the whole ... when I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.

Cut adrift from biblical revelation, grounded in the eternal, antecedent reality of God himself, unbelief will always swing wildly from one pole to the other. PM displays the truth taught by Paul in Romans 1:28ff ‘... since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind.’

Remedies

How is the Church to combat PM? How can we most effectively proclaim and live the gospel in this kind of world? Beyond that, how can we plan for the future that lies beyond, when PM bites the dust, as surely it must?

Doing the truth - an end to manipulation

The criticisms of Foucault, Barthes and others are not to be dismissed lightly. There are far too many floodlit concentration camps for comfort. The quiet atmosphere of a prayer meeting, the frenetic mood of evangelism and charismatic worship are all vehicles for crass spiritual pressure and manipulation. How often do evangelists use music to get their audience into the right mood, to soften them up, so that they can influence them more easily and so change their behaviour? This is utterly reprehensible. In the search for statistics and success, lives are subordinated to an evangelist's or a preacher's ego. Much worship today is not worship at all, not directed to the Holy Trinity but to the advancement of hidden agendas and the bolstering of human pride.

Jesus prayed that his Church might be one (John 17), not only in a spiritual sense or in heaven but visibly in this world ‘so that the world might believe’

that the Father sent him. This unity is to mirror on a creaturely level the union in the Trinity. It is thus a unity grounded in truth, not a merely institutional or enforced unity but a unity in deed and truth. It is not yet evident. To combat PM, and for the furtherance of the world-wide advance of Christ's rule, it must come. We must work towards it in practical terms now, by abandoning manipulation, by doing the truth and by seeking to promote the unity and catholicity of the Church, as well as its purity and apostolicity.

Initial spadework necessary

We suggested earlier that our efforts at evangelism are frequently frustrated in the PM setting by the far-reaching diversity and pluralism that is now entrenched. Unless we start at square one we might as well operate from a different universe. It is not only a question that people today have as little understanding of creation and the God who made it, as pagans in Paul's day (Acts 17:16-34). Behind all that, we saw that the idea of truth itself is in question.

This applies also to Church people. Vast numbers who call themselves 'born-again Christians' may actually be living in the PM world and have simply no idea of the universal and absolute claims of Christ. For many Christianity is something that has worked for them, an insight that affects their life but only that. In effect, the gospel has often been presented as a private hotline to heaven and the corporate, cosmic and universal dominion of Christ neglected or ignored. The long term impact of pietism, which restricted the Christian faith to personal, spiritual experience at the expense of doctrine and a comprehensive Christian worldview, has joined forces with PM. The result is deadly. The need is to recapture the reality that Christ claims the whole of life, from church and prayer to family life, business and education. In evangelism, this requires laying patiently the groundwork of the nature of God, the Holy Trinity, creation and the objectivity of truth. It is vital we present people with the context in which an intelligent response to the gospel can be made.

Trinity and incarnation

Here perhaps the most appropriate response to the PM suspicion of totalising discourse lies in our focusing on the manipulation-free self-giving love of God. The incarnation of Christ demonstrates this beyond parallel. In Philippians 2:5ff Paul stresses that even in eternity the Son did not count his equality with the Father something to be exploited for his own advantage. Instead he

received all things from the Father, including the honour of being our high priest (Heb 5:5). In his incarnation he emptied himself, not by ceasing to be God but by adding the form of a servant, becoming man. Then in his incarnate ministry he freely humbled himself, serving others, ultimately giving himself up to the cursed death of the cross, reserved by the Roman authorities for the lowest of the low and which the Philippians, priding themselves on Philippi's status as a Roman colony, under the protection of the *ius Italicum* (Roman law), would readily see as the most despicable way to die. Christ does not put pressure on us so as to achieve his own hidden agenda. Instead, he gave himself up to death.

All this shows us what God is like. The holy and undivided Trinity live in unbroken love, communion and union. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit do not manipulate each other for their own ends. They cannot be deconstructed so as to disclose that the real situation is other than it first appears. Their love is pure and just, good and kind. The distinctions of the persons exist in undivided union. There is no conquest of unity by diversity, nor of diversity by unity. The three are one and the one is three. Here is the theological heart of the Christian faith and this should also be our focus in piety, apologetics and evangelism in the PM world.

Can the world of PM last?

It should be very evident that PM cannot last for long. It has no stability, nor is it true to real life. It bears within itself the seeds of its own demise. The problem is that it may well carry much else with it. Arbitrariness in public life will mean the destruction of public justice. The rule of law emerged in the context of a Christian worldview. The great medieval jurist, Henry de Bracton (d. 1268), taught in his groundbreaking and seminal work *De Legibus et Consuetinibus Angliae*, in which he systematised the laws of England, that the king was himself under the law . . . responsible to God, in the place of Jesus Christ, as God's vicar:

'For judgments are not made by men but by God, which is why the heart of a king who rules well is said to be in the hand of God ... let no one unwise ascend the seat of judgment lest in the day of wrath he feel the vengeance of him who said "Vengeance is mine, I will repay ..." on that day when they shall behold the Son of Man ... who shall not fear that trial when the Lord shall be the accuser, the advocate and the judge?'⁴ (citing Rom 12:9, Rev 18:9-10, John 5:22, Rev 3:7, Matt 12:36, 3:7, 13:30,41,42)

The abandonment of truth for a lie, exemplified by PM, may unravel the last remaining vestiges of this holy order handed down from the middle ages.

Additionally, modern science and the prosperity accompanying it was built on the capital bequeathed by the Protestant Reformation. Science cannot even exist in a world of mere language games, with no objective order. Prosperity cannot continue in a world of self-conscious anomie (lawlessness). As ethnic and interest groups press with increasing vigour their own agendas, discord and violence will increase.

Confident expectation

The world of PM may, and probably will, pass as suddenly as it arrived. Nevertheless, it may do great damage. The remark of the great W E Gladstone to the Earl of Aberdeen on the state of Naples is apt in relation to PM, 'the negation of God erected into a system of government'. In the face of this, we should remember Paul's triumphant declaration that, following his resurrection, Christ must reign until all his enemies are subdued under his feet (1 Cor 15:25). PM could possibly be Satan's last desperate throw of the dice. Christianity has survived all manner of opposition, suppression and contradiction. This latest assault no longer argues it is false but turns to the question of truth itself.

There will be a world beyond PM. What its particular configurations will be we cannot at this stage say. Strategically, the Church would do well to invest in the future, planning ahead for the longer term beyond the implosion of PM. By bringing Christ to the Jews we will be working in harmony with God's promise unfolded by Paul in Romans 11. China, the world's largest country and potentially most powerful economy by the mid twenty-first century, is an obvious area for missionary targeting. A largely Christianised China, together with a massive influx of Jews, could transform the scene beyond recognition once PM bites the dust.

References

- 1 David Edwards, *Tradition and Truth: the Challenge of the Church of England's Radical Theologians 1962-1989* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), 83, cited in Thiselton (1995), 113.
- 2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1936-1949) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), section 265.
- 3 Thiselton (1995), 131.
- 4 Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England. Trans., Samuel E Thorne (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1968), 2:21.

John Calvin and his Missionary Enterprise

Editor

An Outline of Calvin's Life

John Calvin was born in 1509 in the town of Noyon in Picardy, north-west of Paris. He studied law and was so gifted that he was able to take the place of his lecturers when they were absent. In due course he earned his doctorate in law.

During the latter studies in about 1531 he was suddenly converted from Rome to Christ. He left Paris in 1533, being in danger because of his Christian faith. He lived in various places and began to devote his time to producing a systematic theology which was to become famous under the name *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He continued to work on and enlarge this work throughout his life. The first edition, published in 1536, was modest in size but over the years Calvin extended this work which soon became a classic and has continued as such ever since.¹

In 1536 Calvin travelled from Italy to Strasbourgh. On the way he stopped at the city of Geneva



John Calvin – This likeness of Calvin comes from a painting found in a castle in 1955 which had upon the back in French: Portrait of Calvin by Holbein. Hans Holbein (1497-1543) worked in Switzerland, Italy, France, and the Netherlands, but is especially known as the court painter of King Henry VIII of England.

where he intended to stay just one night. However there he met the fiery Reformer Farel.

At this point we need to look at the background as it will not only explain why Farel was so keen to engage Calvin's help but also show how these cities became Protestant. Geneva had seven regions (parishes) and about 300 priests and nuns. Farel had sought to reform the city but had been expelled. He then persuaded a friend by the name of Froment to

begin teaching French in Geneva. This French language school attracted many prominent women students. Froment chose the New Testament as his text- book which was used by the Holy Spirit to convict the women who then influenced their husbands. In due course the evangelical party in the city increased in number. The way in which these cities were won was by challenging the Roman Catholic priests to a public debate which the city leaders were invited to attend. There were 200 City Council members in Geneva. The priests were mostly ignorant and unable to defend the Roman Catholic position. The Reformers would demonstrate the Roman Catholic teaching to be without biblical foundation and this convinced the City Council to reject Roman Catholic practice and control.

It was just when Farel was involved in this desperate struggle to persuade the leaders of Geneva to reject Romanism that Calvin arrived, then only 27 years old. Farel immediately saw in Calvin the teacher needed to consolidate the work. But Calvin had no desire to stay in Geneva. He was tired and longed for rest. 'May God curse your rest!!' shouted Farel. These words made Calvin

tremble. Later he wrote in the introduction to his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 'I was terrified by Farel's words and made conscious of being a coward.' So Calvin was persuaded to stay and he began to preach in Geneva. Not long after this the Roman Catholic priests of the nearby city of Lausanne were challenged to a public debate by the Reformers. Of 337 priests only 174 arrived and only 4 had any ability to defend their doctrine. Farel and Viret, a foremost Swiss Reformer of those times, were the spokesmen for the Bible. They took Calvin with them as an observer as he had no experience of these debates. The debate went on for several days. One priest in defence of transubstantiation started to quote from the Early Church Fathers. Farel and Viret were unable to handle this and looked to Calvin for help. Standing up, the latter proceeded to quote from memory passages from the Early Church Fathers, giving the exact source in each case. It was an amazing display of learning and had an electrifying effect on the assembly. The opposition was completely confounded. One priest was converted immediately. As a result of this astonishing performance not only did Lausanne

turn Protestant but 200 priests renounced the Roman Catholic Church.

The work in Geneva however was not easy. Calvin wished to bring everything under the authority of Scripture. The City Council would not agree and this led to such a division that they expelled Calvin who then went to live in Strasbourg. There he was influenced by two outstanding Reformers, Bucer and Capito. They recognised Calvin's gifts and invited him to pastor a church with a congregation numbering 500 which he did from 1538 to 1541.

It was in 1541 that a Roman Catholic cardinal by the name of Sadoleto wrote to the Council of Geneva inviting them to return to the Roman Catholic Church. Sadoleto badly miscalculated because the people hated Romanism even though they had not agreed to all Calvin's reforms. They did not know how to reply to Sadoleto's letter. The humble course was followed which was to invite Calvin to return to Geneva. At first he refused but when he did return it was through a long and patient work that Geneva became the foremost centre for Protestantism, a city where many persecuted Christians from all

over Europe were able to find refuge as well as a ministry that inspired them with missionary zeal.

Calvin's method was to expound the Scriptures systematically. He would preach almost every day in the morning and afternoon, expounding the Old Testament during the week and the New Testament on Sundays. He preached without notes directly from the Hebrew or the Greek. His expositions were written down by scribes. This is how his valuable commentaries came into being. He also kept up a huge correspondence. Up to 1553 much of his time was spent working at reformation in Geneva. Thereafter up until the time of his death in 1564 aged 54 he concentrated on the evangelisation of France.

Missionaries sent into France

It is widely believed that the Reformers of the sixteenth century were not involved in missionary activity. That is simply not the case.² John Calvin was involved in the work of sending missionaries to Brazil. Doors into Brazil did not open at that time and those involved in the attempt lost their lives. However the mission field is not only lands far

off. Indeed France constituted a mission field.³

Unlike present day France, which is almost entirely secular in outlook, the France of the 16th century was religious but dominated by the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church. Persecution by the priests against evangelicals was fierce. It could cost your life to actively propagate the evangelical faith. However within the Roman Church a very considerable Bible movement had taken place through the secret reading of books by Luther as well as through the teaching of a well-known Catholic, Lefèvre d'Étaples. A great spiritual harvest was there to be reaped.

From 1555 to 1562 we know for sure that 88 preachers were sent from Geneva into France. Of these, nine laid down their lives as martyrs. There may have been more than 88. Historical research is hampered by the fact that everything in that period was done in a secretive way for security reasons. Also we must account for many short term missions into France. Those who were ordained and sent out as church planters were exceptionally gifted men. Some of them were from aristocratic families and most were

from a well-educated upper middle class background in France. Very few were from artisan origin and none from a peasant background. With the exception of Pierre Viret who was Swiss, (he became the pastor of the largest church of 8,000 communicants at Nîmes), these church planting missionaries originated from almost every province of France. This fact helps explain how it was that almost all regions of France were permeated with the gospel.

Of these missionaries those who were not already accredited pastors were obliged to conform to rigorous standards set up by Calvin. The moral life of the candidate, his theological integrity and his preaching ability were subject to careful examination. With regard to moral discipline a system was established by which the pastors were responsible to each other. There was an exacting code listing offences that were not to be tolerated in a minister. Offences in money, dishonesty or sexual misconduct meant instant dismissal.

All Calvin's students had to be fully proficient in Latin, Hebrew and Greek, in order to be thoroughly proficient in line by line exegesis of the Scriptures.

They were required to be trained in Church History and Systematic Theology. Character training was paramount. These pastors had to face the reality of martyrdom. Only when Calvin judged a man to possess the necessary fibre and stamina would he be sent into France to preach and plant churches. Each church began by a group gathering in a home, and then out of that a fully disciplined church would be constituted. Such was termed 'a dressed church'.

In 1555 there was only one 'dressed church'. Seven years later, in 1562, there were 2150 such churches! This represents growth of extraordinary proportions. Eventually there were over two million Protestant church members out of a French population of twenty million. This multiplication came in spite of fierce persecution. For instance in 1572, 70,000 Protestants lost their lives. The church order used was Presbyterian. There were 29 national synods from about 1562 to 1685 when persecution forced

most of the believers to leave France.

The real character of John Calvin is revealed in his letter-writing which was very extensive and pastoral in character. Besides personal letters he also wrote to the French churches as a whole. For instance in November 1559 he wrote: 'Persecutions are the real battles of Christians, to test the constancy and firmness of their faith; we should hold in high esteem the blood of the martyrs shed for a testimony to the truth.'

Conclusion

From the example provided above we need above all to recapture the biblical idea that a missionary is a male preacher/pastor who engages in church planting. There are many ancillary services and many ancillary agencies but without the application in practice of preaching and pastoring in the work of church planting the prospect of Christianity in any unevangelised land will be bleak.

References

1. *Calvin's Institutes*. The two volumes, edited by John T McNeil and translated by Ford Lewis Battles, form part of the *Library of Christian Classics*. 1,500 pages, Westminster Press, USA.
2. For a detailed description of the Brazilian saga see *The Heritage of John Calvin* edited by John Bratt, pages 40-73, Eerdmans, 1973.
3. John Calvin's enterprise in the evangelisation of France is described by Jean-Marc Berthoud in a carefully researched treatise of 53 pages, *Westminster Conference Papers for 1992* obtainable from John Harris, 8 Back Knowl Road, Mirfield, WF14 9SA, UK £4.00 including postage. It is from this treatise that I have extracted the material about France.

Arklatex!



*Family Ascol with Lyn Hulse, Karen and Bill, Jason (Joshua was at work)
and from left to right Jennifer, Joanna and Joy*

A report by the editor

During February my wife Lyn and I made a tour of some of the southern states of America with a visit to Kansas City which is geographically quite central in that huge nation. It was my privilege to preach at West Monroe and Shreveport in Louisiana, Fort Worth in Texas, Texarkana on the border between Arkansas and Texas, at Midwestern Seminary in Kansas, and Fayetteville in Atlanta, Georgia.

Shreveport, LA

With a little less than five weeks' planning, Bill Ascol, pastor of Heritage Baptist Church, Shreveport, organised the first regional Southern Baptist Founders'

Conference called ARK/LA/TEX drawing friends from Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas with 115 registered for Thursday evening to Saturday midday 5-7 February. The theme was *Sanctification*. I addressed this subject in three parts: 1. The Provision of 2. Positional 3. Progressive. Conference details and cassettes can be obtained by writing to Cindy c/o Bill Ascol, 457 Mohican Lane, Shreveport, LA 71106, USA. Several ministers from the area participated with valuable papers. One of the heartening features of this conference was the high degree of unity among the churches in and around Shreveport. Pastor Joe Nesom from Jackson, LA led the music. Recently pastors Nesom and Ascol ministered in Nizhniy Novgorod, Russia's second largest city.



*Don and Caffy Whitney and daughter
Laurelen*



*Jim Elliff in the library of Charles Haddon
Spurgeon which is housed at the William
Jewell College, Kansas, Missouri. The College
is the venue of a bi-annual Spurgeon's study
conference. Details of the next conference can
be obtained from Gary W Long
INTERNET:gwlong@juno.com*

Fort Worth, TX

Heritage Baptist Church is led by Pastor Larry Vincent. The midweek meeting was well attended and the people enthusiastic. The church hopes to buy its own building and property this year. There are at present 55 members with a further five families in regular attendance and several being prepared for baptism.

Texarkana

Rick Vis who trained at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson has pastored this Reformed Baptist church for about two years. A ministers' fraternal meets regularly at TRBC. I had sent a list of about 6 possible subjects for a Saturday ministers' conference. *The Challenge of the Charismatic Movement and the Reformed Faith* was chosen unanimously. After about an hour of exposition a further hour was spent in discussion before lunch

which provided extra time for personal fellowship. The Lord's Day was a delight, two morning sessions being Bible Class (exposition of a chapter), a break, worship service, then lunch and fellowship. This form of one prolonged time of worship and fellowship is popular in America and is helpful for those who travel a long distance.

Midwestern Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri

This was our first visit both to the city and seminary where a considerable reformation has been taking place under the leadership of president Mark Coppinger. I took several classes on a variety of subjects: *The Puritan doctrine of original sin; How to prepare a worship service; The Covenant and Baptism; and, The pastor and piety.* A morning was set aside for preaching and prayer and I was invited to develop the subject of my book

IRBC & ARBCA

The Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies (IRBS) has been established under the oversight of the *Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America (ARBCA)*. Both ARBCA & IRBS represent Confessional Baptist churches subscribing to the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689.

The Institute has been organised to operate in close cooperation with Westminster Theological Seminary, CA. ARBCA will provide academically qualified professors with considerable pastoral experience to teach IRBS courses on the Westminster campus. Dr James Renihan has been appointed by the churches as the first Dean & Professor.

The single purpose of IRBS is to direct all studies toward preparing men for the pastoral ministry. Course charges will be identical to the fees of Westminster Seminary. Institute professors will offer personal guidance to IRBS students and there will be opportunities for practical ministry during their years of education as well as in seeking placement in the ministry following graduation.

Details: Dr J Renihan, Westminster Seminary 1725 BearvalleyPitwy, Escondido CA 92027, USA

Give Him No Rest. It was encouraging to note the sterling leadership of the president Mark Coppinger and the effective ministries of Jim Elliff and Don Whitney who work together in the building up of a Reformed Baptist church which meets on the campus. Don Whitney is well known for his books on *Spiritual Discipline* and Jim Elliff promotes a literature ministry, *Christian Communicators Worldwide*. The Seminary occupies a 200 acre site, mostly woodland. It was stimulating to have discussion with students including some heading for the mission field. Jim Elliff took time to take us to see the present home of CH Spurgeon's library (now part of the William Jewell library).

Fayetteville, Atlanta

Steve Martin is in the tenth year of his ministry in the church he planted at Fayetteville, one of the suburbs covering a vast area of development around Atlanta. The church has grown steadily and in the last year a further 10 families joined. We experienced an unusual occurrence as I began to preach when a gentle rumble shook the building. Steve thought a plane had crashed, I thought it was an earthquake but Lyn correctly interpreted it as a low level thunderstorm. It had the effect of reminding us of the sovereignty of God. Again we followed the pattern outlined for Texarkana. We were joined for the day by a group from Macon, about 1½ hours south, who are committed to planting a Reformed Baptist church in their area.

News

We welcome Michael Haykin as an associate editor of *Reformation Today*. Prof Haykin teaches Church history at *Heritage Baptist College and Theological Seminary*, Cambridge, Ontario. He is the author of *One Heart and One Soul* (EP) and more recently of *Knollys, Kiffin and Keach* published by Reformation Today Trust (distributed by EP).



Baptismal service. See report on Canada

Canada

Toronto Baptist Seminary, which is based on the same strategic metropolitan site as *Jarvis Street Baptist Church*, has organised the bi-annual *International Baptist Conference* since 1980. It was through meeting at the IBC that birth was given to the *International Fellowship of Reformed Baptists* in 1990.

It is good to hear of growth in the *Jarvis Street* membership, 24 last Spring, 10 by baptism. The photos show four candidates being baptised

by Dr Geoff Adams who has been a leader in the Seminary and Church for many years.

Israel

The ultra orthodox members of the 120 strong Israeli Parliament hold sway. It is historic therefore that the draconian legislation designed to suppress Christians has been withdrawn. Already however it is rumoured that another bill designed to restrict evangelism is on the drawing board. The dilemma faced in

the Knesset is that they wish to keep their reputation as a democracy. This cannot be if they pass legislation that denies basic human rights.

Philippines

Cubao Reformed Baptist Church

During the absence of Pastor Brian Ellis and his wife Neco who are due to be travelling in the UK and USA from 16 April till 24 July Pastor Mon will continue the oversight of Cubao RBC with its many outreach ministries and oversight to younger churches.

Grace Ministerial Academy

The Academy has just concluded its second year. The number of students was 24 at the end of term in March. During the break the current classroom will be enlarged as it is expected that there will be about 40 students in mid-June at the beginning of the new academic year. Besides leading his own church, Pastor Noel Espinosa gives able leadership to the Academy.

Christian Compassion Ministries

The work of caring for children in need includes sponsorship of children in needy families to help with their clothes and books for school, and a permanent home for several girls who are orphans or need long-term residential care. Recently the decision was taken to open a second home and a suitable property is under offer. One of the further outreaches associated with this ministry has been Bible Studies in very depressed areas of the city. Attendance and response have been very encouraging.

Details from Pastor B Ellis, CRBC, 55 Miami St, Cubao 1102 Quezon City, Philippines.

Burma (Myanmar)

The Karen and Karenni peoples

(These are two entirely different tribal groups, both from the southern parts of Myanmar – formerly Burma. The central area of the country is largely Buddhist, surrounded by several rural people groups many of whom have been radically affected by Christianity.)

Recent attacks on Karen civilians in camps in Thailand left 3 dead, 60 injured and thousands homeless after 3 border camps suffered brutal attacks and partial destruction by joint units from DKBA (Democratic Kayan Buddhist Army) and SPDC (State Peace and Development Council). The loss of life and injuries occurred on March 11 when about 200 armed men ran into Wangkha Camp at 1.00 am shouting threats and shooting randomly. Mangha Camp was bombed on March 15 and 60 homes burnt on Maw Ker Camp on March 23. The residents were left in appalling conditions in ramshackle shelters. The situation is made worse by the approach of the rainy season. The Thai government has been urged to resettle these refugees further from the border.

The plight of the Karenni people is even worse in some respects. A minority of 12,000 are in border camps in Thailand. The remainder, some 300,000, are living in terror and danger in Karenni State, Myanmar,



A group photo taken at the ministers fraternal that meets at the Reformed Baptist Church, Texarkana. Central to this picture in the row kneeling is Rick Vis pastor of the church – see report under the title Arklatex.

either having been relocated to concentration camps without medical care or proper food, or else in constant fear of their own villages being attacked by SPDC troops. These soldiers often arrest people for forced labour. The previous agreements following peace talks with the State Council in 1995 were not honoured and the Karenni leadership is highly apprehensive about new talks resulting in a worse situation.

We should support by prayer and by joining our petitions with groups who monitor human rights situations.

*From a report by **Christian Solidarity Worldwide**, PO Box 99, New Malden, Surrey KT3 3YF.*

Fiji

Reports of the church led by Vijay Chandra have appeared in our news columns since about 1988. The church has continued to meet in Vijay's home and has grown steadily making the need for a separate building imperative.

In Fiji most property is rented and so it was with the acre of land where Vijay's home is situated. Recently the owner offered the land and dwelling for sale and this has now been procured by the church. Plans for a new church building have been drawn up and the next steps are to obtain permission and funding to build.

Further information from: Norman

Coleman, 176 Marvels Lane, Grove Park, London SE12 9PL, UK or Wally Barlow, 6021 Albion Drive, Flint, Michigan 48506, USA.

USA – RBMS

Reformed Baptist Mission Services have taken on several translation projects for 1998 including:

Japanese – *The 1689 Confession of Faith*

Hebrew – A series of sermons by Baruch Maoz on the Ten Commandments, *'The Fruit of the Spirit and the Work of the Holy Spirit'*.

Spanish – Gurnall's *'Christian in Complete Armour'* (modern translation); booklets: Van Til – *Why I believe in God* and Geoff Thomas – *Reading the Bible*.

For details write to: RBMS PO Box 289, Carlisle PA 17013, USA.

Belgium

A report by Michael B Robinson, Opeisingstraat 8, 9900 Eeklo, Belgium who serves with the European Missionary Fellowship.

Just a short boat ride from the south-east coast of England lies a land abounding in material wealth, yet in spiritual truth so poor. Belgium is one of those Western nations which rank amongst the most needy mission fields of the world. Of the 10 million population fewer than 1% have any kind of Protestant connection. Roman Catholicism accounts officially for 90% of the people, yet for the average Belgian organised religion is simply not relevant to everyday life. This is

true of both the Dutch-speaking Flemings of the north and the French-speaking Walloons of the south.

And yet Belgium's religious history could have turned out differently. 400 years ago she was penetrated by the teaching of the Reformers and this is reflected in the *Belgic Confession* of 1561. This document, largely the work of Guido de Bres, was designed to be a clear and comprehensive statement in defence of the Reformed faith at the time of the Spanish Inquisition. However, King Philip II of Spain was determined to root out all Protestant factions under his jurisdiction which included Belgium. As a result most of the Protestants fled north to the Netherlands. A spiritual darkness settled over Belgium and even today not much light has broken through.

In the 20th century a number of evangelical groupings have tried their hand at working in Belgium. Almost all are Arminian in doctrine and practice and very few have met with any lasting success. Reformed theology remains largely unknown in Belgium.

I have been in Belgium for some time but since September 1997 I have been working alongside Pastor Jakobus De Feyter in Eeklo Evangelical Church. We are a small group of about a dozen believers but we are committed to maintaining a Calvinistic witness. We share the preaching ministry, whilst I have the responsibility for the children's work, literature and distribution, and door-to-door outreach. It is uphill work but we look to the Lord to build his Church. Do please pray for us.

A Missionary Policy

Bill James

What place does the Great Commission occupy in the life of your church? Nominally we would all give hearty assent to our responsibilities in mission. But practically is such concern evident for example in the regular ministry of the church, in the prayer meeting, in the church budget, and in the evangelistic zeal of church members?

Some churches find it helpful to formulate a missions policy to clarify their commitment to world mission. A policy can also help us to face up to the many practical issues involved in sending out and supporting missionaries.

Statement of Principles

Such a policy might include the following affirmations by the church:

1. The mission of the church is defined by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18-20, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.'

2. This command defines the mission of our local church, and of every member. This is not a command for a few within the church, but for us all. We all share a common responsibility, in dependence upon God's help and the promise of the presence of Christ, to share the Gospel and make disciples wherever we have opportunity, both personally and as a church. We have a responsibility to pray and to practically support such work. Our responsibility is not only to our immediate locality, but also to the wider world as we look for disciples in 'all nations'.

3. The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church both local and universal, and it is he who raises up labourers for his harvest field. We acknowledge our responsibility to pray that he would raise up labourers, and recognise that he may call some from our own congregation to take the Gospel to other places, cultures, and nations. We acknowledge our responsibility to recognise the gifts and calling which he may give to our members. We recognise, according to the

pattern of the New Testament, that it is the local church which is the proper sending agency for Gospel workers (Acts 13:1-3). We recognise that this implies a responsibility for training and practical support of workers, and a responsibility upon them to be accountable to the local church.

4. Our obedience to the Great Commission is to be carried out in fellowship with other members of the church militant. We acknowledge that support, training and preparation of members sent out from our own congregation may best be accomplished in fellowship with like-minded churches and other agencies. We recognise that workers sent out from our church should work in fellowship and cooperation wherever possible with indigenous churches in the locality to which they are sent.

5. Our goal in missions is the planting and strengthening of indigenous local churches to facilitate further Gospel-preaching and disciple-making in that area. This is the New Testament pattern. However, we recognise that obedience to the Great Commission may take many forms including for example literacy, Bible and book translation work, radio work, training indigenous workers, etc., and that support staff will be needed to facilitate this work. We recognise that both long and short-term assignments may sometimes be

appropriate. We recognise that some workers may need full financial support, while others will work as 'tentmakers' according to the opportunities of the field to which they are sent.

6. We seek to maintain the integrity of our mission, whether local or international. Our commitment to evangelism and disciple-making in doctrine and practice is to be in accordance with the biblical teachings expressed in our church basis of faith. Our fellowship with other churches is to be on the same basis overseas as locally. Ministries of women are on the same basis wherever they serve, excluding roles which are the functional equivalent of eldership but including all manner of other ministries.

Sending in practice

When such principles have been established, numerous practical issues arise. How is a missionary to be sent out (whether to another region or another nation)? The elders will take a leading role, but as in Acts 13 the whole church will be involved in sending the candidate in the same way as the church will be involved in recognising other church officers.

There are certain fundamental issues to be considered. If the Lord of the harvest is calling this

candidate to missionary service, is there evidence that the Lord has first of all given a real conviction and concern to the candidate for such work. Has this been evident in local church life? Is his heart in it? Is there a passion for the glory of God and the souls of men? Then are there providential indications that the Lord is calling this person to a particular field: opportunities in a particular country, a burden and concern there? Is this recognised by the church? Does the church see the Lord's hand in this and his leading in this person's life?

Then there are three aspects to be considered before sending the candidate:

1. Assessing Character

If the candidate is to serve as a church-planter or pastor/ teaching elder then he should be no less qualified than the elders of the local church. If the candidate is to serve in a support role, then the qualifications of deacon may be more appropriate. In either case, the qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are relevant. Character is of first importance. Missionary work will often involve exceptional pressures and stresses, and mature spirituality is a necessity. A variety of questions may be relevant:

he relate how he walks with God? Are there clustered in the candidate's life the spiritual traits of one who evidences union with Christ in love, humility, meekness, joy and peace? If the role involves preaching, has the candidate evinced the spiritual mind and discipline required for an effective preacher?

- b. In a Confessional Reformed church, Baptist or Presbyterian, the elders and deacons are required to be familiar with and ascribe to the Confession of Faith. Has the candidate studied the Confession of his church? Some areas may require special attention, such as the uniqueness of Christ.¹ How does the candidate view charismatic claims or decisionism? How would he relate to those who hold to these beliefs and practices?
- c. Our generation has been scandalised by the sins of the 'tele-evangelists'. It is necessary to check whether the candidate is free from all sexual aberration. It is necessary too to check financial integrity. William Carey was almost ruined by the careless use of funds by the missionary doctor who accompanied him to India. A further question: Are there any vestiges of racism in the candidate?
- d. How does the candidate relate to his wife and children, to his

- a. Does the candidate maintain a robust daily devotional life? Can

parents, to other church members, to his neighbours and to his fellows in the work place? How does he take criticism? Is he subject to gossip? Does he show the qualities of leadership? Will he be able to relate humbly and sensitively in a cross-cultural situation?

- e. Is the candidate subject to depression? How does he endure discouragement? Is he stable in a crisis? Is family life of good quality, and will it survive the pressures of a cross-cultural situation? If the candidate is single does he have the resilience to survive in an isolated situation in a foreign land?
- f. Is the candidate driven by pure motives? Is he sure there are not mixed motives such as the desire for adventure or change from a boring life at home? Is there any emotional involvement with someone in the society to which he wishes to apply?

2. *Assessing Gifts*

Calling and gifts go hand in hand. Candidates for eldership roles should be 'apt to teach'. Those for diaconal roles will have been 'tested'. Has the candidate been an active and committed member of the local church? How has he operated in church life? Have real gifts been evident, and used with zeal? No-one

becomes an evangelist or a teacher simply by crossing the ocean; these qualities should be evident in the local church.

Some form of theological training would normally be required, and the candidate should be prepared for the special challenges of cross-cultural work. If a specialised work is in view are his skills adequate to meet the challenge? Is further training required? Is the candidate willing to undergo further studies or training if that will in the long run ensure more efficiency and effectiveness? What aptitude does he have for languages?

3. *Practical Issues*

There are yet further questions to consider:

- a. What is the candidate's state of health? What provision will be made for health care when the missionary is overseas?
- b. What family does the candidate have? Does he have family responsibilities, e.g. to parents, and how will these be discharged? If there are children, how will they be educated? Will they return to the sending country for secondary or tertiary education, and what provision will be made for this?
- c. How will the missionary report

back to the local church? How often should he communicate? How often will he return to his sending church, and for how long? What will this involve? What commitment will the home church make to communicate regularly with the missionary, including field visits?

- d. What provision will be made for holidays and retirement?

Allocation of church funds

Some churches set a good example by attaining to a high level of missionary giving and support. Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, USA, has 1,300 members. 30% of the church income is devoted to missions. Our whole church budget should be considered in light of the Great Commission, and a balance struck between our responsibilities at home and overseas. Cooperation between like-minded churches means that the financial burden of sending missionaries can be shared.

Grace Baptist Mission in England (begun in 1861) provides a basis for like-minded Reformed Baptist churches to co-operate together in the sending and supporting of missionaries. They are able to

advise churches in preparing missionary candidates in the UK.² Depending on which part of the world is envisaged there are other reliable missionary societies and agencies that can be consulted. The church elders and deacons should explore areas of co-operation with such agencies.

Apart from sending missionaries, churches can also consider direct support of like-minded churches overseas. This can take various forms: direct financial support, assistance with ministerial training, provision of literature, etc. By this means indigenous workers can more effectively make progress in their work; this may be much more useful than sending a Western missionary.

By all such means we seek to be obedient to the Great Commission, and to see the name of our Saviour glorified throughout the world.

Notes

- 1 Hywel R. Jones, *Only One Way – Do you have to believe in Christ to be saved?* Day One Publications, 144 pages, £5.99, 1996.
- 2 Grace Baptist Mission supply useful introductory statements: *Working Together in Mission and Calling, Preparing, Sending – A Guide for Churches*. These two documents are available together for £6 including postage from GBM, 12 Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JD, UK.

Sensitivity to Others

Jim Holmes

Can Christians of differing theological persuasions enjoy close and happy fellowship?

In our concern for orthodoxy, have we at times been so zealous that we have drawn boundary-markers of division around ourselves to the exclusion of fellow-believers who simply have not been persuaded of the truth of sovereign grace? Sadly it seems that some Calvinists have unwittingly developed a kind of spiritual apartheid in which they practise segregation from their not so well-taught Arminian brothers and sisters. And even worse, in fact, sinister, is the thought that perhaps such people aren't Christians at all.

I suggest four principles which should govern our thinking concerning true fellowship between believers. As believers, our rationale must always be determined by the teaching of the Bible. I suggest:

1. The Lord grants to his people varying levels of doctrinal understanding and differing rates of growth in grace. 1 Corinthians 4:7 – 'Who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive?' The believer must answer in the words of the apostle Paul, 'I am what I am by the grace

of God.' The diversity in spirituality and maturity is reflected in John 21:15-17.

2. The fear and knowledge of the Lord form the basis of spiritual companionship and fellowship. Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, originally written as a pastoral handbook for members of his congregation, made it abundantly clear that knowledge of God establishes the foundation for all valid spiritual experience. Believers are united not by the shibboleths of quoting points of doctrine, or the names of highly respected authors. They are united by a common fellowship or participation in the grace of Christ. 'I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who keep your precepts' (Psalm 119:63).

3. Fellowship involves common participation with many brothers and sisters in the one family of God. This does not refer to ecumenism which includes non-Christian religions. However, the analogy of Scripture insists on the recognition of this principle. 1 John 3:1 and the verses following make it clear that God the Father bestows a great love upon us, and thus we are called the children of God. We are therefore united with God and must also enjoy the bonds of union with his other children. And

this union is expressed not only in theological terms, but in powerfully practical terms: ‘...we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers ... let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth...’ (vv16,18). So strongly does the apostle insist on the connection between love and deeds that he makes it an indicator of the saving grace of God (see 1 John 3:10).

It should be stressed at this point that loving one’s fellow Christians does not require doctrinal compromise. The Lord Jesus, in his incarnation, did not compromise the honour of the gospel in laying down his life for sinners and accepting them for his own. We read in Romans 15:7, ‘Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.’

4. We are to do all we can to work out the prayers of our Lord (John 17) and the injunctions of the apostle Paul (Eph 4). According to the high-priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in John 17 (especially v 21), it is his express will that all his people should be one. There will surely be an eschatological fulfilment of this when we are all gathered around his throne, united in happy, harmonious and undistracted worship of his majestic and holy person. But we cannot be united with Christ without desiring and working towards that for which he prayed so explicitly. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, ‘...be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit

through the bond of peace.’ (Eph 4:2,3) These words are introduced with the exhortation, ‘Be completely humble and gentle...’ As those persuaded of the doctrines of grace, are we at times guilty of contradicting the very foundational principles which the Lord gave through his apostle in our zeal to advance his honour, and have we substituted humility with arrogance? We would do well to apply the search-light of God’s Word to this area of our lives, and to take the required corrective action.

It is noteworthy that the apostles frequently established sound doctrine in the beginning of their letters in order that careful practical living come about as a direct result. Pride of knowledge is no guarantee of an exemplary lifestyle. In fact, the injunction of Paul to Timothy, ‘Watch your life and doctrine closely’ (1 Tim 4:16) establishes the connection between the understanding of truth and practice of truth.

In Reformed circles we should be diligent to put into practice the details of Scripture at the point of engaging in warm, gracious, caring fellowship with others who name the name of the Lord. Some years ago a minister cultivated the friendship of a non-Reformed minister from a main-line denomination and encouraged him to attend a well-known Reformed conference. On his arrival, the newcomer was seen by another minister who had recently seceded from the main-line denomination. Seeing the newcomer, he rounded on

him and rebuked him for not having seceded. At this, the newcomer picked up his bags and returned home. The damage was irrevocable.

The point might be raised that being generous in fellowship is tantamount to spiritual compromise. Is it? Does not the Lord's acceptance of the imperfect churches in Revelation 2 to 3 indicate a principle of latitude in which growth and change might take place? Did not the apostle Paul exemplify the same spirit in his acceptance of wayward believers such as the Corinthians who would probably raise more than just an eyebrow if they came to our churches today? Do we, then, consider ourselves wiser or better than the Lord and his apostles?

Practical conclusions

On the international scene, there are, sadly, all too many small differences which become major hindrances to fellowship. I venture to ask whether some of these do not have to do with personality or intolerance? As those who love the Reformed faith, and who are zealous for the honour and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, there is surely room to broaden our horizons and commend more affectionately the powerful truths of Scripture. The example of Aquila and Priscilla, whose hospitality and godly example inspired Apollos, provides a model for us. The warm and caring atmosphere of one's home provides an ideal environment to share the truth. Books, booklets and

cassettes can also be used. Correspondence with those who serve the Lord in far-away places can be invaluable in encouraging weary labourers and promoting biblical thinking.

There are many opportunities which present themselves to build bridges rather than walls. It has been suggested that believers should make a point once a year or more of attending at least one event held in another church – e.g. a special series of evangelistic or teaching meetings, a weekend conference, or perhaps a picnic or camp. This can do wonders for a more tangible sense of unity. The gospel presentation may be different, and the teaching not exactly what we are used to, but it won't be the end of our spiritual lives, and what excellent ground for building strong, meaningful Christian relationships with the resulting opportunities for introducing our Christian friends to a biblically founded understanding and practice of truth.

Finally we can be stirred from a letter from the past: 'Cæteris a candid, catholic spirit. Seek not the little interests of a party, but rather lament that human imperfection has rendered party distinctives unavoidable; and suffer not a party spirit to aggravate the misfortune. O for a heart, among all the professors of the religion of Christ, widely expanded as the spirit of the religion they profess, and as that of its benevolent founder!' (From the circular letter of the *Midland Particular Association*, 1785.)

A Task Unfinished

How to recruit, support and pray for missionaries and Christian workers in a constantly changing world

A Task Unfinished, Michael Griffiths, 185 pages, OMF/MARC Monarch Publications, 1996, £5.99.

Review by David Earl, assistant pastor, Woodstock Road Baptist Church, Oxford, UK.

The church at Ephesus where Timothy was pastor was young, harassed by false teachers, and lacking in elders and deacons. Not the sort of church we might expect to have time or resources for missionary work. Paul thinks differently. He urges this church to intercede for people everywhere because God wants people everywhere to be saved (1 Tim 2:1-3). Michael Griffiths, like Paul, believes this and points out very simply that there is no other place than the local church from where missionaries can be recruited and supported. He writes, 'Every church shares in the call to make disciples of all nations, and must mobilise its activities to that end ... The local church is the nursery of missions. For every individual member chosen to go out to the cross cultural "front-line" there need to be ninety nine committed supporters standing behind them.'

This book is about how, in practice, we in our churches can do this today. In terms of his style Griffiths is easy to read with many examples from

history and the present day. Lindsay Brown, General Secretary of IFES (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students), is one of twenty two Christian leaders who commends the book in its first three pages. He writes, 'Michael Griffiths always combines a sharp historical perspective, a wholehearted devotion to Scripture, a commitment to seeing the work of God move on through the church. He writes with the benefit of a lifetime spent advancing the cause of the gospel cross culturally.'

In showing that the local church has the key role to play in supporting missionary work, Griffiths does not dismiss missionary societies. Rather he points out what they and training colleges can do best. But it is from the churches that missionaries receive practical, prayer and financial support, as well as what he calls 'morale' support through letters, phone calls, and even visits. Such encouragements stand in contrast to his story from John Paton, where 'a dear old Christian gentleman' kept on saying, 'The cannibals. You will be eaten by cannibals!' Paton replied, 'Mr Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to

be eaten by worms; I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms.'

If each local church is to fulfil its particular duty to look beyond its borders, it is the pastor who will need to be convinced. 'The pastor more than anybody else can encourage missionary concern to flower, or by his attitude can lead to the neglecting or even stifling of it.' Griffiths quotes JB Whiting of the CMS in 1860: 'We must fan the flame of missionary zeal in the pastor. Can an icicle light a fire?' For a contemporary pastor what began the change in his attitude was when on a sabbatical visit to Liberia a young believer asked him, 'What is your mission strategy?'

On the question of screening missionary candidates, Griffiths argues well that someone's local church will know the person best. 'Over the years I have noted that when a student at college or a missionary on the field fails in some way, if you look back at what their referees had to say when they first applied, there is almost always an indication of some weakness.'

To give us a better understanding of what a missionary typically goes through, there is an excellent outline of the joys and frustrations of each stage of missionary life. For example most will return on their first home leave with little to show; their prayer letters haven't been gripping ('you cannot write too many letters about irregular verbs'); by contrast they see

their friends in well-established jobs, and even in church they easily feel marginalised. Before being sent they might have been an elder, deacon, or on the pastoral team, but now they feel unemployed. Griffiths has known many missionaries who have been only too pleased to get back to the field for this reason. His suggestion is that missionaries back home should make few visits to other churches so as to be able to spend most of their time with their home church. Here they should be given opportunity for ministry. I would add that sufficient time should also be granted for missionaries to spend with their families back home.

Other chapters include those on the role of a church missionary committee, including the setting up of a church missionary policy; on how the sender and sent can keep in touch with each other; and on 'A fresh look at self-supporting missionaries'. The chapter entitled 'Prayer for missionaries in days of distracted busyness' shows Griffiths' encouraging way of writing. He urges us on, but not to attempt too much too soon. Start small, be it with the introduction of a missionary prayer meeting or the drawing up of a missionary policy.

Every big fire started out as a small one. Maybe the start for you and your church will be reading this book as you see your responsibility before God. If you have already started there is still much to learn from it. You will be encouraged to go on supporting those whom God sends as his messengers of the gospel across his world.

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