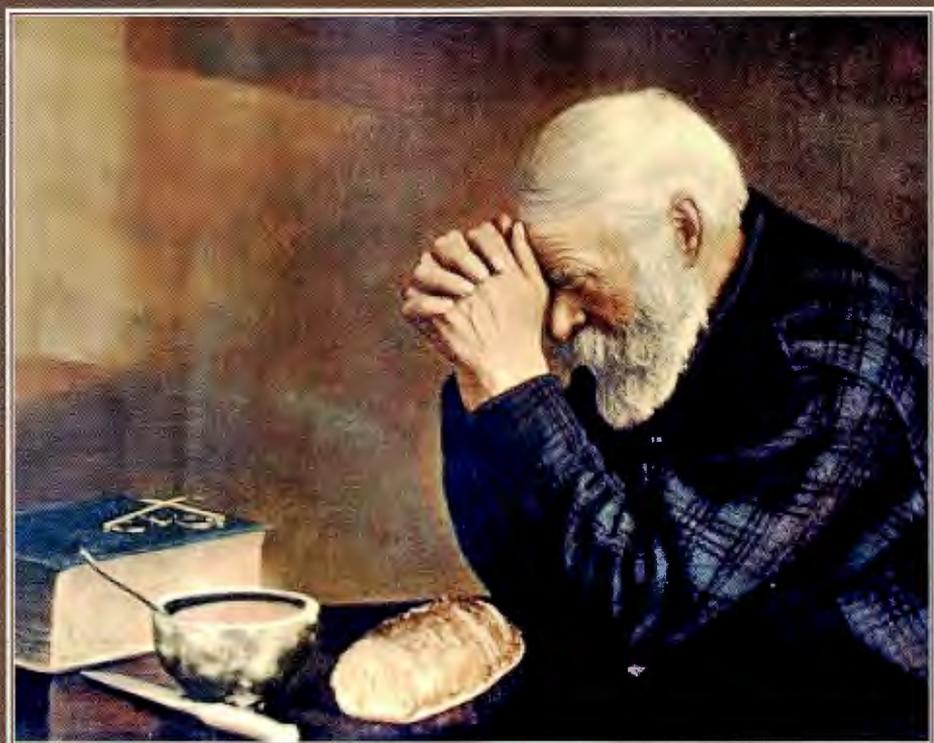


REFORMATION TODAY



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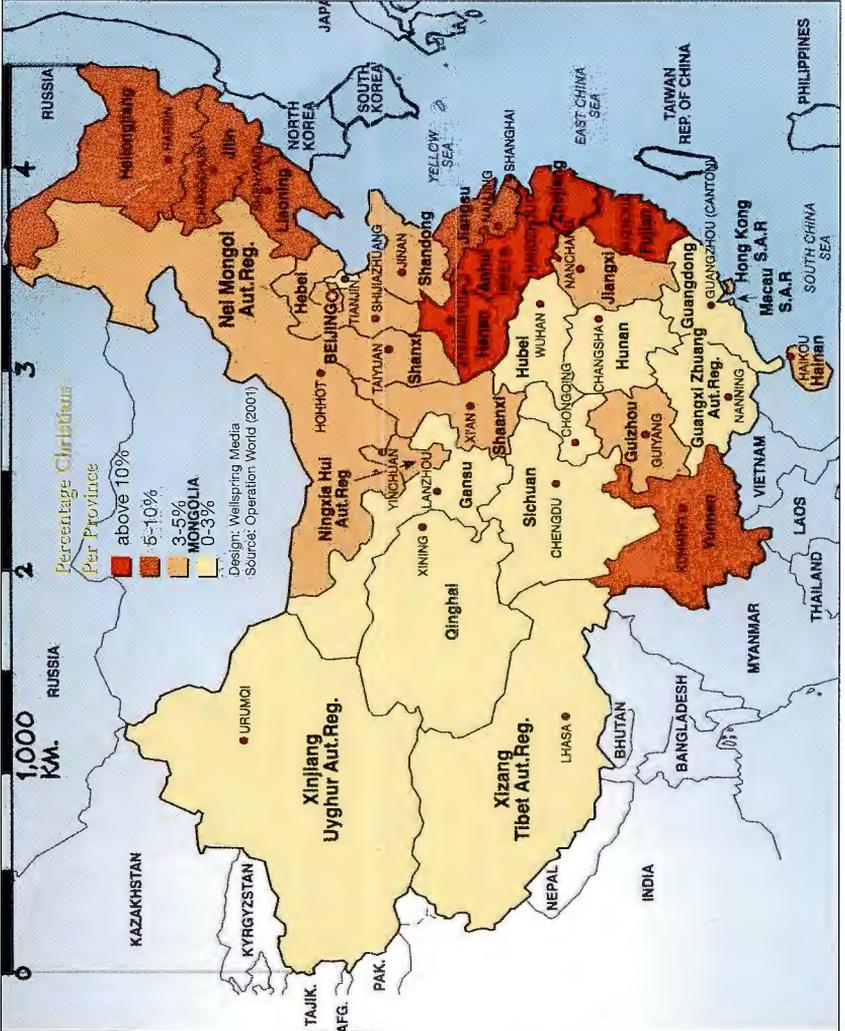
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Websites www.reformation-today.org

The editor's personal website is <http://www.errollhulse.com>

<http://africanpastorsconference.com>

People's Republic of China



Front cover picture – This famous painting titled “grace” was based on a photograph taken by Eric Enstrom in 1918 of a man called Charles Wilden who sold foot-scrappers. Even in the Great War there was much to be thankful for. Eric Enstrom’s daughter painted the picture.

Editorial

This is a special issue of *Reformation Today* celebrating the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth with an article of much greater length than usual, namely, the material by Jonathan Bayes on 'Calvin the Missionary'.

Indelibly marked on the young John Calvin's mind was witnessing the execution of a surgeon named Pointent who was burned to death. That was followed by Calvin's narrow escape from arrest out of a window at the back of a house in Paris. Jonathan Bayes reminds us of his first church planting work. Believers met in a cave in a remote, solitary ravine. John Calvin was deeply concerned for his fellow Frenchmen. When he had established a sound spiritual base in Geneva (See RT 223) and a seminary, he was able with others to train men to undertake courageous church planting work in his homeland which was notorious for its persecution of believers (See RT 221, 222, 224). Refugees studied and trained at Geneva and returned as missionary/church planters in the Acts 13-14 sense of preacher/church planters in Italy, the Netherlands, the independent states of the Rhineland, Hungary, Poland, Germany, England and Scotland where John Knox exercised an amazingly effective ministry. The majority of foreign refugees in Geneva came, like Calvin himself, from France. In 1561 there opened a brief window of opportunity to send a willing army of pastor/preachers into France. Calvin seized this opportunity. Some of these ministers were actually welcomed by the French Court (See RT 225).

The missionary effort into Brazil was courageous and ended in martyrdom. The history of the Indians in Brazil is tragic. It is estimated that there were six million indigenous people in Brazil in the 1500s. Over the years these have been reduced so that only about 200,000 remain today. These survivors continue to be threatened by disease and the decimation of their habitat. However, what would Calvin think of the estimated nine million Bible believers in Brazil today? What would he make of the Reformed literature industry that is now thriving in Brazil?

John Calvin is the father of Presbyterianism and his missionary zeal has been repeated many times in Presbyterian denominations. One example is the missionary outreach from the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, extending to many tribes across southern Africa, by missionaries who had been converted in a powerful revival in the prisoner of war camps in Bermuda and Sri Lanka during the Boer War (1899-1902). Another example is South Korea,

the home of the largest and most numerous Presbyterian bodies. Only the USA exceeds South Korea in the number of serving missionaries in the world today.

Leading missiologist David Bosch states: 'It is absurd to summon the Reformers before the tribunal of the modern missionary movement and find them guilty for not having subscribed to a definition of mission which did not even exist in their time' [*Transforming Mission*, page 244]. John Calvin accepted the principle of *Corpus Christianum*: the whole of society is nominally 'Christian', cemented together by infant baptism, that is all without exception. Roman Catholic baptism was recognised. The historical development of *Corpus Christianum* is described in the article, What is the Church? When Calvin's men evangelised they preached for conversion and gathered believers into churches and then employed various disciplines to maintain consistent church membership. The difference between the way the apostles practised entrance into the Christian Church by believers' baptism versus *Corpus Christianum* will doubtless be re-appraised in the future especially since Western Europe is increasingly no longer even nominally 'Christian' but secular.

For inclusion in RT 232 will be *The Church in the Wilderness*, the continuation of the series on France by Frederick Hodgson. Bob Davey will continue his series on China with *Christianity in China up to 1800*.

* *Increasing secularist pressures in Europe*

Britain's Roman Catholic leaders have branded a proposed European Union (EU) Equal Treatment Directive an 'instrument of oppression'. The bishops are concerned that the Directive could limit freedom of religion and freedom of expression. They warn that if the Directive were implemented 'the EU would effectively be dictating to religious bodies what their faith does or does not require: a wholly unacceptable position'.

The Roman Catholic response cites several possible examples of this, including campaigners for same-sex marriage declaring themselves offended by presentations of the Roman Catholic Church's moral teaching on homosexual acts; and an atheist claiming to be offended by religious pictures in an art gallery. In the response the bishops state: 'What the Church is seeking from this Directive is simply the right to maintain its own teaching and activities with integrity, according to its own ethos.'

This increasing threat from the EU as well as secular lobbies in the UK illustrates the confusion which results when the State imposes its anti-Christian pagan values on the Church.

Calvin the Missionary

Calvin's 'inexcusable blindness'
– 'no trace of missionary
enthusiasm'?

by Jonathan Bayes



John Calvin was born in Noyon, Picardy, on July 10th, 1509. He became a talented student at the Universities of Paris, Orléans and Bourges. He was converted at some point during his student days, though the exact time and circumstances are unknown. Some eight or nine years after his conversion Calvin began his second period of ministry in Geneva. He had served there briefly five years earlier. Now, in 1541, he returned to the city, and remained there for the next 23 years until his death in 1564.

Emile Doumergue has commented eloquently on the workings of God's providence in Calvin's experience. Calvin held a lay benefice in the church at Noyon. This enabled him to observe the abuses of the Roman system. He was led to leave Noyon by an outbreak of plague. This resulted in his exposure to the Protestant faith. In Paris Calvin was taught by Mathurin Cordier, the best Latin teacher in France. At Orléans he studied under Melchior Wolmar, the leading Greek scholar of the day. The differing emphases at the universities where he studied gave him both an appreciation for classical learning and an understanding of Renaissance humanism. In these things God was preparing Calvin for his life's work as a Christian teacher. The result was the writing of *The Institutes*.¹

It is probably as the author of *The Institutes* that Calvin is best known. However, Harrison points out that the most significant characteristic mark of Calvin's Christian scholarship is his concern with usefulness. Harrison goes so far as to speak of Calvin's 'obsession' with utility. He believed that 'scholarship for its own sake, reading and writing for the sheer fun of it, could never be justified'. And ultimately the usefulness of theological scholarship was that it served the advancement of the kingdom.²

The words of my subtitle are borrowed from two works. The reference to Calvin's 'inexcusable blindness' is based on an assertion made by Charles Ranson. He writes like this: 'The leaders of the Protestant Reformation were too busy with their domestic concerns to give thought to a world mission. This strange silence of the Reformers may be explained but can hardly be excused. They were engaged in a titanic struggle for the soul of the Church. They were seeking a recovery of apostolic Christianity. But this very fact only renders more puzzling their blindness to a universal missionary obligation.'³

In speaking of this inexcusable blindness, Ranson is referring to the Reformers as a group, including Calvin, along with Luther and Zwingli. The second part of my subtitle is an exact quotation from A M Hunter, who says of Calvin specifically: 'Certainly he displayed no trace of missionary enthusiasm.'⁴

Let me define my subject. I am using the words 'missionary' and 'mission' in a narrow sense. I am referring specifically to cross-cultural or cross-border evangelism. I well recognize the following point, ably made by Brian de Yong: 'The mission of the church is to reach locally first (Jerusalem), regionally second (Judea and Samaria), and internationally third (the ends of the earth). To emphasize the international 'overseas' ministry of the church to the exclusion of the local and regional is patently unbiblical. It is not the entire mission of the church – it is only a part of it.'⁵

This is true, but in this present context it is the third part of mission with which we are concerned. But do please notice that our sub-title ends with a question mark. My aim is to question whether it is correct to say that Calvin had no trace of missionary enthusiasm, and to criticize him for this inexcusable blindness.

Certainly such a viewpoint has been put forward so often that it is almost taken for granted by many people. Here are just a few examples of the kinds of things which have been said.

Over a hundred years ago Gustav Warneck made the assertion that 'there was no missionary action' on the part of the Protestant Church during the age of the Reformation. He continues: 'We miss in the Reformers not only missionary action, but even the idea of missions.'⁶ Having spoken of the Reformers in general, Warneck turns his attention to each of the magisterial Reformers in turn. As regards John Calvin, he claims that in his

writings there is no recognition of a ‘duty on the part of the church to send out missionaries’.⁷

About fifty years ago J D Graber claimed that the Reformers, with the sole exception of the Anabaptists, ‘explained away the significance of the Great Commission by declaring that it applied only to the apostles and was no longer binding after the apostolic age’.⁸

More recently Jack Stotts has alleged that the earliest Reformed churches gave little attention to the mission of the church beyond the boundaries of Christendom. He writes: ‘Mission as a category of the church’s constitutional documents was absent.’⁹

Even right now, in the publicity connected with the forthcoming Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town next year, Christopher Wright can say: ‘The 16th Century Reformation was criticized because it lacked missionary awareness and energy until much later. They were so obsessed with tackling abuses in the Church that they neglected world mission.’ He adds: ‘Reformation without mission was defective.’¹⁰

However, my purpose is to demonstrate that such a view of Calvin’s work is a complete myth. Rodney Stark notes that Calvin was the director of an international underground evangelistic mission. Stark expresses bewilderment that ‘Calvin’s remarkable career running missionary agents has been so completely ignored by historians’. This is particularly surprising in that this aspect of his career had such an ‘immense impact on the success of Reformed Protestantism’. Stark, indeed, attributes the widespread influence of the Reformed faith more to Calvin’s ability in directing this missionary movement than to his profound theology, his superb preaching, or his ability to write with such clarity.¹¹

I want to consider this subject under two headings: (1) Calvin’s missiology, and (2) Calvin’s missionary endeavours.

(1) Calvin’s missiology

In view of Warneck’s comment that we search in vain even for the idea of missions in Calvin and the other Reformers, we need to examine Calvin’s teaching on the subject of world mission. Regardless of his practice did he have a theoretical understanding of overseas mission? What was his theology of missions?

We have to be careful here. The terms ‘mission’ and ‘missionary’ never appear in the Authorized Version. The word ‘mission’ is used in some modern English translations of the Bible, but only in a general sense, and not in the technical sense with which we are familiar. Barry Morgan claims that it was only in the early nineteenth century that ‘mission’ entered Christian parlance as the accepted word for the Church’s global outreach.¹² This may be a little late. In his Enquiry William Carey uses the word ‘missionary’ once, ‘missionaries’ nine times, ‘mission’ twice and ‘missions’ three times.¹³ Nevertheless, Morgan is probably correct to acknowledge that the word had not acquired its technical sense much earlier.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the word ‘mission’ occurs infrequently in Calvin’s *Institutes*. The word appears just four times in Henry Beveridge’s 1845 translation. Twice it refers to the mission of Christ,¹⁴ and twice to the mission of the apostles.¹⁵ Its frequency is higher in the more recent 1960 translation by Ford Lewis Battles. Here we find the word nine times. The increased frequency probably reflects the way that ‘mission’ had had its technical use fixed in the course of the century separating Battles from Beveridge. In Battles’ translation it refers once to the mission of Christ,¹⁶ once to the Church’s mission of reconciliation,¹⁷ twice to the mission entrusted to Peter,¹⁸ and five times to the mission of the apostles.¹⁹ We see, then, that neither translator has employed the word ‘mission’ in a context which speaks of world mission in the modern technical sense of the word.

However, it would be wrong to conclude, with Graber, that Calvin saw no ongoing application of the missionary challenge. His commentaries make it clear that he did see world mission as the Church’s permanent responsibility.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake simply to chase ‘mission’ vocabulary through Calvin’s commentaries. The word appears around 50 times, but not once with its modern technical sense. We must, therefore, carefully examine what he actually said on the subject which we have become accustomed to describing as ‘mission’.

The obvious place to start is with Christ’s ‘Great Commission’. How did Calvin understand its application? Did he restrict it to the apostles? Certainly, he recognizes that, in the first instance, the Lord was addressing the apostles specifically. However, he does not fail to see ongoing relevance in Jesus’ words. Here is part of his comment on Matthew 28:18: ‘Christ commands them to promise eternal life in his name, to reduce the

whole world under his sway, and to publish a doctrine which subdues all pride, and lays prostrate the whole of the human race. And by this preface Christ not only encouraged the Apostles to full confidence in the discharge of their office, but confirmed the faith of his gospel in all ages.’²⁰

This emphasis on the application of the commission to all ages continues in Calvin’s comment on the next verse. Again, he acknowledges that the initial mandate to go and teach all nations was given to the apostles. However, he then defines the successors of the apostles as those who preach the gospel, and writes: ‘The Lord commands the ministers of the gospel to go to a distance, in order to spread the doctrine of salvation in every part of the world.’²¹

In similar vein Calvin comments like this on the words ‘I am with you always, even to the end of the age’: ‘It ought likewise to be remarked that this was not spoken to the apostles alone; for the Lord promises his assistance not for a single age only, but *even to the end of the world*.’²²

A similar perspective is clear in Calvin’s comments on another Gospel passage. In Matthew 24:14 Jesus states that ‘this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations’. In his comment Calvin faces the objection that, in his own day, there were distant nations which had not been reached by ‘even the slightest report concerning Christ’. However, he finds this a difficulty which may be ‘speedily resolved’. Christ meant that ‘the gospel would be spread to the farthest bounds of the world before the day of his last coming’.²³

Some of Calvin’s comments on passages in the Psalms and the prophets also demonstrate his missionary vision. Here is one example from each to substantiate this point.

In Psalm 2:8 we read the LORD’s words to his anointed:

Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession.

Calvin’s comment is that we must apply this prophecy to Christ, ‘who alone has subdued the whole world to himself and embraced all lands and nations under his dominion. Accordingly, here, as in many other places, the calling of the Gentiles is foretold, to prevent all from imagining that the Redeemer who was to be sent of God was king of one nation only.’

Calvin acknowledges that we do not yet see the fulfilment of the prophecy, and blames this on ‘the wickedness of men’. He then continues: ‘But although the ingratitude of men hinders the kingdom of Christ from prospering, it does not render this prediction of none effect, inasmuch as Christ collects the dispersed remnants of his people from all quarters, and in the midst of this wretched desolation keeps them joined together by the sacred bond of faith, so that not one corner only, but the whole world is subjected to his authority.’²⁴

Isaiah 12:4-5 reads like this: ‘In that day you will say: “Praise the LORD, call upon his name; declare his deeds among the peoples, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for he has done excellent things; this is known in all the earth.”’²⁴

Calvin explains that God’s work of deliverance in Isaiah’s time would be ‘so excellent, that it ought to be proclaimed, not in one corner only, but throughout the whole world’. In this worldwide announcement of temporal deliverance Calvin finds ‘a forerunner of the preaching of the gospel’. With the coming of Christ, the gospel should sound aloud ‘through every country in the world’. From this Calvin deduces that every godly soul will cherish the desire that ‘the goodness of God may be made known to all, that all may join in the same worship of God’.²⁵

Then, in the course of his comment on verse 5 Calvin writes: ‘He glances at the calling of the Gentiles, and confirms what has been already stated, that the work is such as ought not to be concealed in a corner, but to be everywhere proclaimed.’²⁶

These observations show that Calvin certainly had a theology of mission, even though it is not to the fore in *The Institutes*, the work for which he is best known. However, I think that Scott Simmons makes a perceptive point when he says this about Calvin: ‘Perhaps the reason why no systematic theology of missions can be found in his writings is because missions were central to his ministry in Geneva. Missions were not a ‘section’ of his systematic theology, it was central to what he was trying to accomplish in his ministry.’²⁷

(2) Calvin’s missionary endeavours

Having established that Calvin had a coherent missionary theology, we must now take a look at how he actually contributed to worldwide gospel mission.

Geneva during Calvin's time has been described by Frank James as 'the hub of a vast missionary enterprise'.²⁸ The city became a temporary haven for thousands of refugees fleeing from Catholic persecution in other European nations. Refugees came from Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Poland, Bohemia, and elsewhere. While there they studied God's Word in depth. When they later returned to their homelands, they were effectively Genevan pioneer missionaries, carrying the torch of the gospel across the continent.

Scott Simmons rightly notes that Europe was largely an unevangelized, pioneer mission field in the sixteenth century. He points out that even the corrupt, Catholic version of Christianity had not touched Europe's uneducated masses. The unavailability of the Scriptures in the common languages of the time, and the fact that church services were also held in Latin, meant that the vast majority of Europe's population had never had any sort of gospel preached to them in an understandable manner.²⁹ Calvin spearheaded an evangelistic campaign which brought the gospel to the peoples of Europe for the first time for many centuries.

However, there are two specific missionary enterprises which deserve particular consideration – the missions to France and Brazil.

1. The mission to France

The majority of foreign refugees in Geneva came, like Calvin himself, from France. Although now settled in Geneva, Calvin retained a missionary burden for his homeland. Brian de Yong writes: 'From the city of Geneva, Calvin unleashed a corps of missionaries intent on taking Roman Catholic France for the gospel.'³⁰

Robert Kingdon explains: 'A first missionary pastor was sent from Geneva to France in 1555. More and more were sent in following years, reaching a climax in 1561 and 1562.'³¹

Pete Wilcox refers to 'the growth of the missionary movement from a trickle in 1555 to a flood in 1561'.³²

The Genevan Company of Pastors kept records of its proceedings in an official register. It lists 88 men by name who went as missionaries to France. However, it does not name every missionary. Robert Kingdon's research has revealed that 142 missionaries left Geneva for France in 1561. However, the register names only twelve of them.³³ If that discrepancy is

typical, many hundreds of missionaries must have been commissioned in the final period of Calvin's life. As Frank James says, 'The last ten years of Calvin's life in Geneva (1555-1564) were preoccupied with missions!'³⁴

Actually, Kingdon may be mistaken in dating the commencement of the French mission to 1555. Ray van Neste acknowledges that it was in April 1555 that the register first made mention of the departure of missionary pastors to foreign lands. However, he comments: 'The entry that mentioned these men stated that they had been sent out prior to April 1555, and they were already ministering in the Piedmont valleys.' That area is, of course, in north Italy. However, van Neste continues: 'More ministers may have been sent out before this time without being recorded in the *Register*.'³⁵ Simmons dates the beginning of the French mission as 1553.³⁶

The reason why the two years 1561 and 1562 saw the peak in missionary activity was linked to political developments in France. In God's providence, there was at that time a brief window of opportunity, when the severe repression of Protestants was replaced by a period of relative toleration.³⁷ The Genevan church seized its moment.

Here is an example from which we may learn a lesson. Like the sixteenth-Century Genevan church, we need to cultivate what we might call 'spiritual opportunism'. We need to learn to see and grasp opportunities opened up by God's providence. Calvin himself writes like this about gospel opportunities: 'The *door is shut*, when no prospect of usefulness is held out. Now as, on the door being shut, it becomes us to enter upon a new course, rather than by farther efforts to weary ourselves to no purpose by useless labour, so where an opportunity presents itself of edifying, let us consider that by the hand of God a door is opened to us for introducing Christ there, and let us not withhold compliance with so kind an indication from God.'³⁸

We might debate whether Calvin is right here. Does he perhaps overlook the need sometimes for perseverance and faithfulness in unpromising situations? Nevertheless, the challenge remains, in whatever situation we find ourselves ministering, to seize the gospel opportunities presented by God's providence.

Of the 88 missionaries whose names we know, 62 were French by birth.³⁹ That means that 26 were cross-cultural missionaries in the fullest sense of the term.

The reason for the small number of missionaries who were identified by name was that this missionary operation was clandestine in nature. The French Protestant cause necessarily took the form of an underground church. The mission to France functioned as an underground enterprise. Security demanded secrecy. Brash transparency would court danger. Some of the missionaries travelled under assumed names. They travelled by foot along mountain by-ways.⁴⁰

The mission took the form of evangelism and church planting. The missionaries would gather a group in a home. They would meet at night behind heavy curtains. If a home were not available, they would hold their meetings in barns, or even in the open air in some secluded spot in the middle of a wood.⁴¹ Forethought was given to escape routes and hiding places, should they be needed.⁴²

When sufficient people were converted, a church would be constituted. In the four years from 1555 to 1559, nearly 100 churches were planted and constituted. By 1562 that number had risen to well over 2000.⁴³ Rodney Stark sums it up by saying that Calvin created, 'huge underground religious networks of individual converts who brought in their friends, relatives, and neighbours, under the guidance of professional, missionary secret agents'.

Stark also notes how Calvin had had firsthand experience of underground church life some years earlier. He lived briefly in Poitiers in 1535-1536, having had to flee from persecution in Paris. Here he engaged in secret evangelism in homes, and held secret services in a cave just outside the city.⁴⁴ No doubt the memory of this period of his life served him well in planning the missionary venture twenty years later. Perhaps it is significant that it was to Poitiers that the first named Genevan missionary, Jacques l'Anglois, was sent.

One key feature of the French mission was the conversion of many members of the French nobility. Robin Gwynn refers to the 'successful tactic of aiming at the top'.⁴⁵ Several members of the Bourbons became Christians. They were related to the French royal family. It has been estimated that half the French nobility were Calvinistic Christians by 1562.⁴⁶ Where noble families were converted, Protestant congregations could meet in relative safety on their estates.⁴⁷

Perhaps to aim at the top in our more democratic and egalitarian age would mean targeting university lecturers, capable students, bankers and

businessmen, local politicians and our constituency MPs. Is this a valid strategy, or should we be content with more ordinary converts, as we follow the one whom the common people heard gladly?

Calvin recognised the vital place of two things if this mission were to succeed – training and printing.

1. TRAINING

John Knox first arrived in Geneva in 1555. His comment on the city in those days is famous. He called it ‘the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth, since the days of the Apostles’.⁴⁸ Probably his choice of words was not accidental. It has been well said that Geneva ‘was not only a place of refuge for persecuted Protestants but it was a place where they came to learn’.⁴⁹ Philip Hughes explains that Calvin’s Geneva was far more than a terminus for Protestant refugees. It was also a school: ‘Here able and dedicated men, whose faith had been tested in the fires of persecution, were trained and built up in the doctrine of the gospel at the feet of John Calvin, the supreme teacher of the Reformation.’⁵⁰

They were instructed in the Word of God, and so trained for gospel ministry when they were able to return to their native lands.

Frank James observes that Calvin ‘did not want to send uneducated missionaries back to the dangers of Catholic France. He believed that a good missionary had to be a good theologian first. And so he inspired and educated them.’⁵¹

In the early years, the training took the form of attendance at daily Bible lectures given by Calvin and Guillaume Farel. Wilcox makes this observation: ‘Not everyone who attended Calvin’s lectures was a missionary in training; ... but the majority of his hearers were Frenchmen caught up with Calvin in the evangelization of his homeland. It was primarily for them that his lectures were intended.’⁵²

In 1559 the training became more formal with the establishment of the Geneva Academy, under the leadership of Theodore Beza. This was intentionally set up as a missionary training college. Its express purpose was ‘to train missionary pastors to plant churches throughout France and all Europe’.⁵³ From this base, competent men would carry the gospel message to the nations. By 1564 the Academy had several hundred students.

Before a missionary candidate was allowed to leave for his assignment, he had to undergo a rigorous examination before the Company of Pastors. They examined his theology, to ensure his orthodoxy. They examined his linguistic ability, to verify that he was capable of interpreting Scripture from the original texts.

However, these missionaries were not being prepared for academic irrelevance. In addition to their studies at the Academy missionary candidates were given practical experience. Some served as preachers in village churches around Geneva. Others worked as chaplains in the city, or as tutors to well-to-do families.⁵⁴

The final assessment in front of the Company of Pastors included a test of a candidate's preaching ability. The pastors also scrutinised his moral integrity, and questioned him on personal matters to satisfy themselves that he was of sufficient calibre for what was sure to be an arduous task. Although the maintenance of security was high on the missionaries' agenda, and they endeavoured to keep their activities secret, it was difficult to avoid the attention of hostile parties. Often the authorities got wind of what was going on. Meetings were interrupted and congregations disrupted.⁵⁵ Several of the Genevan missionaries were caught and martyred. That applied to nine of the 88 whose names we know.⁵⁶

The boldness of these missionaries in the face of danger, their willingness to risk their lives for the cause of Christ, is a powerful challenge to us, especially if days of persecution come to the churches here.

The work of training was not completed as the missionaries left Geneva. They themselves went out to train others. Rodney Stark explains: 'The primary role of these agents from Geneva was to recruit local missionaries whose task was to inspire their flocks to convert others.'⁵⁷

Calvin's commitment to the training of missionaries is another example which we should emulate. The task of gospel mission worldwide requires teaching and training which is both academically rigorous and intensely practical. Calvin would not have been prepared to send into the field men who had done a few evening classes and the odd residential week. Brian de Yong poses the challenge: 'Our understanding of necessary training must be influenced by Calvin's example. By means of the Academy at Geneva, Calvin trained an élite missionary force that conquered almost all of France for the gospel. What made his missionary preparation so successful? Does his emphasis on theology provide the foundation which

is missing from today's training that produces effective communicators who have nothing to say?'⁵⁸

Jonathan Stephen recounts a conversation he had with Peter Jensen. Jensen suggested that the British Free Churches are squandering their heritage because of their lack of a training seminary of international standing. What is needed, he suggested was 'a centre of excellence in theological education and ministry training, which was unashamedly Bible-centred, gospel-focused and culturally-engaged, and yet had its roots deep in the soil of our historic Free Church tradition'. Jonathan Stephen goes on to point out the limitations of regional, part-time, mid-level training schemes. He asserts: 'It is highly unusual for anyone to enter the pastorate in most mainline denominations without a high level of theological education. But, almost uniquely, UK Independency seems not to value or even to appreciate the need for a comprehensive, theological, biblical, practical and spiritual preparation for those who will lead its churches. We may well insist that our doctors and even our plumbers have the best possible education and training, but we often appear not to be so concerned about those who instruct us regarding our eternal destiny.'⁵⁹

2. PRINTING

Calvin understood how essential the ministry of literature was in the propagation of the true gospel. Mention has been made of 'the lifelong and deliberate use of publication as a weapon on the part of Calvin'.⁶⁰ Great emphasis was placed on the printing of tracts, pamphlets, books and Bibles. This was seen as such a vital part of the French mission that 'printing soon became the major industry in Geneva', with presses running day and night.⁶¹ Alister McGrath identifies Calvin's 'extensive publishing programme' as one of the keys to the success of his evangelistic mission.⁶²

David Hall names the two most famous and prolific printers as Robert Estienne and Jean Crespin. However, there were at least 34 presses operating by 1563. 'Bibles and theological texts flew off Genevan printing presses,' as Hall puts it. A commission on printing was set up to co-ordinate the work of the various printers and to check the orthodoxy of each manuscript presented for publication. Hall presents the following statistics. In 1536 three books were published in Geneva. By 1554 the annual number of publications had risen to 28, and by 1561 it was 48. From 1559 to 1564 the average was 38 books published per year.⁶³

'The city also sustained large paper mills and ink-making plants,' as well as importing large amounts of paper. A large proportion of Geneva's

population was employed in this industry, as printers, paper-manufacturers, ink-makers, editors, proof-readers, and authors.⁶⁴

Calvin himself was very active in writing polemical works against the errors of Catholicism. These works offered guidance to the fledgling French Church, and made a large contribution to the success of the mission.⁶⁵

The southern French city of Lyons was a major trade centre. It was relatively close to the Swiss border, and to Geneva, the border city. Much literature was smuggled into France and then disseminated across the country via Lyons.⁶⁶

Here is another lesson for us. Preaching the gospel is not enough without also the resourcing of the Church. Today that is likely to mean the production of audio, visual, and digital materials, as well as printed literature. It will involve learning to use the internet as a tool for the gospel. Unless the younger churches are grounded in sound doctrine through their own study, they will remain weak and vulnerable to error.

Two further things are worth noting as we close our consideration of Calvin's mission to France.

First, a notable feature of this missionary effort is the remarkably high priority which it was given by Calvin and his colleagues in Geneva. Van Neste points out that 'at times even their own churches were deprived of pastors to meet the needs of struggling groups abroad'.⁶⁷ or, as Owen Chadwick puts it, 'Swiss cities denuded their pulpits for the sake of the French.'⁶⁸ Pete Wilcox comments that from 1559 to 1564 the Academy catered 'more for the Church in France than for that in Geneva'.⁶⁹

These observations force us to face the challenge: are we prepared to give away our best pastors and people for the sake of the gospel in the nations where the churches have not yet been able to enter into the rich heritage of truth that we have been privileged to enjoy?

In a letter to Heinrich Bullinger in 1561, Calvin said this: 'From all sides pastors are requested from us.... We certainly want to comply with these requests, as far as is possible, but our resources are completely exhausted. Indeed, we have already been obliged to squeeze to the dregs the labourers' workshops, to find those who have even a smattering of learning and godly teaching.'⁷⁰

This extract reveals the other significant aspect of Calvin's missionary endeavours. In the evangelization of Europe he was responding to requests for help. Calvin recognised that mission is partnership. The men commissioned from Geneva went to serve alongside struggling churches to assist them in their mission. But the initiative came from the mission field.

This is not to deny that there are situations where pioneers must blaze a trail where there is no indigenous church to support. And the other missionary enterprise undertaken by Calvin which we are to consider demonstrates that he was well aware of that duty.

2. The Mission to Brazil

All the missionary efforts mentioned so far involved the spread of the Reformed faith across Europe. However, Calvin and Geneva were also involved in an effort to carry the gospel beyond the boundaries of the Catholicized world of the Middle Ages. Perhaps even more than the mission to France, it is the mission to Brazil which finally gives the lie to any suggestion that Calvin was inexcusably blind to the global missionary obligation of the Church.

The story of the Brazilian mission is told in detail in two articles, one by Gonzalo Baez-Camargo and the other by Pierce Beaver.⁷¹ I shall here give a summary, focussing on the aspects most pertinent to our theme. Justice Anderson describes this enterprise as 'possibly the first Protestant evangelical mission of the 16th century'.⁷²

In 1555 a fleet of ships left France to establish a French colony in Brazil. The expedition was led by Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon, with the support of the French Grand Admiral Gaspard de Coligny. The initial colonists included a number of persecuted Protestants, released from prison in order to join the party. Coligny had Protestant sympathies, and hoped that the colony would be a place of refuge for persecuted believers where they could worship in liberty.

The following year Villegaignon wrote to the church of Geneva requesting that they send pastors to preach to the colonists. He also held before the Company of Pastors the prospect of bringing the local Indian population of Tupinamba people to the knowledge of salvation. The Company of Pastors agreed to this request, and appointed Pierre Richier and Guillaume Chartier. The two pastors were accompanied by a number of others sent to swell the population of the colony. One of them, Jean de Léry, a theological trainee, kept a record of the mission.

The joyful reaction of the Genevan church to this opportunity to participate in the worldwide spread of the gospel is captured in Léry's summary of their response: 'The church of Geneva at once gave thanks to God for the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in a country so distant and likewise so foreign and among a nation entirely without knowledge of the true God.'

These words imply that the priority in the mind of the Genevans was not ministry to French colonists, but the evangelistic potential of a mission to the distant, foreign, and spiritually ignorant indigenous population.⁷³ In a letter to Calvin, written from the mission field a few months later, Richier said of winning the indigenous tribes for Christ, 'This really is the most important thing of all.' As Anderson says, 'this is definitely an intentional missionary project.'⁷⁴ That fact exposes the error in a statement made by Warneck who claims that we must guard against magnifying this venture into a great missionary effort on the part of the Reformed church. He alleges that there is no proof that Calvin 'contemplated an independent mission to the heathen'.⁷⁵

It is true that Calvin was actually away from Geneva at the time that this invitation was received. However, it is clear from Léry's account that Calvin's colleagues certainly did see this as a gospel opening to the heathen world. Moreover, Beaver points to several pieces of evidence that Calvin was kept informed of what was going on, and notes that there is no evidence of any disapproval or even caution on his part.

Pioneering outreach to the Tupinamba people began soon after the arrival of the team in Brazil. Richier became very quickly despondent about the prospects of winning any of them for Christ. This is another fact which Warneck seizes on as evidence that this enterprise was not an earnest missionary endeavour.⁷⁶

However, Léry had a much more optimistic outlook. He began by trying to get to know the Tupinamba, and to understand their culture. He showed respect, even where he was bewildered or repulsed. Anderson observes that Léry's 'appreciation of the Tupi culture reflected a high view of general revelation'.⁷⁷ He did not try to preach the gospel in a formal way, but took advantage of opportunities that cropped up in ordinary conversation. In his account of the mission he mentions two such opportunities in particular. One arose as a result of a question from one of the Tupinamba who had

observed the French people giving thanks before a meal. The other occurred when a group of Tupinamba people requested an explanation of a psalm which they had heard Léry singing. On these occasions Léry did not simply address the Tupinamba, but engaged them in discussion.

In the course of these contacts with the Tupinamba Léry experienced several disappointing setbacks after thinking that he had made some progress. Nevertheless, he was convinced that, given time, persistence and sympathy, some of them could be drawn to Christ, a point which even the pessimistic Richier conceded.

However, this mission was not given the time it needed. Within 15 months Villegaignon turned against the Reformed faith and reverted to Catholicism and, according to Baez-Camargo, started behaving in a profane and godless fashion. The missionaries continued to make contact with the Tupinamba people, but they were now labouring under almost impossible constraints. After another six months, having been expelled from the colony, they left Brazil and returned to Europe. Three of their Genevan associates were brutally murdered by Villegaignon. Two years later the French colony was defeated by the Portuguese and ceased to exist.

Beaver makes this comment: 'The short-lived mission had no statistical fruit in conversions. Yet it has historical importance. Confronted with a challenge to undertake mission, the church of Geneva responded immediately.'

This missionary effort has often been described as a failure.⁷⁸ Beaver's words suggest that a more positive assessment is appropriate. Justice Anderson speaks of failure, but acknowledges that the attempt to evangelize the Tupinamba people constitutes 'a striking testimony to the far-reaching missionary vision of John Calvin and his Genevan ministers'.⁷⁹ He also adds this encouraging observation: 'Protestantism, with its evangelical core, had touched Brazil, a country destined later to become an evangelical bulwark in Latin America.'⁸⁰

The story of the Brazilian martyrs was published in Europe by Léry six years later. It was introduced with these words: 'A barbarous land, utterly astonished at seeing the martyrs of our Lord Jesus Christ die, will some day produce the fruits that such precious blood has been at all times wont to produce.'⁸¹

Baez-Camargo's article, written in 1952, finishes with this comment on that statement: 'Prophetic words indeed! For although it took four

centuries before modern missions could enter Brazil in full force, nowhere else, so far, in Latin America as in that land has the gospel of Christ produced a richer and more rewarding crop.' With so many Protestant denominations in Brazil (population 190 million [90 million RC]) it is not easy to suggest an accurate statistic but it will be about nine million members. The 2001 edition of *Operation World* states that there are 3,100 missionaries to Brazil and 4,754 missionaries from Brazil, more going out than are coming in.

More specifically and more recently, Joel Beeke notes that 'today, the Reformed faith is growing in Brazil.'⁸²

One thing that stands out from these two missionary endeavours is Calvin's definition of a missionary. He used the term exclusively of a man who was an ordained preacher of the gospel, who planted churches and then pastored the flock. Essentially, a missionary was no different from any other full-time minister. It was merely that he was sent to a place further afield.

In recent times the word missionary has become so debased that almost any activity can be construed as part of Christian mission. It is certainly the case that there are many forms of service which are valid expressions of Christian calling. However, Calvin was wise to retain the notion of mission for the frontline work of evangelism and church planting. Similarly, William Carey distinguished between missionaries, who were men ordained to preach the gospel, and those necessary companions of missionaries, who attended to other needs on the field.⁸³ We would do well to restore such an emphasis.⁸⁴

A plea for such proper distinctions has been made recently by Terry Virgo. He says this: 'Some argue today that we don't have apostles; we have 'missionaries' but the word 'missionary' obscures rather than clarifies, since it does not honour biblical definitions or categories. A modern missionary may be an agricultural worker, a nurse, a school teacher, a Bible translator, or a literature distributor (all very worthwhile and wonderful ministries). Some missionaries may, in reality, be evangelists or apostles but the term is vague and unhelpful since it has come to indicate any one who works overseas. Historically some have established 'mission stations' rather than churches. We need biblical definitions and biblical practices. It is vital that these categories are clarified for the sake of world mission.'⁸⁵

Whether or not we accept Virgo's preference for the term 'apostle', we must applaud his intention to restrict mission terminology to gospel preaching and church-planting.

According to the Joshua Project, the Tupinamba people today remain one of the world's least reached people groups. They now number only 1300, and at most a handful of them are evangelical Christians. No active church planting ministry is taking place amongst them.⁸⁶ Surely the best way to honour Calvin's memory in his 500th anniversary year would be to commit ourselves to earnest prayer for all the unreached and less reached people groups of the world, as we anticipate the day when, to quote Calvin, 'Christ shall be extolled to the utmost regions of the world.'⁸⁷

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Readers who would like to refer to Jonathan Bayes' extensive bibliography can obtain that from him by e mail jf-cm.bayes@breathemail.net

The Chinese Church Today

by Roger Weil



A visitor and translator addressing a Chinese House church

Before reporting on my sixth visit to Christians in China there are some general questions that need to be answered, the better to understand what is going on in the Chinese Church today.

1. Why, in the twenty-first century, is the Chinese Government still persecuting Christian people?

Religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is the only popular ideology in Chinese society opposed to Marxist-Leninist-Mao ZheDong thought. For centuries China has only known absolute rulers; any disagreement was regarded as dissent threatening the unity of the nation. This mindset still prevails today. To hold Christian meetings in your own home without State permission is looked upon by the authorities as defiance against the Government. Secondly, Communism is very nervous of any group activity it does not know about or fully control. Why? Because of the perceived danger of counter-revolution. Christianity is

regarded as a western religion and it is well known how much influence the West has in the Chinese Church today. The Chinese Government always suspects the West of sowing seeds of anti-Communism within the Chinese Church. Thirdly, because of the spectacular growth in the Christian faith during the last thirty years. Some estimate the number of Protestant Christians as high as 80 million from a base of less than two million in 1978! This profoundly worries the Chinese leadership who are always prone to meet any form of dissent with a brutal show of force. This mentality is written into the DNA of all Communist Governments, summed up succinctly by Chairman Mao, "*Power grows out of the barrel of a gun*". Force seems to be the only weapon they can think of to stop the spread of Christianity in the House-Church Movement – sad but true. House churches and their leadership are under constant attack, though this varies from province to province (see map printed on front inside cover).

2. Apart from force, how else does the Government seek to control the Church?

Apart from the House churches (estimated at 60 million) there is the official State Registered Church, known as the Three-Self Patriotic Church (estimated at 17 million). This comprises all the churches founded in the one hundred years before Communism and which Chairman Mao purged of all western influences and connections as soon as he came to power. After his death in 1976 churches were allowed to open again but were tightly controlled. Over the years the measure of control has eased considerably, possibly due to the rapid growth and proliferation of the House-Church Movement, the authorities hoping that, by giving greater freedom to the T S P Church, people would be drawn away from the House churches. Buildings can now be registered with the authorities for use as churches or 'Meeting Points', and many thousands are open for worship. But it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain such permission for new ones. For example, Beijing, with a population of 14 million, has only six official TSP churches. This is the Government's policy of 'containment'.

There are twenty official Bible seminaries for those wishing to train for the ministry, but a limit of approximately two hundred students is placed on each seminary – a deliberate policy to ensure there is always a shortage of pastors. Those who graduate are told that their pastoral activities must be strictly confined to the church or parish to which they are licensed – they must on no account function outside of these boundaries. So the Government tries to prevent the Church from evangelizing the population at large. Until recently no one under eighteen was allowed to attend church and Sunday schools were banned. In many places,

particularly in the cities, this law has been relaxed for believers' children.

It has to be said that this policy of confinement is not applied uniformly throughout China's thirty provinces. Freedom appears to be greatest in those areas (please see map) where there is the highest percentage of Christians.

3. Why is the House-Church Movement more popular than T S P churches?

- (i) There is every reason to believe that the Holy Spirit is freer to work where there are no man-made rules and regulations to hinder him. Bold Christian witness opening up new meetings is the method the Spirit uses, free of all human or political constraints. (Mark 16:20). The phenomenal growth of the House Churches is due to the working of the Holy Spirit.
- (ii) Many Chinese Christians object in principle to the idea of a State-sponsored Church with its arbitrary interference in spiritual work.
- (iii) The leadership of some TSP churches are more concerned to obey the rules of the Communist Party (through the Religious Affairs Bureau) than they are to witness boldly for Christ. So people leave in disgust to form their own meetings.
- (iv) Some do not like the theology or worship culture of their local T S P church.
- (v) In many parts of China, especially rural areas with Maoist-minded cadres who hate Christianity, it has proved impossible, even after many attempts, for local Christians to register their meetings. They are left with no alternative but to meet independently.



A new T S P church seating 2,000

NB. Those wishing to know more about the House-church Movement should read the following: *China's Christian Millions*, by Tony Lambert, published by Monarch. *Jesus in Beijing*, by David Aikman, published by Regnery, USA.

2009 Spring visit to a House-church in Eastern China

My first visit to this prosperous burgeoning city of six million people took place last year. I had been invited to speak at a number of meetings by the leader of a House-church which had only recently come into existence. They met in a new modern flat rented specifically for the purpose. About thirty young professionals between the ages of twenty to thirty-five comprised the membership.

They kindly invited me back this year to speak on subjects they had chosen for me;

- 1) What does the Bible teach about church growth?
- 2) What is Christian leadership, who leads and how should it be done?
- 3) What is the biblical way to reach those who are lost?

We had nine meetings in twelve days, but this year the venue had changed to a bigger modern flat to accommodate the larger numbers who were coming. The majority of the meetings I conducted as a normal preaching service, but others were conversational Bible-readings with questions posed either by myself or by those who were there. Even during the preaching I did ask the occasional question to make sure they understood the subject we were studying. The Chinese deeply respect their elders and always answer questions in the affirmative out of politeness, even when they don't know the answer! They were serious and hard-working with many of them taking notes. The singing was vigorous and the tunes were contemporary. The fervency and fluency of their prayers was, at times, astonishingly powerful; seldom have I heard anything like it! Seeking souls brought along by their friends were also present. Along one side of the room there was also present a dais with a small pulpit at one end; special lighting and air-conditioning units had been installed, as well as microphones for voice amplification. Light decorative curtaining covered the wall behind the dais. The room was extremely large, comfortably

seating sixty people at our Sunday service. The two smaller rooms accommodated the crèche and Sunday school.

In spite of their vibrant spiritual life and enthusiasm Bible-teaching is their one weak point. They have no full-time pastor and no one who has been to Bible seminary. They are not in fellowship with any of the major House-church networks, some of whom do have their own secret seminaries. It remains a serious unresolved issue for most, if not all, churches of this kind.

Visits to T S P churches

In the city and throughout its hinterland there are so many large new churches. It is claimed that at least 10% of the population of six million are evangelical Christians! Memberships of one and two thousands are not uncommon. We were shown over one church by the pastor who told us that actually his title was 'Preacher'. Looking down into the courtyard of the church from an upper storey he pointed to a decrepit dwelling saying, "*That's where I live.*" We were shocked at the contrast between it and the modern multi-storeyed church where we stood. 'I'm employed by our Church Council,' he explained, 'they decide who our Sunday preachers will be. I mostly take our mid-week meetings and travel to other churches on Sunday.' We were amazed at such an unbiblical system being the custom in these churches. 'But surely', we reasoned, 'you are the full-time pastor not the Church Council, you must tell them what preaching programme you want!' He laughed, 'But I haven't been ordained and I don't want to be!'. He declined to go into detail, but it appeared that the price for being ordained entailed certain pledges to the State he would rather not make.

In spite of graduating from two seminaries he was still only a 'Preacher' and was, as yet, ineligible to be a pastor. I am still unclear as to the level of control the State exercises over TSP church pastors but fear it must be considerable. Other Preachers I met confirmed that they too were subject to this thoroughly unbiblical peripatetic system. I was keen to find out how it had originated. They recommended me to meet an old man who had been a true believer from the time before the Communists took over the Church in 1950.

He himself had been imprisoned during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). He told us that many pastors never came out alive from prison and, when a measure of freedom was restored in 1978, there were simply not enough to go round. Lay pastors had to help out and this ad hoc, temporary measure soon became the tradition that it is today. 'During my time in prison I had great peace in my heart and after Mao we had revival in the church until 1986,' he said. He bemoaned the blight that this new era of material prosperity had brought into the life of today's Church, worse in its effects than the years of persecution. This is another factor that I hadn't heard mentioned before.

Conclusion

Whether by a policy of confinement towards the T S P Church or by one of persecution towards the House churches, the Chinese Government is committed to opposing the spread of the gospel. May the Lord so influence the minds and hearts of the Party Leaders that the Chinese Church will be allowed to live, 'a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty' (1 Tim 2:2). This should be our prayer for China and the Chinese Church today.

What is the Church?

Two views of the Church – the gathered community or Church/State?

By Erroll Hulse

The Rt Hon Ann Widdecombe MP has been a Member of Parliament for twenty years. She served in the cabinet of Prime Minister John Major. Fifteen years ago she converted to Roman Catholicism from the Church of England. Recently (Feb 2009) she contributed a presentation in a series of eight on *The History of Christianity* on British Television.

There were encouraging features for all Christians. Ann Widdecombe believes in the incarnation. She praises the fact that Luther made the Bible available to the German people in their own language. She admits that the corruption of the medieval Roman Catholic Church was appalling and especially so with regard to the selling of indulgences as though you can buy places in heaven with money.

Much of her programme was devoted to highlighting the terrible divisions and religious wars that ensued as a result of Luther's breaking away from the Church. She presented the Roman Catholic and Ecumenical view that the Reformation was a tragedy which splintered the Church and began divisions which have multiplied ever since.

Miss Widdecombe deplored the carnage of the religious wars that followed Luther. The awful holocaust of St Bartholomew in 1572 in France was exposed and the fact that the Pope struck a medal to celebrate this slaughter of Protestants by Catholics was not omitted.

Is there a key which explains why these religious wars took place? There is a key and it is discovered when we go back to the Emperor Constantine and the development of sacralism.

CONSTANTINIANISM

Sacralism is the union of Church and State wherein the one is called upon to change the other. Christian sacralism emerged in the fourth century AD. A major shift took place when Christianity was granted official tolerance in the

Roman Empire by the Emperor Constantine and was completed by the Emperor Theodosius' declaration in 392 outlawing paganism and making Christianity the official religion of the Empire. A Latin saying that has often been used to describe the principle of sacralism is *cuius regio, eius religio*, or 'he who reigns decides the religion'. The idea is that the ruler of each kingdom decides the religion of those under his control based upon his own faith.

Constantine the politician

Constantine was the first Christian Caesar. He was the founder of Constantinople and the Byzantine empire. He was exceptionally gifted, energetic and successful. Philip Schaff describes Constantine as 'the first representative of the imposing idea of a Christian theocracy, or of that system of policy which assumes all subjects to be Christians, connects civil and religious rights, and regards Church and State as two arms of and the same divine government on earth. This idea was more fully developed by his successors, it animated the whole Middle Ages, and is yet working under various forms in these later times. However it has never been fully realised, whether in the Byzantine, the German, or the Roman church-state, the Calvinistic republic of Geneva, or the early Puritanic colonies of New England. At the same time, however, Constantine stands also for the type of an indiscriminating and harmful conjunction of Christianity and politics, of a holy symbol of peace with the horrors of war, of the spiritual interests of the kingdom of heaven with the earthly interests of the state.'¹

Constantine was an outstanding politician. To quote Schaff again, 'So in the case of Constantine. He was distinguished by that genuine political wisdom, which, putting itself at the head of the age, clearly saw that idolatry had outlived itself in the Roman empire, and that Christianity alone could breathe new vigour into it and furnish its moral support. Especially on the point of the external Catholic unity his monarchical politics accorded with the hierarchical episcopacy of the Church. Hence from the year 313 he placed himself in close connection with the bishops, made peace and harmony his first object in the Donatist and Arian controversies, and applied the predicate 'catholic' to the church in all official documents. And as his predecessors were supreme pontiffs of the heathen religion of the empire, so he desired to be looked upon as a sort of bishop, as universal bishop of the external affairs of the church. All this by no means from mere self-interest, but for the good of the empire, which, now shaken to its foundations and threatened by barbarians on every side, could only by some new bond of unity be consolidated and upheld until

at least the seeds of Christianity and civilisation should be planted among the barbarians themselves, the representatives of the future. His personal policy thus coincided with the interests of the state.’²

It is inaccurate to think that it was Constantine who made the Roman Empire Christian. Rather Constantine set the trend for Church and State to act in union. It was the emperor Theodosius I (363-392) who consolidated the primacy of Christianity and began to use State legislation to turn the screws in suppressing heathendom. In 391 with the threat of heavy fines he prohibited the visiting of heathen temples for religious purposes. The practice of idolatry became a political offence. After the first three centuries during which time Christians had been severely persecuted, the tables were now turning and heathen began to be persecuted by the Christian State. When we read the Great Commission of Christ to his disciples this situation is absurd. Jesus did not say, ‘Go and persecute the heathen,’ but rather, ‘Go and teach them about me’ (Matt 28:16-20).

The title ‘Pontifex Maximus’ was taken by Constantine which had meant high priest of the heathen hierarchy. His coins bore on the one side the letters of the name of Christ, on the other the figure of the Sun-god. Constantine did not formally renounce heathenism and did not receive baptism until he lay upon his deathbed.

Constantine the Christian

Opinion is divided as to whether Constantine was a born-again Christian. There are many examples of politicians who favour Christianity but that does not mean that they are spiritual and determined to advance in holiness of life or that in daily life they are active members of a local church. Jimmy Carter, one of the recent presidents of the USA, was liberal in his theology but in his private life evidenced a life of prayer and taught weekly Sunday School. It is worth observing here that being a Christian should enhance a person’s natural gifts but at the same time being a Christian does not guarantee that you will be more skilful as a politician than those who are secular and have no faith in Christ.

Constantine promoted the elevation of women. He was chaste which was unusual for a Roman emperor. He improved conditions for slaves and facilitated the emancipation of Christian slaves. He exempted Christian clergy from military and municipal service. He legalised bequests to Catholic churches. He encouraged civil observance of Sunday.

When his authority was challenged he followed political expediency. In 325 the same year that he decreed the Council of Nicea he gave orders for the execution of his conquered rival and brother-in law Licinius. This was in breach of a solemn promise of mercy in the previous year. As if that crime were not enough to stain his reputation for posterity he ordered in addition the execution of his nephew, the son of Licinius who was only about ten years old. Then in 326 he murdered his eldest son Crispus. These barbaric acts show that Constantine was a politician to the core and used religion for political ends.

The conversion of Constantine does not show repentance toward God for sin and personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ for cleansing and justification by imputed righteousness. It shows rather a conversion to Christianity as a religion. It took place in the midst of war when he claimed to see a shining cross in the heavens. Above the sun he claimed to see the inscription, 'By this sign conquer.' Constantine claimed in addition that Christ appeared to him in a dream and directed him to prepare a standard in the form of the sign of the cross.

The sign in the skies was almost certainly a natural phenomenon and the dream was self-induced as Christ never taught that we should go to war in his name. In fact he told Peter to abandon the use of the sword (John 18:11 *cf* 18:36).

EXAMPLES OF SACRALISM IN ACTION

The Crusades

Sacralism accounts for the 'holy' crusades in which 'Christian' armies were organised to set off to repossess the Holy Land and recapture Jerusalem. There were eight of these military episodes. The first proclaimed by Pope Urban II started in 1096 and ended in 1099 with the purpose of liberating Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Seljuk Turks. The last of these crusades proclaimed by the Popes of Rome took place from 1270 to 1272.

The Crusades are extremely important because they have shaped how Jews and Muslims perceive Christianity, not as a religion of love but one of violence and intolerance. Jews perceive the holocaust as a tragedy which stemmed from Germany, a 'Christian' country. Opposition to the Nazi movement came from too small a number of pastor/martyrs like the well-known Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the lesser-known courageous Paul Schneider.

The crusades in the name of Christ proved to be a calamity for the reputation of Christianity. There was nothing biblical about them. They were motivated by superstition. Central to the crusades was the idea that there was something especially holy about Jerusalem. This icon (Jerusalem) was in the hands of the Muslims. Islam has been prevented from attaining world dominion only by military means. That does not mean for one moment that we can set off in the name of Christ to go and kill Muslims. When it is necessary to defend the realm from tyrants like Hitler we go to war as Christians, but do so in the name of king and country not in the name of Christ.

The Inquisition

The union of Church and State (sacralism) developed to the point where non-conformity was banned. In 1184 the Inquisition was instituted by order of Pope Lucius III and Emperor Friederich Barbarossa. The Inquisition was a spiritual court of the Roman Catholic Church for the detection and punishment of those whose opinions differed from those of the Church, an institution backed to the full by the State and endowed with the power of capital punishment. The Inquisition was to be universally applied. The New Testament teaches excommunication for unrepentant scandalous sin in church members (1 Cor 5), but there is no hint whatsoever to support the idea of inquisition. During the first four centuries the cast of thought was opposed to compulsion in religious faith. The Inquisition as a practice resulted in the most appalling history of torture and executions.

The most notorious branch of the Inquisition was the Spanish brand which 'blossomed out with peculiar fullness'. 'It developed from the thirteenth century, against the background of persecution of Moors and Jews. Prior to the sixteenth century its principal operation was against the Maranos or alleged converts from Judaism to Christianity. The Inquisitor-general Tomas de Torquemada appointed by Pope Sixtus IV outdid all precedents in the way of executions and confiscations.'³

This idea of enforced submission by the Church/State power (sacralism) was used for the 'Christian' conquest of Central and South America by the Spanish and Portuguese, not by gospel preaching but by the sword. The manner in which ancient peoples of South America were decimated is barbaric.

At the time of the 16th-century Reformation whole nation states changed from being Roman Catholic to Protestant.

King Henry VIII

King Henry VIII, who reigned from 1509 to 1547, exemplifies the principle of sacralism. When he decreed it the nation was obliged to be Protestant even though the majority by conviction and practice were Catholic. Under the short reign of the boy king Edward VI who reigned from 1547 to 1553 much was done to advance the Protestant cause. When Mary came to the throne, and she reigned from 1553 to 1558, everyone was obliged to be Catholic. Mary was nick-named ‘bloody Mary’ because of her ruthless persecution of Protestant leaders. About 270 were burned alive at the stake. The brave testimony of the English martyrs and the manner of their dying caused great revulsion and resentment and did more to make England Protestant than any law-making ever did. John Foxe wrote a book recording the story of the martyrs. It is said of his book that ‘no book ever gave such a mortal wound to popery as this’.⁴

The Magisterial Reformers

Luther, Zwingli and Calvin followed the policy of *Corpus Christianum*, that is the whole of society is to be regarded as ‘Christian’, cemented together by infant baptism. Roman Catholic baptism was accepted. Practically the Reformation could not succeed without this system. Those who advocated believers’ baptism were dubbed Anabaptists and executed by the State.⁵

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE CHURCH

There is no evidence in the New Testament that whole nations should constitute Christ’s Church. Rather the Bible teaches that God calls out of all nations a people for himself. Jesus said that he would build his Church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matt 16:18). There is no nation, tribe, language or kindred from which God does not call a people into spiritual union with Christ. The proportion of those he calls varies. God calls individuals from the Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. For instance it is estimated that there are about 300,000 Evangelicals in the Romanian Orthodox Church.⁶

The nature of his Church is described in Ephesians. ‘There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all’ (Eph 4:4-6). Every member is clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ and is thereby justified by God the Father. Every member is born again and every member is united to the Trinity and thereby

united to every other member. This unity crosses every barrier, sex, race, language and tribe. 'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:26-28).

In building his Church our Lord calls men and women and boys and girls irrespective of denominational background. It is ideal when those who are called are gathered into believing Bible-based churches but the reality is that there are national churches like the Church of England which varies enormously from local church to local church. There are evangelical churches which are very similar to non-conformist evangelical churches inasmuch as they consist mostly of committed practising evangelical believers. There are others in which the number of committed believers form a minority. Here is the principle of *ecclesiola in ecclesia* which means the church within the Church: the true believers among nominal adherents. The same applies to the Lutheran Church in Sweden and also to the largest Dutch Reformed denomination in South Africa. There are churches with large memberships of several thousand but those who are committed are numbered in hundreds.

Here are some marks by which we can recognise a true church.

1. The gospel of justification by faith alone is clearly proclaimed.
2. There is a caring, loving pastoral oversight (Hence Hebrews 13:17 – obey your elders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls).
3. There is the Lord's Table to attend and so express reliance with other believers on the death and resurrection of Christ.
4. There is the ordinance of baptism so that new believers can be brought in
5. There is missionary concern and compassion.
6. There is love because the great command of Christ is that we should love one another.

These marks apply to a local church not a nation state.

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, volume 3, Eerdmans, 1910, page 12.

² *ibid* page 13.

³ *The New Schaff-Hertzog Encyclopedia*. Baker Book House, volume six, 1956, page 3.

⁴ Erroll Hulse, *Who are the Puritans?* Evangelical Press, 2000, page 36.

⁵ George H Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 920 pages, The Westminster Press, 1962.

⁶ OPERATION WORLD, Paternoster Press, 2001, page 537.

Book Review

Risking the Truth Handling Error in the Church

Martin Downes

247 pages paperback

Christian Focus, May 2009

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This is a collection of interviews on handling truth and error in churches. Contributors reflect on this issue in relation to the minister's own life, pulpit ministry, local church leadership, seminary training, denominations, the impact of the academy. It is important because it deals with contemporary trends, history, creeds and confessions, and doctrines that are currently under attack. There is personal reflection on these matters, lessons drawn from experience, and practical advice.

Twenty interviews covering the whole range of heresies and errors that threaten the Church make up the content of this volume. Sixteen contributors are from the USA, one from England, one from Wales, one from Scotland and one from Zambia. This American ascendancy reflects the fact that in evangelical and Reformed terms the USA are ten times stronger than the UK, (USA send out 60,000 missionaries compared to 6,000 from the UK.) The reasons why pastors fall into sin form an important part of this book. Also examined: Why is the Church deprived of talent when gifted men enter the academic world there to become spiritually anaemic and of little or no value to the cause of Christ?

Martin Downes is to be congratulated for keeping repetition to a minimum.

The one exception is the needed repeated observation that pastors must live by the same basic personal devotional standards as the people they preach to. The dangers attending neglect in that prove disastrous as Tom Ascol says, 'Ministers need the gospel as much as anyone and we must learn to live by the grace of God in Jesus Christ every day,' and Sean Lucas, 'The root of ministerial decline is the loss of genuine communion with the Triune God.'

The difference between heresy which destroys salvation and error which weakens and confuses it is clearly explained in chapter one.

Every interviewee is briefly described. First to step up to the plate is Karl Trueman. He explores reasons why pastors fall into sin and sometimes apostatise. He suggests that all ministers should make themselves spiritually accountable to others and that seminaries should be accountable to churches. As an aside he suggests, 'In practice, the theologies of Barth and Berkouwer have really proved sterile as ecclesiastical programs.'

Tom Schreiner ably defends the doctrine of penal substitution and recommends the best books on that subject. Michael Horton (Westminster Seminary, California) testifies that while he has not observed anyone in his seminary circle drift he has seen friends – pastors, ordinands and laypeople – leave evangelical and Reformed churches for Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox bodies.

Mark Dever: 'The main theological danger I see confronting us today is the practical rejection of the authority of God's Word even by those who theoretically submit to it.' Derek Thomas sees the New Perspective (N T Wright) as a menace and principal threat because it defines a Christian in ecclesiastical rather than in theological terms. R Scott Clark warns against continuing revelation as dangerous. All these issues are helpfully discussed using the question and answer method. Iain D Campbell of the Isle of Lewis laments the neglect of God's law, and in particular the abiding relevance of the Ten Commandments. 'Whereas before it was a given that the law was the believer's rule of life, that is now characterised as legalism.' Campbell declares, 'The New Perspective on Paul has done untold damage to the cause of the gospel, by de-emphasising our individual responsibility and recasting justification which is our cardinal doctrine.' Dr Guy Waters draws attention to the fact that controversy can bring out the worst in church life but notes that controversy gives occasion to attain greater precision in articulating the doctrines of Scripture.

Kim Riddlebarger in a truly gripping chapter describes how he was extricated from dispensationalism.

Exposition on the place of women in the Church is avoided in this book but it is mentioned by Ron Gleason: 'I watched a solid Reformed church disintegrate. How did that occur? It began with wanting women deacons. Two years later the issue was women elders. The next year it was female pastors. When I left in 1994 the issue was the ordination of homosexuals.' This statement is questionable because some churches

ordain deaconesses on a par with men deacons on what they believe are biblical grounds, whereas when it comes to woman elders denominations that follow that line have abandoned the authority of Scripture and are postmodern and pragmatic in practice. .

The place of Confessions of faith is explored by Sean Lucas who suggests that 'the move of many evangelicals toward minimalism is actually a move in a wrong direction. But confessional statements alone cannot guarantee the doctrinal purity of a church.'

Those who wish to know about the controversy surrounding Norman Shepherd will be fully informed by Gary Johnson who also explains the meaning of Federal Vision (all baptised people are to be regarded as actually saved until they fall away – held by N T Wright and John Armstrong).

Conrad Mbewe reminds us that Africa is plagued by extreme forms of Arminianism. Repeating the sinner's prayer in many places is regarded as salvation when there is no hint of repentance. The health and wealth movement is widespread and gives legitimacy to worldliness. Another distraction is preoccupation with the devil.

Geoff Thomas reminds us that Modernism is another religion, not Christianity, even though it uses God's words or as Michael Horton says, 'They still use the orthodox vocabulary, but mean something completely different by it.'

Joel Beeke corrects the idea that all is bleak and on a downward slide. 'I know hundreds who have moved from non-

evangelical positions to a solid evangelical and Reformed stance.’ Mike Ovey summarises the battle and places the attack on justification as first on his list for defence.

Ligon Duncan provides a brilliant explanation of the New Perspective on Paul. He refutes it and buries it. He then explains Federal Vision which leads to the practice of paedocommunion. Ligon’s contribution is worth the price of the book.

Chapter twenty has the apt title ‘The annihilation of hell’. Robert Peterson, author of ‘Hell on Trial’, maintains that a person holding to annihilationism is not consistently evangelical and should not hold office in the church. John Stott did not allow his denial of eternal hell to affect other doctrines but Edward Fudge descends into systemic confusion because of this error. D A Carson is quoted, ‘It is getting harder and harder to be faithful to the “hard lines” of Scripture in this age of pluralism.’

The last chapter titled ‘The Word of Truth’ is an interview with Greg Beale, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, Illinois, who is booked to speak at the Carey Conference in January next. This chapter is all about the inerrancy of Scripture. Logically it should be placed at the beginning of the book since everything we believe depends on the reliability of Scripture. Many have rested on B B Warfield’s monumental exposition on 2 Timothy 3:16 – All Scripture is God-breathed. Beale endorses that but takes us further into Revelation 3:14; 21:5 and 22:6 to affirm inerrancy. This is exciting. But what about really difficult problems? Beale replies, ‘Our doctrine of inerrancy does not depend on our being able to solve every problem.’

Finally there is a chapter affirming that defending orthodoxy against heresy is not enough. The church at Ephesus was orthodox but lukewarm. The main task of pastors is to feed the flock and only when there is real threat should they preach polemically. In their study they need to be fully alert and capable of defending the Bible against the wide variety of errors and heresies well described in this book.

There is still work to be done on the subject of the manner in which Liberal teaching advances to take over seminaries and churches. When a strong character holds to a serious error rather than hurt the unity of the institution, whether seminary or church, any individual who challenges that error is intimidated and regarded as a threat to unity. That individual is threatened with discipline for rocking the boat. I know of two students who have written well-documented treatises describing the persecution they suffered because they dared to oppose crassly Liberal teaching from professors in the classroom.

In churches where standards have declined it is taken for granted that new church officers hold to the confession of faith. If that is challenged the challenger had better brace himself to bear heat because he will be regarded as a trouble-maker and can even be threatened with discipline for disturbing the unity of the church. The present crisis in the Church of England illustrates this. Those who oppose the ordination of homosexuals are told that they are the potential authors of a split in the Church. Unity is pleaded at the expense of truth.

This book would be improved by the addition of indices. *Editor*

The Servant is Rewarded

The final stanza of the fourth Servant Song

By the way in which Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth we can be sure that he knew Isaiah. Especially would he have taken to heart the Servant passages. The growing realisation that he was the Servant of Yahweh must have been awesome (Luke 2:40).

The broad parameters of the Servant's ministry are described in the first Song (42:1-4). Antidote to discouragement is the central theme of the second (49:4-7). In the third (50:4-11) he would recognise the pattern of his daily devotional life; 'he wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.' The third Song refers to mocking and spitting and his back being beaten. In anticipation of intense suffering the Servant set his face like a flint.

The fourth Song (52:13-15 and 53) consisting of five stanzas begins with a summary of what is to follow and concludes with stanza five:

10 Yet it was the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

The most daunting part here is the LORD's purpose to crush him and make him bear our iniquities. This fifth and final stanza sums up the central message of substitutionary atonement.¹ At the same time there is emphasis on the fact that the Servant's reward will be commensurate with his sufferings. This reward would enable the Servant to focus on the outcome of his suffering. We read of Jesus, 'who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God' (Heb 12:2; cf Ps 110:1).

According to this fifth and final stanza the Servant's reward can be viewed as follows:

- 1 He will see the light of life
- 2 He will see his offspring
- 3 He will prolong his days
- 4 He will enjoy superlative victories

1 *He will see the light of life*

The AV translation 'he shall see the travail of his soul', true and wonderful though it is, does not fit comfortably with the Hebrew text. It should read *after the travail of his soul* 'he will see the light' which is a reference to the resurrection.² Victory over death is the reward given to Yahweh's Servant.

The resurrection from the dead of the man Jesus is the gateway to eternal glory. As the last Adam he guarantees the physical resurrection of the dead of all mankind. Upon his decease he entered the spirit world of paradise and took with him the repenting, believing dying criminal who died alongside him. Immediately upon his physical resurrection he represented the divine right and power to raise all mankind. Those united to him will be raised to eternal glory. 'For as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive' (1 Cor 15:22). According to Romans 8:18-25 at Christ's return the whole creation will be restored to its pristine glory. That day can be likened to an extraordinary sunrise revealing the exquisite beauty and magnificence of God's creation.

2. *He will see his offspring*

The Servant's spiritual progeny is innumerable and is seen in all the nations, tribes, kindreds and languages of the world. Every time a soul is born again a precious soul is added to the visible offspring of Christ. Every time a redeemed soul is absent from the body to be present with the Lord that is an addition to the heavenly company described in Hebrews as 'Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, – thousands of angels in joyful assembly, – the spirits of righteous men made perfect, – Jesus the mediator of a new covenant' (HEB 12:22-24).

In the resurrection of that great day Christ will enjoy his offspring, a multitude which no man can number from all tribes and languages. For us this means: 'We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is

seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal' (2 Cor 4:16-17). Every one of us 'in Christ' will have a perfect body and be fully restored in mind with perfected powers of intellect. What a glory that will be when we will live on an earth purified completely and divested of all sin's evil effects.

When we think of that eternal world of glory we may be inclined in our present weak condition to imagine that Jesus will be situated at a great distance from us surrounded by those much more worthy than ourselves. The Scriptures do not support that idea. Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers. He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises' (Heb 2:12).

3. *He will prolong his days*

The promise that 'he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth' (Isa 42:4) suggests a very long era of time in which the blessings of the gospel will extend beyond individual salvation. We tend to take the benefits of our Western society for granted. Over the years improvements have been made to a degree more than we give credit for. The judicial system reflects positively biblical standards and a social ministry which accords with Psalm 72:12-14: 'For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.' The Nordic countries Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark show practical care which is well in advance of most other countries.

The growth of Christ's Church has continued through the centuries. It was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the interior of Africa was explored and now about 150 years later there are clear boundary lines for over fifty African nations. Most of these are blessed with rapidly growing churches and denominations. China is the best known example of ever increasing seemingly irresistible advance of the gospel in spite of stern resistance.³

4. *He will enjoy superlative victories*

'Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong' (53:12). This is a reference to the manner in which famous generals celebrated their victories with parades through cities and in sharing the riches they had captured in their campaigns.⁴ In the same vein Paul writes, 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men' (Eph 4:8; cf. Ps 68:18).

The crucifixion was *the* great victory (Phil 2:9) Pentecost followed. Out of the ashes of his defeat (so thought by his enemies) there arose suddenly in Jerusalem a vibrant growing church. The second victory following Stephen's martyrdom and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was the establishment of Gentile churches across the Roman Empire. For instance Bithynia was a fairly remote province on the north east side of Asia Minor (Turkey). Pliny the Roman governor of Bithynia in about the year 112 in a letter to Rome expressed dismay at the rapid spread of the Christian faith. He spoke of 'many in every period of life, on every level of society, of both sexes – in towns and villages and scattered throughout the countryside'.⁵

Revivals represent the most astonishing victories wrought by the Holy Spirit for the honour of Yahweh's Servant. There are many such and in our modern era they have come in a series of four periods of extensive great spiritual awakenings each extending to a wider circumference.⁶ These have come at times when human strength has ebbed away in order to display the fact that these victories are not achieved by human power or resourcefulness but by the Spirit (Zech 4:6).

There are mightier victories to come. The spiritual conversion of the Servant's ancient people is one (Isa 49:5; Rom 11). The soon coming dismantlement of the false prophet when the Bible meets head-on its main rival is another victory anticipated.

The fifth stanza concludes appropriately with a one sentence summary of the main point underlying the whole Song: 'For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.' Every sinner is exhorted to repent and believe in him who 'is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them' (Heb 7:25).

¹ Alec Motyer in his commentary suggests that verse eleven is one of the fullest statements of atonement theology ever written. We should compare it with Romans 3:21-26 which is surely the foremost paragraph on propitiation in the Bible and with 2 Corinthians 5:21 as the most decisive single verse.

² For Hebrew usage of the word 'light' see Job 3:16b; 33:28; Ps 36:9; 49:19. Allan Harman in his commentary on Isaiah published by Christian Focus refers to two Qumran scrolls that add the word light and points to the LXX which supports this textual reading.

³ The series of articles by Bob Davey in *Reformation Today* illustrate well that the advance of the gospel in China has come from tiny beginnings and advanced from stage to stage over about 200 years to reach massive proportions today.

⁴ To this day the military victories of Trafalgar and Waterloo are celebrated by the British. These battles were won at immense personal cost and loss of life on both sides. The only loser in the Servant's victories is Satan.

⁵ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, 528pp paperback, Penguin, second revised edition, 1986, page 28,

⁶ Erroll Hulse, *Let's Pray for Global Revival*, Chapel Library booklet.

Editor

ERROLL HULSE, 75 Woodhill Road, Leeds LS16 7BZ

Associate EditorsDAVID KINGDON, UK, TOM NETTLES, USA,
JOHN CAMPBELL, AUSTRALIA, MICHAEL HAYKIN, USA

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