

# REFORMATION TODAY



JOHN SUTCLIFF  
(1752-1814)

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*Although the Filipino children featured above are not connected with the review they remind us of the vulnerability of our children.*

## Review

### **Children at Risk**

David Porter

Kingsway Publications £4.95 1986

Parents, Sunday School teachers, ministers and all who come into contact with children should be fully aware of the many risks facing youngsters today. David Porter has done us all a great service in engaging in detailed research into the products readily available to children and the work presents a very balanced and well argued summary of his findings. The main chapters deal with Television, Films, Home Computers, Role Playing Games (both 'fantasy' and 'horror' games), Sexual Abuse and Drug Abuse. This book is strongly recommended. We must not adopt a passive or defeatist attitude towards this subject. Mr. Porter suggests the positive ways in which concerned Christians can nurture and encourage children, and the action which can be taken to combat

the sinister and evil materials which are increasingly available to the young.

Mr. Porter gave two papers on this issue at the Whitfield Ministers' Fraternal in Sussex on 29th February, 1988, 'Influences on our Children's Imagination' and 'The Role of Good and Evil'. Enquiries concerning the cassette should be sent to Dr. Richard Phillips, 156 Buckswood Drive, Crawley RH11 8JF. Tel. Crawley 513317 or 511893.

An excellent eight page summary of some of David Porter's conclusions called *Danger, Children at Play* is available from the Evangelical Alliance, Whitefield House, 186 Kennington Park Road, London SE1 4BT. It is ideal for giving to your child's teacher, to the school librarian, or indeed any adults you know who might be interested. It is thoughtful and challenging; if you give it to non-Christians the issues raised can provoke useful discussion. (One copy 30p, 10 copies £2.25, including p&p. Payment with order, cheques payable to the Evangelical Alliance.)

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# Editorial

The way in which the Particular Baptists recovered from desperate decline, and the means employed for them to enter into a period of revival, spiritual growth and numerical increase, is a thrilling episode in church history wonderfully described to us by Michael Haykin of Canada in the leading article of this issue. His historical perspective is based on the life and witness of John Sutcliff (1752-1814). This personal approach enables each one of us to enter more rapidly into the stupendous issues involved in the subject of worldwide awakening and the conquering of all the enemies of Christ for his glory.

*What do we understand by the term 'revival'?*

Michael Haykin's description sets before us the crucial question: can we pray and work for revival? When we use the word 'revival' in our circles we mean by that a sovereign outpouring of the Spirit by which the lost are awakened and regenerated. In Southern Baptist circles in the United States the word revival is synonymous with every organised campaign of evangelistic effort. Any church can organise one for next week if they choose to do so! For them the word 'revival' is equated with how many respond to an appeal to come to the front. This year I was shown kind hospitality in those circles and visited a seminary where the preacher, a very eloquent man, made an appeal for all those 'who were willing to be made willing' to come to the front. Literally half of the hundreds present went to the front. That is what they call a 'super duper revival!' But careful enquiry would show that not one person has become a Christian through that excitement. To illustrate the point, Tom Smith of West Virginia, U.S.A., in preaching at Leeds Reformed Baptist Church this year, testified that in his youth, as a seeker he used to go to the front of the church in answer to the public appeal every Lord's Day *both morning and evening*.

What we mean by revival is when a sizeable proportion of the population is savingly converted and the whole country affected as a result. In my book *Crisis Experiences* (page 124), I document a revival in the city of Boston, U.S.A., which took place from September 1841 to September 1842. In that one year the church membership of the Baptist churches increased from 2,817 to 4,161. To be exact 1,344 were added. Church membership in those times meant full participation and incorporation into the local church, not paper statistics. There is such a thing as a city wide revival in which all the evangelical churches are blessed with dramatic increase (page 124 as above). But more often than not they belong to a nationwide awakening.

There are also increases which warrant the term 'revival' in the sense that we use that word. Perhaps the word 'visitation' helps to express what we mean. The Lord Jesus visits a church and in his visit he opens eyes, unstops ears, and converts hearts. In other words during his visit the Holy Spirit quickens and regenerates souls and brings them from death to life, from the power of darkness to light, and from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of the Prince of Peace.

These visitations have their own peculiar character. There is a divine genius, a breathtaking originality, an awesome holiness about every visitation. The people are deeply impressed by the awesome presence of God, just as Jacob was when God visited him at Bethel, saying, 'Surely the LORD is in this place — how awesome is this place!'

Local churches can be revived and have increase without any other church being affected. That is unusual since Church history shows that it is characteristic in revival for the Lord to visit nations or ethnic groups as he has with the French speaking people of Quebec, Canada, in recent years.

#### *A contemporary example examined*

Perhaps I might illustrate this from my present experience. While waiting to move and take up responsibilities alongside Peter Parkinson and the elders of L.R.B.C., the Leeds Reformed Baptist Church, my wife and I attend the Wednesday evening prayer meeting at Garston Bridge Chapel, a Reformed Baptist (1689 Confession) church which is only seven years old. The church is half a mile from where we live. The building is inadequate and a local school hall is hired for the Lord's Day morning services to house the congregation of over 200. During the last twelve months the pastor reports that about 40 have evidenced conversion, 34 have been baptised. The membership now stands at about 75. Gradually we are getting to know the church members. Can we say that this local church has experienced a revival? One answer is that that nobody seems to have thought of the increase in those terms. Perhaps it is better not to use the term revival since in our circles that would claim too much and in any case watchfulness is the urgent priority, not a sense of achievement. At the time of writing this, the Garston church is entering a period of intense effort in further outreach and evangelism, as is the L.R.B.C. church in a united effort with the Chelmsley Wood Reformed Baptist Church at Birmingham. The church officers are acutely aware of the danger of reporting success. As you read this account pray earnestly that Satan will not destroy this good work.

In granting the increase referred to above we note that much prayer was made and extensive persevering practical evangelism was undertaken. Prayer and hard work go hand in hand. To put it figuratively, one hand is up in prayer and the other is distributing John Blanchard's booklet *Ultimate Questions*. A striking feature in the increase of 34 in one year is the commensurate increase of responsibility that has come on the leaders and the established members, a practical responsibility to care for the numerical influx of those who come

mostly from backgrounds in which there has been no biblical teaching or Christian example.

### *The hard work of caring for others*

The adversary contests every soul added and a careful check has to be kept on every lamb, just as a shepherd counts his lambs each day to make sure that not one has been carried off by a beast of prey. It is inevitable in every local church that there are some who are ready to rejoice in additions but not so ready to sacrifice time and effort in the work of consolidation. This raises questions about praying for revival. There needs to be that precious unity in a church if a visitation is to be expected, 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! There the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore (Ps 133).' 'May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me' (Jn 17:23). 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (Jn 13:34). There is within this unity a willingness to labour and persevere, a joyful and generous giving of hospitality, and gladness to spend time with needy people and be patient with them. There is much 'nonsense' praying for revival which is hypocrisy. It is the kind of prayer of words only that says, 'Lord do bless us' but means, 'don't expect me to sacrifice anything in the process!'

Isaiah declares that some prayers and even fastings are a waste of time (1:10-17 and 58:4,5). There is a mentality in which professors of religion work hard but it is for their own status and glory that they strive. They quarrel and strive and sometimes even 'strike each other with wicked fists', not literal fists, but with the fists of wicked hating tongues. According to the prophet their praying for revival is 'nonsense' praying. They are wasting their time. Repentance and putting those things right that have never been put right is their clamant need, according to Isaiah, not in word only, but in practical deeds of restoring justice to the injured, the providing of shelter for the homeless, the feeding of those who are hungry, the provision of clothing for the naked (58:6-14).

### *Can we pray for and work for a revival?*

Observe the link in the above title of prayer and work. Intercession must go hand in hand with effort. We pray together and then we go out and work together in making the saving truth of the gospel known. We return again and are often tempted to think that our efforts are indeed in vain and futile. It is precisely at that point that specific prayer for revival comes into operation. It is when we are desperate that we seek the Lord with all our hearts. When the children of Israel in Babylonian captivity observed the promise of restoration but saw no action and only the remotest hope of any tangible fulfilment of those promises, then they sought him with all their hearts. 'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and will bring you back from captivity' (Jer 29:10-14). Their prayers were the precursor of the unexpected intervention of Cyrus of Persia and the following glorious reestablishment of the commonwealth of Israel in full view before all the surrounding nations.

The same principle applies today. We are simply overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task. On average there is retreat in the UK and not advance. What prospect then for us to reach out into whole counties like Cumbria where darkness prevails on the same scale that it does in neighbouring France where there are 30,000 towns and villages without a gospel witness?

Under such circumstances it makes good sense to covenant to pray more specifically and to have a concert for prayer for our churches. It is good to pray in general for all evangelical churches everywhere but we need to be specific and we can only be specific if we have detailed information. There is a family of Reformed Baptist churches round the world. Some of them were described in the last issue of the magazine (*R.T.* 103). More are described in this issue, churches in New Zealand and here in England, for instance in Cornwall, churches that desperately need to advance and grow. Let us pray for each other round the world. Let us pray specifically for the church at Clinton, Louisiana described in this issue. Let us at least try to have a definite time of prayer in order to have some discipline and muscle in the exercise. Let us follow the biblical examples and encourage a concert of prayer. Let us be enthusiastic about it and seek Holy Spirit empowerment in it. Let our prayers always be accompanied with action and with good works (Tit 3:8). Let our intercession go hand in hand with faithful endeavour (Ps 126).

A concert of prayer is not just a whim or a fancy of one man as Michael Haykin shows. It is something that is very definitely laid on the hearts of the Lord's people. They come to the point when they say 'THIS IS RIDICULOUS! Here we have the Scriptures magnificent promises but no fulfilment, we simply cannot go on like this. Our Lord deserves more glory than this. On our own we cannot do anything. We must work in a corporate way with other churches and we must pray more earnestly and more specifically.'

#### *The biblical basis for a concert of prayer*

The text frequently quoted in the context of a whole people praying in response to specific promises is Ezekiel 36:37, 'Once again I will yield to the plea of the house of Israel and do this for them — the ruined cities will be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD' (N.I.V.). The N.K.J.V. translates, 'I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them.' The word 'yield' gives the idea that nothing will happen until the people pray and when they do they will need to plead earnestly if the LORD is to answer their requests. 'I will also let the house of Israel inquire of me,' suggests far less. It does convey the idea that the people will be aware of the promises and will enquire about it in prayer. *Daras*, means to seek, to examine, to inquire, to demand to desire, to ask. The word used in the context means 'to allow oneself to be sought'.

The promises of success in the gospel age are to be studied and taken seriously. 'I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent

day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her a praise in the earth' (Isa 62:6,7). This is not a text snatched out of its context. Isaiah is describing the messianic age in which the good news will be sounded out so that all nations and kings will be aware of it (62:1-5).

Lying at the foundation of all prayer is our covenant relationship to God Triune. This is seen from the text, 'they will call on my name and I will answer them: I will say, "They are my people", and they will say, "The LORD is our God" ' (Zech 13:9). The intimate relationship of union and adoption which is expounded so clearly in the New Testament highlights the truth that we have a high priest, a Saviour, who has been tempted in every way as we have and who is able to sympathise with our weaknesses (Heb 4:15). He knows what it is to be discouraged (Isa 49:4-7). In union with us he feels all our afflictions. 'In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them: he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old' (Isa 63:9).

Particularly when his people are distressed he hears them, and very especially so when they grieve over the broken down state of the Church, and view the promises of gospel prosperity in all the earth (Dan 2:44; Hab 2:13,14, Ps 72). 'For the LORD will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will despise their plea' (Ps 102:16,17).

If we are greatly concerned about a burden we bear do we not call on our friends to help us? Do we not plead with our fellow Christians to stand by and pray for us? And when our prayers are answered do we not call them together to give thanks to the Lord and express gratitude to those who stood with us? If this is true with our personal and family concerns why not with the great burden and vision for the world? Surely we should pledge to pray specifically and urgently for such great needs.

Should we designate a specific time to prayer? At Cuckfield Baptist Church, Sussex, England, there is a prayer meeting every Saturday morning specifically for personal revival, revival in the local church, revival in the area, in the nation and in all countries of the world. Of course prayer is not confined to that, but the main thrust of the intercession is for revival. At a prayer meeting of that kind turns can be taken to bring some encouragement either by way of news from a land where there is awakening, or details of a previous revival, or a description from a book such as *Operation World*, highlighting relevant matters for prayer. For instance as a result of the imprisonment of Joshua (the Malay evangelist) and Dr Poh, pastor of the church at Serdang in Malaysia, much attention has been drawn to the spiritual needs of that country. The foremost need is a change in legislation and practice whereby there is freedom to propagate the gospel to all without discrimination.

If God's people, in this time of great drought, were but made duly sensible of this calamity, and their own emptiness and necessity, and brought earnestly to *thirst* and *cry* for needed supplies, God would, doubtless, soon fulfil this blessed promise. We have another promise much like this, in Psalm 102:16,17. 'When the Lord shall build up *Zion*, he shall appear in his glory; he will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.' And remarkable are the words that follow in the next verse, 'This shall be written for the generation to come; and the people which shall be created, shall praise the Lord.' Which seems to signify, that this promise shall be left on record to encourage some *future generation* of God's people to pray and cry earnestly for this mercy, to whom he would *fulfil* the promise, and thereby give them, and great multitudes of others who should be converted through their prayers, occasion to *praise* his name.

(Jonathan Edwards, vol 2, page 291)

### *The origin of the 18th Century Concert of Prayer*

On 12th January 1748, Jonathan Edwards published a treatise (which would come to about a 60 page paperback today), with a title which was 187 words in length! In those days it was the practice to give the full publisher's blurb in the title and tell everyone at the outset what it was all about. The title read:

*An HUMBLE ATTEMPT to promote an explicit agreement and visible union of God's people through the world, in extraordinary PRAYER, for the REVIVAL of religion, and the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth, pursuant to scripture promises and prophecies concerning the last time,*

#### OCCASIONED

By a late MEMORIAL published by a number of ministers in *Scotland*, and sent over to *America*; giving an account of a certain CONCERT *for prayer*— which has already been come into by many ministers and others in *Great Britain* and some other parts, and in which they desire the *general* concurrence of their christian brethren every where.

The rest of the title says in effect that the author uses various arguments and persuasives to encourage united and extraordinary prayer and that he also answers some objections. Those who possess the Banner edition in two large volumes of Edwards' works can read the treatise for themselves (Vol. 2, page 279ff.).

Rev. William McCulloch of Cambuslang in Scotland and Edwards frequently corresponded. A number of ministers in October 1744, in Scotland, engaged themselves to unite in prayer that God would 'revive true religion in all parts of Christendom . . . and fill the whole earth with his glory'. The arrangement was to be binding for two years. The favoured time for united prayer was Saturday evening or Sabbath morning (favoured because of the proximity of that time to 'the nearness of dispensing gospel ordinances').

Edwards' noted that the way to the concert of prayer was arrived at not so much through the press but by personal conversations and letter writing. Great numbers in England and Scotland agreed to participate, and some in America. Edwards himself corresponded not only with McCulloch but with other

sponsors of the concert for prayer in Scotland, namely, Robe of Kilsyth, and M'Laurin of Glasgow. When Edwards was dismissed from his pastorate at Northampton these pastors and a younger minister John Erskine organised financial help for him from among ministerial friends. The close bonds of fellowship that prevailed is evidenced by mutual practical support in adversity.

In his book *The Cambuslang Revival* Arthur Fawcett describes how the concept of the Concert for prayer spread to Yorkshire to the minister of Hebden Bridge, John Fawcett, who baptised the then 16 year old John Sutcliff about the year 1768. These details give further background to Michael Haykin's article.

#### *A modern example of covenanting to pray*

The March-April issue of *C.W.I.* (Christian Witness to Israel) *Herald* contains project 1988, with the title 'The Shabbat Covenant'. Shabbat is the sophisticated way of spelling Sabbath from the Hebrew. The sabbath covenant is an attempt to have a concert of prayer for the conversion of the Jews. The time suggested for extraordinary prayer is Friday evening which is the time the Jews begin their sabbath. C.W.I. have not used the word 'extraordinary'. That term is borrowed from Jonathan Edwards' treatise. It means prayer additional to our daily personal, family and church prayers.

Friday is a suitable time since it provides an early preparation for the Lord's Day. Furthermore it suits those who are committed to the Shabbat covenant to pray for the conversion of the Jews.

If you are interested in the Shabbat covenant write to C.W.I. 'Seven Trees', 44 Lubbock Road, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 5JX and request a copy of the March/May issue of the *C.W.I. Herald*, which contains up to date news of evangelism amongst the Jews, details of the Shabbat covenant and a four page review of 'The History of the Jews', a secular 643 page book written by the well known author and newspaper journalist Paul Johnston.

#### *Will you commit yourself to action?*

Should you wish to commit yourself to weekly prayer or to a monthly prayer meeting for worldwide revival please correspond with me about it. Here in Liverpool we are concerned to have a monthly prayer meeting on a Friday evening devoted to a concert for prayer for revival in those churches about which we have tangible information, but very especially those churches which are struggling and which face an impasse.

With regard to world vision let us commit ourselves to action. You may already be fully committed but if you are you will be encouraged to observe others growing in their concern. Prayer and work are inextricable. We must do more than pray yet it is obvious that *we cannot do more than pray until we have prayed.*

When we intercede we look for answers to our prayers. In this editorial the encouragement experienced by one church has been reported. If interest is

shown then we pledge to provide both descriptions of needs as well as answers to prayer as experienced at home and abroad.

#### *A Biblical Basis for the Association of Churches*

Acts chapter 15 describes a crisis for the gospel and its progress which affected all the churches. The leaders took the initiative and a commendation was agreed on which was sent to all the churches. Such is the vast extent of the Church universal today that a conference like that described in Acts 15 is inconceivable. However throughout the world local churches associate together by unions or denominations which vary in nature.

At the Carey Conference in January, David Kingdon described the way in which Particular Baptist churches during the 17th century, for practical reasons, associated in groups of four, five or six churches. That theme is followed up in this issue with the description of the Philadelphia Association, of which Baptist historian Henry Vedder said, 'Pretty much everything good in our history from 1700 to 1850 may be traced to its initiative or active co-operation.' The idea of association is being revived and two contemporary examples are portrayed in this issue.

While preparing this editorial I spoke to a Reformed Baptist leader of an overseas country, and also discussed the subject with a pastor of a large Baptist Union church in England. The overseas leader said that the Reformed Baptist churches in his country do associate closely and unite together on a number of issues.

However he expressed his fear that the pastors might under extreme pressure be carried away with social and political issues. Associating together increases their influence and this adds to the danger of the gospel playing second fiddle to political matters. This reminds us of the truth that any church or association of churches is only as good or as durable as its leaders. The leaders in the above case will simply have to strive to use the advantages of Association in a balanced way and ensure that they continue to concentrate on the all-important issue of church planting.

The pastor of the Baptist Union church mentioned above is very attracted by the idea of an Association of Reformed Baptist churches in his area. Reformation has advanced in his church to the point where the great majority of members would prefer a meaningful association based on the 1689 Confession, to their present affiliation which in doctrinal and practical terms achieves absolutely nothing for them.

Not a few Reformed Baptist churches are isolated. For such association means a great deal. An example of this is the relationship of Vijah Chandra who pastors two churches in Fiji. He is supported spiritually and sometimes practically by the churches in New Zealand and by the Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto.



# Can we Pray and Work for Worldwide Revival?

## Revival — The Perspective of John Sutcliff (1752-1814)

by Michael A. G. Haykin

In a recent review of D. L. Jeffery's *A Burning and Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley*, Donald T. Williams, a pastor in the Evangelical Free Church, draws the following comparison between John Wesley's century, the eighteenth, and our own.

Two crucial truths will be brought home to those who read this book. The first is how far we are from a true state of revival today, despite many claims to the contrary. Shining from the pages of each of these writers is a singleminded earnestness and integrity, a purity of intention (in the search for God) whose absence becomes painfully obvious when one turns to even the best Christian literature of our own day.

The second is the possibility of revival in such an age of decadence as our own. Jeffery's introduction is one of the finest short pieces of historical writing I have read in a long time. In it he draws a portrait of the spiritual darkness which had enveloped England *before* the Revival which reads like a precise delineation of our own vices. For liberalism there was deism; for drugs there was rum; for abortion with its degradation of the worth of human life, there was the slave trade, just as entrenched and

with similar consequences for the whole moral tone of the nation; and then as now there was a large mass of nominal and hopelessly compromised Christianity which was more a part of the problem than the solution. There was as little prospect of real revival then as there is today. But it was in just such a time of darkness that God began one of his greatest works of renewal. A book which can so forcibly remind us of these things is must reading for servants of God who pray for revival today.<sup>1</sup>

Embedded within these comments is an implicit call to today's church to reflect anew on how God has worked in bringing about seasons of revival in past generations. Such reflection, Williams rightly intimates, can kindle fresh hope and new aspirations. For Baptists an excellent period for such reflection is the close of the eighteenth century when God brought revival to English Particular Baptists. Probably the most well-known figure associated with this work of God is William Carey (1761-1834), who was to play a highly influential role in initiating the modern missionary movement. But there were others, now mostly forgotten, who were just as greatly used in this 'time of refreshing'. One such man was John

Sutcliff (1752-1814), who was Carey's one-time pastor and tutor, and then later one of his closest friends and correspondent. In what follows an attempt is made to trace this movement of God's Spirit through the experience of John Sutcliff. Sutcliff's vision for revival will be detailed, along with a brief indication of the way that this revival eventually impacted the Particular Baptists of his day. Then, some concluding observations will be drawn which hopefully will be of benefit to those seeking revival in our own time. But first of all, the general state of the Particular Baptist churches prior to the awakening will have to be outlined, otherwise the magnitude of God's work amongst them may go unappreciated.

1. *The Particular Baptists in 18th Century England*

The Particular Baptists entered the eighteenth century with high hopes. They had weathered the storms of persecution unleashed against them by the state during the reigns of Charles II (1660-1685) and his younger brother, James II (1685-1688). Then, with the passing of the Act of Toleration in 1689, at the behest of the Calvinist William III (1688-1702), they were granted a genuine measure of religious freedom. For this Act guaranteed the right to exist of all religious groups in England, except for Roman Catholics and Unitarians. But instead of seizing the opportunities for growth that toleration afforded, the Particular Baptists began to slide into decline.

Reasons for this decline are varied. There was a growing fascination with theological speculation and controversy, which, when indulged, left little time and energy for evangelism. A censorious spirit had grown up, which was especially aimed at evangelists like George Whitefield (1714-1770) and John Wesley (1703-1791). Then church buildings were erected at the expense of

evangelistic outreach; the monetary value of the denomination increased, while the membership decreased. But what was probably the main reason for Baptist stagnation was the prevalence of Hyper-Calvinism. In fact, the leading Particular Baptist theologian and biblical commentator of this period, John Gill (1697-1771), had strong inclinations towards Hyper-Calvinism. In the words of C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), Gill's writing's were influential in promoting a system of theology which 'chilled many churches to their very soul, for it . . . led them to omit the free invitations of the gospel, and to deny that it is the duty of sinners to believe in Jesus'.<sup>2</sup> Little wonder that Howel Harris (1714-1773), the Welsh evangelist and Whitefield's co-worker, could make this telling contrast between non-conformist ministers, which would have included Particular Baptist pastors, and his friend Whitefield: 'whilst they are in their warm rooms, he ventures his life for God'.<sup>3</sup> And with such a lack of evangelism, the Baptist cause in England inevitably plummeted. This withering of the Particular Baptists is well seen from the following chart which depicts the state of the denomination in the first half of the eighteenth-century:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Churches</i>
1638	1
1644	54
1660	131
1689	Near 300
1715	220
1750	146

Despite the fact that God visited England with revival during the 1740's and 1750's by means of the preaching of Anglican evangelicals like Whitefield and Wesley, the great majority of Particular Baptists remained untouched. The Particular Baptists, Calvinistic to the core, were not likely to warm to Wesley's Arminianism. And

Wesley's view of the Baptists was hardly conducive to building good relations between him and them. For example, Wesley is quoted as having stated publicly on one occasion:

When a Sinner is just awakened to see his state as a Sinner, the people called Anabaptists (i.e. Baptists), begin to trouble him about outward forms and modes of Worship, and that of Baptism; but they had better cut his throat, for it is sending . . . him to Hell and perdition.

And although Whitefield was a Calvinist, Hyper-Calvinist critics amongst the Baptists complained of his 'Arminian dialect' and 'semi-Pelagian address'.

## 2. *John Sutcliff, an Evangelical Calvinist*

But there were some Baptists who did not share this antipathy to the evangelical message proclaimed by Whitefield. In Yorkshire for instance, Whitefield and other leaders in the Evangelical Revival exercised a significant influence on Baptist ranks. One of those converted under Whitefield's preaching was John Fawcett (1740-1817), who became the pastor of the Baptist Church at Waingate, Yorkshire, and a powerful force for revival in the north of England. What is especially significant from the perspective of this paper is that Sutcliff was born and raised in Yorkshire, and when he was converted at the age of seventeen, it was Fawcett who baptised him. Sutcliff subsequently joined the church which Fawcett pastored at Waingate. He thus received his earliest nurture in the Christian faith from one who was appreciative of the need for revival.

Sutcliff devoted two and a half years, from 1772 to May of 1774, to theological study at Bristol Baptist College. Then, for the year following, he served in two churches, one in Shrewsbury and one in Birmingham, till in July, 1775 he entered upon what would be his life's

ministry at Olney. It cannot have been long after his coming to Olney that Sutcliff began to study in earnest the writings of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). Indeed, after the Scriptures, these writings exercised the greatest influence in shaping Sutcliff's theological perspective. Edwards, who has been rightly called 'the theologian of revival', showed Sutcliff that it was wholly Scriptural to maintain 'the obligations of men to love God with all their hearts and their actual enmity against him, and . . . the duty of ministers to call on sinners to repent and believe on Christ for salvation and the necessity of omnipotent grace to render the call effectual'.<sup>3</sup> Of course, such assertions as these ran counter to Hyper-Calvinism, and it is not surprising that his reading of Edwards led Sutcliff to reject Hyper-Calvinism as unscriptural. Moreover, Sutcliff naturally started to incorporate into his preaching what were to him fresh insights regarding the relationship between human responsibility and divine grace. Some of his congregation, however, were deeply disturbed by what they saw as a departure from the canons of 'orthodoxy', and they began to absent themselves from the Church's celebration of the Lord's Supper. But Sutcliff was not to be deterred from preaching Biblical truth, and 'by patience, calmness, and prudent perseverance' he eventually won over all of those in his congregation who stood opposed to his theological position.

Of Sutcliff's sermons, there is but one extant. It reveals a pastor zealous for the salvation of his hearers, eager to enlist them in the service of the King, and bears out the statement of Robert Hall, Jr. (1766-1831) which he made about Sutcliff after the latter's death:

Few men took a deeper interest than our deceased brother in the general state of the church and the propa-

gation of the gospel abroad. The future glory of the kingdom of Christ and the best means of promoting it were his favourite topics, and usurped a large part of his thoughts and his prayers; nor was he ever more in his element than when he was exerting his powers in devising plans for its extension.

It is a sermon on 1 Kings 19:10, in particular Elijah's statement, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord of hosts.' It was preached at a gathering of some of the ministers of the Northamptonshire Association in April, 1791, and would prove to be a key step on the road to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in the following year. Sutcliff first explores the historical context surrounding Elijah's statement. He comes to the conclusion that while Elijah's statement contains a 'degree of impatience . . . and murmuring', his jealousy for God is commendable, because such jealousy 'enters deep into, and is integrated in the very soul of true Christianity'. Sutcliff proceeds to detail the ways in which such a jealousy manifests itself. As he does so, two emphases repeatedly come to the fore. First, Sutcliff lays great stress on the vital importance of bringing the entirety of one's beliefs and lifestyle into conformity with the revealed will of God as found in the Scriptures. True jealousy for God is accompanied by a reverent obedience to God's Word. It is an 'infallible guide' and 'unerring rule', by means of which a believer can test the reality of his faith and the purity of his doctrine, experience, worship and lifestyle. Sutcliff clearly regarded the Word of God as critical in changing the lives and thoughts of his hearers.

Second, Sutcliff places emphasis on the visible extension of 'the empire of Jesus'. True jealousy for God is revealed in a love for men which 'can embrace a globe' and which longs that 'the earth be filled with the knowledge

of the glory of the Lord'. It is seen in a daily lifestyle which takes seriously God's desire for his people to be the salt and light of the world. *And it is displayed in 'fervent prayer for the outpouring of the divine Spirit'*. This last item, prayer for the outpouring of God's Spirit, is the area in which Sutcliff made his real contribution to reviving the Baptists in England. And it is another area in which Sutcliff was deeply indebted to Edwards.

### 3. *John Sutcliff and Prayer for the Outpouring of the Spirit*

Through his treatise *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer, For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time*, first published in 1748, Edwards challenged Sutcliff to pray for a rich effusion of the Spirit upon the Particular Baptist denomination. Basing his thoughts upon Zechariah 8:20-22 Edwards appealed for the establishment of regular prayer meetings where there could be fervent prayer that God 'would appear for the help of his church . . . and pour out his Spirit, revive his work, and advance his spiritual kingdom in the world'.<sup>4</sup> This treatise came into Sutcliff's hands through John Erskine (1721-1803), a correspondent of Edwards' and the minister of the historic church of Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh. Erskine has been described as 'the paradigm of Scottish evangelical missionary interest through the last half of the eighteenth century'.<sup>5</sup> From 1780 till his death in 1803 he regularly corresponded with Sutcliff's good friend John Ryland, Jr. (1753-1825), sending him not only

letters, but also on occasion bundles of interesting publications which he happened to receive. So it was that in April, 1784 Erskine dispatched to Ryland a copy of Edwards' *Humble Attempt*. Ryland in turn shared it with his friend Sutcliff. Sutcliff was so impressed by this treatise that at the next meeting of the Baptist churches of the Northamptonshire Association, to which the Church at Olney belonged, Sutcliff proposed that monthly prayer meetings be established to pray for the outpouring of God's Spirit and the revival of religion. This proposal was adopted by the representatives of the twenty or so churches of the Association and a circular letter sent to their churches which began by urging them 'to wrestle with God for the effusion of His Holy Spirit'. Practical suggestions as to the way in which to implement these monthly prayer meetings then followed. It was recommended that there be corporate prayer for one hour on the first Monday evening of each month.

The grand object of (this) prayer is to be that the Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches, that sinners may be converted, the saints edified, the interest of religion revived, and the name of God glorified. At the same time, remember, we trust you will not confine your requests to your own societies (i.e. churches); or to your own immediate connection (i.e. denomination); let the whole interest of the Redeemer be affectionately remembered, and the spread of the gospel to the most distant parts of the habitable globe be the object of your most fervent requests. We shall rejoice if any other Christian societies of our own or other denominations will unite with us, and do now invite them most cordially to join heart and hand in the attempt.

Who can tell what the consequences of such an united effort in prayer may be! Let us plead with God the many gracious promises of his Word, which relate to the future success of his gospel. He has said, 'I will yet for this be enquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them, I will increase them with men like a flock' (Ez 36:37). Surely we have love enough for Zion to set apart one hour at a time, twelve times in a year, to seek her welfare.<sup>6</sup>

There are a number of noteworthy points about this statement. First, the conviction that reversing the downward trend of the Particular Baptists could not be accomplished by mere human zeal, but must be effected by an outpouring of the Spirit of God. As Sutcliff later observed:

The outpouring of the divine Spirit . . . is the grand promise of the New Testament, . . . his influences are the soul, the great animating soul of all religion. These withheld, divine ordinances are empty cisterns, and spiritual graces are withering flowers. These suspended, the greatest human abilities labour in vain, and the noblest efforts fail of success.

In both this text and that of the circular letter cited above there is evidence of what Richard Lovelace has called 'a theology of radical dependence on the Spirit', a recognition that the Spirit is the true agent of renewal and revival.

Then there is the 'inclusive' nature of the praying. As the Particular Baptists of the Northamptonshire Association gather together to pray they were urged not to think simply of their own churches or even denomination, but to embrace in prayer other Baptist churches and other denominations. The Kingdom consists of more than Baptists! In fact, other Baptist Associations and other denominations were encouraged to join them in praying for revival. Third, there is the distinct mis-

sionary emphasis: pray that the gospel be spread 'to the most distant parts of the habitable globe'! Carey, it should be noted, was at this point in time still working as a 'journeyman shoemaker' and had only just begun to preach. He was not even present at this Association meeting which issued what would prove to be such a highly fruitful call to prayer. An awareness of the chronology of these events thus helps one to realise that Carey's later influence was exercised in conjunction with a group of like-minded men. Finally, and most significantly, there is the Scriptural foundation. Only one text is cited, Ezekiel 36:37, but those issuing this call to prayer are aware of 'many gracious promises' in God's Word which speak of 'the future success of his gospel'. In other words, their vision for revival is rooted in and circumscribed by their reading of God's Word.

The Association meetings at which this Prayer Call was issued were held on 2nd-3rd June. On 29th June the Baptist Church in Olney had resolved to establish a 'monthly meeting for prayer, . . . to seek for a revival of religion'. Ten years later the Church was still firmly committed to praying for revival, as the following entry for 30th October 1794 indicates:

Agreed to have a season of fasting and prayer, to seek the Lord for a revival among us, and to attend to it is as soon as convenient, perhaps this day three weeks.

Nor did the passing years diminish Sutcliff's zeal. For instance, the following extract from Ryland's diary states that on:

21st January 1788 — Brethren Fuller, Sutcliff, Carey, and I, kept this day as a private fast, in my study; read the Epistles to Timothy and Titus; [Abraham] Booth's charge to [Thomas] Hopkins; [Richard] Blackerby's Life, in [John] Gillies;

and [John] Rogers of Dedham's Sixty Memorials for a Godly Life; and each prayed twice — Carey with singular enlargement and pungency. Our chief design was to implore a revival of the power of godliness in our own souls, in the Churches, and in the Church at large.

By 1789 the number of prayer meetings for revival had grown to such an extent that Sutcliff deemed it necessary to bring out an edition of Edwards' *Humble Attempt* to further encourage those meeting for prayer. In his preface to this edition Sutcliff reiterated that the Prayer Call issued by the churches of the Northamptonshire Association five years earlier was not meant for Particular Baptists only.

Rather they ardently wished it might become general among the real friends of truth and holiness. The advocates of error are indefatigable in their endeavours to overthrow the distinguishing and interesting doctrines of Christianity; those doctrines which are the grounds of our hope, and sources of our joy. Surely it becomes the followers of Christ, to use every effort, in order to strengthen the things which remain. . . . In the present imperfect state, we may reasonably expect a diversity of sentiments upon religious matters. Each ought to think for himself; and every one has a right, on proper occasions, to show his opinion. Yet all should remember, that there are but two parties in the world, each engaged in opposite causes; the cause of God and of Satan; of holiness and sin; of heaven and hell. The advancement of the one, and the downfall of the other, must appear exceedingly desirable to every real friend of God and man. If such in some respects entertain different sentiments, and practise distinguishing modes of worship, surely they may unite in the above business. O for thousands upon thousands,

divided into small bands in their respective cities, towns, villages, and neighbourhood, all met at the same time, and in pursuit of one end, offering up their united prayers, like so many ascending clouds of incense before the Most High! May he shower down blessings on all the scattered tribes of Zion! Grace, great grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! Amen!

Here, Sutcliff places the call to prayer issued in 1784 against the broader canvas of history, in which God and Satan are fighting a war for the souls of men. Prayer, because it is a weapon common to all who are committed to God's cause, is one sphere in which Christians may present a fully united front against Satan. Sutcliff is, of course, aware that evangelicals of his day held differing theological perspectives and worshipped in different ways. He himself was a convinced Baptist, and stated quite unequivocally two years later in 1791:

No edict that is issued out under the broad seal of Jehovah, should ever be considered as a trifling article, or represented as a matter of indifference. . . . If, when some articles of faith, some modes of worship are represented as *indifferent*, no more is intended, than that . . . they are not of equal importance with some others, . . . the fact will be allowed. But if this phrase means that such doctrines or parts of worship are of *no importance*, . . . may be believed or disbelieved, . . . practised or neglected, without any offence in the sight of God — this is denied.

Sutcliff probably would have considered believer's baptism a good example in this regard. It certainly does not possess the significance that faith in Christ does. Faith in Christ is essential to salvation, whereas baptism is not. But baptism is not thereby unimportant. God commands all who repent and

believe, and only these, to be also baptized. But, Sutcliff rightly emphasises in his 'Preface' to Edwards' *Humble Attempt*, differences over such non-essentials as baptism should not present a barrier to believers uniting together to pray for revival.

#### 4. Revival

While further references to Sutcliff's passion for revival could be documented, what has been given is sufficient to demonstrate the intensity and nature of this passion for Sutcliff. But how did this movement of prayer for revival affect the Particular Baptists? The following table charts the extent of the expansion of the Particular Baptists up to the middle of the nineteenth century:

Year	Number of Churches
1789	approximately 300
1798	361
1812	532
1851	1,374

The growth is significant. And when Baptist authors in the mid-nineteenth century sought to pinpoint the cause of this very evident revival, they looked to the Prayer Call of 1784. F. A. Cox, writing the history of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1842, could state:

The primary cause of the missionary excitement in Carey's mind, and its diffusion among the Northamptonshire ministers [was] . . . the meeting of the association in 1784, . . . [when] it was resolved to set apart an hour on the first Monday evening of every month, 'for extraordinary prayer for the revival of religion, and for the extending of Christ's kingdom in the world'. This suggestion proceeded from the venerable Sutcliff. Its simplicity and appropriateness have since recommended it to universal adoption; and copious showers of blessing from on high have been poured forth upon the Churches.

Indeed, J. Edwin Orr traces the human

origins of what is known as the Second Evangelical Awakening (1790-1830), which impacted far more than the Particular Baptists in England, back to this Prayer Call of 1784.

### 5. Concluding Observations

What are the lessons in all of this for us today? There are at least four. First, revival is not achieved without a re-examination, sometimes painful, of Scriptural truth and without a willingness to obey that truth. Sutcliff and his friends weighed the theological shibboleths of Hyper-Calvinism in the balance of Scripture and found them wanting. If the Word of God had not been honoured and obeyed, the Spirit, who inspired that Word, would have been grieved instead of being pleased to breathe new life into those Particular Baptist churches of the eighteenth century.

Second, genuine revival is inextricably bound to prayer. Now, it is certainly fallacious to perceive this connection in terms of the following equation: prayer plus fervency equals revival. As Iain H. Murray has written:<sup>8</sup>

God has nowhere promised that he is so closely identified with the means of grace that if we only use the means he is *bound* to bestow the success. The Bible does not teach that if we organise enough prayer, and enough evangelism, there are certain to be glorious results.

Nevertheless, prayer is *the* means that God uses to bring revival. It is in the province of prayer that God creates a thirst for himself and an unquenchable desire to see his glory displayed. This longing in turn 'refuels' the one praying for revival. As Sutcliff noted, zeal for God 'will be seen in fervent prayer for the outpouring of the divine Spirit'. Revival comes when there are some who seek it and who ardently long for it (see Lk 11:13).

Third, in praying for revival, the praying must go beyond one's immediate circle. Sutcliff was not afraid to embrace in his prayers other Christians with whom he had theological differences. We find him, for instance, on 24th April 1798 at the annual meeting of an association known as the Bedfordshire Union of Christians, where he opened the meeting in prayer and a Methodist minister closed it. In the words of the circular letter of 1784 he sought to remember in prayer 'the *whole* interest of the Redeemer'. And God honoured, and will honour, such catholicity in prayer.

Fourth, and probably most significantly, is Sutcliff's understanding of the nature of revival. What is revival? It is an 'outpouring of the divine Spirit'. By such language Sutcliff implicitly confessed that the Baptist churches of his day were lacking the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, Sutcliff did not question the Biblical axiom that all believers are permanently indwelt by the Spirit. In his *The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper considered*, published as a circular letter of the Northamptonshire Association in 1803, Sutcliff could exhort his readers regarding the Lord's Supper:

Here we cannot forbear dropping a word to certain individuals, at least in some of our churches, who, without any bar cast in their way by the dispensations of providence, are occasionally absent from the table of the Lord. . . . Is not this the way to 'grieve the Holy Spirit by which you are sealed unto the day of redemption' (Eph 4:30). That Spirit whose delight it is on the one hand, to glorify Jesus; and on the other, to see him glorified by you.

Sutcliff's use of Ephesians 4:30, a proof text for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and the permanent indwelling of the believer by the Holy Spirit,

clearly indicates where his doctrinal sympathies lie. Those in whom the Spirit lives need to be afraid of grieving him by purposely absenting themselves from the Lord's Table, but Sutcliff in no way implies that by such action believers may lose the Spirit. Thus, when Sutcliff, along with his fellow ministers in the Northamptonshire Association, called upon the Baptist Churches of England to pray that 'the Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches', they were calling them to recognise that simply because the Spirit indwelt his Church did not automatically mean that the Church was enjoying spiritual power.

Is not this the situation of all too many of our churches? For what we have known and enjoyed of the indwelling Spirit, may God be praised. But, O, to know the Spirit's fullness! May God make the prayer of Sutcliff and his friends the prayer of our hearts: O that 'the Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches, that sinners may be converted, the saints edified, the

interest of religion revived, and the name of God glorified'.

*The author has provided full documentation of his source materials. Most of these are from rare works in research libraries, and some (see note 3), are from books now out of print. With the author's permission the editor has reduced the footnotes. The original four pages are available for specialists upon request. About 50p should cover expenses.*

- <sup>1</sup> 'Reporting on Revival,' *Eternity*, 39, no. 1 (January 1988), 37.
- <sup>2</sup> [Susannah Spurgeon and J. W. Harrald,] *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography* (London: 1899), I, 310.
- <sup>3</sup> Cited Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Howel Harris, 1714-1773. The Last Enthusiast* (Cardiff: 1965), p. 46.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834 ed.; repr. Edinburgh: 1974), II, 282.
- <sup>5</sup> J. A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea. Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions 1640-1810* (Kampen, The Netherlands: 1970), p. 166.
- <sup>6</sup> Cited by Hewett, 'Sutcliff', p. 70. Ernest A. Payne [*The Prayer call of 1784* (London: 1941), p. 2] is of the opinion that this statement was actually written by Sutcliff.
- <sup>7</sup> *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, II, 278-279.
- <sup>8</sup> 'The Necessary Ingredients of a Biblical Revival,' *The Banner of Truth*, 184 (January 1979), 21.

It is evident from the Scripture, that there is *yet remaining* a great *advancement* of the interest of religion and the *kingdom of Christ* in this world, by an *abundant outpouring of the Spirit of God*, far greater and more extensive than ever yet has been. It is certain, that many things, which are spoken concerning a *glorious* time of the church's *enlargement* and *prosperity* in the *latter days*, have never yet been fulfilled. There has never yet been any propagation and prevalence of religion, in any wise, of that *extent* and *universality* which the prophecies represent. It is often foretold and signified, in a great variety of strong expressions, that there should a time come, when *all nations*, throughout the whole habitable world, should embrace the true religion, and be brought into the church of God. It was often promised to the patriarchs, that 'in their seed all the nations, or (as it is sometimes expressed) all the families of the earth shall be blessed,' (Gen 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 24:4 and 28:14). Agreeably to this, it is said of the Messiah, Psalm 72:11. 'That all nations shall serve him;' and in verse 17, 'Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.' And In Isaiah 2:2 it is said, that 'all nations shall flow unto the mountain of the house of the Lord.' And Jeremiah 3:17. 'That all nations shall be gathered unto the name of the Lord to Jerusalem, and shall walk no more after the imagination of their evil heart.' 'That all flesh shall come and worship before the Lord,' Isaiah 66:23. 'And that all flesh should see the glory of God together,' Isaiah 40:5. 'And that all flesh should come to him that hears prayer,' Psalm 65:2. Christ compares the *kingdom of heaven* in this world 'to the leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened,' Matthew 13:33.

(Jonathan Edwards, vol. 12, p. 284)

# A Biblical Basis for the Association of Churches

*In preparing this article the editor acknowledges with gratitude the work of pastor John Armstrong of Wheaton, Chicago, who is to be the guest speaker at the next Carey Conference for ministers. It was while reading a manuscript by Dr. Armstrong that he came across the material by Samuel Jones.*

That the Bible teaches marriage, the union of one man with one woman, is irrefutable. Yet the Bible tells us nothing about a marriage ceremony. That the Bible teaches us that God is Triune is basic to all Christian faith, yet the word 'Trinity' does not appear in Scripture. That the New Testament teaches church membership is clear to all but the smallest minority of believers. It is clear by the analogy of the human body as shown in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4:15, 16. It is also clear by other analogies such as the vine (John 15), the building (Eph 2:21, 22; 1 Pet 2:4-8) and the flock (Jn 10). It is also clear from the book of Acts since specific numbers were added to the church and specific leaders and authority to lead specific churches (Phil 1:1). Yet there is no blueprint for organising a church membership and no sample of a church constitution is provided.

Likewise there is no specification as to how far local churches are to express their unity. That they are all one is clear from Ephesians 4:4-6. That they should seek the closest possible unity is clear from our Lord's prayer for unity (John 17:21), that unity being as close as the unity of the three persons of the Trinity, not a lesser unity than that, but a unity striving to be as close and sublime as that, 'May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.' As with the other subjects mentioned the practical details wisely are left for the discretion of God's people for conditions in every land and climate and culture will differ.

In the course of Baptist history some have worked out principles of cooperation and association with great advantage. To be sure no single church group of churches can prosper unless a vital spiritual relationship with Christ is maintained. No system however biblically based can preserve an unspiritual church (Rev 3:14-22), no more than a marriage can be preserved by a certificate once unfaithfulness prevails. Nevertheless that does not mean that we abandon weddings and wedding certificates. Likewise we use church constitutions and follow principles of church cooperation. With regard to cooperation united efforts depend on zeal not on paper agreements. Yet churches should they wish are entirely free to incorporate into their constitutions clauses which clarify their relationship to other parts of the body of Christ, so that new members and

future generations will be taught as to the importance and advantages of inter church unity and cooperation.

One of the clearest statements on the purpose, character and power of a Baptist association was prepared by the Philadelphia Baptist Association. The work was done by Samuel Jones in 1798. Part of it reads as follows:

### **Of the Fellowship and Communion of Churches**

Churches of the same faith and gospel order, so far as is necessary to communion; as they have all drank into and of one and the same spirit; as they are branches of one and the same body, and hold to one and the same head; and as they have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism: they therefore may and ought to have and enjoy fellowship and a friendly intercourse together, as occasion may require and opportunity serve, in the discharge of those relative duties, which may tend to the mutual benefit and edification of the whole (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:5; Jn 17:20-26).

#### *Of an Association*

1. An association consists of delegates or messengers from different particular churches, who have agreed to associate together, at stated times, to promote their own interest, and the good of common cause.
2. This practice is recommended by the reason of things, the spirit of religion, and apostolic practice (Acts 15).
3. The meeting thus of churches by their delegates is of special use; to gain acquaintance with and knowledge of one another – to preserve uniformity in faith and practice (Phil 3:16) – to detect and discountenance heresies – to curb licentiousness in the wanton abuse of church power – to afford assistance and advice in all difficult cases – to contribute pecuniary aid when necessary – to make appointments of supplies for destitute churches – and every way advance and secure the interest of religion, and strengthen and draw closer the bonds of union and fellowship.
4. Other churches, besides those that enter at the original constitution, may be admitted, on making application, and giving satisfactory evidence in regard to their faith and practice, regular order and good standing.
5. The delegates thus assembled are, properly speaking, only an advisory council. They are not armed with coercive power, to compel the churches to submit to their decisions, nor have they any control over the acts and doings of the churches. Every church still remains independent.
6. Nevertheless, the associated body may exclude from their connection any church that may act an unworthy part. This our association did some years ago. Indeed it would be absurd to examine churches at their admission, if afterward they are to be continued in the connection, let their principles and practice be what they may (see Chap 10 verse 22; vide also *Confession of Faith*, Chap 28 para 15; Our late *Discipline*, p. 61; Dr John Owen, *On the Nature of a Gospel Church*, p. 254).



*South Africans will be interested to see John Wilton, well known in Baptist circles in South Africa and former president of The Baptist Union with his son Don, his wife Karen, and Lyn Hulse. John is in demand among Baptist churches in the South. Don is professor of evangelism in the Southern Baptist Seminary, New Orleans.*

7. Let it not be thought, that this power of the association over the churches in connection with it disannuls or destroys the independence of those churches: for if any church of the associated body should become unsound in their principles, or act irregularly and disorderly, and will not do, what may be just and right, such a church will still remain an independent church, though an heterodox and irregular one; but it would be inconsistent and wrong in the association, to suffer such a church to continue among them, since, besides other considerations, they would hereby become partakers of their evil deeds. The association can take nothing for them, but what it gave them. This, in such circumstances, it certainly may and ought to do.
8. From what we have said, as well as from considering that the union of churches in an association is a voluntary act, a voluntary union or confederation like the voluntary confederation of members into a church, it follows that every church stands in the same relation to its association as a member does to his church, and therefore is examined in the same manner on admission. Hence
9. Complaints may be received by the association against any church belonging to it, especially when the complaint is brought in by another church. Hence also,
10. The association has a right to call any delinquent church to account, whether for a wanton abuse of its power towards or over any of its members, neglect of attendance at the association, disregard of those things recommended to them, or any material defect in principles or practice; and if satisfactory reasons are not given therefore nor reformation, then to exclude them.

# The Philadelphia Association of Churches

The Philadelphia Baptist Association was the forerunner and model for the whole associational movement of Calvinistic Baptist churches in the United States of America.

The Philadelphia Association began with five very small congregations in 1707, these being spread out with three located in New Jersey, one in Delaware, and one in Pennsylvania. In England the Abingdon Association in Berkshire, 1652, was initiated by the cooperation of three churches, the Association in South Wales, 1650, by three, and in the Midlands Association, 1655, by six churches. The similarity of the Philadelphia Association with earlier English Baptist example and practice is evident (see article 'Independency and Interdependency' by David Kingdon, *R.T.* 103, p. 16).

The commencement of the Philadelphia Association is described in the church records:

Before our general meeting at Philadelphia, in the seventh month, 1707, it was concluded by the several congregations of our brethren, such as they thought most capable in every congregation, and those to meet at the yearly meeting to consult about such things as were wanting in the churches, and to set them in order.

The first such annual meeting took place on the 27th of that same month.

There was slow growth from that time until the Great Awakening which is associated with the preaching of George Whitefield in America in 1740-1741. As a result of the revival Baptist churches sprang up in all the colonies. The spread of the associational method of cooperation was a very important instrument in Baptist growth. David Benedict the Baptist historian declared that the annual associational meetings provided a vital means for church growth and deeper ministry. Benedict emphasised the effect of these gatherings with this description: 'These things so inflamed the hearts of the ministers, that they would leave the association with a zeal and courage which no common obstacle could impede.'

When we reflect on a situation in which there are few scattered struggling churches where else will inspiration be derived from, except by mutual encouragement? Close parallels today can be seen in New Zealand and in Cornwall, England, reports of which are published in this issue of *Reformation Today*. Literature can inspire isolated churches but preaching and mutual fellowship is more effective.

Added to these means of mutual encouragement and inspiration is a further dimension which is the coming together of two or more churches for

evangelistic effort. To cite an example, last year the Leeds Reformed Baptist Church united with the Reformed Baptist Church of Chelmsley Wood, Birmingham, for a ten day campaign of evangelism: house to house visiting, coffee mornings for women, evangelistic meetings in schools, home meetings for men in the evenings, open air and street evangelism during the day at the market place. As a result of this united effort the congregation increased from 25 to 45 at the Lord's Day services. Another ten day mission of the two churches working together is due to take place from 2nd July to 10th July.

But to return to the example set by the Philadelphia Association the simple procedure they adopted was to organise united conferences at a weekend, with preaching and fellowship on the Saturday followed by two preaching services on the Lord's Day with the Lord's supper celebrated as well. The spirit of revival often accompanied these times and delegates went home *excited* about their common cause for Christ in America and ultimately in the world.

A major problem faced by the young churches was the shortage of well trained educated ministers who at the same time evidenced a call and determination to serve faithfully as pastors. Rejected by the established churches and clergy of the day, the Baptists had to find a means of training and placing capable pastor-preachers in their young and struggling churches. Many churches were tempted to receive almost any itinerant preacher who might appear, claiming to be a Baptist minister. To protect the churches the first meeting of the Philadelphia Association in 1707 agreed that no stranger 'shall be allowed to preach among the associated churches, except he produce credentials of his being in communion with his church and of his having been called and licensed to preach.' This was tightened up later to include examination and certification by the Association itself.

By 1722 an educational fund was established to assist young men hopeful for the ministry and inclined toward serious learning. A London merchant set up the fund and the association decided on how the grants should be used.

The Philadelphia Association also attended to the needs of publishing: a hymn book, a children's catechism, and books on family worship, baptism, apologetics, as well as other titles.

The subject of home mission was one of the highest priority and that was the method employed to reach into all new unevangelised areas. As information was supplied so intense interest was engendered in overseas countries and in the cause of world evangelisation.

These are the obvious functions of the Association. A further important function should be mentioned and that is the role of the Association in maintaining the peace, harmony, and peace of the churches. As in a local church one sick member can bring disease to the whole body, so with churches, one disgruntled member church can bring division to the others. If there are

uncorrected injustices and irregularities in one church it will not be long before division will spread to the other churches because no one church can live in total isolation from sister churches of the same faith and order. The independency of the individual churches was a principle well understood, but equally appreciated was the principle of mutual and collective consultation with regard to anything of mutual concern for all the churches. It was recognised by all member churches that injury or ill health in one church could be injurious to the others.

As early as 1712 a division occurred in one of the churches which appealed to the Association for help the matter being peaceably settled by that means. Another instance is recorded in 1731 of the timely visit of two experienced brethren to a church which was in a sad condition of disarray. The help afforded by the two visitors on behalf of the Association was the means by which a happy restoration to peace and order was achieved.

From the beginning the Philadelphia Association was committed unreservedly to the London Confession of Faith (the 1689 Baptist Confession).

Doctrinal questions which affected all the members were brought to the Associational meetings and guidance given which was not binding but was commended from Scripture. Inevitably the corporate wisdom of the leaders commended itself for voluntary acceptance by all the churches. Included among recommendations was the principle that the baptism of an individual believer should never be separated from his incorporation into the local church as a member.

With the passing of time and the rapid and wide expansion of America other Associations came into being. These were modelled on the Philadelphia Association which has been called 'the mother of all Baptist Associations'. I conclude this brief reminder of that First Association by quoting the Baptist historian, Henry Vedder, who wrote of the Philadelphia Association: 'Pretty much everything good in our history from 1700 to 1850 may be traced to its initiative or active cooperation.'

*This above outline has been extracted primarily from two sources, namely an unpublished manuscript by John Armstrong, and the chapter by Wayne Mack published in The Ideal Church by Carey Publications, but now out of print.*

# Five churches associate in Cornwall

by Andrew D. Rotheray  
(Elder at Bosvale Baptist Church, Falmouth)

It was very interesting to read David Kingdon's paper published in *R.T.* 103 concerning the bristly problems of inter-church fellowship. With this in mind I would like to share with you some of the recent developments in West Cornwall.

Here, there are five Reformed Baptist Churches: Penzance, Helston, Tuckingmill (Camborne), Bosvale (Falmouth) and Newquay. There is also a Congregational church holding to a reformed position (St. Ives). Even the most distant churches are no more than twenty-five miles apart, yet until recently there has not been much in the way of fellowship between us. Normally all a church member would know of other churches was an occasional newsletter telling him about people he had probably never met!

Recent difficulties in some of the churches recently however caused us to see that we *needed* each other and particularly at times of crisis. Help was ready to hand, but perhaps this stimulated us into considering if more could be done for God if church leaders and members could meet and establish an outline of how we could further the work in our churches and area.

Beginning January '88 the elders of the churches agreed to meet three times a year. We would have a time of Bible

study and prayer followed by discussion. Two meetings have so far been held and two important things have been accomplished.

*Firstly* — we have instituted an annual Day Conference for the churches. All church members will be strongly encouraged to come. It will be a Saturday with three addresses and organised so that it will be easy for families to be there. This should offer a fine opportunity for hearing a ministry and having fellowship. Our first meeting took place on Saturday 13th May 1989 when our preacher was Victor Budgen. The speakers will be chosen by the elders and must hold to a reformed non-charismatic position.

*Secondly* — it has been of concern among us for some time that Truro, Cornwall's county town is so lacking in evangelical witness. The other churches expressed their wish that Bosvale Baptist seek to begin a church-planting work in Truro with the aim of establishing a Reformed Baptist Church there. Falmouth is only 10 miles from Truro and we already have some of the congregation who live in Truro. Please pray that by working together we will achieve success in planting a church at Truro.

And if any of you are on holiday down here — please come and visit us!

# A Lively Association of Four Churches in New Zealand



*From left to right, pastors John Leevers, Balasubramaniam, David Yan and Stephen Turner*

Auckland is the largest and most prosperous city of New Zealand, extending over an area of about 30 miles and noted for beautiful coastlines and attractive suburbs. Within this conurbation there are three Reformed Baptist churches, one led by Sri Lankan, Balasubramaniam (Bala, for short, Bala's report on the church in Colombo appears in this issue of *R.T.*), one by a single man of Chinese birth, David Yan, and the third by Stephen Turner who descends from a well known New Zealand family background which goes back for over a century. These three together with John Leevers of Hamilton (a town situated 100 km south of Auckland with a population of about

100,000, meet every two months for prayer and practical cooperation.

John Leevers spent 17 years in South Africa which included pastoring a Baptist church in Hillcrest, Natal. He trained at Kalk Bay Bible Institute where he argued against the doctrines of grace, but like many of us he came gradually over several years to embrace the truths previously rejected.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of the four churches is a great encouragement as it exhibits an international spiritual unity that brings glory to our illustrious Redeemer.

The four churches have grown slowly. One great common purpose of further church planting at home and abroad is shared. Generous giving which is essential for the nurturing of new works has been an outstanding feature. David Yan was instrumental in initiating the now well established Shalom Reformed Baptist Church in Singapore. He is now concerned about the need to begin a work in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia.

In addition to the vision to plant '1689 churches' in NZ and neighbouring countries, the Association has initiated unity with other Reformed churches. The fostering of that kind of unity by which the churches represented will be strengthened and encouraged is vital, the more so when the extreme weakness of the Church scene in NZ is observed. Liberalism has wiped out whole sectors of evangelicalism and what remains is dominated almost entirely by charismatic obsessions. A well known charismatic church in Auckland recently has been torn apart by scandals and divisions which has done nothing to enhance the Christian gospel in the eyes of the world.

Due to the unity of this small but effective Association plus the unity engendered with other Reformed and evangelical churches, it is possible to plan united, well-attended rallies.

At Hamilton it was heartening to note that about 120 gather for the Lord's Day morning services. Students from Malaysia and Singapore are well represented.

The work of pioneering is one of extraordinary difficulty which requires patient endurance. We love the doctrines of grace but without the grace

of the doctrines all is in vain. The predestination of the Father is that we should be conformed to Christ. This is largely wrought in us through the aches and pains of growth. The establishment of the four churches in NZ has been slow. Isolation is a major problem.

At crucial times help has come from abroad. The first contact was made when Stanley and Marian Hogwood visited in 1973. That prepared the way for the first conference in the same year when it was the editor's privilege to minister with others to a surprisingly large number for a first time event. David Fountain provided valuable preaching and pastoral care in the Hamilton Church at a crucial time in their development. David Harman and Norman Porter gave two years each to the life of the Sovereign Grace church (where Bala now ministers) in Auckland. Geoff Thomas, Al Martin and Donald Macleod have been among those who have visited. Douglas MacMillan is at present visiting Australia and New Zealand. Iain Murray in Sydney is the nearest overseas counsellor at a mere 1,200 miles away.

The four churches together seek to keep in contact with and support Vijah Chandra in Fiji who in addition to pastoring one growing church is also involved in the development of another and watchful for the planting of a third.

The location of NZ at the other end of the earth highlights the nature and importance of inter-dependence. But underlying everything is our dependence upon Christ who is the chief cornerstone. Let his glory be our supreme aim as we seek to contribute to laying church foundations for the future.

# Has the light been extinguished in Sri Lanka?

by Ramalingam Balasubramaniam

*History of the Church has always proved that nothing, including persecution can destroy the work of God. Sri Lanka, known as the 'Paradise and pearl of the Indian ocean' has seen political unrest and Ecumenical crisis in recent years. But the light continues to shine!*

## **Grace Evangelical Church – Colombo, Sri Lanka**

This church was planted in 1974 with the return of Cecil Siriwardene to Colombo after his theological training in Wales. It began to draw differing people from the society, mainly Tamils and Sinhalese. The church became well known for its true biblical preaching and teaching as this was very rare in many denominations in Sri Lanka. Services were held in English as the church was reaching mostly the middle class people who were able to converse well in that language. Though 1979 was my first introduction to Grace Evangelical church, it was in 1982 that we as a church decided to reach the Tamil population in Colombo who were not able to speak English. After my training at Lanka Bible College for some time I was appointed as Associate Pastor and we started an evening worship service in Tamil on the Lord's day. It proved to be a great success in a short time. One church with its two congregations of Tamils and Sinhalese came to know what true peace in Christ was.

1983 was the year that Sri Lanka, for the first time, witnessed nationwide racial violence. Grace Evangelical church came to a standstill as a result of this. Most of the people in the church were affected and moved to northern Sri Lanka where the majority of the Tamils

lived and others left to other countries. The unrest continued for months. It was a time of trial for the Tamil believers. I was led to leave the shores of Sri Lanka in 1984 for further training in Wales. Cecil accepted a position with 'Christian Nationals' in the U.S.A. in the same year.

During this time things began to change in Sri Lanka. The church was able to regroup and called a person from Youth for Christ as Pastor of the church. He is a Dutch descent Sri Lankan who is not a Tamil nor Sinhalese. At the end of 1985 I returned to Sri Lanka with my family to co-pastor the church with him. During my stay there I was able to influence the congregation to some extent in the doctrines of grace. We saw many young Tamil believers wanting to learn more about free grace. I was able to train some of them for future leadership in the church. We also saw the Tamil congregation in particular literally changing three times during our stay there. The reason was that most of the Tamils leaving the country from the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka came in to Colombo to attend to things regarding departure from the country. The church had a great time in giving the gospel to many who were passing through. In 1986 I was led by the Lord to leave the country for New Zealand. Now Grace Evangelical Church has two full-time



*Recent converts in the Tamil congregation, Colombo, Sri Lanka. There are also Sinhalese and English congregations meeting in the same venue.*

workers and three congregations consisting of Sinhalese, Tamils and Burghers. Services are held in three languages. The light continues to shine!

#### **Mannar Christian Fellowship – Mannar, Sri Lanka**

In 1978 a Tamil student converted while he was studying in England committed himself to return to Sri Lanka. He came to know the free grace doctrines while he was in England and dedicated himself to teach them to his people in northern Sri Lanka. His influence upon young people and others saw many converts among the Tamils. He and others began to spread the gospel and also to minister to weak nominal churches.

This group's influence also spread to the north west coast of Sri Lanka and a town called Mannar. This predominantly Roman Catholic area witnessed the

work of God in an unusual manner. Many young people from the Catholic church were converted. Inevitably their new understanding of the scripture brought them into conflict with the church authorities and a group of almost entirely young people left, with the view of forming a church. Navai Manoharan from the northern group had some contact with these people and eventually left for Mannar to work full-time with the church.

As the fighting between the Tamil rebels and the government troops brought many difficulties to the people in the area, they began to cross over to India into the refugee camps. With them went the young leaders of the church who had great opportunity to spread the gospel among the refugees. Many were converted including some members of the rebel Tamil groups.

*(Continued on page 29)*

*The First Baptist Church at Clinton, Louisiana was founded about 150 years ago, and built up on the grand truths of sovereign grace as expounded by the founding fathers who are described by Tom Nettles in the booklet An Introduction to the Southern Baptists. A very different climate has prevailed this century. It will take men of brave heart and Lutherlike spirit to bring the churches back to their Biblical foundations.*

## Reformation in the First Baptist Church, Clinton, Louisiana

This is a Southern Baptist Church which has been pastored by Bill Ascol for four years. He is now *Reformation Today* agent for the Southern States of the U.S.A. Founded on the doctrines of sovereign grace, the church was begun in 1836. Congregations of over 200 filled the 115 year old church building and enjoyed Bill Ascol's expository preaching when he first arrived. There appears to be in many traditional Southern Baptist churches a 'floating congregation' that re-surfaces every time a new preacher arrives on the scene. When the novelty wears off, many of these people disappear.

In the case of the First Baptist Church of Clinton, it was the application of truth that caused offence to members. About ten weeks after Pastor Ascol began his ministry in Clinton, it became necessary to apply church discipline to those living in scandalous sin, chief among them a man and a woman who were in prominent places of leadership in the congregation. The congregation had never before heard of such an outrageous procedure! The principle of discipline was proved by the pastor both from the Scriptures and by the historic records of the church. (Nearly 100 years earlier, at a regular business meeting, the church had reaffirmed its commitment to Biblical church discipline.) Because of a

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*(continued from page 28)*

Numbers of them were trained in the gospel service. During this time Navai Manoharan was sent by the church to England for training in eldership at Calvary Evangelical church, Brighton, which provided generous support to this church from the beginning.

The church is slowly returning back to northern Sri Lanka from India even though the problems are not yet over.

They will begin to function as an Independent Reformed Baptist Church from August this year. Navai Manoharan has completed his studies at Calvary Evangelical Church. He was ordained as the Pastor of Mannar Christian Fellowship in January this year. He is now back in Sri Lanka to provide leadership to the church. Through all the civil unrest in this beautiful country there blossoms a Reformed witness for the glory of our Sovereign God. The light continues to shine!



*Bill and Karen Ascol*

determination on the part of the pastor, deacon body, and the majority of the active membership to re-establish church discipline, a great exodus occurred. Over 200 members resigned membership and aligned themselves with various other churches in the area because they disagreed with the propriety of church discipline and/or they rejected the doctrines of grace.

While the furore was going on, the Holy Spirit honoured his own Word with conversions. At the same time, there were 75 who have come to an intelligent love of the Reformed Faith in all its biblical comprehensiveness. The pastor, deacon body, and faithful members have continued in the work of reformation with respect to church life.

It was discovered that over 100 members were on the church roll who were living in other parts. (These are called 'non-resident church members' in Southern Baptist nomenclature!) Only three responded to a circular letter enquiring about their membership. All were subsequently removed from the membership roll. At present over 100 'inactive resident church members' (more SBC nomenclature) are being personally contacted one by one in an effort to recover them into a vital relationship with the life and ministry of the First Baptist Church. With one or two exceptions, many have remained obstinate and therefore have been or will be removed from the membership.

This latest dimension of reformation in congregational life has resulted in various forms of financial pressure being brought to bear upon certain faithful members of the congregation, as well as multitudinous slanderous accusations hurled in their direction. The reformation has advanced to the point where there is now a congregation of about 100 who are regularly experiencing a steady building up of the quality of the fellowship. Having descended to the nadir, the congregation now evidences strong bonds of love and unity. The church under the policy of quality rather than quantity is a body which fulfils the description of 1 Corinthians 1:1,2.



*Billy Andrews, Bill and Karen Ascol, Lyn Hulse, and children  
Joshua, Joy and Jason Ascol*

With regard to the church at Clinton, the trauma of many resigning, some prematurely, from membership, has been costly in terms of time and emotional energy for the pastor and his wife. One of his church members who, subsequent to Pastor Ascol's arrival, has come into a wholly new appreciation of the free grace of God Triune is an ex-professional footballer and now a dairy farmer, named Billy Andrews. The two of them trained together in the gymnasium and in the road, which was a great help in sustaining an exacting work load. A continual decline in the dairy industry, however, meant that Billy Andrews had time only to think of work in terms of survival. The intensity of the crisis has lessened for the time being, so that both he and Pastor Ascol can think of recovering from the enormous trials through which they have passed and return to a normal and balanced life, which will include more time with their families and time to regain physical fitness.

The door opened to the Southern Baptist church led by Bill Ascol is a door wide open. In addition to local evangelism, good relationships exist with many other churches as well as the large Southern Baptist Seminary in New Orleans (1,500 students). We spent time with leaders there who have come to appreciate our Reformed inheritance. The book *The Great Invitation* is particularly relevant at this time.

There are some who reject the idea of reforming churches that are set in traditional ways. When Bill Ascol insisted on discipline, he used Daniel Wray's booklet on the subject, published by the Banner. Several of the men on the deacon body rejected the booklet outright because it was not written by a Southern Baptist and was not published by official Southern Baptist publishing concerns! Bill was then compelled to reproduce proofs for the necessity of church discipline from several Southern Baptist sources (such as J. L. Dagg's *Manual of Theology and Church Order*; B. H. Carroll's work on *Baptist Doctrines*; P. H. Mell's *Handbook of Church Discipline: A Summary of Discipline of the Charleston Baptist Association*; et al).

# THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST CONFERENCE

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It is true that in many Southern Baptist churches reformation seems impossible. The churches operate on the independent system, and pastors are hired and fired on a vast scale. The average Southern Baptist length of pastorate for the whole denomination is 1.8 years (the pastors might as well live in specially designed mobile caravans, 'pastormobiles', at that rate!). Nevertheless, in such a large denomination, there are churches where there is an appetite for expository preaching with a desire for the application of that teaching to church and family life. While acknowledging the awesome nature of the task, we should not be cynical but be grateful that there are men well equipped and called to accomplish a work of reform in churches, bringing them back to the solid doctrinal foundations of the founding fathers.

Not far away in Baton Rouge is the centre of the Jimmy Swaggert Empire, now discredited even more by Swaggert's recent defiance of the discipline placed upon him by the denomination called the Assemblies of God, because of his adulterous record. Swaggert is known for his fierce denunciation of the doctrine of election. He has specialised in vivid language and uses five adjectives to describe Calvinism: detestable, damnable, devilish, deplorable, despicable. We drove through the Swaggert complex which includes a bookstore in which the only items for sale are by Swaggert: literature, cassettes, videos. We also drove past his palatial home (valued at over \$1 million dollars) which is hidden from plain view by a brick fence that cost a purported \$300,000 to build.

In a nation in which the gospel has been brought into disrepute, and the doctrines of grace distorted and maligned, it is imperative that there be churches where biblical standards are maintained, not legalistically or imperiously, but justly and lovingly; and also where the preaching can be relied upon as faithful, practical and spiritual.

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