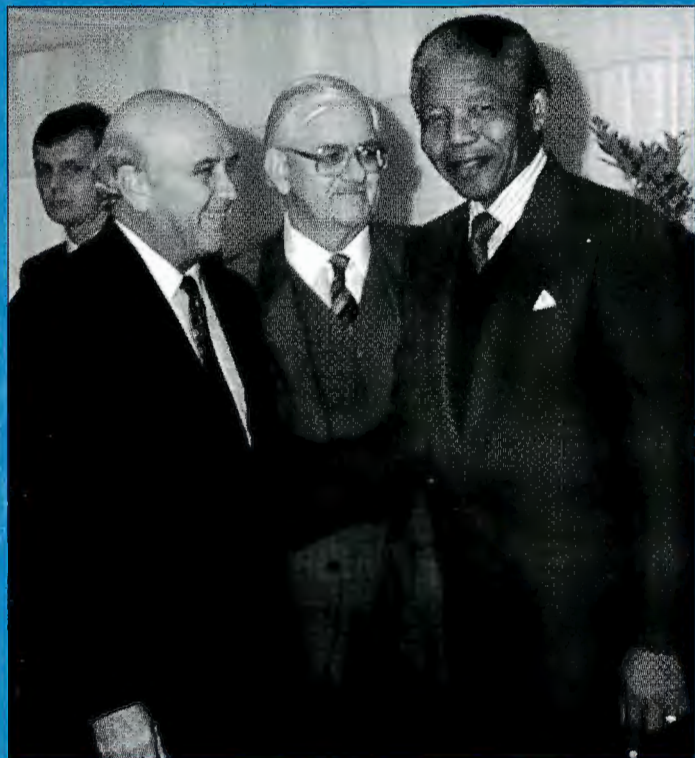

REFORMATION TODAY



MARCH/APRIL 1994

138

International Baptist Conference, Toronto, Canada

October 17th-20th, 1994

Theme: *The Believer as Salt and Light*

Details from:

TBS, 130 Gerrard St E, Toronto M5A 3T4, Canada

A meeting for members of the IFRB (International Fellowship of Reformed Baptists) is planned to take place at the conclusion of the IBC.



David Straub

Carey Family Conference

25th - 30 July 1994

Bolney, West Sussex, UK

Visiting speaker, David Straub of
RB Mission Services, USA

Theme: *Daniel and How to Live in
a Pagan Society*

Details from: Mrs M Keulemans,
4 Fry Crescent, Oakhurst,
Burgess Hill RH16 8TP
Phone 0444 871806

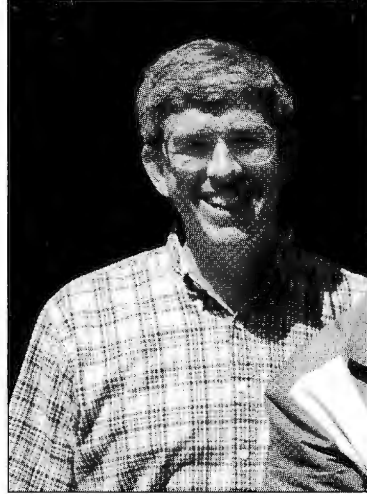
The Carey Family Conference is booked for
24th - 29th July 1995
at Quinta Hall, Weston Rhyn, OSWESTRY,
North Shropshire.

Front cover: *F W de Klerk and Nelson Mandela. The photo was taken during December 1993 at the time that they received the Nobel Peace Prize. As the election scheduled for April 27, 1994 approaches, the situation in South Africa is critical. The prayers of Christians everywhere are urged that violence will be minimised and that a stable, new and better South Africa will emerge (1 Tim 2:1-4). For a report on the Dutch Reformed Church see the News section.*

Editorial

Tom Nettles and Spurgeon on the Atonement

Tom Nettles demonstrates how Spurgeon proclaimed definite atonement clearly, at the same time being uninhibited in the free offers of the gospel. It would be difficult to find anyone who enjoyed so great an unction in addressing the unpersuaded as Spurgeon. God honoured his Christ-centred ministry in an astonishing fashion.



Tom Nettles

Spurgeon's ministry, his doctrine and especially the manner of his free offer preaching, forms the substance of the 145 page paperback *A Marvelous Ministry* published by Soli Deo Gloria, Suite 2311 The Clark Building, 717 Liberty Avenue, Pittsburg PA 15222. Any help our readers can give to promote the Puritan books published by SOLI DEO GLORIA will be appreciated.

The Free Offer Controversy

*The British Reformed Fellowship*¹ was set up in 1990 by a group 'concerned for the defence and propagation of the historic Reformed faith in the British Isles'. It is rightly appalled by the downward trend in doctrine in Britain, and 'takes the threat of Arminianism seriously'. However, the BRF regards those who teach 'a universal love of God for all men' as Arminian. Is this so? This is the question addressed by Bob Sheehan in this issue. The magazine promoted by the BRF, *The Standard Bearer* represents a position which denies the love of God for all mankind, denies the free offer of the gospel, and is hostile to the doctrine of revival. It is important to note that the denial of common grace, or the love of God for all men, cuts the throat of the gospel so that it bleeds to death. The gospel is good news sincerely addressed to and offered to all sinners without exception. We are grateful to Tom Wells for permission to use material from his valuable work on 'The Free Offer Controversy'.

Way back in 1958 the *Banner of Truth* (11th issue) made an historic move in publishing an outstanding article on the free offer of the gospel by Iain Murray. The free offer was shown from Scripture to be to all without distinction; particular to every individual; an offer which is real and sincere; an offer which embodies command, urgency and solemnity.

This was followed up in 1959, *Banner of Truth* (issue 14) with a cogent article by John Bonar titled *The universal calls and invitations of the gospel consistent with the total depravity of man and particular redemption*. The Banner of Truth has never swerved from this Reformed and Puritan distinctive.

The Puritan View of the Sabbath

Tragically the issue of the Sabbath continues to divide brethren, particularly in the USA. The erosion of the Lord's Day by our secular humanistic pagan climate is a calamity for the Church and for society. The Puritan view of the Sabbath is set out in a paper presented at the Westminster Conference in 1981.² There is not one line of that paper that I would want to change. However conviction of the Puritan view does not necessitate separation from brethren of a different persuasion.

Life in union with Christ is the only way in which we can keep God's commandments from the heart without legalism. The exacting nature of this spiritual exercise is appreciated when we read our Lord's exposition of the sixth and seventh commandments (Matt 5:21-30). Isaiah 58:13,14, I take to be the spiritual manner in which we keep the creational and moral law of the fourth commandment. Delighting in the Lord's Day may well mean that we prefer its joys to that of baseball or golf and that without being Pharisees. The avoidance of antinomianism on one side and legalism on the other was much in sight in the Carey Conference reported by Russell Bridges.

References

- 1 Readers of *Evangelical Times* received the brochure of the BRF in a recent issue.
- 2 *Aspects of Sanctification*, 120pp paperback available from John Harris, 8 Back Knowl Road, MIRFIELD, West Yorks WF14 9SA. Price including post £2.40 in the UK and 5 dollars for USA.

Spurgeon's Message of Christ's Atoning Sacrifice

Tom Nettles

All Spurgeon's preaching requires to be set within the context of the centrality of the cross. He said,

I do believe that we slander Christ when we think that we are to draw the people by something else than the preaching of Christ crucified. We know that the greatest crowd in London has been held together these thirty years by nothing but the preaching of Christ crucified. Where is our music? Where is our oratory? Where is anything of attractive architecture, or beauty of ritual? 'A bare service,' they call it. Yes, but Christ makes up for all the deficiencies.¹

The Lord Jesus Christ on his cross of redemption was the centre, circumference and summation of the preaching ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Its themes he repeated continuously and tirelessly but always with a freshness of power and passion that would startle the hearers and set them in the congregation at Galatia before whose eyes Christ was plainly portrayed as crucified. He was a cataract, an avalanche, a flooding Mississippi in his unrelenting emphasis on the death by crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Redemption is the 'heart of the gospel' and the 'essence of redemption is the substitutionary atonement of Christ'.² If in one analogy it is the heart, then in another it is 'the cornerstone of the gospel'; and when announcing it as his theme in some amazement he would ask himself before his congregation, 'How many times will this make, I wonder? The doctrine of Christ crucified is always with me.'³

Albert Barnes' opposition to limited atonement

In 1854, in Spurgeon's first full year as a pastor in London at the New Park Street pulpit, the commentator Albert Barnes published an article in *The Church Advocate* entitled 'A Limited Atonement Not to be Preached'. Barnes claimed that 'there is nothing that more cramps the powers, fetters the hands, and chills the heart of the preacher, than such a doctrine'. Barnes, moreover, found the doctrine so objectionable that he said not only that it should not be preached, but it could not be preached.

It is found in ancient books on divinity, written in a sterner age, and when the principles of interpretation were less understood, and the

large and liberal nature of the gospel was less appreciated. It is petrified in certain creeds maintained by the church – made firm, like fossil remains in a transition state, when ancient opinions were passing to a more liberal form. It is taught in a few seminaries, where men feel themselves constrained to repress the warm emotions of their own minds to reach conclusions which they can scarcely avoid. But the doctrine is not preached, except when the heart is cold and dead. It is not preached when the soul is on fire with the love of men, and when the cross, in its true grandeur rises to view. It is never preached in a revival of religion - a proof, not feeble, that the doctrine is not true.⁴

Barnes could not have known that the warmest and most powerful preacher of the nineteenth century could and would preach the doctrine that Barnes found so unthinkable, and preach it without bringing a chill either to himself or his hearers.

Infinite value but special design

Spurgeon believed that there was infinite value in Christ's atonement, but special design.

Never could justice be more gloriously exalted in the presence of intelligent beings than by the Lord of all submitting himself to its requirements. There must be an infinite merit about his death: a desert unutterable, immeasurable. Methinks if there had been a million worlds to redeem, their redemption could not have needed more than this 'sacrifice of himself'. If the whole universe, teeming with worlds as many as the sands on the seashore, had required to be ransomed, that one giving up of the ghost might have sufficed as a full price for them all. However gross the insults which sin may have rendered to the law, they must be all forgotten, since Jesus magnified the law so abundantly, and made it so honourable by his death. I believe in the special design of our Lord's atoning death, but I will yield to no one in my belief in the absolutely infinite value of the offering which our Lord Jesus has presented; the glory of his person renders the idea of limitation an insult.⁵

For this reason Spurgeon used the nomenclature of limitation sparingly and with positive explanation in his exposition of the atonement. He preferred to speak of effectuality and certainty. But just as strongly, his consideration of

'limitation' as an insult led him to reject the concept of universal atonement. In fact he was glad to use the term 'limited' if one set the idea of 'general' opposite it, for such a limitation was really no limitation at all.

Now, beloved, when you hear any one laughing or jeering at a limited atonement, you may tell him this. General atonement is like a great wide bridge with only half an arch; it does not go across the stream: it only professes to go half way; it does not secure the salvation of anybody. Now, I had rather put my foot upon a bridge as narrow as Hungerford, which went all the way across, than on a bridge that was as wide as the world, if it did not go all the way across the stream.⁶

'It is quite certain, beloved,' Spurgeon reasons, 'that the death of Christ must have been effectual for the removal of those sins which were laid upon him.' We cannot conceive that Christ has died in vain. 'He was appointed of God to bear the sin of many,' and it is 'not possible that he should be defeated or disappointed of his purpose. Not in one jot or tittle will the intent of Christ's death be frustrated. Jesus shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. That which he meant to do by dying shall be done, and he shall not pour his blood upon the ground in waste in any measure or sense.'⁷ If he has been condemned, those united to him in his death as indicated by their faith in him shall in no wise come into condemnation.

In speaking on 'The Determination of Christ to Suffer for His People' Spurgeon considers why Christ refused the cup of wine mingled with myrrh. One of the reasons was that such a refusal was 'necessary to make the atonement complete'. If Christ had drunk from the cup the atonement would not have been valid because he would not have suffered 'to the extent that was absolutely necessary'. Christ suffered 'just enough, and not one particle more than was necessary for the redemption of his people'. The ransom price would not have been paid had the wine cup taken away part of his sufferings. Had as much as a grain of his suffering been mitigated 'the atonement would not have been sufficiently satisfactory'. Insufficiency to any degree would have condemned his people to perpetual despair. The utmost farthing must be paid; inexorable justice cannot omit a fraction of its claim. Christ must go the whole length of suffering.⁸

Rejection of universal atonement

Not only did Spurgeon see great comfort and assurance in the doctrine of limited atonement, he found the doctrine of universal atonement to be

positively destructive of the moral attributes of God. In volume 1 of his *Autobiography* Spurgeon gives a 'Defence of Calvinism' and includes a particularly striking defence of limited atonement.

Some persons love the doctrine of universal atonement because they say, 'It is so beautiful. It is a lovely idea that Christ should have died for all men; it commends itself', they say, 'to the instincts of humanity; there is something in it full of joy and beauty.' I admit there is, but beauty may be often associated with falsehood. There is much which I might admire in the theory of universal redemption, but I will just show what the supposition necessarily involves. If Christ on his cross intended to save every man, then he intended to save those who were lost before he died. If the doctrine be true, that he died for all men, then he died for some who were in hell before he came into this world, for doubtless there were even then myriads there who had been cast away because of their sins.

Once again, if it was Christ's intention to save all men, how deplorably has he been disappointed, for we have his own testimony that there is a lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, and into that pit of woe have been cast some of the very persons who, according to the theory of universal redemption, were bought with his blood. That seems to me a conception a thousand times more repulsive than any of those consequences which are said to be associated with the Calvinistic and Christian doctrine of special and particular redemption. To think that my Saviour died for men who were or are in hell, seems a supposition too horrible for me to entertain.

To imagine for a moment that he was the substitute for all the sons of men, and that God, having first punished the Substitute, afterwards punished the sinners themselves, seems to conflict with all my ideas of divine justice. That Christ should offer an atonement and satisfaction for the sins of all men, and that afterwards some of those very men should be punished for the sins for which Christ had already atoned, appears to me to be the most monstrous iniquity that could ever be imputed to Saturn, to Janus, to the goddess of the Thugs, or to the most diabolical heathen deities. God forbid that we should ever think thus of Jehovah, the just and wise and good!¹⁹

Encouragement in evangelism

This concept of a definite atonement encouraged Spurgeon in his evangelism also. When Jesus used the word 'many' he indicated a certainty in the efficacy of his death. But just as surely he meant 'many'. Not just a few, but 'many'. 'Let us expect to see large numbers brought within the sacred enclosure,' Spurgeon encouraged his congregation. Because the blood is shed for many, the masses must be compelled to come in. While a group of half a dozen converts gives us joy why should we not expect half a dozen thousand at once? 'Cast the great net into the sea,' Spurgeon challenged, and to his young men he urged, 'Preach the gospel in the streets of this crowded city, for it is meant for many.' And to personal workers he said, 'You who go from door to door, do not think you can be too hopeful, since your Saviour's blood is shed for many, and Christ's "many" is a very great many.' No one shall ever trust Christ in vain or find the atonement insufficient for him. 'O for a large hearted faith,' he cried, 'so that by holy effort we may lengthen our cords, and strengthen our stakes, expecting to see the household of our Lord become exceeding numerous.'

Conclusion

We can learn from Spurgeon the evangelistic power of definite atonement. His sermons surge and vibrate with the positive and optimistic application of the wondrous doctrine. Many who believe the doctrine seem secretly to believe that one should be forbidden to give public display of it. Spurgeon obviously meditated strongly on that biblical truth and found it to be a power with saints and sinners alike. It arms the evangelist with certainty and every sinner with hope. God saves sinners and will not bring this world to a close until the efficacy of Messiah's death has been fully satisfied.

References

- 1 Charles Spurgeon, 'The Crisis of This World' in *The Passion and Death of Our Lord*, vol 6 of *A Treasury of Spurgeon on the Life and Work of Our Lord*, 6 vols, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids 1979, p8. Hereafter this reference will be cited as *P & D*. The reader may assume hereafter also that all notes will be 'Charles Spurgeon' unless noted otherwise.
- 2 'The Heart of the Gospel', in *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, 15 vols. Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1977, 8:97.
- 3 'The Blood Shed for Many', in *P & D*, p34.
- 4 Albert Barnes, *The Church Advocate* 8.10.1854, p119.
- 5 *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, 1:348.
- 6 'Particular Redemption', *New Park Street*, 4:135, 136.
- 7 'Jesus the Substitute for his People', *Metro-politan Tabernacle*, 21:160.
- 8 'The Determination of Christ to Suffer for his People', *P & D*, p467.
- 9 *Autobiography*, 2 vols, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1962, 1:172.

The Free Offer Controversy

Tom Wells

What Precisely is the Question?

All sides agree that clearly defining our terms is the first step in trying to settle any issue. As so often happens, however, this is one major part of the difficulty connected with the question of the free offer of the gospel. Since I find myself more nearly in agreement with those who hold to the so-called 'free offer', I propose to accept the definition of one who opposes it, to be as fair as possible to all who are concerned.

Here is that definition:

The 'free offer of the gospel' is the teaching that God offers salvation to all men when the gospel is preached indiscriminately to all. The free offer teaches that God graciously and sincerely offers salvation to all who hear the preaching, and honestly and sincerely desires to save all of them.¹

The first thing about this definition is the fact that the free offer controversy could only have arisen among those who believe in God's sovereign election of some to eternal life and his sovereign reprobation of others. In other words, this is a controversy that is confined to *Reformed* circles, or a controversy among *Calvinists*. Other Christians would whole-heartedly embrace the free-offer doctrine without further discussion.

And this general acceptance outside the Reformed camp presents a temptation to some to read those who disagree with them out of the Reformed or Calvinistic camp. An objective observer will know what happens after that. One extreme is likely to be met with another at the opposite end of the spectrum.

The difficulty over the free offer may be put like this: since God has chosen to save some and pass others by, how can it be said that *he offers salvation to those he has decided not to save? Doesn't this make God of two minds, wanting all to be saved on one hand, and desiring only his elect to be saved on the other?* Anyone who cannot see that there is some difficulty here must have done very little thinking about theology. Indeed, for some, this is the rock upon which the whole idea of election, as understood by Calvinists, founders.

This question, of course, must be settled by Scripture. Does Scripture teach that *in some sense* God desires the conversion of the non-elect? A subsidiary

question has, however, arisen in connection with this controversy. Have Reformed theologians taught the free offer of the gospel and have they held that in some sense God desires the conversion of the non-elect?

The Scriptural Argument

The difficulty that we meet at the outset is this: almost all Christians of every persuasion have found the gospel a sincere offer of salvation made to all men.² This, however, cannot settle the question. However unlikely it may be that so many Christian men and women are wrong, their impressions are not enough. What is needed are specific texts. The battle, then, has been fought out over the texts of Scripture.

A further difficulty awaits us here, however. There are texts that have been alleged to teach that God has a favourable attitude to all men individually. These are the texts that have been used for the idea of common grace (the idea that God shows his favour toward all men in various ways such as sending them sunshine and rain). It is clear that such texts are not irrelevant to our task. But I have chosen to limit myself to a few texts that deal directly with the subject before us. Are there texts that teach that 'God sincerely offers salvation' to all who hear the gospel?

Those who have not studied the matter will be surprised that relatively few texts speak to the subject directly. The reason is this: the question is not about whether God calls all men to faith and repentance when the gospel is preached. The question is rather: does God in any sense *will or desire* the salvation of the non-elect who hear the gospel?

The following texts from Ezekiel have played an important role in the controversy (18:23,32; 33:11):

"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?... For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies" [literally "of one who dies"], declares the Lord GOD. Therefore, repent and live... Say to them, "As I live!" declares the Lord GOD, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?" (NASB)

On the surface these texts seem to teach the following: God takes no delight in anyone being lost. He rather finds delight in men repenting and receiving life. He desires *in some sense* that all who hear the gospel might be saved. Is this what Ezekiel teaches?

A consistent opponent of the free offer was Herman Hoeksema. Of the latter verse (Ezek 33:11) he has written:

It simply will not do, to make *wicked* in the first part refer to all wicked men without distinction. Such an interpretation is also guilty of doing violence to the text. For in the first part, the Lord declares wherein he has *no* pleasure; in the second part, he declares wherein he *does* have pleasure. We have to do, therefore, with a contrast. Now the Lord declares in the second part, that he has pleasure in this, that the wicked *turn and live*. He has pleasure, therefore, in the living of the wicked, *only* if he turns. Turning and living are inseparably connected with each other. But from this, it also follows that the wicked who do not turn are excluded from the first part of the text.³

This, of course, is just a small part of what Hoeksema writes on this verse.

Most people, I think will *not* find Hoeksema compelling here. The crux of his argument seems to me to amount to this. The verse really only describes God's attitude toward those who actually turn and live. On all others it is silent. But it is very difficult to read the verse in that way, or so it seems to me.

We turn now to two passages from Deuteronomy 5:29 and 32:28-29. In both God is speaking:

Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it may be well with them and their sons forever!... For they are a nation lacking in counsel, and there is no understanding in them. Would that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would discern their future! (NASB)

Most people I think in reading these words will see God desiring something for the nation of Israel that he had not necessarily decreed to give them.

John Calvin's Teaching

No one, I think, doubts that Calvin believed that God had settled the destinies of men according to his own decree. Nevertheless, Calvin looked upon the preaching of the gospel as an act of grace toward the non-elect.

David Engelsma, who opposes the idea of the free offer, devotes an entire chapter to *Calvin's Doctrine of the Call*. In it he says, 'Calvin does not regard the external call of the gospel as grace to all hearers or as an expression of God's sincere desire to save all.'⁴ Perhaps not, but how else can we explain the following words from John Calvin?

For even though his outward call renders inexcusable those who hear it and do not obey, *still it is truly considered evidence of God's grace*, by which he reconciles men to himself. Let us therefore regard the prophet's instruction that the death of the sinner is not pleasing to God as designed... *to make the wicked feel that their transgression is doubled* because they do not respond to God's great kindness and goodness.⁵

Further (p985) Calvin writes:

The wicked cannot claim they lack a sanctuary to which they may hie themselves from the bondage of sin inasmuch as they, out of their own ungratefulness, reject it when offered. Therefore since God's mercy is offered to both sorts of men through the gospel, it is faith – the illumination of God – that distinguishes between pious and impious...

Both these quotations seem to show that Calvin thought gospel preaching was an evidence of God's graciousness to the non-elect as well as to the elect. How else could he hold the non-elect as being guilty of not responding 'to God's great kindness and goodness'? How else could he hold that they were guilty of ingratitude for rejecting God's mercy? Let's hear Calvin once more:

When [God] first shines with the light of his Word upon the undeserving, he thereby shows a sufficiently clear proof of his free goodness. Here, then, God's boundless goodness is already manifesting itself but not to the salvation of all; for heavier judgment remains upon the wicked because they reject the testimony of God's love. (p967)

Does Calvin mean that they are guilty of rejecting the testimony of God's love to others?

All of these quotations show that Calvin recognises that God extends his goodness and love to the non-elect.⁶ But let me add one more quote from Calvin on Romans 10:21 as a free offer man:

Paul repeats the reason why God passes over to the Gentiles. It is because he sees that his grace is treated with contempt among the Jews... God says that he stretched forth his hands to Israel, whom he constantly called to himself by his Word, and did not cease to allure by every kind of favour. These are the two methods which God employs to call men, for in this way he proves his good will to them... [Contempt of his gospel] is all the more detestable the more strikingly God reveals his fatherly care in calling men to himself by his Word.⁷

Concluding Observations

At any time in the history of Reformed theology it was open to theologians to reason thus: God has decreed to save some and damn others and all else must be controlled by that fact. Salvation and damnation and that's that! All God's love goes to his elect and that is the end of the discussion.

Nevertheless, few actually took that course. *This is a remarkable fact and requires to be accounted for.*

Unlike some today who see the earlier position as not Reformed, these men claimed to find in Scripture God's love for all his creatures, and a common offer to all gospel hearers to participate in blessings connected with Christ.

If we recognise, as we must, development in Reformed theology over the centuries, it is not apparent that Herman Hoeksema's scheme is *the* legitimate development. The heart of the question seems to lie in this direction: Do all of God's desires culminate in his purposes? His purposes, of course, reflect his desires: but do they exhaust his desires?

This article has been gleaned from a 24 page exposition by Tom Wells, Notes on the Free Offer Controversy. Readers may obtain this booklet by writing to: Pastor Tom Wells, The King's Chapel, 7365 West Chester Road, West Chester, Ohio 45069, USA. Please enclose two dollars to cover cost and postage.

References

- 1 Barrett L Gritters, *Grace Uncommon*, The Evangelism Society of the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, Michigan, p13. I commend this booklet for its moderate tone.
- 2 That this is true of the *Reformed* as well I will show when we come to the historical argument.
- 3 The quotation is taken from a mimeographed paper entitled, An Interpretation of Ezekiel 33:11. It is handstamped with the words: The Evangelism Committee/Protestant Reformed Church/16511 South Park Avenue/South Holland/Illinois 60473. In a short preface David Engelsma explains that he has translated this from a Dutch language work by Hoeksema.
- 4 David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, 1980, p84
- 5 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T McNeill editor, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960, p983. The italics are mine.
- 6 See also Calvin's discussion of Romans 2:4-5 in his commentary. It is instructive to contrast his recognition of God's goodness to the non-elect with Herman Hoeksema's effort to avoid the same conclusion in this text in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, 1973, p119.
- 7 John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, Torrance & Torrance editors, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, p236. He goes on to say (p237) that God is not wearied 'in showing kindness to the Jews, although his unceasing care for them has no effect' (italics mine). Here Calvin follows Paul in finding fatherly love for the non-elect in God.

Reflections from R L Dabney

Now, no straightforward mind can ever be satisfied that the utterance of entreaties to shun destruction is not the expression of compassion, if they come from a sincere person. . . . Do all the solemn and tender entreaties of God to sinners express no more, as to the non-elect, than a purpose in God, uncompassionate and merely rectoral, to acquit himself of his legislative function towards them? To speak after the manner of men, have all these apparently touching appeals after all *no heart* in them? We cannot but deem it an unfortunate logic which constrains a man to this view of them. How much more simple and satisfactory to take them for just what they express? . . .

We are told (Luke 19:41,42) that Christ wept over the very men whose doom of reprobation he then pronounced. Again, the question is raised by them, If Christ felt this tender compassion for them, why did he not exert his omnipotence for their effectual calling? And their best answer seems to be, that here it was not the divine nature in Jesus that wept, but the humanity only. Now, it will readily be conceded that the divine nature was incapable of the *pain* of sym-

pathetic passion and of the *agitation* of grief; but we are loath to believe that this precious incident is no manifestation of the passionless, unchangeable, yet infinitely benevolent pity of the divine nature. For, first, it would impress the common Christian mind with a most painful feeling to be thus seemingly taught that holy humanity is more generous and tender than God.

The humble and simple reader of the Gospels has been taught by them that there was no excellence in the humanity which was not the effect and effluence of the corresponding ineffable perfection in the divinity. . . .

'He is the image of the invisible God'; He is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person'; 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?' (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; John 14:9). It is our happiness to believe that when we see Jesus weeping over lost Jerusalem, we 'have seen the Father', we have received an insight into the divine benevolence and pity. And therefore this wondrous incident has been so clear to the hearts of God's people in all ages.

From *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, vol 1, BoT, 1967, pp. 306-309.

Is there a Love of God for All Mankind?

Bob Sheehan

During 1993, for reasons which are not clear, a number of articles from the UK and USA have appeared which have argued that Calvinism is opposed to the idea of a love of God for all mankind, a love which extends to the non-elect. One such asserts, 'It is not and never has been Calvinistic to believe in a love of God for all mankind.'¹

Is this assertion accurate? If it is being claimed that God does not love all men electingly and savingly then no Calvinist should dispute that. However, it is not a lack of electing love which is in view but a lack of any love. The argument is that there is 'not a single passage that clearly speaks of a love of God for those who are not and never will be saved', and that there are 'hundreds of passages that speak of the eternal, unchangeable and abiding hatred of God for those who continue unbelieving and unrepentant and who never are saved'.²

Let us then turn to some of the leading Calvinistic theologians and test the claim that it 'never has been Calvinistic to believe in a love of God for all mankind' and let us consider some of their comments on scriptural

passages. We shall take just one or two major theologians from each century since the Reformation.

The Sixteenth Century – John Calvin (1509-64)

It is evident that Calvin accepted that God showed a general love of benevolence to all men. Commenting on Acts 14:17-18, he wrote, 'For why do the sun and stars shine in the heavens except to be of service to men? Why does rain fall from heaven and why does the earth bring forth its fruits if it is not to provide men with food to eat?... God lavishes more on men than their need requires... However mean we may be, the fatherly love of God still breaks through, even to the unworthy. In particular mankind as a whole has evidence that the benefits of God, in which he is seen to be our Father, never cease.'³ It is clear that here Calvin was not referring to electing love but providing love.

Commenting on Mark's statement that the Lord Jesus loved the 'rich young ruler', even though he was to turn from Christ, Calvin notes, 'God embraces in fatherly love, none but his children, whom he has regenerated with the Spirit of adoption... But God is sometimes said to love those whom he does not approve or

justify.⁷⁴ God's love is not limited to the elect. There is a love even for those who display vices which are hateful to God.

**The Seventeenth Century –
Francis Turretin (1623-87) and
John Owen (1616-83)**

In his discussion of the love of God, Turretin of Geneva saw that love as an expression of God's goodness. 'From goodness flows love by which he communicates himself to the creature and (as it were) wills to unite himself with and to do good to it, but in diverse ways and degrees according to the diversity of objects. Hence is usually made a threefold distinction in the divine love: the first, that by which he follows the creatures, called love of the creature; the second, that by which he embraces men, called love of men; the third, which is specially exercised towards the elect and is called the love of the elect.'⁷⁵ Turretin obviously sees a distinction between the love of men in general and the love of the elect.

The distinction between a general and special love of God was not lost on John Owen either. He commented, 'That God is good to all men, and bountiful, being a wise, powerful and liberal provider for the works of his hands, in and by innumerable dispensations and various communications of his goodness to them, and may in that regard be said to have a universal love for them all is granted; but that God loveth all and every man alike,

with that eternal love which is the fountain of his giving Christ for them and to them, and all good things with him, is not the least intimated.'⁷⁶ Owen recognised a love for all and an electing love for some.

**The Eighteenth Century –
John Gill (1697-1771)**

Commenting on Matthew 5:48, Gill wrote, 'Such, who profess God to be their father, ought to imitate him particularly in their love to men, which ought to be extended to the same objects, as the divine goodness is; that, as he shows regard in a providential way, to all men, good and bad, just and unjust, and as his tender mercies are over all his works; so ought they to love all men with a natural affection, and hate no man, no, not their enemies: for he that loves only his friends, and not his enemies, loves imperfectly; he does not take in the whole compass of objects his love is to extend to; and as God loves sincerely and without dissimulation, so should they... be ye sincere and upright in your love to all men as your heavenly Father is hearty and sincere in all his affections to them.'⁷⁷ Gill saw no need to deny God's hearty love to all men.

**The Nineteenth Century –
James Thornwell (1812-1862)**

Thornwell stated, 'It is often forgotten that love is ascribed to God under two or three different aspects. Some-

times it expresses the complacency and approbation with which he views the graces which his own Spirit has produced in the hearts of his children; and in this sense it is plain that God can only be said to love the saints... Sometimes God's benevolence and general mercy are intended, such as he bestows on the just and the unjust, the evil and the good... The special love of God is confined exclusively to the elect. The general benevolence of God is common, but it implies no purpose of salvation at all; and, therefore, in that sense, God may be said to love the reprobate and disobedient.⁸ The distinction remains!

**The Twentieth Century –
Louis Berkhof (1887-1957) and
John Murray (1898-1975)**

In his Systematic Theology, Berkhof wrote, 'When the goodness of God is exercised towards his rational creatures, it assumes the higher character of love, and this love may again be distinguished according to the objects on which it terminates... He does not even withdraw his love completely from the sinner in his present sinful state, though the latter's sin is an abomination to him, since he recognises even in the sinner his image-bearer... At the same time he loves believers with a special love, since he contemplates them as his spiritual children in Christ.'⁹

In the same vein, Murray comments on Matthew 5:44-45; Luke 6:35-36,

'Here the disciples are called upon to emulate in their own sphere and relations the character of God, their Father, in his own sphere and relations. God is kind and merciful to the unthankful and evil; he makes his sun to rise upon evil and good, and sends rain upon just and unjust. Both on the ground of express statement and on the ground of what is obviously implied in the phrases "sons of your Father" and "sons of the Most High", there can be no escape from the conclusion that goodness and beneficence, kindness and mercy are here attributed to God even in his relations with the ungodly. And this simply means that the ungodly are the recipients of blessings that flow from the love, goodness, kindness and mercy of God.'¹⁰

I leave it to the reader to judge whether or not the assertion is true that 'It is not and never has been Calvinistic to believe in a love of God for all mankind'.

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Interview with Nico van der Walt

Nico van der Walt is the pastor of Antipas Baptist Church in Vereeniging, Transvaal, South Africa. He is a personal member of IFRB. The following interview with the editor took place at Emmanuel Church, Roodepoort (pastor Martin Holdt) 30th Nov 1993.



Your name leads us to expect that you are of Afrikaans origin. Could you tell us about your background?

Yes, my origins are entirely Afrikaans. I do not know of a single English speaking person in my family history. My father was a member of the Afrikaans broederbond. He was an elder in the Gereformeerde Kerk.

Most Afrikaans speaking people, who form 60 percent of the white population of South Africa, belong to one of the Dutch Reformed Churches. The Gereformeerde Kerk is known as the most conservative of the three main groupings and represents about ten percent of the DRC constituency. The middle and largest group has declined into liberalism but we think of the Gereformeerde grouping in which you grew up as the orthodox Bible believing sector. Can you tell us more about that?

The church is largely nominal. This denomination is of Dutch lineage, influenced by Abraham Kuiper. The doctrine is paedobaptist but along the lines of presumptive regeneration. Providing there is no gross sin in covenant children they are accepted as Christian and as church members. The result is a predominantly nominal membership.

What about the ministers? Do you believe that they are converted?

Sad to say there is little evidence of real spiritual life among the ministers. Of course there are exceptions and there are a few who are forthrightly evangelical.

What about your education?

I studied civil engineering at Stellenbosch University. After that I worked as a professional engineer for about five years. I was due to commence working for a doctorate in the sixth year but due to my change of heart this never materialised.

How did you become converted?

I was very aware of the authority of Scripture and the holiness of God. After high school I thought I was called to the ministry and attended seminary but after six months I realised that I was misguided. I changed to engineering.

Later, at the age of 28 I came under an intense conviction of sin. This lasted about 18 months and resulted in my conversion. My calling to the ministry was involved in this change of heart. At that time I was in love with my career and in love with money. The spiritual conflict was intense. When it was over I was resolved to go forward into the ministry. Seven years of seminary study are required to be a Dutch Reformed (Gereformeerde) minister but as a graduate my course was reduced to six years.

Did your wife agree with this plan?

By this time I had been married for three years. My spiritual convictions and conversion were traumatic for my wife who was not converted. Eighteen months later her heart was changed. However this period was very disturbing for us both.

Where did you train for the ministry and how did you finance your course?

My course was at Potchefstroom University. For two years I saved all I could. We did not have adequate funding. On the basis of my calling we trusted that provision would be made and went forward by faith. There was no church backing by way of finance. Our resources were depleted after two months but the Lord provided in remarkable ways for over two more years. Then I was offered a position as a senior lecturer in engineering. This concurrent way of lecturing and studying was extremely demanding but that is the way we came through.

When you completed your seminary training what did you do about a calling to a church?

About half way through my final year I became involved with the Charismatics. I would like to explain why I was open to their free kind of approach. You will appreciate that I had not heard the gospel as such in my denomina-

tion. In that sense I felt cheated. It may not be the same for others but that is how it was for me. I did not feel that I owed anything to my denomination. In addition to this I had been influenced by my experience of the world. For instance in my secular work I had spent some time on a hydro-electric scheme on the borders of Angola. There engineers from 14 different nations were involved. Without exception they were all atheistic secular men. All of them were critical of churches yet all of them were open to the gospel and to Christ. This challenged me deeply to think about the character of the churches and the people and attitudes that form them.

I became more and more convinced that the church should consist of a called-out people, a holy people, a people of genuine faith. This brought me to face up to the question of believers' baptism. I read Pentecostal books on baptism but these did not help at all because the issues of the covenant are ignored. That simplistic approach can never help those with a Reformed background. Ultimately I read Paul K Jewett's book on Baptism and the Covenant and also David Kingdon's book *Children of Abraham*. When I grasped the issues explained in these books I knew that I could never be anything but a Baptist. Accordingly both my wife and I resigned from the Gereformeerde Kerk. We were baptised as believers. It was at that time I became involved with the Charismatic church and began to plant a Charismatic church in Potchefstroom. In the first two and a half years this grew to 72 members.

After two and a half years in this new church at Potchefstroom I was called to plant another Charismatic church at Vereeniging in the Vaal triangle. This church grew rapidly. I ministered there for five years. However the lack of theology among the Charismatics distressed me. I read Lloyd-Jones and J I Packer in particular. These writings enabled me to grow in a Puritan, God-centred approach.

What happened when you began to change in your theology?

Coming into an understanding of the implications of Reformed theology I saw the shallowness of the Charismatic movement and their great need for theological understanding. It was then that an opportunity came to start a theological training centre in the Cape Peninsula. On the surface this looked wonderful. In fact it soon came to disaster. There was a collision. I was put out of fellowship. Suddenly I was without a job and no prospects. The date was 1990. This was an overwhelming 'Job-like' experience.

What happened as a result of this painful experience?

As never before I was compelled to think through my entire theological position. This fortified my understanding of the Reformed faith. It confirmed

the truth of believers' baptism. I had to think my way through the problem of guidance. What about those prophecies made about my coming to the Cape which had back-fired? Through an intense study of the Scripture I came both intellectually and experimentally to the deep conviction of the all-sufficiency of Scripture. I came to the cessationist position and now reject the idea of continued prophecy and tongues as God's way of completing the canon.

A way of economic survival was opened to me through a temporary teaching post in a school for missionary training at Wellington in the Cape. Then to my amazement I was called back to the Charismatic church in Vereeniging. They trusted me in spite of the collision, crisis and dismissal through which I had passed. I told them that theologically I was not the same. I had changed. But they insisted that they wanted me back. And so I returned to that pastorate.

Since returning, the church for the most part has accepted and embraced the theology which I have shared with them although a few families left as they were not able to accept Reformed doctrine. I have concentrated on God-centred expository preaching. The church has continued to grow and about 20 have been added to our membership during the last two years.

Your Charismatic church was part of the extreme Restorationist group. How do you look back on that now?

I should explain that I was always a very conservative kind of Charismatic and not at all typical. My Reformed background always influenced me. I never believed in a two-stage work of the Holy Spirit. We did try to practise prophecies, tongue speaking and healings. There was more reality in the healings but the other parts were not convincing. Also I have always rejected the 'health and wealth' prosperity gospel preached in South Africa especially by the Rhema and Hatfield Churches.

Looking at the whole situation in perspective, what is the overall hope for Reformation among the Charismatics?

The basic problem is one of subjectivity and man-centredness. I find that the problem is the desire of the people for new sensations and fashions. I remember hearing one of the Charismatic leaders saying that we need to keep the expectation level of the people high. There has always to be some new thing. Lack of teaching allows gullibility to persist. Charismatics do not analyse. They do not think issues through. There is an underlying need for reality, a need to accept the reality of pain and trial. The centrality of the cross needs to replace the centrality of sensation.

What about the prospect of reformation in the Gereformeerde Church?

I have the highest esteem for the godly ministers that work in the denomination of my birth and especially those who labour in missionary situations. I appreciate that so far modernism has been resisted and kept out. But now there is an increasing emphasis on academic issues. This can so easily lead to modernism. This catches my breath. I am extremely anxious about this trend. A fatal direction can so easily come, and defection from fidelity to the Scriptures. But to me the chronic problem is infant baptism and corresponding presumptive regeneration. Infant baptism sustains the nominal character of the Gereformeerde Church. It is a terrible error. It deceives multitudes. For this reason we should perhaps call it heresy.

What about your views of the future of South Africa?

I try to be realistic about all the threats of violence and even the possibility of civil war. But over the last few months I have become more optimistic. I believe we will pull through and adapt ourselves to the changes. It may well be that we will have to endure a period, even several years of terrorism. Yet I believe the country will settle down again. I do not think the right wing can reasonably stay out of the new South Africa. I truly believe that 95 percent of the population are heartily sickened by violence and long for peace.

What is your hope for the Reformed faith in Africa South?

Especially encouraging is the Reformed movement in Zambia. I think we still need a break-through in South Africa. I have experienced the power of truth in my own life and ministry. I must therefore be optimistic about its power to change others. Up to now growth has been slow but I have every confidence that the truth will continue to grow significantly.

Do you believe there will be revival in South Africa?

I do pray for revival. I struggle with this because of what has happened in post-Christian secular Europe. This makes me wonder whether we too have not been given over to judgment. Has the Lord given us over to our sins? Nevertheless many sincere Christians are praying for revival and that in itself gives us hope for revival and for the future.

Jude and the False Prophets

The letter to Jude and the second chapter of II Peter address the question of false prophets in the Church. The problem with present day false prophets is that they are not like the heretical teachers described in Jude's letter. The false prophets of Jude's day were apparently trying to convince believers that being saved by grace gave them license to sin since their sins would no longer be held against them.

In other words these false prophets were morally lawless. Their characteristics fitted a particular mould which may not be the case with false prophets today. Their behaviour was grossly immoral. They did not hesitate to use the Lord's work to gain money. Their principal interest was themselves and their own gain. They had no qualms about joining the lovefeasts of the godly. They were clouds without rain: trees without fruit. The false prophets described by Jude were rudely aggressive. They spoke abusively of any who dared oppose them or correct them. They were like unreasoning animals.

False prophets today are politely unbelieving about the deity of Christ. They are firm and polite in their rejection of his virgin birth and bodily resurrection from the dead. They are not drunkards or brawlers or curb crawlers in red light districts. They are scholarly men who glory in their learning and write learned treatises (mostly for each other and to enhance their scholarly reputations). These scholars regard as a joke the evangelical biblical view of Scripture, namely that Scripture is of divine origin and therefore perfect in nature (infallible), and hence absolute in authority and all sufficient and fully relevant in every epoch.

The false prophets of our day are moralistic but they do not emphasise the holiness of God; certainly do not stress the exceeding sinfulness of sin; are silent about the great judgment; and positively scorn and deplore the doctrine of eternal punishment.

What are we to say of the false prophets of our day? How are we to regard them? The apostle John tells us that we are not to countenance them or give them credibility. John affirms, 'If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work' (2 John 10).

False prophets today are mostly eclectics. To be eclectic is to have a wide knowledge and use it selectively. Modernist eclectics disagree with Jesus when he said that he was the only way to the Father and that no man could come to the Father but by him (John 14:6). They believe that is only one opinion.

The tragic error of evangelical leaders has been to disregard the warning of the apostles concerning false prophets. Instead of bringing discipline to bear on those who use their churchly position to destroy the truth they have given them credibility. False teachers are paid handsome salaries, and in the case of the Church of England, modernist bishops are given palaces to live in. Modernist leaders are invited to crusade platforms and enquirers have been directed to liberal churches, all of which contradicts the plain teaching of the apostles. Refusal to reject modernist Christ-denying false prophets has meant that most Bible seminaries and colleges have been invaded by these unconverted teachers. In this way the ministry has been undermined and churches destroyed. Once the gospel is undermined and rejected in the pulpits then those churches will soon be emptied, and sold to be used as snooker clubs, warehouses, furniture stores, or, as lately

The Carey Conference for Ministers 1994

Russell Bridges

With the main theme, *The Grace of Law*, the Carey Ministers' Conference met in Swanwick, UK, January 5-7. Our visiting conference speaker was Dr Robert Godfrey, president of Westminster Seminary at Escondido, California.



From left to right: the editor, Peter Jeffrey, Geoff Thomas, Robert Godfrey, Bob Sheehan

Breaking with the tradition of beginning with a biography, Geoff Thomas gave a very helpful general exposition of 1 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, which lay a foundation to the theme on which he spoke: 'The True Bounds of Christian Freedom'. This exposition was very practical and led to a lively discussion. A challenging question emerged, 'Do we really love those whom we consider weak?'

Two papers by Robert Godfrey, one on Luther and the other on Calvin in their respective emphases concerning law, were rich in historical, biographical and theological content.

Sinclair Ferguson was taken ill and was

unable to attend the conference, so, at the eleventh hour, Erroll had the task of stepping into his shoes to present a paper with the title 'The Law in the New Testament.'

Using Galatians chapter 3, Erroll described this as the pivotal passage on

Continued from page 22

in some parts of England, turned into mosques. A friend of mine in Liverpool told me that during the 1960s he was an elder in a Presbyterian church in the city which had a membership of 500. Liberalism entered, was unchecked, and subsequently totally destroyed that church scattering the members, some of whom lost their faith.

We must surely be sensitive to evangelical unity wherever we can find it and be friendly with evangelical ministers even when they are muddle headed about doctrine and about cooperation with Liberals. In our personal friendship we must explain from the Scriptures why we cannot compromise with false prophets. Using biblical arguments we must do all we can to dissuade fellow evangelicals from such cooperation.

I remember Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones warning against fraternising with Modernists and also warning students against submitting themselves to the tutelage of Liberal Seminaries or Colleges. He was surely correct to say it is sinful to submit one's soul to a teacher who is subverting the authority of Christ.

the subject in the New Testament, where we learn of the place and use of the Mosaic law in the purposes of God. He then proceeded to present his paper in a most original and refreshing manner by suggesting ten sermon titles that a pastor might use in presenting this subject thoroughly to his congregation.

In addition to the theme of the grace of law, there were two papers, one on the ordination of women by Robert Godfrey and the other, on maintaining discipline in the churches, which Erroll addressed. Both led to lively and edifying discussions. On the issue of women's ordination, many will find Robert Godfrey's exposition of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and his descriptive references to the tremendous battle going on in his own denomination extremely valuable.

Peter Jeffery, addressing the subject of 'The Law and Gospel Preaching', began by referring to the function of the law as an instrument both of holiness and love, love to protect us and holiness to protect the character of God. But the theme was essentially practical. Is our gospel preaching both faithful and successful? He affirmed that the only true gospel preaching is preaching that is effective in saving sinners. He quoted Spurgeon, 'Soulwinning is the chief business of the gospel minister' and cited J I Packer: 'Paul's ultimate aim in evangelism was to convert. When the word convert is used it is used not of God but of the soulwinner. When the Scriptures speak in this way the point is that the objective is to convert. The preacher is to work to conversion. Evangelising is not merely imparting information and instruction for the mind but includes an endeavour to elicit a response, to gain, to win, to catch the sinner.'

Our Lord depicts it as fishermen's work. He explained the necessity of setting forth the law and holiness of God. Sin can only

be defined in terms of God. The gospel is not just a dispensary to help man in his needs but is God's salvation from sin. A bad conscience in a bad man is not conviction of sin. Conviction of sin is a sense of transgression of God's law which alone defines the nature of man in his sin.

Peter Jeffery illustrated his theme out of his experience at Rugby where he saw, over the years, a good number of conversions and more recently from seven years at Sandfields in Wales where in contrast there has been little fruit.

Amongst those from whom we heard in the prayer and sharing session, always a popular and encouraging part of the conference, were Morgan Sund of Sweden, David Zadook of Israel, and José Moreno of Spain who informed us that the Reformed faith is advancing gradually in Spain. Recently 70 ministers gathered in that country for a conference.

Bob Sheehan concluded the conference by preaching from Hebrews 12:14 and taking the theme, 'The Law and Gospel Holiness.' He showed that the holiness insisted upon is a practical and progressive holiness, essential for salvation and the inevitable outcome of being joined to Christ by faith. He concentrated on the promise of the new covenant and the nature of that law written on the hearts of believers. He declared, 'We have been set apart to become beautiful replicas of Christ.'

Cassettes of all eight sessions are available. The cost is £2.50 each to which postage must be added (65p, 85p, £1.05, £1.25 for 1-4 cassettes respectively). Orders with payment to: Carey Conference Cassettes, Crag House Farm, Cookridge, LEEDS, LS16 7NH.

The next conference has been set for January 4-6, 1995. Be sure to mark that time in your diary.

The Martyrdom of Bishop Haik

*Diary –
Persecution
in Iran*



Rev. Haik Hovsepien Mehr and his family

Lord's Day 16th January We are informed at the morning service here in Leeds that Mehdi Dibaj was due to be put to death today. Mehdi is reconciled to die in joy and peace but requests that he should receive communion from Bishop Haik Hovsepien Mehr before his execution. The reason given for the death penalty is apostasy from Islam. Mehdi testifies that he never had any religion and then was converted to Christ at a young age.

Mehdi Dibaj has been in prison for nine years. He is one of the translators of the Bible into Farsi which is the language of Iran.

During the afternoon we hear that Mehdi has been released on bail. We rejoice to hear this. The release is attributed to international pressure.

18th Jan Today Bernard Levin, one of Britain's most effective journalists who writes for THE TIMES, himself Jewish, describes briefly the situation in Iran and publishes Mehdi's testimony in full. It is very unusual for any secular paper in Britain to publish a testimony which is thoroughly biblical.

19th Jan We hear that Bishop Haik has disappeared. Haik is a superintendent and leader of The Assemblies of God denomination in Iran. The authorities used the term 'Bishop' and that has stuck. He is the boldest of the Christian leaders in that country. Mehdi was one of his church members. Since Haik

communicated Mehdi's plight to pressure groups in the West, it is likely that this is revenge.

Lord's Day 30th January We hear today confirmation of Haik's death. His eldest son was summoned by the coroner's office to the mortuary to identify his father's body from a photograph.

1st Feb Today the INDEPENDENT newspaper publishes an obituary of Haik. We learn of his courage in standing up to the persecutors in refusing to sign a declaration that Muslims and Muslim converts would not be allowed into Assemblies of God churches. The Assembly churches are serving Farsi speakers of Muslim background which particularly evokes persecution. We learn too that in 1969 Haik was involved in a car crash. His baby son was killed and he and his wife were so badly injured that they were not expected to walk again. But they both made a remarkable recovery.

3rd Feb Today 2,000 stand in the freezing cold weather for three hours in the Christian cemetery in Tehran for the funeral of Bishop Haik. According to government officials he had been stabbed to death on January 20. Officialdom had gone ahead and buried him in a Muslim cemetery but gave permission for the body to be returned to the family for a Christian burial.

7th Feb THE TIMES publish an obituary of Bishop Haik. We read that Haik was born into a middle-class Armenian Christian family in Tehran. At the age of 15 he began to be active in the Lord's work and at 18 he became a full-time Christian worker. While on military service in Gorgan, north Iran, he established a cell group which eventually became the Gorgan Church of which he became the pastor for the next 14 years. Christians in Iran have come under increasing hostility and persecution. On one occasion radical Muslims planned to burn down the church at Gorgan. They were stopped only by a last minute government intervention. Church meetings were regularly broken up by rocks hurled through the windows. Muslim converts were harassed and spies planted in the congregations. Haik is survived by his wife and four children aged between 10 and 23.

Bishop Haik Hovsepian Mehr laid down his life for his friend Mehdi Dibaj, for the evangelical cause in Iran, and in the cause of 350,000 in Iran who bear the name Christian.

Memorial services are to take place in London, Turkey, Norway, Germany, Denmark, Japan and in several American cities.

15th Feb A further article in THE TIMES by Bernard Levin describes the onslaught on the evangelical churches of Iran. The rejoicing over the release of Mehdi Dibaj at a meeting in Haik's home is also described. At that time Haik expressed his concern for the survival of the gospel cause in Iran and said, "I am ready to die for the cause of the church so that others will be able to worship their Lord peacefully and without so much fear." Two days later he was murdered. Since the Iranian authorities maintained a 24 hour surveillance of Haik, his family and visitors, we can know for sure that the same authorities know exactly who his brutal assassins are.

Conclusions

The tyranny of extreme fundamentalist Muslims stretches across North Africa, the Middle East and Asia and radically affects many nations. Egypt highlights this. In Egypt the extremists now threaten to kill tourists and so destroy the tourist industry. These extremists are regarded as a menace and are resented by the vast majority. We need to distinguish between the majority of Muslim people and those who distort that religion in a most ugly fashion.

We must pray according to Psalm 2 that our Lord will exercise his power to break the domination of the persecutors. It is the tyranny exercised by the small minority who wield power and yet who are mostly hated and despised by the common people who are too fearful and too disorganised to resist. The tyranny of totalitarianism and the employment of secret police to eliminate opposition resembles that of Communist regimes. According to a secular agency 95,000 in opposition have been killed in Iran since the removal of the Shah in 1979 and the empowerment of Khomeini. Bernard Levin in a recent TIMES article (1.2.94) showed how tyranny reigns in the land of Tunisia. The extremists often exercise power to kill whom they like, when they like and how they like. There is no redress and no restraint.

We need to pray for the believers who are constantly harassed and sometimes compelled to compromise seriously to the detriment of the gospel. For instance those who have the power, have forced most of the churches to agree not to preach in Farsi, the common language. Can you imagine not being permitted to preach and teach in English? Especially do we need to remember in our prayers the danger to Mehdi, the church leaders, and many others.

*'For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered'*
(Rom 8:36, cf Rev 6:10,11).

Whatever Happened to Hell?

A review of *Whatever Happened to Hell?* by John Blanchard, Evangelical Press, 1993, 336pp, pb £8.95.

I have some sympathy with one of the elders of my church who was talking about this book and groaned at the prospect of reading over 300 pages on the subject of hell. Even the blurb on the back cover warns the prospective reader:

Nobody can think seriously about hell and remain emotionally and psychologically unaffected. The idea that after a few years of life on earth an untold number of human beings, many of whom would be thought of as decent, law-abiding citizens, will spend eternity in indescribable agony and exposed to God's relentless anger is overwhelming.

This is not an appealing subject, and not the sort of topic which one would instinctively choose to study for spiritual encouragement or inspiration. Perhaps this is one reason why hell is so widely neglected even in evangelical circles today; more than that, the notion of everlasting punishment is being strongly attacked and undermined by the teaching of 'conditional immortality'. John Blanchard's book is a vital counterbalance, reminding us of the biblical teaching on this subject and of its central importance to the gospel.

Blanchard first of all lays a good foundation, clearing away much muddled thinking by setting out clearly that the Bible is the reliable and trustworthy Word of God, and Jesus the Son of God is our faithful teacher. It is here that we must look for our understanding of hell. The author then proceeds step by step building up the Biblical case regarding life after death and the reality of hell. There is an impressive marshalling of the scriptural data, and the arguments are clear and persuasive. Some chapters include helpful summaries, and at the end of the book there are indices of Names, Subjects, and Scripture References, as well as over 17 pages of end notes.

The author begins by showing the range of meaning of the word 'Sheol' in the OT and 'Hades' and 'Gehenna' in the NT. Then the subject of death itself is examined; it is shown to be a judgment of God, but physical death is never the 'end' but only a 'separation' leading to something different. This leads on to a discussion of the intermediate state, with ideas of 'soul sleep', limbo, purgatory, and reincarnation being effectively demolished by biblical evidence. Then there is the teaching of the Second Coming and the resurrection of the dead to final judgment. Christ will be the judge, and our relationship to him the decisive issue. In a useful aside,

Blanchard touches on the issue of the unevangelised. He sweeps away some of the woolly thinking of men like Peter Cotterell. Cotterell, the principal of the leading evangelical Bible College in the UK, London Bible College, has argued in his recent book *Mission and Meaninglessness* that, 'To any reasonable person it would appear to be unjust to condemn people to an eternal hell for failing to avail themselves of a medicine of which they have never heard and, moreover, of which they could not have heard.' It is apparent that Cotterell's theology is moulded more by what is emotionally acceptable and intellectually reasonable to him than by Scripture. Blanchard, by contrast, lays out scriptural principles which give a clearer, albeit more gloomy picture. He also touches on the issue of those who die in infancy.

We then move on to a description of hell itself. Gruesome medieval images of demons torturing their victims with unimaginable horrors are set aside. But the picture he paints is even more powerful, as it springs not from the speculation of human imagination, but directly from the infallible Word of God. The biblical images are sobering indeed: the rubbish dump, the prison, the pit, the darkness, the fire, the worm, in the company of the Devil and his angels. The pains of hell are expounded not only in terms of an endlessly nagging conscience, and shame and contempt, but also real punishment for sin including the torments and anguish of

those banished from the blessing of God and all the good things of life, without help or hope for all eternity. Finally the fire of hell itself, Blanchard suggests, is the fiery presence of a holy God who constantly manifests himself in wrath against his enemies.

For some this teaching is unpalatable, and is rejected with suggestions that hell is impossible if God is love. Perhaps all will be saved, or there will be at least a second chance for those who died unrepentant. The author dismisses these ideas and turns to another objection: how could we enjoy heaven if we knew of unbelieving relatives and friends consigned to eternal torment? He responds that we are told that we **will** be happy. We must trust God for the rest, that his judgment will be perfectly just and righteous, and above any criticism or doubt.

Blanchard then turns his attention to conditional immortality or annihilationism which is now becoming so popular amongst evangelicals. He provides a fine summary of the arguments advanced by the annihilationists, and makes reference to the main figures in the debate. He then responds with brief word studies of the OT and NT terms which carry the sense of perishing, being cut off, or destroyed, and shows the fallacy of maintaining that these terms must mean annihilation. Texts which clearly teach the everlasting character of punishment for the wicked are then

listed: Matt 18:8, Matt 25:41,46, 2 Thess 1:9, Jude 7, Jude 13, Rev 14:11, Rev 19:3, Rev 20:10. The implications of these verses cannot be dismissed because the 'eternal' character of the punishment runs parallel to the eternal character of glory for God's people, and indeed the eternal character of God Himself. This is most clearly stated in Matthew 25:46. Then Revelation 14:11 speaks of the wicked having no rest 'day or night'. There is no reasonable interpretation, but that the punishment of the wicked will go on for ever and ever.

While there is here a wealth of good solid teaching material, this book is by no means a dry and dusty tome. Far from it; all is well presented with an attractive style which is easy to read. Furthermore, there is throughout a note of solemn urgency. The reader is always reminded that he is dealing with the matter of the eternal destiny of multitudes of his friends and neighbours. Teaching on the final judgment is filled with applications to be sober about our words, thoughts and actions now in the light of that Last Great Day, and as the book draws to a close there is a challenge about the roads to heaven and hell. Perhaps one would not at first think of giving such a large volume on such a subject to the enquiring unbeliever, but if any should read this book they will find here the pleadings of an evangelist who wants us not only to face the reality of hell but also to be sure of escaping it ourselves. Christ is

portrayed as the Saviour; the atonement is explained, and a call is made for whole-hearted repentance and saving faith.

Meanwhile the believer is challenged by a final chapter on his responsibility to those who are perishing. 'How can you possibly accept that multitudes of people – including many you know personally – are on a collision course with an announcement of God's righteous and terrifying condemnation and yet do nothing to warn them of their danger?' The doctrine of eternal punishment is only properly understood when it stirs our emotions and drives us to compassionate concern for the lost. Blanchard calls on us to pray, to give, and to take the gospel directly to others. This is indeed a powerful challenge to evangelism.

Is it possible to be enthusiastic about a book on the subject of hell? I can only be enthusiastic about this volume. We are indebted to John Blanchard for his careful reasoning, his marshalling of the evidence, clarity of thought and attractive style, and his demolition of unbiblical theories. But most of all we must be grateful for his determination that we should not study this subject and come away unmoved. Rather we should live soberly in light of the Final Day, and be stirred to action to share the good news with those who otherwise will face the awful reality of hell for ever and ever.

Bill James

News

South Africa

Cristo Heiberg is a young minister in the largest Dutch Reformed grouping (NG) in South Africa. He graduated from the University of Pretoria which has the largest theological faculty in the country. In October 1992, he published a thesis of about 110 pages which documents meticulously his claim that the professors of the faculty are no longer faithful to the formularies of the Dutch Reformed Church but are humanistic, rationalistic, existential and pragmatic. In other words, the faculty has by and large fallen into liberalism.

A 27 page response has been made by the professors involved. They attack the person of Cristo Heiberg and accuse him of being unscientific (onwetenskaplik) and incompetent (onkundig). However Heiberg's thesis is neither incompetent nor malicious, on the contrary it evidences a tremendous grasp of the subject with a comprehensive range of references by which he compares the current teaching in the classrooms at Pretoria with orthodox Reformed theologians.

I was astounded to read of the contempt shown by some of the professors for what they regard as fundamentalism. They fail to define what they mean by fundamentalism. It is the movement that originated in America in 1920 and is defined and

described by G M Marsden in the *New Dictionary of Theology* (IVP pp266ff). We would be cautious of militant expressions which would include dispensationalism but would associate whole-heartedly with J I Packer's defence of basics in his book *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*. It is extremely discouraging to find that belief in a six day creation, assurance of salvation, (*heilsekerheid* – the nuance in Afrikaans would point to subjectivity), opposition to women's ordination, and all those who hold to verbal inspiration are dismissed as 'fundamentalist'. Sticking out of the rubbish bin called 'Fundamentalism' are Jay Adams, Herman Bavinck, Totius, Abraham Kuiper and B B Warfield.

Cristo Heiberg's thesis has provoked a vigorous discussion in the principal DRC paper *Die Kerkbode*. Cristo writes to say that some 400 copies of his thesis have been requested. Some have given testimony to the fact that they have prayed for many years that a spokesman will be raised up to define and document the modernism into which the denomination has been sliding.

We hope to report further and in the meantime pray fervently especially during this time of extreme stress in the country that the Dutch Reformed Church (NG) will rediscover her great Reformed heritage.

The Republic of Ireland

Pastor Trevor Ramsey of Limerick Baptist Church reports that his church has just opened a new church building to take the place of the one that has served well for over 100 years. He believes that this is only the second Baptist Church building to be constructed in the Republic this century.

Pastor Ramsey reports that there has been a slow but discernible growth of the gospel cause in the Republic during the last 30 years since Vatican 11. Bible study groups have grown in many urban centres and in the traditionally more Catholic rural areas. New churches have been planted by missionaries from outside whilst in other places churches have come into being where people have been converted and started to meet together.

Within the last six years years Irish Baptists have seen new works commenced in Dundalk, Cavan, Middleton, and Carrigaline. Several other causes have been revived and evangelistic efforts have increased dramatically. There is scarcely any traditional Irish fair or festival nowadays, and they are particularly plentiful during the summer months, without a team witnessing by preaching and literature.

The Irish people are becoming increasingly disaffected with traditional religion.

There is a need for Reformed leadership, solid church government rather



Martin Howell

than haphazard practice. There is also the very real need to be practical and have adequate premises.

Hebden Bridge and Halifax, West Yorkshire

Martin Howell featured above, full-time elder at Zion Baptist Chapel, Hebden Bridge, informed us at the Carey Conference in January that ten members at Hebden Bridge have been set aside to support a new church-planting work in Halifax.

Sweden

Don Ritter (Box 50 S-424 22 Angered, SWEDEN), has published a booklet containing indices of the subjects covered over 20 years in the Reformed magazine, *Det Står Skrivet*, which he edits. Don has laboured for 30 years in Sweden and continues energetically in his work of publishing and distributing evangelical and Reformed books.

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