

# REFORMATION TODAY



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214



In the late 60s Bill Clark of Evangelical Press began pioneering in West Africa, mainly in Ivory Coast but also in several other countries. He majored in gospel broadcasting in French. This work continues under the leadership of pastor Paul N’Goran. At the same time considerable progress was made in publishing reformed books in French. The French work became independent in 1986 and flies under the title Europresse. Jean-Claude Souillot, who runs the European operations, has followed in Bill Clark’s footsteps and makes several trips to West Africa each year. He recently ministered at two church camps in Benin and Togo. Europresse runs a correspondence course for preachers and pastors. Conferences are held each year in Bénin and in Cameroon during which intensive training sessions take place over a week, and subsidised books are made available from Europresse. The photo above shows the delegates at one conference, with Jean-Claude fourth from the left. The photo below shows the book table at the same conference.



Front cover picture – *Attentive congregation in the small village of Agbédranfo in West Bénin (Voodoo country). The church was in a neo-apostolical denomination, but was disfellowshipped when it adopted the doctrines of grace.*

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## Editorial

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In the patristic era the Church was described as 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'. These characteristics well describe the Church invisible. The completed Church will be perfect in unity and in holiness and will be made up of people from every tribe, language and country, a people who have been saved through the gospel of the apostles of Jesus.

But what about individual churches on earth? The 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformers added three characteristics they deemed essential. To qualify as a church there needs to be the faithful preaching of the apostolic gospel, the practice of baptism and the Lord's table, and the implementation of church discipline.

The latter principle of church discipline immediately raises the question of the nature of the church with regard to its membership. Discipline can only be exercised where members have voluntarily covenanted to be subject to the teaching and rules of the church. That presupposes that the members have a credible profession of faith. If a member commits scandalous sin he is in open breach of his confession of faith and he dishonours Christ and his Church. He is therefore subject to discipline.

Regenerate church membership as a standard has always been part of Baptist practice. At the first Baptist World Congress in 1905, J D Freeman said of Baptists, 'This principle of a regenerated church membership, more than anything else, marks our distinctiveness in the Christian world today.' Since that time the Pentecostal churches and Pentecostal denominations have multiplied greatly. They practise believer's baptism and the same principle of seeking to maintain a regenerate church membership. This practice is based on the book of Acts. Those who repented and believed in Christ were baptised. The practice will never be infallible. It was not in the book of Acts. There we have the example of Simon the sorcerer. He was baptised wrongly. We do not know the ultimate outcome with Simon and whether his repentance turned out to be genuine. If we are too strict in ascertaining a credible profession of faith we can err in excluding true believers. On the other hand if we are not scrupulous enough we can err in accepting false professions of faith.

In this issue Dr John Hammett, professor of Systematic Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary expounds the biblical rationale for regenerate church membership. Prior to his work in the seminary John Hammett was a pastor and missionary. This material has been extracted from his book *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Kregels, 368 page paperback, 2005).

The line of Particular Baptists from the days of the three early outstanding leaders, William Kiffin (1616-1701), Hanserd Knollys (1599-1691) and Benjamin Keach (1640-1704), can be traced out through the books reviewed in this issue. From about 1700 to 1770 there was a dearth of leadership among Particular Baptists. Thereafter leaders such as John Rippon (1751-1836), Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and Abraham Booth (1734-1806) brightened the scene. These pastors followed the example of the English Puritans in combining a beautiful proportion of doctrine, experience and practice. This proportion is seen clearly in the life of Abraham Booth described in this issue.

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century like the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century represents a barren time. From about the 1970s many Particular Baptists began to call themselves Reformed Baptists. Increasingly since that time they have multiplied significantly in developing countries such as Zambia, Kenya, the Caribbean, the Philippines and in many other countries.

Recently the paper *Christianity Today* printed a six-page article describing the recent rapid resurgence of the reformed faith in the USA. The article features the ministry of John Piper whose book *Desiring God* has sold 275,000 copies since 1986. 'Passion for God' conferences led by Piper have attracted large numbers of young people. For instance in 2000, 40,000 students came together outside Memphis and 18,000 gathered in Nashville earlier this year. The article tells of Joshua Harris who early received a bad impression from hardline unattractive reformed people but he was won over by Piper's books. He then discovered C H Spurgeon and read Iain Murray's *Spurgeon versus Hyper-Calvinism*. Left to himself Harris confesses that he would have been reading Christian comic books. He now testifies, 'Once you are exposed to doctrine you see the richness in it for your own soul, and you are ruined for anything else.' The article continues with a description of Southern Seminary where under Dr Mohler liberal tutors were replaced by reformed tutors. Only 4 out of 100 faculty members remained. Now 15 years later enrolment has reached 4,300 which makes it the largest Southern Baptist seminary. Other seminaries report a rise in the number of reformed students. Douglas Sweeney of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School said that among evangelicals 'there is more interest in Jonathan Edwards today than there has been since the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.'

Many other examples of the reformed advance could have been cited in *Christianity Today* but the cross section had to stop somewhere. It concludes with a 'smaller church' of 525 members, namely, Capitol Hill Baptist led by Mark Dever. Dever organises his church teaching program around a group of renowned church leaders which includes Augustine, Luther, Calvin, John Owen, John Bunyan, Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Carl Henry.

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## Regenerate Church Membership

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*John Hammett*

The biblical basis for seeing the church as composed exclusively of believers is so strong and obvious that the difficulty is in seeing how this idea was ever obscured. The very idea of the church as the called out ones presupposes that the members of the church have heard and responded to God's call. The image of the church as the people of God assumes that these are people who belong to God. They are referred to more than sixty times as saints, or holy ones (*hagioi*), or people set aside for devotion to God. They are the ones who believe in Christ and are bound to one another by the Holy Spirit. The church is the body of Christ, and believers form one body in Christ (Rom 12:5). A common possession of Christ is the ground of the church's unity. The church shares 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father who is over all and through all and in all' (Eph 4:5-6). It is difficult to see how the church could be described as the body of Christ or the temple of the Spirit if some of the members of the body or some of the living stones in the temple had no connection with Christ or the Spirit. The very distinction in the New Testament between the church and the world indicates that the church differs from the world, and does so because the church is composed of those who believe in Christ, belong to God, and are bound together by the Spirit. The church is obviously composed of believers.

Some might acknowledge the strength of this argument but seek to limit its application to the universal church. That church, by definition, is composed of believers only, all believers of all time. The local church, they may say, only imperfectly reflects that ideal. We cannot know with certainty the state of anyone's heart and thus we have to accept that local churches cannot be composed of believers only, due to the limitations we have as humans beings.<sup>1</sup> But four factors seem to me to weaken this line of thought.

First, simply as a matter of logic, if the universal church is composed of all believers, it seems that the goal of local churches should be to come as close to that same standard as possible. Certainly we may fail, but we need not make a virtue of our limitations. In many areas biblical standards are above our ability to reach perfectly, but that does not justify lowering the standard. In the same way we should retain the ideal of a membership of all believers as the goal for local churches, even if we must acknowledge imperfectly reaching that ideal in practice.

Second, it seems as if the New Testament anticipates the possibility that local churches will inadvertently allow false members to creep in, and provides for it. That provision is church discipline, which is applied to ‘anyone who calls himself a brother’ but denies that claim by his life (see 1 Cor 5:11). He is put out of the church, both in the hope that he will repent and in order to keep the church pure. If the church is not intended to be a pure body of genuine believers, what is the point of 1 Corinthians 5 and other New Testament teaching on church discipline?

Third, the descriptions of local churches in the New Testament assume that these local, visible congregations are composed of believers only. The church of God in Corinth is called ‘those sanctified in Christ Jesus’ (1 Cor 1:2). The letter to the Ephesians is addressed to ‘the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus’ (Eph 1:1). The letter to the church in Philippi is sent ‘to all the saints in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 1:1). Paul wrote ‘to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse’ (Col 1:2). The church of the Thessalonians is described in both letters as a church ‘in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thess 1:1 and 2 Thess 1:2). Clearly Paul thought he was addressing bodies of Christians.

Finally, as we see local churches being gathered in Acts, it seems that they gathered only those who believed. On the day of Pentecost the church in Jerusalem was constituted of those who ‘accepted the message’ (Acts 2:41). Those who were added in subsequent days were those ‘who were being saved’ or those who heard the message of the apostles and believed (Acts 2:47; 4:4). The church in Antioch began when ‘a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord’ (Acts 11:21). Near the end of their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas visited the

churches they had established and encouraged them to stay true to their commitment as believers (Acts 14:21-23). The clear implication is that those churches were composed of believers. The church in Philippi began when the Lord opened the heart of a woman named Lydia to respond to Paul's message (Acts 16:14). Paul's regular strategy was to enter a city, preach the gospel and organise those who responded into churches. He operated with the assumption of regenerate church membership.

Thus the objection that regenerate church membership applies only to the universal church seems to run contrary to logic, the biblical teaching on church discipline, and the way local churches are described and gathered in the New Testament.

Others object to regenerate church membership on the grounds that the New Testament reflects a pioneering evangelistic situation. The accounts in the book of Acts record the apostles preaching to adults, and certainly no adult should be baptised and granted church membership apart from regeneration. However, as the church grew, the regenerate individuals composing the church had children. The children of believing parents, they claim, have a special connection with the church because of their parents, and should thus be baptised and brought into the fellowship of the church, even prior to personal faith.<sup>2</sup>

Those who advocate regenerate church membership acknowledge that the children of believing parents have a great blessing and many advantages, but they would note that the children of believing parents must still trust Christ personally to be saved, and that until they are saved, they are not proper subjects of baptism, for baptism in the New Testament is baptism of believers only. And since Baptists agree with most other Christian denominations that baptism is the proper ceremonial rite of initiation into church membership, they object both to baptising infants and to including them among the church's membership, for both are appropriate only for believers.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the early church did not move to the adoption of infant baptism and a corresponding adoption of infant membership in local churches as soon as their founding members had children. Most scholars

agree that the practice of infant baptism did not appear until the latter half of the second century, and did not become widespread or standard until the late third or even fourth century. As late as Augustine the issue was still being debated, but his support and rationale for it became decisive, and infant baptism, and with it, the acceptance of the church as the mixed body composed of saved and unsaved, became standard for the next thousand years.

A final objection that could be raised against the idea of regenerate church membership comes from history. We have argued that history can be a useful tool in checking our interpretation of Scripture with those of other times, lest our interpretation be unduly influenced by contemporary cultural forces and assumptions. Some might argue that the fact that the church as a whole, for the bulk of its history, accepted the idea of the church as a mixed body of believers and non-believers should call into question the interpretation of Scripture held by those in the believers' church camp. For more than a thousand years, some could argue, the idea of the mixed church had not been seen as incompatible with Scripture by some of the most able interpreters in all of church history. If the doctrine of regenerate church membership is as obvious in Scripture as claimed in this chapter, why did so many notable students of the Bible miss it? Why was it absent for more than a thousand years of Christian history? While these are valid questions, there are three cogent answers to this objection.

First, while it is true that the mixed church interpretation had been accepted for more than a thousand years by the time of the Reformation, it was not true of the first 400 years of the church's history. During that time, the story was much more mixed. As mentioned above, infant baptism did begin in the late second century, and with it there was a challenge to the believers' only church. But infant baptism was not immediately or universally accepted. There are also records indicating the serious preparation new believers underwent prior to baptism,<sup>4</sup> and the recurring waves of persecution tended to act as a purifying agent for the church, scaring off those who were not genuinely committed to Christ. The very vehemence with which Augustine argues for the mixed church shows that it was not yet fully or universally accepted in his day.

Second, the long period in which the believers' church interpretation was not adopted coincides with the long period of relative biblical ignorance. Once the Bible became readily available, the believers' church interpretation was renewed almost immediately. Even Luther, in one of his early writings, contemplated the possibility of a church for those who wanted to be 'Christians in earnest', but did not pursue it, saying he lacked the people ready for it.<sup>5</sup> But others, the Anabaptists and later the Baptists, found thousands of people ready for it, people persuaded by Scripture that the church should be composed of believers only, people who formed such churches in the face of severe persecution. The English Baptist historian J H Shakespeare noted that the availability of the Bible is an important yet often underrated factor in the origin of the Baptists as a pure church of believers only.<sup>6</sup> Once the Bible was opened to people, they soon found the believers' church within its teachings.

Finally, the believers' church has proven itself to be more than a passing fad in biblical interpretation, but one that has grown more and more prevalent over the past 500 years. History rightly guards us against novel interpretations of the Bible, but the believers' church is no longer a novel interpretation. For those who value fidelity to Scripture above tradition, the biblical support for a regenerate church of believers only is so strong and obvious that we wonder how the church could have missed it for so long. I think the answer to that question lies in a confluence of historical circumstances that powerfully shaped beliefs about a number of issues that in turn led to an acceptance of the church as a mixed body.

### **The development of the *Corpus Permixtum***

This leads to the second stage of our investigation. How, in view of the strong biblical support for the believers' church, did the opposing idea of the church as a *corpus permixtum*, or mixed body composed of believers and non-believers, become so widely accepted?

A key event noted by many in the believers' church tradition is the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the battle of Milvian Bridge with Maxentius Constantine supposedly received a vision which he saw as divine aid from the Christian God. The genuineness

of his conversion is still debated by historians; the genuineness of the change in the Roman Empire cannot be doubted. Rodney Stark says, 'For far too long, historians have accepted the claim that the conversion of Emperor Constantine . . . caused the triumph of Christianity. To the contrary, he destroyed its most attractive and dynamic aspects.'<sup>8</sup> In 313 the Edict of Milan made Christianity a legal religion, and over the course of the next century Christianity became the dominant religion. At the time of Constantine's conversion Christians in the Roman Empire comprised about 10% of the population; within a century, that number jumped to 90%.<sup>9</sup> Before Constantine persecution tended to keep membership in the church limited to those who were genuinely believers, and the line between the church and state was clear. After Constantine the church became the recipient of imperial funds and favor, rather than persecution. As a result, membership in the church became a mark of social acceptability, and there was a virtual stampede of candidates for the priesthood.<sup>10</sup> This growing friendliness between church and state led to the eventual union of the two.

Even as the Roman Empire began to break down, the pattern begun by Constantine continued. For example in 496 Clovis, king of the Franks, agreed to accept Christ, as his Christian wife Clotilde wanted, if God gave him victory over his enemies. Victory came, and Clovis was baptised along with 3000 of his still pagan soldiers. It is hard to see their baptism as the baptism of believers or the church to which they belonged as a church of genuine believers. This pattern of 'conversion' became common in the spread of Christianity across Europe. Historian Stephen Neill describes the process:

The record in place after place tends to be much the same. The first bishop was martyred by the savage tribes; his blood then appropriately forms the seed of the church. Initial successes are followed by pagan reactions, but the church comes in again under the aegis of a deeply converted ruler. The initial Christianization is inevitably very superficial, but this is in each case followed by a long period of building, in which the faith becomes part of the inheritance of the people.<sup>11</sup>

Of course the churches produced under these circumstances were quite different from those we see in the New Testament. In fact, Stark notes how frequently the church incorporated various popular pagan practices: ‘The Church made it easy to become a Christian – so easy that actual conversion seldom occurred.’<sup>12</sup>

Was there no protest to this decline in commitment? Yes, early on there was protest by a group known as the Donatists. Their protest called forth the definitive defence of the church as a mixed body by Augustine. The Donatists wanted a church of genuinely holy people, and were disturbed by the ease with which the church received back into her midst priests and bishops who had denied Christ under persecution or handed over copies of the Scriptures. They separated from the Catholic Church in North Africa, seeing themselves as the preservers of the true and holy church. Augustine argued that the holiness of the church is not a present observable holiness found in the lives of the individual members, but a holiness the church has by virtue of her connection with Christ and the Spirit. He highlighted a parable of Jesus that became often used over the centuries, that of the wheat and tares. In this present age the wheat and tares grow together; only at the harvest time are they separated. In the same way the church today consists of believers and non-believers. God will separate them only at the final judgment. Of course, the problem with this analogy is that in the parable (Matt 13:24-30), the field in which the wheat and tares grow is the world, not the church. But Augustine’s influence prevailed, and the accepted view of the church became that of the mixed body (*corpus permixtum*) of believers and non-believers.<sup>13</sup>

Infant baptism became the norm for those in areas where the church was established; large scale baptisms incorporated whole tribes into the church in pioneer areas. Baptism was seen as effecting the forgiveness of original sin, regardless of whether the individual baptised had genuine faith or not. The idea of limiting membership in the church to believers only was effectively lost.

Augustine also furthered the union of church and state by appealing to the state for help against the Donatists. He saw their separation from the one true and established church as a sin against the unity of the church, a sin

so serious that they should be compelled to reunite with Mother Church. He took as his proof text Luke 14:23: 'Compel them to come in.' Since religious unity was seen as an aid to political unity and stability, states were eager to act to compel religious unity. Luke 14:23 gave them biblical justification.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the Middle Ages the church remained a very much mixed and often immoral body. Those who desired a purer fellowship usually found their way into one of the monastic orders that developed, at least in part in reaction to the declining level of commitment in the church.<sup>15</sup>

On the eve of the Reformation Europe could be seen as basically religiously unified in the *corpus christianum*, the one body of Christ. But that unity was to be shattered by the Reformation. Yet, in the case of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, there was no change in the fundamental idea of the church. Indeed, all three are called *magisterial* Reformers, because all three saw a role for the *magistrate*, or state, in supporting the church. Though Luther in theory wanted to separate church and state, and at times espoused ideas that would seem to lead to a gathered church of believers only, he never followed these ideas to their logical conclusions. In practice he allowed the godly prince to support and establish the true church, and embraced the inclusive or territorial church, where all the members of society were members of the church. Zwingli was emphatic that every member of the state must be baptised and thus become a member of the church, accepting the mixed nature of the church as wheat and tares. And though Calvin clashed with the magistrates in Geneva over a number of issues, he never denied that it was both the right and duty of the magistrates to maintain religious uniformity, nor did he ever disavow the idea of the church as a mixed body.

But in Zwingli's Zurich some emerged with more radical ideas. Though the flashpoint was the baptism of believers only, the fundamental battle was over the nature of the church. People like Conrad Grebel, George Blaurock and Felix Mantz began to argue for a church of believers only. They had been taught by their pastor, Ulrich Zwingli, that they should derive their doctrine from Scripture alone. They saw Scripture as teaching a church of believers only and baptism for believers only. The response to their ideas

was violent persecution from Catholics, Lutherans, Zwinglians and Calvinists alike.

What was so dangerous in the Anabaptist view that it called forth such a violent response? The Catholics and magisterial Reformers both assumed without question that a political entity could not remain politically unified without religious uniformity. The church and the state were coterminous; that is, they shared the same membership. And the wars of religion that swept Europe in the wake of the Reformation seemed to support their belief. The 1555 Peace of Augsburg was only able to stop these religiously based wars by mandating that the religion of an area would be that of its prince or ruler (under the formula *cuius regio, eius religio*, which is roughly translated, ‘whose the region, his the religion’). The idea that there could be multiple churches in a state seemed to them to be a route to anarchy. I think Luther in particular feared that the Anabaptist view would lead to anarchy and political unrest and that would hinder the Reformation and the spread of the gospel. As Paul Avis puts it, the magisterial Reformers were more concerned with redefining the center of the church (Christ and the gospel); the Anabaptists emphasised the importance of defining the circumference of the church (believers only).<sup>16</sup> But defining the circumference meant separating the church from the world. This Anabaptist idea was not just seen as bad theology but as political treason that would lead to chaos in countries they influenced and ultimately hinder the spread of the gospel. Thus the Anabaptists suffered horrible persecution, but the idea of the church as a gathered body of believers would not die. It re-emerged with the origin of the Baptists.

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<sup>1</sup> Luther objected to the Anabaptist practice of limiting baptism and church membership to those who were believers due to the uncertainty or difficulty of knowing who has faith. He writes, ‘Have they now become gods so that they can discern the hearts of men and know whether or not they believe?’ See Martin Luther, ‘Concerning Rebaptism’, in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 351.

<sup>2</sup> This is one of the classic arguments of those who baptise infants, going back at least as far as Calvin. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1346-47 (4.16. 23-24).

- <sup>3</sup> In his classic work on Anabaptism, Franklin Littell says that baptism became important to Anabaptists because it was ‘the most obvious dividing line between two patterns of church organization’. See Franklin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*, 2d ed. (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), xv. Leon McBeth sees a similar development in Baptist life. He says the origin of the Baptists is best seen ‘as a search for a pure church’, composed of what they called ‘visible saints’. It was that search that led them to adopt believer’s baptism. See Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 75. I would add that for both the Anabaptists and Baptists, their commitment to Scripture alone was also crucial for their adoption of believer’s baptism.
- <sup>4</sup> The very term ‘catechism’ is derived from the oral instruction given to baptismal candidates prior to baptism in the early church, often over a period of months. It shows the concern of the early church to baptise only those who could make a credible profession of faith.
- <sup>5</sup> See Martin Luther, ‘The German Mass and Order of Service, Martin Luther’s Preface’, in *Luther’s Works*, gen. eds. Jaroslav Pelikan, H T Lehmann, et al., vol. 53, ed. Ulrich Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 63-64.
- <sup>6</sup> J H Shakespeare, *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1906), 2-4.
- <sup>7</sup> John Howard Yoder describes the fall of the church as the ‘fusion of church and society of which Constantine was the architect, Eusebius the priest, Augustine the apologete, and the Crusades and Inquisition the culmination’. See John Yoder, ‘A People in the World: Theological Interpretation’, in *The Concept of the Believers’ Church*, 272. Donald Durnbaugh, *The Believers’ Church*, 212-215, sees this idea of the fall of the church with Constantine as one of the defining characteristics of the believers’ church tradition.
- <sup>8</sup> Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2003), 33.
- <sup>9</sup> Robert G Clouse, Richard V Pierard, and Edwin M Yamauchi, *Two Kingdoms: The Church and Culture Through the Ages* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 109.
- <sup>10</sup> Stark, 33-34.
- <sup>11</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1964), 90.
- <sup>12</sup> Stark, 40.
- <sup>13</sup> For more on this issue, see G G Willis, *Saint Augustine and the Donatist Controversy* (London: SPCK, 1950).
- <sup>14</sup> Clouse, et al., 82.
- <sup>15</sup> Stark, 40, calls the official church that developed after Constantine the Church of Power, a mixed body whose leaders were often blatantly immoral. As a reaction to the Church of Power, the Church of Piety arose, mainly in the monastic movement.
- <sup>16</sup> Paul D L Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 54-55.

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## The Life of Abraham Booth (1734-1806)

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Sharon James

*Part I deals with Booth's life and personality. Part II (next issue) will comment on the movements he was involved with, his major writings and his significance for Calvinistic Baptists.*

The eighteenth century is remembered, rightly, as the century of the great evangelical revival. However, the mid-part of the century is remembered as a time of stagnation for many Calvinistic Baptist churches. While the extent and influence of hyper-Calvinism can be overplayed, it is undeniable that all too many preachers felt inhibited in proclaiming the free offer of the gospel because of what Andrew Fuller was to describe as a 'false Calvinism'. Although the scene was not uniformly bleak (for example the Bristol Academy turned out a steady stream of pastors who combined robust Calvinism with evangelistic fervour) the number of Calvinistic Baptist Churches in England dropped from about 220 (1715-1718) to 150 (in the early 1750s).<sup>1</sup> Fuller famously commented: 'Had matters gone on but for a few years, the Baptists would have become a perfect dunghill in society.'

Abraham Booth's *The Reign of Grace*, published in 1768, showed that a firm grasp of sovereign grace should encourage fervent gospel preaching, rather than inhibit it. So did Robert Hall's *Help to Zion's Travellers* (published in 1779) and Andrew Fuller's *The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation* (1785). At the same time the works of Jonathan Edwards were inspiring many Particular Baptists. Edwards showed that praying for and expecting mighty scenes of revival was utterly consistent with a belief in the absolute sovereignty of God. John Sutcliffe's reprinting of Jonathan Edwards' *Humble Attempt* (the appeal for a Concert of Prayer for Revival) in 1789 led to individual and corporate commitments to prayer for revival.

It is not then surprising to see a genuine renewal of mission and evangelistic concern in the final decades of the eighteenth century. During this period we see the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society, the inauguration of numerous societies to promote itinerant preaching, the

beginning of the Sunday School movement, new initiatives in ministerial training and the planting of new churches. All these developments were symptomatic of a period of exciting expansion, (the number of Particular Baptist Churches in England grew from approximately 300 in 1789 to 1,374 in 1851<sup>2</sup>), and Booth, in one way or another, was involved in all of them.

## 1. Overview of his life

Abraham Booth's life can be divided neatly into two halves. The first 34 years were spent in and around Nottinghamshire, in relative poverty and obscurity. Then he was called to one of the most prestigious London churches, where he ministered for the 37 remaining years of his life.

### *i Nottinghamshire (1734-1769)*

Abraham Booth was born in 1734 in the village of Blackwell, Derbyshire (just up the road from Swanwick). Before his first birthday his father became a tenant farmer on the estate of the Duke of Portland. The family moved a few miles south to Annesley, Woodhouse, in Nottinghamshire. They were so poor that Abraham could not go to school; he was expected to help on the farm. But his father taught him to read, and Abraham soon showed a voracious appetite for books.

By the time of his tenth birthday, in 1744, the area was being affected by the evangelical revival. Abraham's family had been nominal adherents of the Established Church, but now they heard gospel preaching from a group initially encouraged by Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. Itinerant preachers travelled widely through many of the villages of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and North Leicestershire, including Annesley. The preachers sometimes braved vicious attacks, but many hearers were converted. Groups of believers began meeting in several villages. A meeting house was built at Barton, and an Independent church constituted in 1745. Ten years after the church was formed, in 1755, the group had become convinced of believer's baptism, and sixty or so, including Abraham aged 21, were baptised by immersion.

The group were Arminian by conviction, and Booth had naturally imbibed the teaching of those who had led him to Christ. With the zeal of a young

convert he embraced the party line with such enthusiasm that he composed a rabidly anti-Calvinist poem. More positively, his zeal led him to accept preaching invitations in villages up to forty miles away from his home. Since the age of sixteen he had been working for a stocking maker, rather than on the farm, as this gave him greater opportunities for private study. He worked immensely hard, eventually owning his own stocking frames. Often he studied through much of the night, and then travelled long distances preaching at weekends. When the many groups of converts, loosely attached to Barton, were constituted into a number of separate churches, Booth was asked to take pastoral oversight of the church at Kirkby Woodhouse.

At the age of twenty-four he married Elizabeth Bowman. She was a farmer's daughter, but her family had managed to provide her with a better education than was usual for girls in her situation. She thus had the skills to help Abraham set up a school in the small weaving community of Sutton-in-Ashfield (just west of Mansfield in Nottinghamshire). Elizabeth taught the girls, and Abraham the boys. He also continued with his stocking making.

Abraham Booth's persistent study ultimately led to a complete change in doctrinal conviction. Having been converted and disciplined by Arminian teachers, and having been taught to despise Calvinism, he found himself compelled to embrace what he had once abhorred. He admitted to his own church as well as the various churches he preached in, that he had had a change of heart. He resigned his pastorate, and stopped preaching. But a group of supporters rented 'Bowers Hall' in a hosier's warehouse in Sutton-in-Ashfield where he could continue his ministry, and pastor a Calvinistic Baptist church.

For some time Booth taught school and continued weaving during the week to support his family, as well as preaching three times each Sunday. He didn't limit his preaching to Sutton-in-Ashfield, but often travelled to Nottingham and Chesterfield. A series of sermons on the doctrines of grace formed the basis for his book *The Reign of Grace*. Booth had no prospects of publishing this, but a friend who read it enthused about it to Henry Venn (1725-1797), an evangelical minister in Huddersfield. Venn, an educated Church of England man, probably didn't expect much from a self-taught dissenting school-master. But he was so impressed with the

manuscript that he paid for it to be published. Venn also took the time to travel south to meet with Booth, the start of a long friendship.

ii. *London (1769-1806)*

Venn admitted that one of the spinoffs *he* hoped for from the publication of *The Reign of Grace* was that it would lead Booth to a more advantageous situation, and that it would lead to his being liberated from the need to support his family by manual work. That is exactly what happened, and the timing was perfect. April 1768 was the month that *The Reign of Grace* appeared. It was also the month when Pastor Samuel Burford, of Little Prescot Street, Goodman's Field, London died, unexpectedly, at the age of forty-two.

*The Reign of Grace* made such an impression on some of the Prescot Street members that three of them travelled immediately to Nottinghamshire to hear Booth preach. As a result they recommended that he should be invited to preach at Prescot Street for three Sundays in June. After this the church voted unanimously to ask him back. It also set aside a day of prayer and fasting to seek God's will about the matter. He returned for four Sundays in August, after which a unanimous call to the pastorate was extended. The induction service was held in February 1769.

The change in situation for the thirty-four year old Booth and his family was immense. No more weaving, no more lessons for village boys. He immediately engaged a tutor, an ex-priest, to further his knowledge in Latin and Greek. He eventually became an accomplished scholar; reading voraciously in theology and church history, many of the books in Latin. Booth formed a life-long habit of reading a chapter of the New Testament in Greek every morning. He did not only read, he retained what he read, and processed it.

The little rural community which the Booths had left behind had only ninety-five families in it at the beginning of the eighteenth century. By contrast, London was growing in 'a fitful and almost feverish manner . . . Everyone was going faster. Everything was going faster. The city was growing faster . . . It was about to burst its bounds completely and become the first metropolis of the world.'<sup>3</sup> By Booth's death the population had hit one million.

When the Booths moved to London in 1769, heads of traitors were still impaled at Temple Bar. Public hangings at Tyburn still provided popular entertainment. Dishonest traders were still put in the pillory. Hogarth's engravings of Beer Street and Gin Lane vividly portray poverty, violence and degradation.

The previous year John Wilkes, the radical politician, had been elected to parliament and then arrested. On 10<sup>th</sup> May 1768 15,000 people had gathered outside his prison shouting 'Wilkes and Liberty!' and 'Damn the King!' Troops then opened fire killing seven people; which triggered off violent disturbances all over London.

Eleven years after Booth arrived in London, in June 1780, the city was again convulsed with violence, this time in the form of anti-Catholic riots. It took ten days to restore order. Over 700 were killed.

Fear of disorder and fear of the mob was an underlying *motif* of London life. The War of American Independence (1776) and the French Revolution (1789) fuelled the paranoia of the authorities. There was always an underlying current of suspicion against dissenters. Booth and other dissenting leaders had to walk a constant tight rope, trying to maintain a principled stand for liberty of conscience, while also assuring the authorities of their fundamental loyalty and peaceful intent.

So this was the city in which Booth was to minister for nearly 37 years. For most of that time he enjoyed good health and was able to work enormously hard.

He had come to a historic church, perhaps the oldest Baptist Church in London, in a fashionable area. Many wealthy merchants and other prosperous city people lived there. During his first ten years there were 122 baptisms. Oddly, the elegant meeting house had been built without a baptistry, so they had to go elsewhere for baptismal services. Over the period of his pastorate there were a total of 452 baptisms. Booth tried to preach in his own church every Sunday, only taking engagements elsewhere during the week. He was closely involved in the pastoral work of the church; he wrote up all the minutes of the monthly and other church meetings, kept the records of membership, and was dearly loved by his congregation. In the last years of his life he struggled with asthma, and the

church took on two successive assistants to help out with the work. He died at the age of seventy-one in January 1806.

### **Booth's personal characteristics**

#### *i Booth, the family man*

We only have a few glimpses into Booth's family life. He had three sons and four daughters. He was able to give each of them a good education.

Some time after their arrival in London, his wife Elizabeth nearly died during childbirth. She and all the children then contracted scarlet fever. Abraham recalled of this time: 'The Bible was then sweeter to me than ever it had been, even when I could only snatch from it a few verses at a time – One evening – I besought the Lord that I might find an entire resignation to his will. When I arose from my knees I felt peculiar satisfaction in the perfections of God and had such full persuasion of his righteousness, his justice, his mercy and his love, that I lifted up my eyes to heaven, and said, "O God, I give my wife, my children, my all to thee;" and if I ever prayed in my life, I prayed at that time.' They survived.

Twenty-three years later, in 1804, Elizabeth died (just two years before her husband). A friend remarked that Abraham seemed to be resigned to her death. He told of her previous sickness and his impassioned prayer, commenting simply: 'Seeing then that [God] has given her to me for three-and-twenty years in answer to my prayer, dare I now to murmur?'

Abraham's attitude towards family responsibilities is beautifully revealed in a charge he delivered to a young pastor, Thomas Hopkins, at his ordination:<sup>4</sup>

'Take heed to your 'second-self' in the person of your wife – Next after your own soul – your wife and your children claim the most affectionate, conscientious, and pious care – many a devout and amiable woman has given her hand to a minister of the gospel, in preference to a private Christian – in expectation – of enjoying peculiar spiritual advantages in the matrimonial relation. But, alas! – not a few individuals among those worthy females, have often reflected to the following effect: "My husband is much esteemed among his religious acquaintance – but his example at

home is far from being delightful. Affable, condescending, and pleasing, in the parlours of religious friends; but – trifling and unsavoury, or imperious and unsocial, in his own family. Preferring the opportunity of being entertained at a plentiful table, and of conversing with the wealthy – to the homely fare of his own family, and the company of his wife and children; he often spends his afternoons and evenings [away] from home, until so late an hour, that domestic worship is either omitted, or performed in a hasty and slovenly manner – Little caring for my soul, or for the management of our growing offspring; he seems concerned for hardly any thing more, than keeping fair with his people – I have often calmly remonstrated, and submissively entreated, but all in vain. Surrounded with little ones – destitute of the sympathies, the instructions, the consolations, which might have been expected from the affectionate heart of a pious husband – I pour out my soul to God, and mourn in secret”. Such – has been the sorrowful soliloquy of many a minister’s pious, dutiful, and prudent wife. Take heed, then, to the best interests of your *Second-Self*. To this end, except on extraordinary occasions, when impelled by duty, *spend your evenings at home*. Yes, and at an early hour in the evening, let your family receive their demands on your presence.’

One can gather from this that despite all his hours in the study, and despite the heavy demands of the pastorate, Booth did not neglect his own wife and children. Or perhaps he did tend to neglect them in the early years, but Elizabeth was so effective in what he describes in the address as ‘calm remonstrations and submissive entreaties’ that he mended his ways!

In terms of relations with his wider family, Booth’s extant correspondence<sup>5</sup> shows a touching concern for the relatives left behind in Nottinghamshire; an affectionate anxiety that good relationships be maintained between his various siblings, and above all a warmly pastoral care for their spiritual interests.

## ii *Simple living*

In *The Reign of Grace*, there is a powerful excursus on the dangers of covetousness. Booth condemned Christians who are: ‘lavish at their own tables, while the poor among the people of God are almost starving by their side.’ He argued that covetousness is no more and no less than the desire to increase in wealth. When the members of Prescott Street read these

sentiments, they must have realised that their new pastor was not going to soft-pedal his teachings on practical holiness to appease the wealthy. And nor did he. His congregation always knew that personal considerations would not sway him in matters of conscience. He did not court the rich, he did not despise the poor.

But what is impressive and endearing is that despite the major increase in income when Booth moved to London, he resisted any temptation to adopt a more lavish standard of living.

His household was known to be thrifty and moderate. He warned at least one ministerial colleague against the temptation to eat too extravagantly. Although many of his church members were wealthy, he felt no compulsion to mimic their lifestyle.

Booth never forgot the years of having to support his family by manual work; he never lost his compassion for those who were much poorer than himself. These were years of poverty in both town and country. In London, in October 1795, 100,000 people gathered chanting, 'Peace! Bread! No Pitt! Down with George!' (protesting against heavy taxes necessitated by the war with France, 'famine' conditions, and the policies of the government led by Prime Minister Pitt, as well as King George III.) By 1803 there were around a million 'paupers' (dependent on relief) in England and Wales; that is one eighth of the entire population. Booth, financially secure himself, was able to identify with the powerless and needy.

Abraham Booth was unselfconscious about his appearance. In an age of inordinate foppiness, when wealthy men spent vast amounts of time and money on their appearance, Booth resolutely refused to make his wardrobe more fashionable. One visitor to Little Prescot Street wrote: 'So plain was his appearance that I mistook him before he ascended the rostrum for a poor layman.' And in an age of excess, when many wealthy people gained huge amounts of weight through over-indulgence, we read in his Memoir that Booth 'never inclined to corpulency'.

The respect which he invariably commanded was based on his own character, rather than appearance or any pulling of rank. Again, we read in his Memoir, 'Such a degree of majesty attended him, plain as he was in

exterior, that if he sat down with you but a few minutes you could not help feeling that you had a prince or great man in the house.’

### *iii Godly preparation for death*

Booth’s childhood and youth had been spent in hard physical labour, and he was always a strong man. However, as he approached his seventieth birthday, the damp winters of London exacerbated his asthma, while the warmth of the summer ‘relaxed his nerves’, making writing a problem.

Letters written during these final years offer a poignant glimpse into his frame of mind as his physical strength ebbed away. There is no trace of self-pity, rather a clear sighted expectation of eternal life and an urgent desire to exhort his relatives to be ready for death themselves.

In the summer of 1797 Abraham heard that his brother Robert’s wife had died. (Robert was the second son in the family, two years younger than Abraham.) Abraham wrote, encouraging Robert to rest in the sovereignty of God, and quoting Psalm 46:10, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ He went on:

‘Our time is not likely to be long. Be it, then, your daily and your main concern, to be ready for death, and fit for heaven. Diligently examine whether you know Christ, live by faith upon him and be devoted to him. Forget not that you must be saved by grace, if saved at all; and that you must have a relish for heavenly things, before you can be fitted for death.’<sup>6</sup>

By the January of 1806 Abraham knew that his end was approaching fast. The eternal well-being of his relatives was much on his mind, and he made the effort to write his farewells to his brothers. On January 19<sup>th</sup> he wrote to William:

‘Dear Brother, I have not been able to preach for a considerable time; but have attended public worship as a private worshipper, sitting by the fireside in the vestry. This week, however, I have been and still continue to be, so much worse, that unless I be better on the next Lord’s Day, I must probably keep at home. My respiration is more labourious, my cough more frequent and my strength less, all which connected with the idea of being in the seventy-second year of my age, imperiously urge the necessity of considering myself on the verge of the grave. Yes, Brother! I feel myself in

a solemn situation! For death is a very serious event . . . But blessed be God, though my situation be very solemn, yet, a good hope through grace preserves me from terrifying slavish fear, at present, and, I trust, will continue to do so. The Lord bless me with the peace of God, with patience, resignation, and [a] spiritual mind . . . then, I shall be ready for life or death. Diligently examine, Brother, the state of your heart, with regard to spiritual things. I am very much afraid that you [are] by far too fond of being noticed by xxxxx . I have long been suspicious that this has been a snare to you, and I fear it will continue so to be. The Lord bless you and sister; indeed, I am, your affectionate Brother, Abraham Booth.<sup>7</sup>

The real godliness of a man is seen not just in public pronouncements from the pulpit, or in published works. Booth's genuine reliance on grace, and his urgent desire for the salvation of his loved ones, is very evident from these letters, written with such effort, during his last days on earth.

*Next time we will follow the major movements Booth was involved in and look at his major works. This two-part article on Booth has been taken from a lecture given at Regent's Park College, 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2006, at a conference to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Abraham Booth. The other lectures were on 'Abraham Booth, the Pastor' (in which Dr Kenneth Dix drew on his extensive knowledge of the church records of Little Prescott Street), and 'The Piety of Abraham Booth' (in which Dr Michael Haykin dealt especially with his personal prayer life). All three lectures will be published in a forthcoming book on Abraham Booth to be edited by Michael Haykin and published by the Particular Baptist Press. Footnotes have been kept to a minimum in these articles; full documentation will be found in that volume. The Particular Baptist Press is in the process of reprinting the complete works of Abraham Booth.*

<sup>1</sup> Michael A G Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul: John Sutcliff of Olney, his friends and his times*. Evangelical Press, 1994. p.25.

<sup>2</sup> Michael A G Haykin, John Sutcliff, *Reformation Today*, July/August 1988, p.15.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography*. Vintage 2001. pp.517-8.

<sup>4</sup> This charge is reprinted in *The Works of Abraham Booth*, vol. 1, Particular Baptist Press, 2006. pp. 57-84, entitled Pastoral Cautions.

<sup>5</sup> The Booth collection, the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

<sup>6</sup> Booth Collection, 1/3 (a) August 25<sup>th</sup> 1797.

<sup>7</sup> Booth Collection, 1/3 (a) January 19<sup>th</sup> 1806.

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# The Unity of the Church

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*Joel Beeke*

## **One church**

The Nicene Creed confesses ‘one church’ (unam ecclesiam), meaning the church is built upon one rock, one Messiah, one confession. The Westminster Confession adds that the church’s unity lies in Jesus Christ: ‘The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all’ (Chapter 25.1).

That the church is Christ’s body, and he its head (Col 1:18) implies that Christ and the church are complementary, since a body and a head cannot exist without each other.

Wilhelmus à Brakel expressed this truth by saying that the church and Christ are each other’s property. Their union is affirmed by the gift of Christ to the church; Christ’s purchase of and victory for the church; the indwelling of Christ’s Spirit within the church; and the church’s surrender by faith and love to Christ.

## **Christ’s fullness**

To think of Christ without the church is to sever what God has joined in holy union. The church is organically related to Christ; she is rooted and built up in Christ (Col 2:7), is clothed with Christ (Rom 13:14), and cannot live without Christ (Phil 1:21).

‘The church is in Christ as Eve was in Adam,’ wrote Richard Hooker. The church is Christ’s fullness because the plenitude of his grace is poured out upon her (John 1:16; Col 2:9-10).

The church, Christ’s mystical body, ‘is like a vessel into which the fullness of Christ is poured,’ wrote L S Thornton; ‘He fills it with himself.’ Christ’s attributes – truth, power, mercy, love, patience, goodness, righteousness, wisdom – are both the embodiment of the church’s virtue and her resources.

## **Members one of another**

All the members of Christ's body are united to one another because of their common Head (1 Cor 12). All who confess Christ as their exclusive Saviour are 'joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit', says the Belgic Confession in Article 27. They are united as members of the household of God, the community of Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit.

There is one gospel (Acts 4:12), one revelation (1 Cor 2:6-10), one baptism (Eph 4:5), and one Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10:17). A A Hodge said that if there is one God, one Christ, one Spirit and one cross, there can only be one church. The believers of this one church are described by New Testament images such as 'the salt of the earth', a 'holy temple', the 'new creation', sanctified slaves, 'sons of God', and fighters against Satan.

They are many branches in one vine, many sheep in one flock, and many stones in one building. The church is 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (1 Peter 2:9).

## **Division**

The church's oneness in Christ is indestructible, for it comes from him. Her unity, however, can be disrupted by unfaithfulness to Christ and declension from the apostolic pattern of unity. And when it is, we should feel shame and grief.

She is afflicted by inattention to doctrinal and practical purity (1 Tim 6:11-21), factionalism (1 Cor 3:1-23), lust for power (3 John 9), unwillingness to seek reconciliation (Matt 5:23-26), failure to maintain church discipline (Matt 18:15-20); and unwillingness to help needy believers (Matt 25:31-46). Such sins tear apart the body of Christ, causing church and denominational splits.

Of the 23,000-plus church denominations today, more than 700 are Reformed. Nevertheless, even the multiplicity of church denominations caused by rifts between believers cannot divide the true family of Christ.

Brothers and sisters in a family may quarrel and separate, but they still remain members of one family. Likewise the church is one body in Christ with many members (Rom 12:3-8), one family of God the Father (Eph 4:6), and one fellowship in the Spirit (Acts 4:32; Eph 4:31-32).

As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, ‘There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all’ (4:4-6).

### **Spurious unity**

A right understanding of the church’s oneness should help us avoid the kind of ‘unity’ that a church achieves at the expense of her confessions of truth. Some divisions are essential to keep the true church separate from the false. ‘Division is better than agreement in evil,’ declared George Hutcheson.

Those who support spurious unity by tolerating error and heresy forget that a split based on biblical essentials helps to promote the true unity of the body of Christ. An organisation that moves away from faithful teaching, true worship and obedient discipline ceases to be a church.

As John Calvin said, ‘Those who wish to build the church by rejecting the doctrine of the Word build a pigsty, and not the church of God.’ John Brown added, ‘The suffering of gross error in the church must be very sinful. It brings contempt on the oracles and ordinances of God, [and] gives Satan opportunity to employ ordinances and ministers as instruments of rebellion against God.’

### **Living in harmony**

An appreciation of the church’s oneness should help us avoid denominationalism produced by splits over non-essential doctrines or egotistical differences. As Samuel Rutherford warned, ‘It is a fearful sin to make a rent and a hole in Christ’s mystical body because there is a spot in it.’

Such disunity offends the Father who longs to see his family living in harmony; it offends the Son who died to break down walls of hostility and it offends the Spirit who dwells within believers to help them live in unity.

Church members must realise that they cannot touch any part of the church’s body without affecting the whole (1 Cor 12). Disunity affects the whole church, including its work of evangelism. In John 17 Jesus prayed for the unity of the church so men would believe that God sent his Son to be Savior of the world.

Authentic church unity stands in startling contrast to the strife of the world, and is a sign to the world of the unity that exists between the Father and the Son. Christians therefore should work for unity in the church.

John Murray wrote, 'If we are once convinced of the evil of schism in the body of Christ . . . we shall then be constrained to preach the evil, to bring conviction to the hearts of others also, to implore God's grace and wisdom in remedying the evil, and to devise ways and means of healing these ruptures.'

### **Union of affection**

We need to follow Matthew Henry's advice: 'In the great things of religion be of one mind, but when there is not a unity of sentiment, let there be a union of affections.' Authentic church unity is not promoted by exclusive denominationalism nor by an ecumenism that embraces even those who deny apostolic doctrine.

Rather, authentic unity is based on the work of the Spirit, who binds the church together and purifies it as Christ's bride. The Spirit dwells within believers and endows them with the gifts to practise unity. That unity is a strong and attractive testimony to the gospel of Christ.

Consequently Paul urged believers to be of one mind in the Spirit and to be joined and knit together so that they might grow up in every way in Christ (1 Cor 3:1-17; Phil 1:27; Eph 4:1-16). Unity is not something to be *created* by Christians but something to be *safeguarded* by the church of all ages through the work of the Spirit.

Despite denominationalism and false attempts at unity true believers will continue to be united as members of one body of Christ until the end of time, when every external division will disappear.

There will be no denominations in heaven. There Christ's prayer that all believers may be one will find its fulfilment (John 17:20-26). In heaven the unity of the body of Christ will be resplendent (Rev 7:9-17). What we now can hardly believe by faith will then be gloriously evident by sight.

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## Recent books on Baptist History

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### *A Review Article*

Walker, Austin. *The Excellent Benjamin Keach*. Joshua Press, Canada, 2004.

Hayden, Roger. *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism among eighteenth-century Baptist ministers trained at Bristol Academy, 1690-1791*. The Baptist Historical Society, 2006.

Abraham Booth. *Confession of Faith and Sermons*, edited by Michael A G Haykin. Particular Baptist Press, US, 2006.

Haykin, Michael A G (ed). *The British Particular Baptists*, volumes 1-3. Particular Baptist Press, US, 1998, 2000, 2003.

Oliver, Robert. *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists, 1771-1892*. Banner of Truth, 2006.

Dix, Kenneth. *Strict and Particular: English Strict and Particular Baptists in the Nineteenth Century*. The Baptist Historical Society, 2001.

Shaw, Ian J. *High Calvinists in Action: Calvinism and the Cities of Manchester and London 1810-1860*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Talbot, Brian R. *The Search for a Common Identity: The Origins of the Baptist Union of Scotland, 1800-1870*. Paternoster, 2003.

Randall, Ian. *The English Baptists of the Twentieth Century*. Baptist Historical Society, 2005.

Thompson, Philip E and Cross, Anthony R (eds). *Recycling the Past or Researching History? Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths*. Paternoster, 2005.

Nettles, Tom. *The Baptists: Key People involved in forming a Baptist Identity*. Volume 1 Beginnings in Britain. Volume 2 Beginnings in America. Christian Focus, 2005.

*The Baptist History Collection* CD, Version 1.0. Available from [www.standardbearer.org](http://www.standardbearer.org)

Over the past few years a number of significant works relating to the history of British Calvinistic Baptists have been published. Many of them represent a massive amount of research based on primary sources (several are lightly re-worked doctoral theses, and thus academic rather than popular in style). There is considerable overlap between them, but each one is valuable in enhancing our understanding of our heritage. This article does not treat each work extensively, but gives an overview, taking the books chronologically.

Benjamin Keach (1640-1704) was one of the most important Baptist thinkers of his day. Other works have included discussion of his life and thought (eg – Haykin: *Rediscovering our English Baptist heritage*, Kiffin, Knollys and Keach, 1996), but Austin Walker

devotes a whole book to Keach, drawing out his significance. Keach suffered greatly for preaching the gospel while just a young man; he also played a key role in introducing hymn-singing into the Baptist churches, but *The Excellent Benjamin Keach* develops his significance in other areas as well.

It has become something of a truism that the mid-eighteenth century was a low point in the history of English Baptists. While numbers of General (Arminian) Baptists were influenced by Unitarianism, it is maintained that many Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists were veering towards Hyper-Calvinism, and thus were inhibited in evangelism and resistant to the Great Awakening. Later in the century the Particular Baptist cause was renewed by the efforts of such as Abraham Booth (*The Reign of Grace*, 1768); Robert Hall (*Help to Zion's Travellers*, 1779); Andrew Fuller (*The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, 1785); John Sutcliff (reprinting of Jonathan Edwards' *Humble Attempt*, 1789); and William Carey (formation of The Baptist Missionary Society 1792).

However, the contrast between mid-century stagnation and later prosperity can be overdrawn, and Roger Hayden's detailed study of evangelical Calvinism among eighteenth-century Baptist ministers trained at the Bristol Academy is a welcome corrective. *Continuity and Change* examines the development of evangelical Calvinism among Baptists from 1690 to 1791. It 'challenges the commonly received view of eighteenth-century Particular Baptists as obscurantist, ill-educated hyper-Calvinists. From the very beginning Particular Baptists had been

evangelical in their Calvinism. In the seventeenth century this was true of all Particular Baptists who shared the 1644 Confession of Faith and sought to promulgate it in various parts of the country. At the end of the century this Evangelical Calvinism still gripped the minds and hearts of many Particular Baptists in the Western Association, based upon Bristol.' (p.xi).

Dr Hayden traces the outworking of this evangelical Calvinism through the Western Baptist Association. He also comments on associational life in Wales, the Midlands, the North and Ireland. He outlines the birth of the Bristol Academy. Foundations were laid by Bernard Foskett and the work was carried on by Hugh and Caleb Evans. During the eighteenth century, the Bristol Academy trained 188 Baptist ministers. The Western Association and Bristol Academy took a lead in initiating itinerant preaching as an important means of evangelistic outreach. They also developed local church life in very positive ways: an emphasis on the gathered church as expressed in covenant, encouragement of congregational hymn-singing and nurturing clear understanding of the faith by means of confessions and catechisms. By contrast the London churches were more heavily influenced by men like John Gill and John Brine.

Dr Hayden includes helpful discussion of the Hyper-Calvinism of John Gill and others; but maintains that the effects of this doctrinal rigidity were largely worked out in the London area. In the regions outside the capital teachings based on the 1689 Confession prevailed, due in large measure to the influence of Bristol trained pastors. Consequently many

Particular Baptist churches outside London were sympathetic to and involved with the Great Awakening, *contra* some earlier historians. This work is thoroughly researched, carefully written, and greatly enhances understanding of a neglected period of Particular Baptist history.

The works of Abraham Booth, one of the leading Particular Baptist theologians of the later eighteenth century, have long been out of print. The Particular Baptist Press has just issued volume 1 of what will be a 3 volume series. This first volume contains a selection of Booth's sermons and Booth's confession of faith given at the time of his ordination in 1769. In two future volumes there will be his theological and soteriological works (Volume 2) and ecclesiological treatises (Volume 3). It should also be noted that the Particular Baptist Press has now completed publication of the 3 volume series on the British Particular Baptists (1998, 2000, 2003). These volumes contain essays on over fifty significant Particular Baptists in Britain, from John Spilsbury (1593 – c. 1662/1668) to Alexander Maclaren (1834-1910). For details of these and other works produced by the Particular Baptist Press, consult their website: [www.pbpress.org](http://www.pbpress.org)

*History of the English Calvinistic Baptists, 1771-1892* carries the story of Calvinistic Baptists through the period of their greatest advance, and on to the end of the nineteenth century. Robert Oliver begins with a chapter on John Gill. He then turns to the long and fruitful ministry of Benjamin Beddome in Bourton-on-the-Water in the Cotswolds. This chapter confirms the picture painted by Dr Hayden in

*Continuity and Change*. Beddome 'combined faithfulness to the historic Particular Baptist theology with the evangelical zeal of the eighteenth-century Revival' (p. 29). The rest of the book deals with some of the leading ministers among the Calvinistic Baptists (J C Ryland, Robert Hall sr, Abraham Booth, Andrew Fuller, William Gadsby, John Stevens, J C Philpot and C H Spurgeon.) The greater part of the work is taken up with discussion of the controversies which absorbed much time and energy during this period, especially the question of who should take the Lord's Supper, the place of the law in the Christian life, and the issue of whether the gospel should be 'offered' to all people. Dr Oliver carefully traces the emergence of the 'Strict Baptist' constituency from within the Particular Baptist tradition, including the role of magazines and organisations.

When the Baptist Union was formed in 1813, the basis was Calvinistic. But when it was reformed in 1832, the basis of faith was replaced by a declaration of acceptance of 'the sentiments usually denominated evangelical' which left the way open to Arminians joining. However the formal union of General and Particular Baptist only happened in 1891. By 1832 those who were veering towards Hyper-Calvinism, which included many of those who believed in the 'closed table' (to become known as 'Strict' Baptists) were uneasy about the way the Union was going. A loose grouping of 'Strict and Particular' Baptists was coming into being, their fellowship fostered by a number of magazines and associations, although significant numbers were staunchly independent.

This book is a tremendously valuable piece of research. It stands as a salutary warning. So much of it deals with fierce controversies and the impression is that some of the controversialists not only lacked grace towards fellow-believers, but also displayed little sense of the 'big picture' of the extension of Christ's kingdom in the whole world. If some Baptists in the twentieth century were so concerned with unity that they downplayed truth (see below), some of the Calvinistic Baptists described in this volume were guilty of the opposite error as were many of those described in the next book. While Dr Oliver focuses on the leading personalities and major controversies among nineteenth-century Calvinistic Baptists, Kenneth Dix in *Strict and Particular* offers a more 'grass roots' account of English Strict and Particular Baptists in the same period. He has gathered an immense amount of information on Strict and Particular Baptist chapels throughout England. His list of chapels in 1900 shows how they were distributed across the country; (the names alone are fascinating: numbers of Bethels, Ebenezers, Zions, Rehoboths, Providences, Bethesdas, and Beulahs – just four Cave Adullums!). There were almost 600 chapels altogether. Dr Dix begins with a chapter on William Huntington. He then moves on to William Gadsby and the northern counties, and then a chapter on the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists. There are then regional overviews of Suffolk and Norfolk, London, the South-East and the Home Counties. There is plenty of interesting local detail.

Dr Dix is refreshingly honest about his own tradition, concluding that 'Strict

Baptists were always averse to any kind of change, whether necessary or otherwise, which may well explain their far greater success in the more conservatively minded rural areas. Extreme conservatism and internal controversies, coupled with a preoccupation with the preservation of primitive communion and what was believed to be historic Calvinism, gave little opportunity or desire for involvement in the nineteenth-century debates on the authority and inspiration of Scripture, on eternal punishment, or the growing tide of secularism' (pp. 266-7). Dr Dix also draws out the dangers of extreme experimentalism, a feature of many Strict and Particular Baptist Chapels. (A letter from Jenkin Jenkins to Mary Hooper vividly illustrates the over-emphasis on experience which was ultimately to prove so damaging, Appendix 2, pp. 295-296). He points out that they were often unnecessarily separatist and isolated, emphasising sin and salvation while neglecting practical Christianity and the wider issues of the day. 'Their internal wrangling and consequent divisions, often on matters that were only peripheral, only weakened the effect of their forthright stand for what they believed to be historic Christianity' (p.278). It is almost incredible, today, to read of one Strict Baptist doubting 'the Divine reality' of Spurgeon's conversion (p. 209). Surely this very honest analysis should stand as a warning to us all to keep the gospel at the centre of our church life.

While many of the chapels studied by Kenneth Dix were introspective, it needs to be remembered that there were hyper-Calvinist ministers who were exemplary in their concern for the poor.

Ian Shaw in *High Calvinists in Action* gives detailed case-studies of William Nunn (Anglican), William Gadsby (Strict Baptist), Joseph Irons (Congregational) and James Wells (Strict Baptist). Each of these was High Calvinist (the term preferred by Dr Shaw to 'hyper-Calvinist'), and each was involved in a variety of ways to relieve the needs of the desperately poor who lived in their localities. Dr Shaw also examines the ministries of two 'evangelical Calvinists', Andrew Reed (see RT 210 for review of Ian Shaw's *The Greatest is Charity: the Life of Andrew Reed, preacher and philanthropist*) and William McKerrow (Presbyterian). Gadsby, Nunn and McKerrow ministered in Manchester, Wells and Reed in London. Social conditions in both cities are vividly portrayed. There is careful and detailed analysis of each ministry in terms of response to the huge challenge of urban poverty.

Brian Talbot has produced a comprehensive work on the Baptists of Scotland during the nineteenth century. In *The Search for a Common Identity*, he effectively uses a host of primary sources to unravel a complex scenario of various strands of Baptist life. Although in 1851 Baptists represented only 1% of churchgoers in Scotland, they still managed to divide into four groups: the Scotch Baptists, the Baptists who followed the Haldanes, the Particular Baptists (or 'English' Baptists) and the Arminians. This heterogeneity explains why all attempts at union between Baptists failed for the first two thirds of the nineteenth century. Brian Talbot explores these failed attempts, and then explains the

changing situation which led to the establishment of the Baptist Union in 1869. In particular he describes the impact of the work of the Baptist Home Mission Society, and he explains that the 1859 Revival had the effect of drawing different Christian groups together. He also traces the influence of English Baptists north of the border, especially pastors trained by C H Spurgeon. (See RT 211 for Brian Talbot's article summarising these developments.)

Moving on to the twentieth century, Ian Randall's work *The English Baptists of the Twentieth Century* completes the helpful series on English Baptists published by the Baptist Historical Society (previously published works on the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by B R White, Raymond Brown, and J H Y Briggs, respectively). *The English Baptists of the Twentieth Century* in fact does not deal with all English Baptists. It is, effectively, a history of Baptists within the Baptist Union, only mentioning in passing the Strict Baptists, Reformed Baptists, independent Baptists, charismatic Baptists outside the BU and so forth. To include all of these would have made the book too unwieldy (it is 600 pages). Dr Randall deals clearly with an enormous amount of material (he takes a chronological approach). This will stand as the indispensable text on the subject.

The end of the nineteenth century had seen the 'Downgrade Controversy', when C H Spurgeon withdrew from the Baptist Union over what he believed to be increasing tolerance of liberal doctrine. This tolerance accelerated during the twentieth century. In 1971,

the principal of the Northern Baptist College, Michael Taylor, gave an address in which he confessed his inability to affirm the Deity of Christ. 'However remarkable His life, I think I must stop short of saying categorically: Jesus is God.' When the Baptist Union resisted calls to remove Taylor from his position of training Baptist ministers, a significant number of churches and ministers left the Union; exact figures are not given. (It is telling that the Northern College now shares premises with and works in partnership with a Unitarian College.)

Following this episode the Baptist Union issued the following statement: 'The Union has always contained within its fellowship those of different theological opinions and emphases, believing that its claim for toleration involved tolerance and respect within its own ranks' (p.374). A leading layman, Sir Cyril Black, proposed that this amendment be added: 'consistent with acceptance of and loyalty to, the doctrinal clauses of the constitution'. This was defeated. 'Cyril Black was amazed that his own amendment had been rejected, since it seemed that there was now no limit to the views acceptable in the Union' (p. 375).

Looking forward into the twenty-first century, what is the vision of the Baptist Union? The 1997 statement of aim affirms the 'Baptist way of being the church, a covenant based on trust, commitment to justice, agreed models of translocal leadership, including superintendency, commitment to close partnership with the BMS [Baptist Missionary Society], and commitment to working ecumenically whenever possible' (p.517). Here as elsewhere,

one misses clear vision of the supreme aim of the glory of God in all things.

The history of the 'other' non-Baptist Union Baptists in the twentieth century is picked up by Tim Grass in an essay in the symposium *Recycling the Past or Researching History?* 'Strict Baptists and Reformed Baptists in England, 1955-1976' (pp. 294-316) is a helpful and fair analysis which will be of immediate interest to our readers. Tim Grass traces the development of these two distinct strands among Calvinistic Baptists, highlighting differences in ethos, doctrine and practice, while pointing to signs of mutual acceptance. (*Reformation Today* hopes to produce this essay as a 32 page booklet.)

There are fifteen essays altogether in the collection including a fine piece by Michael Haykin on Andrew Fuller and the political implications of his thought; thought-provoking essays by Anthony Cross on English Baptist attitudes to the Lord's Supper, by J H Y Briggs on denominationalism and by Stanley Fowler on independency and inter-dependency. A fascinating piece by Karen Smith on 'Forgotten Sisters' is included. Mark Medley discusses the negative impact of (largely American) decisionism on Baptist understanding of progressive sanctification, and suggests that returning to the early Baptist Confessions of faith would begin to remedy this problem.

Clive Jarvis discusses the 'myth' of High Calvinism (pp. 231-263). Drawing on Roger Hayden's work, as discussed above, he, like Hayden, seeks to challenge the 'old consensus' that the mid-eighteenth century was a period of stagnation for Particular Baptists, due

to the Hyper-Calvinism of such preachers as John Gill. Hayden puts forward a convincing argument that Hyper-Calvinism was a reality, albeit more limited in influence than has sometimes been maintained. Jarvis is so keen to vindicate John Gill from any responsibility for the decline of Particular Baptist fortunes, that he will only admit that 'it seems likely that the Calvinism of John Gill was more rigid than the likes of Fuller, Sutcliff and John Ryland Jr' (p. 252). This is, surely, an understatement. And to say that 'High Calvinism' was a 'myth', I believe takes historical revisionism a step too far; although this essay considers the eighteenth century, it is important to remember that hyper-Calvinism was very much a reality in the nineteenth century (as the works by Oliver and Dix demonstrate; for example the opposition to James Wells to the gospel ministry of C H Spurgeon).

What is a Baptist? Professor Tom Nettles sets out to answer this question in a projected three volume set, *The Baptists: Key People involved in forming a Baptist Identity*, of which the first two volumes have been published by Christian Focus. Volume 1 argues that Baptist identity consists of four main ideas: orthodoxy, evangelicalism, conscientious confessionalism and ecclesiological separateness. This thesis is illustrated from the lives of a number of leading British Baptists from the early seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century, including John Smyth, Dan Taylor, John Spilsbury, John Gill, Andrew Fuller and William Carey. Volume 2 tells the story of Baptist beginnings and growth in America. Professor Nettles shows that

Baptists were significant in the achievement of separation of church and state, and liberty of conscience. He traces the rapid growth of Baptists in New England, the Middle Colonies, and the South. There are biographies of a number of Baptist leaders, including Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland, John Gano and Richard Furman. Tom Nettles deals with the beginning of the missionary movement, and the anti-mission society movement. He concludes with a brief treatment of some of the Baptists of Scotland, Germany and Russia. Throughout the period covered by these first two volumes (the seventeenth through to the nineteenth century), Tom Nettles argues that the great majority of Baptists would embrace theological commitments involving historic orthodoxy and confessional evangelicalism (vol. 2, p. 445). The final volume will look at those factors which 'combined to start an avalanche of theological and denominational redefinition'.

Finally, *The Baptist History Collection*. This CD, which will be of most help to students of American Baptist history, contains 43,298 pages of resources on Baptist history. (A full list of contents is available on the website). It includes a number of general histories, national histories, including those of Crosby and Ivimey, state histories, association records, source documents, and a number of biographies.

*Sharon James*

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*Readers will understand that we cannot supply these books. Current prices and availability are best checked on the websites of the appropriate publishers.*

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## What is the Church?

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*A comparison between the 17<sup>th</sup>-century confessions*

*Kees van Kralingen*

### **Introduction**

Ecclesiology is receiving renewed attention in recent years in evangelical circles<sup>1</sup>. Part of the reason must be the emergence of new and different forms of churches: seeker-sensitive churches, the so-called 'emerging church' movement,<sup>2</sup> the phenomenon of internet-based churches. In addition, global communication and the growing exchange of people from different parts of the world have drawn attention to cultural aspects of the church. The key question is: What is the church? The aim of this article is to give a brief survey of the reformed answers given in the great 17<sup>th</sup>-century reformed confessions and to evaluate the relevance of these views for today.

### **The 17<sup>th</sup>-century confessions**

The Puritan movement in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century resulted in the development of the three great reformed, doctrinal confessions,<sup>3</sup> which have exerted a powerful influence in Protestant churches ever since. These confessions also address the subject of ecclesiology in more or less detail. The Westminster Confession is firmly Presbyterian, whilst the Savoy Declaration<sup>4</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> London Baptist Confession of Faith<sup>5</sup> of 1689 (referred to as the 1689) adopt a congregational ecclesiology (with the latter distinguishing itself

from the Savoy Declaration regarding the view on infant baptism).

*The Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration*

The Savoy Declaration and the Westminster Confession treat the subject relatively briefly with only 5 and 6 paragraphs, respectively. All three are uncompromisingly emphatic that the Pope represents antichrist and is not head of the church. Christ alone is Head of his church. The Savoy is unique in its eschatology of victory, 'we expect that in later days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the Kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.'

Both the Westminster and the Savoy follow Calvin in adopting the distinction between the invisible and the visible church.<sup>6</sup> According to the Westminster the latter is composed of those who profess the true religion and their children (the latter in line with its paedobaptist and Presbyterian position). This confession equates the visible church with the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. With the statement that 'outside the church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation' the Westminster also follows Calvin although it leaves some room for (a divine) exception. The Savoy

Declaration defines the visible church as 'the whole body of men throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel and obedience unto God by Christ according to it (the gospel)'. This is an expansion from the brief Westminster statement on the profession of true religion.

### *The Baptist Confession of 1689*

The 1689 also includes all the main elements of the Westminster but with some significant modifications and a lot of additional material. The 1689 has 15 paragraphs on the church. The 1689 also uses the term 'invisible church' but specifies this by adding the words 'in respect of the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace'. In other words, the church is invisible because the work of the Spirit is invisible.

Unlike the Westminster and the Savoy Declaration the 1689 does not use the phrase 'visible' church. The 1689 states in paragraph 2: 'All persons throughout the world who profess to believe the gospel and to render gospel obedience unto God by Christ are, and may be called visible saints' and it ends the paragraph by saying that 'and of such persons all local churches should be composed.' As compared to the Westminster the 1689 like the Savoy Declaration is more detailed about what is professed (the faith of the gospel) and adds the element of obedience. The 1689 places both here and in other places more emphasis on the personal nature of faith and obedience as essential marks of true believers and as pre-requisites for church membership.

Paragraph 3 explains that churches in this world are still troubled by mixture and error, in other words, are not pure.

However, Christ will always have a kingdom in this world.

In paragraph 5 the 1689 emphasises the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the church calls individuals (the elect) to faith and obedience, who are commanded to organise themselves in local churches. Paragraph 6 describes this as it were from the human perspective: they show by their confession and way of life, that they obey Christ's call. These are the 'visible saints' who 'willingly consent to hold fellowship together' and form the local church. The 1689 rejects any institutions or bodies over and above the local church (see paragraph 15). The 1689 in these two articles holds together a number of important features: first of all the work of the Lord through Word and Spirit and the command to form a local church and secondly, the focus on the personal response in voluntary church membership.

So true believers called by the Holy Spirit must become 'visible' in this world and then must also form a local church. In this way the 1689 draws a close connection between the invisible church and the visible appearance of the church (the visible saints). The biblical standard is that only true believers should be members of local churches. Even though the standard sometimes appears compromised because of human weakness and imperfection (see paragraph 3), there should be no conscious decision to allow non-believers into local church membership (see also the article by John Hammett in this issue). This is a significant development from both Calvin and the Westminster Confession.

The idea that there is no ordinary possibility of salvation outside the church is notably absent from the 1689. The reason is that the 1689 confesses that 'the Lord Jesus calls to himself from out of the world, through the ministry of his Word, by his Spirit, those who are given to him by his Father' (paragraph 5). This can happen wherever the Word is preached: in the church (meeting) or outside the immediate context of the church by the personal testimony of a believer. In the Westminster (following Calvin) the order is: through the ministry of the church (the preaching of the gospel) people are saved and added to the church. The 1689 reverses this order by stating that people, who hear the gospel, believe and obey form a local church. The 1689 in fact says that new believers are the fruit of the preaching of the Word applied by the Holy Spirit, and not the product of the church.

#### **Evaluation of the differences between the Westminster and the 1689**

Both confessions agree on key points thus reflecting their basic reformed position. The question on the need of the church if believers are the product of divine election is resolved explicitly in the 1689 (in contrast to the Westminster) in terms of the biblical command, necessity and inevitability for believers to meet and form a local society or church. The 1689 can do this because of its definition of visible saints.

In this way the 1689 can and does maintain a close connection between the invisible church and the visible church (regarded as the local congregation of visible saints), without making them completely equal (the

1689 still maintains the possibility that churches may contain hypocrites). The position of Calvin and the Westminster Confession has more difficulty relating the invisible church to the visible church. If a too intimate connection between the two is made, the risk is that the visible church as an institution will claim more than is in agreement with either the Bible or reality (showing imperfection). If they separate the two, the visible church may degenerate into an earthly institution robbed of its essentially biblical and spiritual nature. This element in the 1689 is relevant to any reformed ecclesiology. It does not resolve all the tension there is between the invisible church and its visible manifestation in the world, but it maintains a more biblical balance.

#### **Relevance for today**

The 1689 emphasises the responsibility of the churches to fight against error. The view of the local church composed of true believers therefore assumes application of biblical discipline (as indeed mentioned in paragraph 13).<sup>7</sup> Recent developments in the way people form churches underline the need for a fresh view on biblical church discipline.

The confessions and especially the 1689 assume both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. To keep these concepts in a biblical balance also in the area of ecclesiology is of utmost importance today. The church is not the product of human effort: Jesus Christ is the Head of the church who will gather and maintain his church to the end of the world. At the same time the Lord Jesus has given us the task to proclaim his Word in this world.

The clear biblical view on the importance of the local church is also much needed today. The church is not a 'fluid' and informal organisation. The biblical concepts of fellowship, congregation and covenant are fully applicable. This also means commitment. Believers are subject to the new covenant and they also 'covenant' with each other to form a local church. The aim of the local church is not entertainment or development of its members for its own sake. Rather the church has a clear biblical mandate and task to perform. The 1689 refers to the task 'to promote their common welfare and to engage in the public worship which he requires them to carry on while they continue in the world' (paragraph 5). We need to show the love of Christ in preaching the gospel in evangelism and mission and care for each other and needy people in the wider world.

The biblical emphasis on the local church does not mean total isolation from other churches. There is every biblical reason (Acts 15) to consult one another and to associate for mutual support 'with gifts and graces' whilst maintaining formal independence of the local church. This is well expressed in paragraphs 14 and 15 of the 1689. David Kingdon has shown from history that the early Baptist churches practised this kind of association with much benefit.<sup>8</sup> Many examples can be cited all over the world of Baptist churches uniting in unions or associations. We should at our conferences maintain and strengthen unity and association. Isolation is always dangerous for a local church.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Carson D A (ed.), *The Church in the Bible and the World* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1987); Carson D A (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); Dever M, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004); Dever M and Alexander P, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2005)

<sup>2</sup> D A Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> All of these can be found on: <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/documents/Savoy\\_Declaration/index.html](http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/documents/Savoy_Declaration/index.html)

<sup>5</sup> *A Faith to Confess: The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 (rewritten in modern English)* (Leeds: Carey Publications Ltd, 1975); see also the article by Erroll Hulse, *The 1689 - Its history and role today*, in: Clarke P *et al.*, *Our Baptist Heritage* (Leeds: Reformation Today Trust, 1993)

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (McNeill J T ed., and Battles, F L transl.) (Philadelphia: Westminster Press) Book IV

<sup>7</sup> This has also become a feature of other, non-Baptist confessions, e.g. the Heidelberg Catechism

<sup>8</sup> Kingdon D *Interdependency and Interdependency*, in: Clarke P *et al.*, *Our Baptist Heritage* (Leeds: Reformation Today Trust, 1993)

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*I.F.E.D. Padova Evangelical Study Centre.*

### Italy

Padova (Padua) is a beautiful city in northern Italy, the home of an ancient university (founded in 1221). It is also the home of an impressive contemporary study centre, the base for IFED (Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione). IFED was established in 1988 to encourage biblical thinking in all areas of life. It is committed to confessional Christianity as expressed in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. The theological study centre includes a library with 25,000 volumes and journals in Italian, Spanish, French and English and an auditorium which doubles as a meeting place for the Padova Reformed Baptist Church. This includes a conference meeting area and a residential wing with study bedrooms. The architecture incorporates Christian symbolism. All the lines in the building point towards the pulpit, representing the centrality of the Word. There are valuable reminders of Church history with a

unique collection of rare books representing the Reformation heritage in earlier Italian history. Through training programmes, publications and conferences IFED aims to help the Evangelical Italian Church see the transforming power of the gospel in the family, church, culture and society. The Director of the Centre is Professor Pietro Bolognesi, who leads theology courses in both Padua and Rome. His colleague is Professor Leonardo De Chirico, who leads an Ethics and Bioethics course aimed at promoting a biblical world view in this vital area; the course is open to medical professionals, teachers, social workers and church workers. Leonardo De Chirico has made a detailed study of contemporary Roman Catholicism, and IFED is planning a special programme for English-speaking students on this subject. The nineteenth annual theological study conference was held this year from September 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>. About two hundred and fifty people attended.



Main conference hall.



Dr Leonardo De Chirico and Sharon James.

Many were from churches affiliated to CERBI (Evangelical Reformed Baptist Churches in Italy), an Association based on the 1689 Confession, but many were also from other churches, and there was an encouraging contingent of young people. The theme this year was Christian womanhood and a biblical response to feminist ideology. Sharon James took the main sessions, outlining the background to current gender confusion, and dealing with some of the theological challenges. Whilst warning against being trapped in traditional ways of looking at the role of women, she also urged evangelical Christians not to be intimidated by current egalitarian trends. Other sessions dealt with motherhood, ministry marriages, and issues facing teenage girls. At the end of the conference, a 'position paper' was circulated, and the delegates were urged to take the complementarian vision of manhood and womanhood back, not only to their churches, but into the public sphere as well. We need to support the work of IFED and CERBI in prayer. Italy still needs a biblical Reformation, and the brothers and sisters involved in these movements are dedicated to promoting this.

For further information see [www.cerbi.it](http://www.cerbi.it)  
[www.ifeditalia.org](http://www.ifeditalia.org)

### South India

This year I was able to teach more young pastors and theological students than on any of my previous trips to India. There were 37 men. The great majority would have been in their twenties and they came from Baptist, Lutheran, Primitive Baptist, Church of South India and Pentecostal backgrounds. This year we read the first 30 pages or so of Piper's *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* and Packer's *Knowing God*. We followed my usual method of my reading, explaining vocabulary, and then of my putting a range of questions to them about the line or two that I had just read. Both books went down well and the response since by e-mail, has assured me that many of them are continuing their reading.

We met each morning at 7:00am and then on another 5 occasions through the day. Nearly all of the time remaining was spent talking with individuals. On May 23<sup>rd</sup> I joined a meeting of the Grace and Truth Asia Fellowship. They are endeavouring to meet on a monthly basis to help promote the Reformed faith in their part of the world. During that meeting we continued our discussion which has been ongoing for several years, of how and when to establish a Reformed Seminary in South India. There are a

number of excellent young men who are probably capable of doing this. However, they need to be educated to a higher level. They spoke of purchasing land. None of them has any money to speak of. Perhaps there is someone who reads this who will consider this idea. They are hopeful that Indian friends now living outside India, will help financially when the need is more pressing. *Stephen Turner, New Zealand.*

## **Bolivia**

In mid-July 45 pastors and church leaders from the south of Bolivia, gathered in the city of Sucre for the 3rd Pastors' Congress, organized by SIM missionaries. The main purpose of this conference was to encourage the pastors in their ministry of preaching and teaching the Word of God. The speakers were both from Trujillo in Peru: Alex Donnelly (who currently leads the CMA Seminary) and Pastor Marco Marroquin (the pastor of 'Covicorti' in Trujillo, and a teacher at the seminary). The Bible studies in the mornings were on the theme: 'The Glory of the Christian Ministry' (based on 2 Corinthians 2-4). The rest of the day was dedicated to workshops on the interpretation of Scripture, and the preparation of expository sermons. In the evening, the Bible studies were based on selected portions of Jeremiah.

Two sessions of questions and answers proved enlightening, with all kinds of questions being raised. One question was on justification by faith, and judging by the reaction of the pastors many of them were not clear on this doctrine. Most of those who attended have little theological education. They serve in small churches in scattered towns and villages in

southern Bolivia. Some of them have an itinerant ministry, and are responsible for several churches.

The conference finished with a united service in one of the larger churches in Sucre. 300 people attended, and it was wonderful to see different church groups on the platform, worshipping the Lord in their native language (Quechua) and costumes. The final message was a challenge to the churches to support their pastors, and give them every encouragement to attend such conferences as this.

The organisers have already embarked on the planning for next year's conference. The pastors requested that we study the book of Romans and devote time to Pastoral Theology. Although the round trip from Trujillo is over 5,000 km., we look forward to being with the brethren again next year. *Alex Donnelly*

## **Japan**

The Gallup Organisation has yielded some surprising results about the attitudes of Japanese towards religion, spirituality, and morality. Gallup found that six percent of the population is Christian, a number much higher than any study has previously indicated. Also, almost 20 percent of the youth population claims a faith with 36 percent of those claiming Christianity. This means that seven percent of the total youth population calls itself Christian. Gallup called the findings 'stunning' noting that social scientists considered it the most extensive study ever attempted.

(Gallup World Headquarters, 901 F St., NW, Washington, DC 20004 (202) 715-3030)

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**CONTENTS**

- 1. Editorial**
- 3. Regenerate Church Membership** John Hammett
- 13. Abraham Booth** Sharon James
- 23. The Unity of the Church** Joel Beeke
- 27. Baptist History – reviews** Sharon James
- 34. What is the Church?** Kees van Kralingen
- 38. News**