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*Raymond Zulu, Thomas (a student), Sheila and Nick Court. This photo was taken at Ora et Labora Conference Centre near Pretoria. See news.*



*Irving Steggles is pastor of the Birchleigh Baptist Church, Kemptom Park. He plays a key role in organising the Africa Style Conferences. This photo was taken at his home in Birchleigh.*

Front cover picture – This photo of pastor Bob Dickie and his son Ben and friend Norm, from the USA, was taken at the SUMCAY Conference Centre near Port Elizabeth (see news). Dr Paul Stoltz, a tutor in the Bible Institute of Eastern Cape, is on the left of the photo and in the background is a diving platform over the river. (See news).

Ben has made a film of the conferences which can be seen on <http://www.reformation-today.org/issues/rt216.htm> (see news).

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## Editorial

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The article on John Huss illustrates the appalling condition of the Church of Rome prior to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformation. Although of poor background Huss by hard work was appointed rector of Prague University, the then most important university after Paris and Oxford. Huss experienced genuine conversion. He became a powerful preacher in the Bohemian language. For clinging to biblical truth Huss was condemned at the Council of Constance (1414-1417) and burnt to death in 1415. Jerome, another bold preacher of the gospel, suffered in the same way. Pope John XXIII who had a scandalous personal criminal record was chiefly responsible for this wickedness. In loyalty and allegiance to Huss the Bohemians united in defence of the gospel. The military campaigns mounted by the Papacy against the Bohemians are described in the article.

This pre-Reformation history illustrates vividly the extraordinary nature of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformation that began in 1517 just one hundred years after the martyrdom of Huss and Jerome. The German, Swiss and Anglican reformation movements radically altered the face of Europe. That was a period of thrilling expectation and hope. I suggest that this 21<sup>st</sup> century is equally exciting and has prospects even greater than the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformation. You may well challenge such optimism.

My response is to consider the five largest nations in the world and compare the prospects for the gospel that prevail now compared with the times of Luther, Tyndale and Calvin.

We can start with China, which has the largest population on earth (1.3 billion). The expanding church in China is the culmination of several generations of prayer and missionary effort. The potential of about 70 million Bible believers, hungry for biblical exposition, represents potential that would have stunned the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformers. With indigenous printing presses and internet facilities the race is on to provide Reformed literature for this huge constituency of believers. Compare this to John Calvin who made an effort to start one small missionary work in Brazil. The Papacy soon killed that effort and it came to nothing. Calvin sent 88 trained church planters into France and that prospered so well that eventually the Protestant cause in France grew to over two million Huguenot believers. But that is small compared to China. It is expected that in a few years China will be liberated and become the number one economy of the world. That liberation will bring temptation for many to worship mammon that could have negative effects on the Chinese church. But a more optimistic view is that liberation will see China becoming not only the number one economy but also the number one missionary sending nation of the world. These times are thrilling times and in terms of hope and opportunity even more so than following the days of 1517.

The next most populous nation is India (1.2 billion) where the spiritual needs are so massive and Hindu darkness so oppressive that the overall scene looks hopeless. Yet God has been at work in this the largest democratic country of the

world. Today there are over 44,000 missionaries in India, sixty percent of whom are working cross-culturally in their own multi-lingual nation. Recent revivals in Nagaland and Mizoram have turned these states into Christian majorities. Are these not tokens of the power of the Holy Spirit to turn round other states in India? Pastors who visit India testify that the fields there are white to harvest and that receptivity to the gospel is in stark contrast to most parts of Western Europe. Certainly these are times equal in hope and anticipation to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformation.

Next in size is the USA where the population now exceeds 300 million. America is the number one missionary sending nation. In RT 214 I drew attention to an article in *Christianity Today* that described the rapid resurgence of the Reformed faith in the USA. The focus was on John Piper's ministry as well as that of Albert Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky (4,300 students). That article described only a fraction of the reformed resurgence in America. What an amazing contrast is this compared to the period 1880 to 1960 which was dominated by liberal theology. Seminaries were ruined. Shallow Arminianism prevailed in the churches which survived the destruction of liberalism. The influence of robust theology in America in lieu of sub-standard material has potential for the world that is beyond calculation. The reformed resurgence in the USA makes these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century times equal in hope and excitement to the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

With 240 million Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation and represents the largest predominantly Muslim nation. In

one generation the evangelicals have increased from 1.3 million to over 12 million. With a considerable degree of unity the Indonesian Christians have awakened to the need of reaching about 130 unreached people groups larger than 10,000 and a further 200 with fewer than that number. The American Missionary Aviation Fellowship operates with 28 planes to reach remote areas. Indonesia highlights the possibility of completing the missionary mandate but there are many obstacles and severe persecution. It is thrilling to be able to have a share in the fulfilment of the promise made to Christ that his salvation will be taken to the ends of the earth (Is 49:6). Viewed from the city of London the 4,000 inhabited islands of Indonesia together with the Pacific islands are the ends of the earth.

Brazil (190 million) is a Portuguese-speaking nation blessed with catalogues of the best expository books. The report in this issue describing the FIEL work in Brazil should warm the hearts of readers. Now more missionaries leave the shores of Brazil than enter that half-continent of a nation. The impact of the FIEL work in Mozambique is remarkable and reminds us of Psalm 2:8, 'Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.'

When the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformation began and Luther was summoned to appear before Emperor Charles V he truly wondered whether he would survive. Huss had not survived. For Luther the viable world was confined to Europe. Today almost all the nations of the earth are open to the gospel. To live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and have a part in intercession for the nations is easily as exciting as it was to live in the time of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformation.

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## The Testimony of John Huss

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*Frederick Hodgson*



In looking at a modern map of Europe, one would search in vain to find Bohemia. However, during the late Middle Ages the land around the city of Prague was called Bohemia. During the thirteenth century Waldensian and Albigensian Christians fled to Bohemia in order to escape fierce persecution. In doing so, they brought the gospel. Peter Waldo, who lived in the late twelfth century, made Prague the centre for his evangelisation of the Slavic peoples. However, within a hundred years believers were hounded by the authorities as they endeavoured to meet in homes, caves and woods to celebrate communion. The persecuted Christians were put to the sword or drowned in rivers. From 1376 dissenters were burnt at the stake. However, the surviving Waldensians in particular were to play a part in the coming reformation in Bohemia.

It was at about this time that John Wycliffe (1324 - 1384) was bringing gospel light to the people of England. His teaching was to have a major effect in Bohemia and is linked closely to the emergence of the United Brethren later in the fifteenth century and many evangelical movements throughout the world today. Meanwhile God was raising up a champion for truth in Bohemia. John Huss was born of poor parents in 1373. However, he was enabled to study in the new university in Prague. He was an intelligent, hard-working young student achieving his third degree by 1396. In 1402 he was appointed preacher at the recently built Bethlehem Chapel in Prague. This plain building had been completed in 1391 as a centre where people could hear preaching in their own language. Huss was to preach to up to 3000 people each week. He was known for his high moral standards. He was appalled at the way kings, nobles, prelates, clergy and citizens wallowed in greed, pride, drunkenness, lewdness and every profligacy. Huss preached moralistic scripturally based sermons against these sins. In doing so he was awakened to his own need.

He became aware of the teaching of Wycliffe. This was perhaps through Jerome, a Bohemian knight who had returned in 1400 after studying in Oxford. Like Wycliffe, Huss placed the authority of the Bible over that of the pope and councils of the church. However, with the exception of his view of authority, he did not dissent from the creed of the Roman Church or even plan to leave it at this time.

However as time went on Huss increased in his knowledge of the Scriptures and early church history. He became convinced of the huge gap between the preaching and practice of the early church on the one hand and that of the Roman Church on the other. Like Luther a century later Huss nailed a list of 6 principal errors of the church on the door of the Bethlehem Chapel. This protest made a major impression on the people of Bohemia. He became bolder and bolder and ridiculed the veneration of relics and images and the scandalous riches of the priests. Essentially Huss complained about the misuse of the authority of the church. This included the claim that priests were able to produce the literal body of Jesus Christ in the mass, the demand for faith in the church rather than God alone, and the priestly claim of authority to forgive sins.

It would be a mistake to think that Huss was the only preacher who objected to the errors of his day. His preaching was backed up by the eloquent Jerome. There had been gospel preaching in Prague before Huss. Matthew Janovius had earlier preached in the Cathedral church against sins of the day. He taught 'salvation was only to be found by faith in the crucified Saviour'. Janovius died in 1394 before Huss preached in the Bethlehem Chapel.

Meanwhile, the Roman Church of that time had three popes. The absurdity of this division was felt in Bohemia. Huss drew attention to the prevailing confusion and asserted that the accepted doctrine of apostolic succession was questionable. The attack of Huss on the church caused civil unrest and led to Prague being placed under an interdict which meant among other things that the dead could not be buried. Huss felt that his presence in Prague was making life difficult for his friends and he withdrew to his birthplace. He had done this on a previous occasion when his life had been threatened on the occasion of his attacking the sale of indulgences.

He was invited to the Council of Constance (1414-1417) by the Catholic Emperor Sigismund who promised him a safe passage to and from Constance. This Council was planned in order to remove the scandalous and debilitating divisions in Christendom. Also Muslim armies were threatening the West. Interestingly, the Council assumed supreme power over the church at the time. It deposed Pope John XXIII and had him imprisoned. The other two popes were also forced to resign their claim to office.

As a result of the intrigue of his enemies Huss was imprisoned without trial at Constance. Eventually he was brought to stand before an ecclesiastical court. In spite of his appeal to Scripture he was humiliated by the clerics and handed over to the secular powers, who chained him to a stake and burnt him, scattering his ashes into the Rhine. This happened in 1415. The Council of Constance had earlier decreed that the bones of Wycliffe should be dug up and burnt and then spread onto a flowing river in England.

Jerome went to Constance in order to encourage Huss. Soon he realised that his own life was in danger, so he set off back to Bohemia. On the way he was arrested, put in chains and put in a cart and imprisoned in Constance. Whilst suffering in prison he gave way under pressure and agreed that the judgments of the Council of Constance were right as they were executed against Wycliffe and Huss, but with the reservation that he agreed with their holy doctrines. All this was in vain because some members of the Council were determined to either make him recant or else die like Huss.

Jerome, filled with sorrow at his earlier weakness, then expressed his full identification with Huss and spoke eloquently for the truth. In spite of having been locked up in prison for about a year he quoted Scripture and the writings of the early church fathers with amazing accuracy. Many of those opposed to him were softened by his plea for truth and righteousness, rather than seeking mercy for himself. Despite their efforts to get him to recant, Jerome was unmoved. He was martyred in the same way as Huss.

There was a dramatic reaction to the cruel, unjust treatment of Huss and Jerome. Sigismund had reneged on the promise to Huss of a safe passage to and from Constance. The Bohemian people were utterly appalled at the way this promise was broken. After the martyrdom of Huss the people of Bohemia considered the beliefs he had upheld and compared them with those of his persecutors. Many of those who could study the writings of Wycliffe. This led to many embracing the gospel. The historian Wylie wrote, 'Within four years from the death of Huss, the bulk of the nation had embraced the faith for which he died. His disciples included not a few of the higher nobility, many of the wealthy burghers of the towns, some of the inferior clergy, and the great majority of the peasantry.'

What was the faith that Huss taught? Did he have a detailed confession of faith that he taught his people? He believed that the Bible was the source of all authority, and humbly submitted to its teaching, without developing a system of theology from it. He observed the huge discrepancy between the Roman Catholic Church and its practices compared to that of the New Testament Church. However, he respected the principle of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and some of its dogma; even at Constance he acknowledged the

principle of transubstantiation. Huss was strong on Christian behaviour but not as clear on doctrine as John Wycliffe whom he greatly admired. The Bohemian reformation was inhibited at the time by its weak doctrinal statements.

The followers of Huss were clear in their hatred of the Roman Catholic system and were united in cherishing what they saw as their biblical rights and liberties. However, their grasp of truth was not as strong as that which came to prevail among Protestants of the German, Swiss and Anglican Reformation of the following century.

Rome had insisted that only the priests should drink the wine at communion and that prayers should be said in Latin, rather than in the language of the people but the Hussites rejected both these commands. However, there was a divergence of opinion among the Hussites. Some, called Taborites, entirely rejected the authority of Rome and made the Scriptures their only standard. (They were initially led by John Zelivsky who expected Christ's second coming in 1420). The other group wished to remain in fellowship with Rome and under its authority, but only nominally. The Calixtines (or Utraquists) led by John Rokycana (1390-1471) made the cup their emblem and this was emblazoned on their flags, churches and city gates. They said that the cup was a sign of gladness and was a sign of an accomplished redemption. For many years Taborites and Calixtines prayed and fought together against the armies sent to subjugate them.

The Council of Constance closed in November 1417 after it had elected a new pope, Martin V. One of his first acts was to demand a crusade against Bohemia. The king of Bohemia was Wenceslaus, the half-brother of Sigismund, who had become weak and cynical as a result of reverses in his life. He was also thought to be partly responsible for the death of Huss by not supporting him against his enemies. He had a boisterous, coarse-humoured courtier who was a hardened soldier, called John Trocznowski (better known as Ziska, the one-eyed). On hearing of the death of Huss, he suddenly became serious. The king was struck by his sad countenance and enquired why Ziska was so downcast. Ziska replied that he wished to avenge Huss. He asked for royal permission to engage the Emperor Sigismund in war. This was given in jest, but on hearing of the pope's demand for a crusade against Bohemia, Ziska presented the king's written sealed approval to the citizens of Prague. As a result of their feverish excitement the king had a fit and died.

In 1419 the Calixtines and Taborites had jointly signed the Four Articles of Prague (so designated by 1420). Essentially these articles involved the principles of free preaching of the Word, communion in both kinds, the cessation of clerical temporal rule and excess wealth, and equal treatment

under the law of clergy and people. These four principles continued to hold the two parties together for the next fifteen years.

On Michaelmas Day, 1419 a crowd estimated to be 40,000 in size celebrated communion on a large plain close to Prague. The crowd was unarmed apart from carrying walking sticks. The priests without clerical garb led the service dispensing both bread and wine. This impressive service passed peacefully and a similar service was planned for another occasion. However, on this second occasion the emperor's soldiers heard about it and prepared to ambush the peaceful crowd. Happily this news reached the worshippers before it was too late and they enlisted a small group of Bohemian soldiers who defeated the emperor's force which was superior in numbers. The Bohemians returned joyfully to Prague to announce the news of the first military success over the emperor.

Provisionally the empire was attacked by the Turks at the same time as Sigismund was intent on subjugating the Bohemians. He had to divide his forces and this gave the Bohemians some time to prepare for future attacks.

Ziska encouraged his badly armed and poorly trained followers at his headquarters on Mount Tabor, several miles to the south of Prague. On marching towards Prague, they came across some imperial cavalry and routed them with the happy result that they were able to take their weaponry. On arrival at the city they proceeded to take vengeance on those who had opposed Huss; the monks in particular were targeted. Monasteries were wrecked and the riches stored within them were removed to pay for the war. Sigismund then made peace with the Turks so that he could concentrate his attentions on the Bohemians.

An imperial army of 100,000 men surrounded Prague in 1420, but the siege was broken by Ziska's army. The retreating soldiers wasted the land, committing atrocities on the people they came across, making no distinction as to whether the people were supporters of Ziska or not. In the same year a second excursion by the imperial army met the same fate and wreaked similar outrages on their retreat. A string of military successes earned Ziska much fame and his troops grew in confidence. Strangely, his troops swelled in numbers as a result of a predicted earthquake that would cause the destruction of several towns in Bohemia. The citizens of these towns decided that it was better to fight in the open, rather than be entombed in collapsed buildings.

It must be remembered that at this stage in their history the Bohemians had no king. At a special meeting or *diet* in 1421 at Czaslau, they considered offering the crown to the king of Poland, but it could only be done in such a way that ensured the four indispensable principles. Meanwhile the Emperor Sigismund

approached the *diet* and offered liberty and a correction of wrongs as long as they accepted him as king. He made his claim on the basis that he and Wenceslaus had the same father. The Bohemians rejected his proposals because of duplicity over the safety of Huss.

In the meanwhile it was determined that the country should be ruled by a regency of land-owners, nobles and business men under Ziska's presidency. The war continued unabated, with the Bohemians winning battle after battle despite their smaller army and resources. They believed in the rightness of their cause. They fought a defensive war designed to protect their liberty of conscience. Their confidence was in God and on their way into battle they encouraged themselves by singing hymns, having previously taken the sacrament administered in both kinds.

Ziska was a brilliant and innovative tactician. Essentially when he was under attack, he surrounded his troops by a circle of wagons chained together. Inside this his troops made a ring of shields stuck into the ground. The opposing cavalry was decimated by a cloud of arrows as they tried to get through these two defensive rings. Any horseman who succeeded in getting through was pulled to earth by a long spear with a hook attached and then dispatched with a swinging iron flail.

Ziska was more than a brilliant commander. He was an able politician and worked hard at maintaining the alliance of Calixtines and Taborites. He himself was a Taborite by conviction and had to ensure that the Taborites did not offend the Calixtines. Two groups sprang up within the Taborites that threatened the alliance. In 1420 the Picard priest Martin Houska held that rather than putting a wafer into the mouth of a communicant, a whole loaf should be given to the congregation and that they should break and divide it among themselves. This was opposed by Ziska, but he was more severe on the Adamites, a libertine sect, and 50 of these were burned in 1421.

Despite his attempts to keep the Hussite parties together, Taborites and Calixtines did not always agree and at times took up positions against each other. In 1424 Ziska besieged Prague, held by the Calixtines, but peace was negotiated with John Rokycana. Later that year the emperor was encouraged to hear that Ziska had died of the plague. Some of the Taborites had despaired of ever having another leader and they and their mentor Peter Payne, an exiled Oxford academic and disciple of Wycliffe, became known as the Orphaned.

The enemies of the Hussites received the news of the death of Ziska and the fragmentation of the Hussites with joy and it revived their determination to destroy them and bring an end to their resistance. Resistance did not crumble because the Lord had simply raised up a new man to replace Ziska. The

intelligent, cultured Taborite Procopius (Prokop the Great) had been named by Ziska as his successor.

A largely German force numbering between 70,000 and 100,000 men accompanied by 3000 wagons of supplies and 180 pieces of cannon invaded Bohemia in June 1426. Before battle was joined, Procopius offered quarter (mercy) to any taken captive in battle, but it was refused by the confident enemy. The Germans attacked the Bohemians' defensive positions and eventually broke through to the main body of the Bohemian soldiers. However, by this time the German cavalry was exhausted and was an easy prey of the defenders, who were largely untouched. The fleeing Germans pleaded for mercy, but as they had refused the offer of quarter before the battle, none was given and between 15,000 and 50,000 of their soldiers perished. The rest escaped, but left all the wagons, artillery and tents to the Bohemians, along with provisions and money.

The following year a still greater international force led by Henry de Beaufort, bishop of Winchester, appointed by the pope, assembled to attack Bohemia. As the international force approached the defending army it robbed the peasant farmers of Bohemia. The invaders got so close to the Bohemian army that they were able to see them on the other side of a river. However at the sight of the battle hardened Bohemians they took fright and fled. Again the fleeing soldiers were slaughtered either by the pursuing Bohemians or by the peasant farmers seeking revenge.

Procopius was a statesman as well as being a soldier and he saw his country suffering as a result of the wars and he sought peace. He summoned the Bohemian leaders to a *diet* at Prague in 1429 and got their agreement to discuss arrangements for peace with Sigismund in Vienna in 1429. He still insisted on the same four points for peace, but the bigoted emperor refused to listen and Procopius returned to Prague.

The battles had all been fought in Bohemia and its people had suffered as a consequence of this so Procopius decided to take the war to German soil with an army of 80,000. He devastated Western Germany, pulling down castles and destroying towns and exacting tribute from the wealthy. 300 wagons carried the trophies of war back to Bohemia. Wylie commented that the safety of Bohemia would have been better secured by engaging the minds and hearts of the Germans. Procopius failed to realise that the pen is mightier than the sword. His weak theology failed to produce a missionary concern for the Germans.

Meanwhile a fifth crusade was mounted against Bohemia, launched at a *diet* at Nuremberg. This time it was the new pope, Eugenius IV, who was the

driving force. Imperial soldiers were promised that if they fell in battle they would go straight to paradise and if they survived they would have a paradise on earth gained from the riches of Bohemia. An army of 130,000 men was assembled at Nuremberg and in August 1431 it crossed the border into Bohemia. The Bohemian defenders did not have half that number to repulse them, but they were brilliantly led. Procopius told his troops to fall back and he spread the false report that quarrels had broken out. His enemies marched on confidently into a trap prepared for them. Even at this stage the imperial army leaders expected a quick victory. Their leader, Cardinal Cesarini and his friend, climbed a hill to view the battle. The sight that greeted them alarmed them. They saw their troops suddenly taking flight for no apparent reason. Despite trying to intervene Cesarini could do nothing to stop the stampede of frightened soldiers. The booty of battle that fell into the hands of the Bohemians was enormous.

The Bohemian soldiers then marched into lands belonging to the empire and in 1432 the emperor sent letters to them requesting a peace settlement. The Hussites were invited to a general church council at Basle with the assurance of a safe passage. Despite doubts about these assurances 500 men set out from Prague and entered Basle led by Procopius and others including John Rokycana, representing the Calixites and Peter Payne representing the Orphaned. The Hussites insisted that any settlement should be based upon the four points. They stubbornly refused to be drawn into a wide debate on theological issues and simply held that the Word of God is the supreme authority and they did not believe or teach anything that was contrary to it. They tenaciously stuck to their position for four months.

All parties were sick of war and it was agreed that the debate should be continued in Prague. In 1434 the Diet of Bohemia opened in Prague. A sad compromise was reached in which the four articles were accepted, but the right of interpreting them would belong to the pope and emperor. A Roman Catholic scholar of the time, Aeneas Sylvius, destined to become the next pope, and the secretary at the Council of Basle, commented, 'The formula of the Council is short, but there is more in its meaning than its words.' Sigismund became sovereign of Bohemia after the Diet of Bohemia in Prague.

The testimony of John Huss and his martyrdom played a vital role for the gospel of Christ for a hundred years before the mighty Reformation of the 16th century which began in 1517 and was entrenched by 1522.

Wylie, J.A., *History of Protestantism*

Williams, G.H., *The Radical Reformation*

Randall, I., *Unity Truly of the Universal Christian Faith*

Hutton, J.E., *History of the Moravian Church*

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## The Instrument of Sanctification

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*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth (John 17:17).*

This petition lies in the heart of the great high-priestly prayer of Jesus. Jesus is our great high priest. All believers are priests in the sense that all have equal access to the throne of grace but Jesus is special as he is divine. He fulfils the type of the high priest in the Old Testament tabernacle who represented the twelve tribes. Jesus represents all his redeemed people. In this last great recorded prayer Jesus' paramount concern is for the unity of all his people. This unity is unity in the truth. He prays that this unity will be complete so that the world may know that Jesus is truly sent from the Father (17:23).<sup>1</sup> Unity contributes in a major way to the witness of the church. Disunity is extremely harmful to that witness. The unity prayed for is a spiritual unity which our Lord likens to the unity of the Trinity.

The perfection or completeness of unity with each other is brought about by the indwelling of Christ by the Holy Spirit. The question of unity is closely related to that of progressive sanctification which is the full-time concern or business of all believers. With this comment on the context we will now look in more detail at verse 17.

John 17:17 can be divided as follows

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|----|---|---------------------------|
| 1. | The work to be done                           | <i>Sanctify them</i>      |
| 2. | How this work is to be achieved               | <i>by the truth</i>       |
| 3. | The instrument by which this work is achieved | <i>your word is truth</i> |

### **1. The work to be done**      *Sanctify them*

'Sanctify them' is an aorist imperative which is emphatic. It means sanctify them completely. This strong imperative suggests all the sanctifying activity of God from the time of a believer's being set apart in Christ, (which is the first meaning of sanctify), through the whole process of progressive sanctification to its completion when the believer will be perfect in glory, (which is the second meaning of sanctification).

What is progressive sanctification? The Westminster Larger Catechism answers this well when it says:

'Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the

powerful operation of his Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ to them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance to life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and these graces so stirred up, increased and strengthened, as that they more and more die to sin, and rise to newness of life.’

Christians are described as those who are being made holy. ‘By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy’ (Heb 10:14). Progressive sanctification or holiness applies to all those who are in Christ without exception. Hebrews 12:14 declares, ‘Without holiness no one will see the Lord.’ Paul expresses his burden for progressive holiness when he says that his aim in the ministry is to ‘present everyone perfect in Christ’ (Col 1:28).

## **2. How this work is to be achieved**      *by the truth*

I take the truth here to mean the teaching of the gospel. Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32). The truth here consists of basic facts of the gospel. It is a helpful exercise to compile a list of summaries of saving truth which are found in the New Testament. A good example is 2 Corinthians 15:1-8 where Paul explains briefly how we are saved through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Another is Paul’s introduction in his letter to the Romans: ‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith” ’ (Rom 1:16,17).

Examples of statements which describe soul-saving truth from the Old Testament are Genesis 15:6; Proverbs 3:1-6; Isaiah 53:4-6; Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-29, and from the New Testament: Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 24:45-49; 1 Timothy 1:15-17; Hebrews 7:23-28; 1 Peter 1:3-9; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 1 John 1 and Revelation 22:17-22.

The Holy Spirit uses the words and meaning of Scripture to convince of sin and to regenerate sinners. ‘He chose to give us birth through the word of truth’ (James 1:18). Peter expresses this same truth when he writes, ‘For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God’ (1 Peter 1:23). The same Word is the instrument of progressive sanctification as Peter says, ‘Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have a sincere love for your brothers’ (1 Peter 1:22).

This leads us directly to the next principal issue in our understanding of John 17:17.

### 3. The instrument by which this work is achieved *your word is truth*

The instrument of our sanctification is the Bible. As the truths of the Bible are understood and acted upon so our lives are transformed. Notable is Romans 12:2, 'Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.' The Word is the instrument of renewing the mind. It is through our minds that our affections are stirred to love and obey God's will for us. It is through our minds that we are motivated to serve God in practice. Psalm 119, placed in the centre of the Bible, is an acrostic poem in which each of the twenty-two Hebrew letters is used eight times in each section. The theme of the psalm is the believer's relationship to Scripture. Every part of his life is to be permeated with and governed by Scripture. When he rejected Satan's temptation Jesus cited Deuteronomy 8:3, 'It is written: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

Now why should God change and govern our lives by a book? Why should a book, the Bible, be the instrument? Why does he not speak to us audibly like he did on occasions to Moses? Why does he not use dreams like he did in the life of Joseph? Or why does he not use visions like he did when he called Ezekiel to the ministry of teaching his people in the exile in Babylon? These direct communications are extremely rare and mark those times when God intervened in a major way in history. The fact is that the basic way all God's people are to live is by Scripture. To cite Deuteronomy again, 'It is written: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' God teaches and guides his sons and daughters through the instrumentality of a book, the Bible.

The primary methods ordained of God in mediating the substance of the Bible to us are preaching and reading. Called preachers expound and apply the Bible. What about those who are not blessed with faithful preaching of the Word? They read and meditate on the Word and are thereby instructed by it. And what of those who cannot read? When Tyndale's New Testament reached the English people, those who could not read would gather round a reader and listen. The words were so precious that they memorised paragraphs. What about those who do not have the Bible? That is tragic! The apostle Paul says, 'How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news"' (Rom 10:14,15).

The Word is the instrument of our sanctification. The best way to illustrate this is to take specific subjects that apply to all true Christians as follows:

The Word is unique in revealing the transcendent glory and divine attributes of the Trinity. Throughout Scripture we come face to face with the living God and the way he reveals himself in his actions and in his inspiration of the prophetic writers. The immediate effect of that is to humble us and convict us of our sinfulness and unworthiness. A striking example is the calling of Isaiah. He saw the glory of God in the Temple. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5).

The Word of God is unique in exposing the origin and appalling consequences of sin. No other book is like this one which faithfully describes sin and its effects. Cain murdered Abel. Then it is reported in Genesis chapter six, 'The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of his heart was only evil all the time.' Then followed the universal flood. After the flood Noah's sin is exposed. New hope for the race of mankind came in the calling of Abraham but not even Abraham's sins are concealed. King David sinned grievously and that is on record too. The fact is that the Bible is unique not only in describing sin as it really is but in providing atonement for it and a way by which believers can live holy lives in which they make progress in sanctification. All this comes by a knowledge of Scripture. The Word is the instrument of sanctification.

The Word of God is unique in defining what sin is and in warning of the judgement to come and of eternal hell. As soon as the children of Israel emerged from Egypt and came into Sinai the Lord gave them the Ten Commandments. This was spoken audibly to them all and the same Ten Commandments were written on tablets of stone to be kept in the ark. The primary importance of the decalogue and a perfect summary of moral law could hardly have been more emphatic. Here is moral law by which not only Israel but all mankind will be judged. This perfect moral law is also written in the consciousness of all mankind (Rom 2:14).

The Bible is unique in showing that sin is destructive and damning. Also the Bible alone shows the great difficulty and cost of atoning for sin and that nothing but the ultimate sacrifice of Christ could take away the guilt of our sin (2 Cor 5:21). Leon Morris suggests in his commentary on Romans that Romans 3:21-26, where Paul describes propitiation, is the most important single paragraph ever written.

The Word of God is unique in describing salvation. Christ is revealed progressively through the Old Testament by way of descriptions of his person and work. For instance his glorious person, his ministry and his perseverance are described by Isaiah in the four Servant passages. When Jesus comes to

fulfil all these promises there is not one Gospel to describe him but four. This is germane to our sanctification because as believers we are in union by faith with Christ and it is from him that we derive our salvation. We are reminded of this every time we come to the communion table and partake of the bread and the wine. But that ordinance too is dependent on the Word of God for its authority. There is no other book which describes the life, death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Christ like the Bible. As believers we feast on Christ but that feasting comes through Scripture. Hence Jesus prays, 'Sanctify them by your truth; your word is truth.'

The Word of God is unique in describing the sovereign way in which salvation takes place. 'You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly' (Rom 5:5). We call this free grace. It is unmerited favour freely given without any regard to human merit. When we were dead in sins God raised us up in a spiritual resurrection which is expressed by Paul when he declares, 'For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do' (Eph 2:10). The Father has predestined his people to be conformed to the likeness of his Son (Rom 8:29). 'He who begins a good work in you will carry it on to completion' (Phil 1:6). This knowledge of God's sovereign purpose is vital in personal sanctification and it is conveyed to us through the Word. We would be discouraged to say the least if everything depended on us. The Father works it so that we live as though everything depends on us, but at the same time through Scripture we know that he will never leave us nor forsake us. Human responsibility is greatly emphasised in the Word. Hence the exhortation, 'Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good pleasure' (Phil 2:12,13). Why has God allowed Satan such powers and why is it that we are not immediately translated to heaven like Enoch and Elijah? Why can't we escape death like they did? The reason is that God's purpose for us is progressive sanctification and in the last written words of Peter, 'Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 3:18). When things go wrong and we are disobedient or even rebellious the Lord is patient with us and restores us. This may take place through chastisement because the Lord disciplines those he loves (Heb 12:1-12). But how would we know this unless it were so clearly described to us in the Word?

The Word is unique in explaining the life of holiness in its every department. 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (Ps 119:105).

Here are some examples.

The Word explains how we should live as husbands and wives and how we should bring up our children. Ephesians 5:22-6:4 provides instruction for

family relationships. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church. Wives are to be submissive to the leadership of their husbands in the Lord. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord. Fathers are to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. This theme is especially important in days when there is a massive attack on family life. Pastors should preach regularly on the family as it is essential for families and for the churches. The sermons on Ephesians by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones provide an example of how this can be done.

The Word explains how we should live out the doctrines of grace. In Colossians 3:12-14 we are exhorted 'as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience'. John Davenant (1572-1641) unpacks the meaning of each word in this passage in a masterly way. His commentary on Colossians is published by the Banner of Truth. Included in this passage is the exhortation to forgive each other even as Christ has forgiven us. On that theme there is nothing to equal the example of our Lord which is described in 1 Peter 2:21-23.

The Word of God explains how we should mortify besetting sin (Col 3:5; Rom 8:13). Also the Scriptures explain the wiles of the devil and how we conduct spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6:12-18 is an important passage since it describes the weapons provided for the conflict. Discipline is a necessity. Holiness includes tears and toil but it is combined with joy, peace and hope. There is the anticipation of the second coming of our Lord and the glorious resurrection from the dead. There is the joyful prospect of the new Jerusalem and the new earth in which eternal righteousness will reign. There is the glory day by day of coming to the throne of grace in prayer (Heb 12:22-24).

I have sought to show the centrality of the Bible in our lives as Christians and how the Bible is used by the Holy Spirit to achieve progressive sanctification. A Christian's relationship toward the Bible is a telling and crucial factor. How do you relate to the Bible? To love the Bible is to love the Triune God.

i The periphrastic (roundabout way of speaking) plural, perfect, passive participle *teteleiōmenoi* is pointing to a goal namely the goal of complete unity which has ongoing effects. John 17:23 is not easy to understand. Don Carson says in his commentary on John, 'The thought is breathtakingly extravagant.' As we look about today the unity of individual churches is often in tatters and there are so many denominations it is bewildering for the world to understand. Of these denominations some have moved so far from the Bible that it is difficult to explain to unbelievers that they hardly come into the orbit of John 17 which is a unity of those who are united to the Trinity.

### **Bird's-Eye view of Conferences in Southern Africa**

The first Evangelical and Reformed week-long family conference in South Africa had its origin in 1971 and is now regularly attended by about 250 at Skogheim Conference Centre, Port Shepstone, Kwazulu. The dates for the next conference are 29<sup>th</sup> June to 4<sup>th</sup> July. Spencer Cunnah and Chris Hand are the preachers. In Zambia, Reformed Baptist conferences began about fifteen years ago and have grown steadily with about 600 attending one of these conferences. In South Africa the Grace Conference for ministers and their wives also began about fifteen years ago. Two well-known speakers are invited year by year. Numbers have increased gradually. This conference is repeated three times in early January. This year 163 (including day visitors) attended in Stellenbosch. At Eskom, Midrand, near Pretoria, 207 and 199 came. Mark Dever and Don Carson were the visiting speakers. The ministers' conference in Nampula, Mozambique, has increased from 84 in 2000 to 190 in 2006. 'Nampula' is a pure African Style conference with a large amount of books in Portuguese selling at low prices. The Namibian conference and the SOLA5 conferences are reported by Bob Davey (See news). The SOLA5 conference is for church delegates. It is exciting to observe that they come from about seven different southern African countries.



*Group photo taken at Hillcrest. Some conferees missed the photo.*

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## Herman Witsius (1636-1708)

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*Joel R Beeke and Randall J Pederson*  
*(taken from Meet the Puritans, see page 27)*



Herman Wits (Latinized as Witsius) was born on February 12, 1636, at Enkhuizen, to God-fearing parents who dedicated their firstborn to the Lord. His father, Nicholas Wits, was a man of some renown, having been an elder for more than twenty years, a member of Enkhuizen's city council, and a writer of devotional poetry. Witsius's mother, Johanna, was a daughter of Herman Gerard, pastor for thirty years of the Reformed church in Enkhuizen. Herman was named after his grandfather with the prayer that he might emulate his godly example.

Witsius began Latin studies at age five. Three years later, his uncle, Peter Gerard, noticing the boy's gifts, began to tutor him. By the time Witsius took up theological studies in Utrecht at age fifteen, he could speak Latin fluently, read Greek and Hebrew, and had memorized numerous Scriptures in their original languages. At Utrecht, he studied Syriac and Arabic under Johannes Leusden and theology under Johannes Hoornbeek,

whom he called "my teacher of undying memory." He also studied under Andreas Essenius, whom he honored as "my father in the Lord," and Gisbertus Voetius, whom he called "the great Voetius."

After studying theology and homiletics with Samuel Maresius at Groningen, Witsius returned in 1653 to Utrecht, where he was profoundly influenced by the local pastor, Justus van der Bogaerd. According to Witsius's later testimony, van der Bogaerd's preaching and fellowship brought him experientially to understand the difference between theological knowledge gleaned from study and the heavenly wisdom taught by the Holy Spirit through communion with God, love, prayer, and meditation. Witsius wrote that he was born again in "the bosom of the Utrecht church by the living and eternal Word of God." Through this godly pastor's influence, Witsius said, he was preserved "from the pride of science, taught to receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, led beyond the outer court in which he had previously been inclined to linger, and conducted to the sacred recesses of vital Christianity."

As a teenager, Witsius had demonstrated his gifts in public debate. In 1655, he defeated some of the leading debaters at the University of Utrecht by showing that the doctrine of the Trinity could be proven from the writings of ancient Jews. The following year, Witsius passed his final examinations and was declared a candidate for the ministry.

In 1657, Witsius was ordained into the ministry at Westwoud. His catechizing of young people there bore special fruit, but he also encountered opposition because of the congregation's ignorance of their Reformed heritage. Medieval customs such as praying for the dead were still

evident among the people. These problems convinced Witsius early in his ministry of the need for further Reformation among the people. It also prompted him to publish his first book, *'t bedroefde Nederlant* (The Sorrowing Netherlands).

In 1660, Witsius married Aletta van Borchorn, daughter of a merchant who was an elder in Witsius's church. They were blessed with twenty-four years of marriage. Aletta said she could not tell what was greater – her love or her respect for her husband. The couple had five children – two sons, who died young, and three daughters: Martina, Johanna, and Petronella.

In 1661, Witsius was installed in the church at Wormer – one of Holland's largest churches – where he succeeded in uniting warring factions and training the people in divine knowledge. He and his colleague, Petrus Goddaeus, took turns teaching a doctrinal class on weekday evenings to “defend the truth of our teachings against false doctrines” and to inculcate “the sanctity of our teachings in terms of God-fearing conduct.” The class began in private homes, then outgrew that space and moved to the church. Eventually people had to stand outside the church due to lack of room. These class lectures were eventually published in a book titled *Practycke des Christendoms* (The Practice of Christianity), to which Witsius appended *Geestelycke Printen van een Onwedergeborenen op syn beste en een Wedergeborenen op syn slechste* (A Spiritual Picture of the Unregenerate at His Best and the Regenerate at His Worst).

*Practycke des Christendoms* explains the primary grounds of godliness, while the appended work applies those grounds by teaching what is laudable in the unregenerate and what is culpable in the regenerate. John Owen said he hoped he could be as consistent as Witsius's unregenerate man at his best and that he would never fall so deeply as Witsius's regenerate man at his worst.

Witsius accepted a call to Goes in 1666, where he labored for two years. In the preface to *Twist des Heeren met syn*

*Wijngaert* (The Lord's Controversy with His Vineyard), published in Leeuwarden in 1669, he said he had labored with much peace in this congregation together with three colleagues, “two of whom were venerated as fathers, and the third was loved as a brother.” Of these four ministers working together in one congregation, Witsius noted: “We walked together in fellowship to God's house. We did not only attend each other's services, but also each other's catechism classes and other public services, so that what one servant of God might have taught yesterday, the others confirmed and recommended to the congregation the next day.” Under the influence of these four ministers, “all sorts of devotional practices blossomed, piety grew, and the unity of God's people was enhanced,” Witsius wrote.

After serving Goes, Witsius went to his fourth pastoral charge, Leeuwarden, where he served for seven years (1668-1675). In 1672, called the “Year of Disaster” (*rampjaar*) because the Dutch Republic was attacked by four enemies who had declared war on the Netherlands (France, England, and the German electorates of Cologne and Munster), Witsius gained renown for faithful ministry in the midst of crisis. Johannes à Marck, a future colleague, said of Witsius that he knew of no other minister whose labors were so owned of God. In 1673, Witsius again teamed up with a renowned colleague – this time, Wilhelmus à Brakel, with whom he served two years. At Leeuwarden, Witsius played a critical role mediating disputes between Voetius and Maresius.

In 1675, Witsius was called to be a professor of theology. He served in this capacity for the rest of his life, first at Franeker (1675-80), then at Utrecht (1680-98), and finally at Leiden (1698-1707). Shortly after his arrival at Franeker, the university there awarded Witsius a doctorate in theology. His inaugural address, *On the Character of a True Theologian* (1675), which was attended by scholars from all over the province, stressed the difference between a

theologian who knows his subject only scholastically and a theologian who knows his subject experientially. Under Witsius's leadership the university began to flourish as a place to study theology, especially after the arrival of the twenty-one-year-old professor, Johannes à Marck, in 1678. It soon attracted students from all over Europe.

During his professorship at Franeker, tension between the Voetians and the Cocceians escalated. Witsius's concern about this controversy moved him to publish *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus* (1677), first printed in English in 1736 as *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man, comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*. It was reprinted numerous times, most recently in two volumes by the den Dulk Christian Foundation in 1990 (see below). In governing his systematic theology by the concept of covenant, Witsius uses Cocceian methods while maintaining essentially Voetian theology. In his work on the covenants, Witsius argued against Roman Catholicism, Arminianism, Socinianism, and those Dutch Protestant theologians who, with Hugo Grotius, had exchanged a *sola scriptura* theology for an institutionalized, sacramental view of the church based on traditions that paved the way back to Rome.

Witsius next went to Utrecht, where he labored for eighteen years as professor and pastor. Students from all over the Protestant world attended his lectures; magistrates attended his sermons. On two occasions, his colleagues honored him with the headship of the university (1686, 1697).

In 1685, the States General appointed Witsius as a delegate to represent the Dutch government at the coronation of James II and to serve as chaplain to the Netherlands Embassy in London. While there he met the archbishop of Canterbury as well as several leading theologians. He studied Puritan theology and enhanced his stature in England as a peacemaker. Later, the English church called on him to serve as a mediating figure between

antinomians and neonomians – the former accusing the latter of overemphasizing the law, the latter accusing the former of minimizing the law. Out of this came his *Conciliatory Animadversions*, a treatise on the antinomian controversy in England. In this treatise, Witsius argued that God's starting point in His eternal decrees did not demean His activity in time. He also helped facilitate the translation into Dutch of some of the works of Thomas Goodwin, William Cave, and Thomas Gataker and wrote prefaces for them.

Witsius's years at Utrecht were not free from strife. He felt obliged to oppose the theology of Professor Herman A. Roell, who advocated a unique mixture of the biblical theology of Johannes Cocceius and the rationalistic philosophy of René Descartes. Witsius felt that this combination threatened the authority of Scripture. Witsius taught the superiority of faith over reason to protect the purity of Scripture. Reason lost its purity in the fall, he said. Though reason is a critical faculty, it remains imperfect, even in the regenerate. It is not an autonomous judge, but a servant of faith. Clearly Witsius's understanding of who God is affected his understanding of how we know what we know and that Scripture is the final standard of truth rather than our reason. His knowledge of God through the Scriptures shaped all his thinking, as is evident in his defense of the penal substitution of Christ against the rationalist Socinus.

Subsequently, Witsius opposed rationalism in the teachings of Balthasar Bekker as well as the popular, separatistic ideas of Jean de Labadie. He admitted that the Reformed churches were seriously flawed, but he strongly opposed separating from the church.

At Utrecht, Witsius published three volumes of *Exercitationes Sacrae* (Sacred Exercises), two on the Apostles' Creed (1681) and one on the Lord's Prayer (1689). Second in importance only to his *Economy of the Covenants*, these books stress the truths of the gospel in a pure, clear manner. The three works birthed in a

seminary setting are known as Witsius's trilogy (see below).

In the midst of his busy years at Utrecht (1684), Witsius's wife died. His daughter Petronella, who never married, remained with her father, faithfully caring for him through his twenty-four years as a widower.

When he was sixty-two years old, Witsius accepted a call to serve at the university at Leiden as professor. His inaugural address was on "The Modest Theologian." At Leiden he trained men from Europe, Great Britain, and America, including several Native Americans who had been converted through the work of John Eliot.

In 1699, Holland and West Friesland appointed Witsius inspector of the University's theological college. It was a position he held until he retired in 1707 because of ill health. In his last six years he suffered painful bouts of gout, dizziness, and memory lapses. After a serious attack in October of 1708, he told friends that his homecoming was near. Four days later, he died at the age of seventy-two after nearly fifty-two years of ministry. During his last hour, he told his close friend, Johannes à Marck, that he was persevering in the faith that he had long enjoyed in Christ.

Witsius had many gifts. All his life he was a humble biblical and systematic theologian, dependent on the Scriptures. He was also a faithful preacher. For him, Christ – in the university, on the pulpit, and in daily living – took preeminence. As an exegete, he exhibited scriptural simplicity and precision. As a historian, he measured movements against the ideal, apostolic church, bringing history and theology from numerous sources to bear upon his reasoning. As a theologian, he grounded spiritual life in regeneration and covenantally applied the entire order of salvation to practical, experiential living. As an ethicist, he set forth Christ as the perfect example in probing the heart and guiding the believer in his walk of life. As a polemicist, he opposed Cartesianism, Labadism, antinomianism, neonomianism, and the excesses of Cocceianism. As a

homiletician, he, like William Perkins, stressed the marks of grace to encourage believers and convict nominal Christians.

Witsius influenced many theologians in his lifetime: Campegius Vitringa and Bernardus Smytegelt in the Netherlands, Friedrich Lampe in Germany, and Thomas Boston and the Erskine brothers (Ralph and Ebenezer) in Scotland. James Hervey commended him as "a most excellent author, all of whose works have such a delicacy of composition, and such a sweet savour of holiness, [like] the golden pot which had manna, and was outwardly bright with burnished gold, inwardly rich with heavenly food."

*The Apostles' Creed* (P&R; 2 vols., 1,170 pages; 1993). More than a century after Witsius's death, two of his most significant works were translated into English: *Sacred Dissertations on what is commonly called The Apostles' Creed*, translated by Donald Fraser, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1823), and *Sacred Dissertations on the Lord's Prayer*, translated by Rev. William Pringle (Edinburgh, 1839; see below). Both of these works are judicious, practical, pointed, and edifying. They are meat for the soul.

Witsius's two-volume work on the Apostles' Creed, originally published in Latin at Franeker in 1681, grew out of lectures he gave to his students at the University of Franeker. His exposition of the creed begins with studies that discuss its title, authorship, and authority; the role of fundamental articles; and the nature of saving faith. The creed's authority is great but not supreme, Witsius said. It contains fundamental articles that are limited to those truths "without which neither faith nor repentance can exist" and "to the rejection of which God has annexed a threatening of destructions." It is scarcely possible to determine the number of fundamental articles. Some are not contained in the creed but are taken up in lengthier doctrinal standards.

Witsius again addressed the acts of saving faith, affirming that the "principal act" of

faith is the “receiving of Christ for justification, sanctification, and complete salvation.” He stressed that faith receives “a whole Christ,” and that “he cannot be a Saviour, unless he be also a Lord.” He reasserted the validity of obtaining assurance of faith by syllogistic conclusions and distinguished temporary faith from saving faith. Because temporary faith can remain until the end of a person’s life, Witsius preferred to call it presumptuous faith. These kinds of faith differ in their knowledge of the truth, their application of the gospel, their joy, and their fruits (1:56-60).

The remainder of the work follows a phrase-by-phrase 800-page exposition of the creed, accompanied by more than 200 pages of notes added by the translator. Throughout, Witsius excels in exegesis, remains faithful to Reformed dogmatics without becoming overly scholastic, applies every article of the creed to the believer’s soul, and, when occasion warrants, exposes various heresies. His closing chapter on life everlasting is perhaps the most sublime. His concluding applications summarize his approach:

- From this sublime doctrine, let us learn the Divine origin of the Gospel
- Let us carefully inquire whether we ourselves have a solid hope of this glorious felicity
- Let us labor diligently, lest we come short of it
- Let us comfort ourselves with the hope of it amidst all our adversities
- Let us walk worthy of it by leading a heavenly life in this world (2:xvi, 470-83).

***The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*** (P&R; 2 vols., 960 pages; 1990). Witsius wrote his *magnum opus* on the covenants to promote peace among Dutch theologians who were divided on covenant theology. He sought to be a theologian of synthesis who strove to lessen tension between the Voetians and the Coccejians. He wrote in his introduction that “the enemies of our church...secretly rejoice that there are as

many and as warm disputes amongst ourselves, as with them. And this, not very secretly neither: for they do not, nor will ever cease to cast this reproach upon us; which, I grieve to say is not so easily wiped away. O! how much better would it be to use our utmost endeavours, to lessen, make up, and, if it could be, put an end to all controversy!” (1:22-23).

*Economy of the Covenants* is not a complete systematic theology, though its title claims that it comprehends “a complete body of divinity.” Several major doctrines not addressed here, such as Trinity, creation, and providence, were dealt with later in Witsius’s exposition of the Apostles’ Creed.

For Witsius, the doctrine of the covenants is the best way of reading Scripture. The covenants are for him what J. I. Packer calls “a successful hermeneutic,” or a consistent interpretative procedure yielding a proper understanding of Scripture, both law and gospel. Witsius’s work is divided into four books:

- Book I: The Covenant of Works (120 pages)
- Book II: The Covenant of Redemption, or The Covenant of Grace from Eternity Between the Father and the Son (118 pages)
- Book III: The Covenant of Grace in Time (295 pages)
- Book IV: Covenant Ordinances Throughout the Scriptures (356 pages).

Throughout his exposition of covenant theology, Witsius corrected inadequacies of the Coccejians and infused Voetian content. He treated each topic analytically, drawing from other Reformed and Puritan systematicians to move the reader to clarity of mind, warmth of heart, and godliness of life.

In Book 1, Witsius discusses divine covenants in general, focusing on etymological and exegetical considerations related to them (*berith* and *diatheke*). He notes promise, oath, pledge, and command as well as a mutual pact that combines promise and law. He concludes that covenant, in its proper sense,

“signifies a mutual agreement between parties with respect to something” (Book 1, ch. 1, par. 3-5 – hereafter 1.1.3-5). Then he defines covenant as “an agreement between God and man, about the method of obtaining ultimate blessedness, with the addition of a threat of eternal destruction, against anyone contemptuous of this blessedness” (1.1.9). The essence of the covenant, then, is the relationship of love between God and man.

Covenants between God and man are essentially monopleuric (one-sided) covenants in the sense that they can be initiated only by God and are grounded in “the utmost majesty of the most high God.” Though initiated by God, these covenants call for human consent to the covenant, to exercise the responsibility of obedience within it and to acquiesce in punishment in case of violation. In the covenant of works, that responsibility is partly gracious and partly meritorious, whereas in the covenant of grace, it is wholly gracious in response to God’s election and Christ’s fulfillment of all conditions of the covenant (1.1.15).

Nevertheless, all covenants between God and man are dipleuric (two-sided) in administration. Both aspects are important. Without the monopleuric emphasis on God’s part, covenant initiation and fulfillment would not be by grace alone; without the dipleuric emphasis of divine initiation and human responsibility, man would be passive in covenant administration. The attempt made by contemporary scholars to force seventeenth-century federal theologians into either a monopleuric or dipleuric concept of the covenant misses the mark, as Richard Muller has shown.

According to Witsius, the covenant of works consists of the contracting parties (God and Adam), the law or condition (perfect obedience), the promises (eternal life in heaven for unqualified veneration to divine law), the penal sanction (death), and the sacraments (Paradise, the tree of life, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the Sabbath). Throughout, Witsius stressed the relationship of the covenant

parties in terms of the Reformed concept of covenant. He claimed that denying the covenant of works causes serious Christological and soteriological errors.

For example, the violation of the covenant of works by Adam and Eve rendered the promises of the covenant inaccessible to their descendants. Those promises were abrogated by God, who cannot lower His standard of law by recasting the covenant of works to account for fallen man’s unrighteousness. Divine abrogation, however, does not annul the demand of God for perfect obedience. Rather, because of the stability of God’s promise and His law, the covenant of grace is made effective in Christ, the perfect Law-fulfiller. In fulfilling all the conditions of the covenant of grace, Christ fulfilled all the conditions of the covenant of works. Thus “the covenant of grace is not the abolition, but rather the confirmation of the covenant of works, inasmuch as the Mediator has fulfilled all the conditions of that covenant, so that all believers may be justified and saved according to the covenant of works, to which satisfaction was made by the Mediator,” Witsius wrote (1.11.23).

Witsius outlines the relationship of the covenant of works to the covenant of grace in his second book. He discusses the covenant of grace from eternity, or, the covenant of redemption as the *pactum salutis* between God the Father and God the Son (2.2-4). In the eternal *pactum*, the Father solicited from the Son acts of obedience for the elect, while pledging ownership of the elect to the Son. This “agreement between God and the Mediator” makes possible the covenant of grace between God and His elect. The covenant of grace “presupposes” the covenant of grace from eternity and “is founded upon it” (2.2.1).

The covenant of redemption established God’s remedy for the problem of sin. The covenant of redemption is the answer for the covenant of works abrogated by sin. The Son binds Himself to work out that answer by fulfilling the promises and conditions and bearing the penalties of the covenant on behalf of the elect.

This covenant of grace worked out in time (Book 3) is the core of Witsius's work, and covers the entire field of soteriology. By treating the *ordo salutis* within the framework of the covenant of grace, Witsius asserts that former presentations of covenant doctrine were superior to newer ones. He shows how covenant theology binds theologians together rather than drives them apart.

Though the "internal, mystical, and spiritual communion" of the covenant is established within the elect, there is also an external economy or administration of the covenant. Those who are baptized and raised with the means of grace are in the covenant externally, though many of them "are not in the testament of God" in terms of being saved (3.1.5).

Effectual calling is the first fruit of election, which in turn works regeneration. Regeneration is the infusion of new life in the spiritually dead person. Thus the incorruptible seed of the Word is made fruitful by the Spirit's power. Witsius argued that so-called "preparations" to regeneration, such as breaking of the will, serious consideration of the law and conviction of sin, and fear of hell and despairing of salvation are fruits of regeneration rather than preparations when the Spirit uses them to lead sinners to Christ (3.6.11-15).

The first act of this new life is faith. Faith, in turn, produces various acts: (1) knowing Christ, (2) assenting to the gospel, (3) loving the truth, (4) hungering and thirsting after Christ, (5) receiving Christ for salvation, (6) reclining upon Christ, (7) receiving Christ as Lord, and (8) appropriating the promises of the gospel. The first three acts are called preceding acts; the next three, essential acts; the last two, following acts.

Witsius is solidly Reformed on justification by faith alone. He speaks of the elect being justified not only in Christ's death and resurrection, but already in the giving of the first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15. Applications of justification to the individual believer occur at his regeneration, in the court of

his conscience, in daily communion with God, after death, and on the Judgment Day.

Sanctification is the work of God by which the justified sinner is increasingly "transformed from the turpitude of sin, to the purity of the divine image" (3.12.11). Mortification and vivification show the extensiveness of sanctification. Grace, faith, and love are motives for growing in holiness. The goals and means of sanctification are explained in detail. Nevertheless, because believers do not attain perfection in this life, Witsius concludes by examining the doctrine of Perfectionism. God does not grant perfection to us in this life for four reasons: to display the difference between earth and heaven, warfare and triumph, toil and rest; to teach us patience, humility, and sympathy; to teach us that salvation is by grace alone; and to demonstrate the wisdom of God in gradually perfecting us (3.12.121-24).

After explaining the doctrine of perseverance, Witsius ends his third book with a detailed account of glorification. Glorification begins in this life with the firstfruits of grace: holiness, the vision of God apprehended by faith and an experimental sense of God's goodness, the gracious enjoyment of God, full assurance of faith, and joy unspeakable. It is consummated in the life to come.

Book 4 presents covenant theology from the perspective of biblical theology. Witsius offers some aspects of what would later be called progressive revelation, emphasizing the faith of Abraham, the nature of the Mosaic covenant, the role of the law, the sacraments of the Old Testament, and the blessings and defects of the Old Testament. Some of his most fascinating sections deal with the Decalogue as a national covenant with Israel rather than as a formal covenant of works or covenant of grace, his defense of the Old Testament against false charges, and his explanation of the ceremonial law's abrogation and the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. He then explains the

relationship between the testaments and the sacraments of the New Testament era. He strongly supported the restoration of Israel according to Romans 11:25-27 (4.15.7). He sets Christian liberty in the context of freedom from the tyranny of the devil, the reigning and condemning power of sin, the rigor of the law, the laws of men, things indifferent, and death itself.

In summary, Witsius was one of the first theologians among Dutch Further Reformation divines who drew close ties between the doctrines of election and covenant. He aimed for reconciliation between orthodoxy and federalism, while stressing biblical theology as a proper study in itself.

The Cocceians did not respond kindly to Witsius's efforts to reconcile them and the Voetians. They accused him of extending the covenant of grace back into eternity, thereby helping the Reformed orthodox negate the Cocceian principle of the historical development of redemption.

Witsius's work on covenant theology became a standard work in the Netherlands, Scotland, England, and New England. Throughout this work, he stressed that the motto "the Reformed church needs to be ever reforming" (*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*) should be applied to the church's life and not to doctrine, since Reformation doctrine was foundational truth. His emphasis was on experiencing the reality of the covenant with God by faith and the need for godly, precise living.

***The Lord's Prayer*** (P&R; 420 pages; 1994). Like Witsius's work on the Apostles' Creed, *Sacred Dissertations on the Lord's Prayer* was based on lectures delivered to his theological students. As such, it is a bit heavy with Hebrew and Greek words; however, Pringle's translation includes a rendering of most words of the original languages into English.

*The Lord's Prayer* contains more than its title reveals. In his preface to a 230-page exposition of the Lord's Prayer, Witsius

devoted 150 pages to the subject of prayer: "First, to explain what is prayer; next, in what our obligation to it consists; and lastly, in what manner it ought to be performed." Though parts of this introduction seem a bit dated (especially chapter 4), most of it is practical and insightful. For example, Witsius's dissertation "On the Preparation of the Mind for Right Prayer" contains valuable guidance on a subject seldom addressed today.

Throughout this introduction, Witsius established that genuine prayer is the pulse of the renewed soul. The constancy of its beat is the test of spiritual life.

Witsius's exposition of the individual petitions of the Lord's Prayer is a masterpiece. In many instances, the questions receive greater instruction from Witsius's pen than anyone else to date. For example, where else can such insight be found on whether the infant believer and the unregenerate should use the name Father in addressing God (pp. 168-70)?

Witsius stressed that those who would have God hear them when they pray must hear and obey Him when He speaks. Prayer and work must both be engaged in. To pray without working is to mock God; to work without praying is to rob Him of His glory.

***On the Character of a True Theologian*** (RAP; 59 pages; 1994). This 1675 essay was Witsius's renowned inaugural address at Franeker. The Free Church of Scotland valued this address so highly that it distributed nearly one thousand copies to its divinity students free of charge in 1856.

*On the Character of a True Theologian* is a masterpiece that exemplifies Witsius's own dictum, "He alone is a true theologian who adds the practical to the theoretical part of religion." Like all of Witsius's writings, this address marries profound intellect with spiritual passion. All ministers and theological teachers and students would do well to peruse it prayerfully and repeatedly.

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## The Carey Conference

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*John Benton*

**The Carey Conference is unique in that pastors and wives come together. It makes for a very relaxed and warm atmosphere. But this year, as around 150 gathered at the Hayes, Swanick, January 2-4, there was much more.**

Such was the quality and enthusiasm of the teaching and the encouragement of what God is doing in many churches that it was as if the conference caught fire. One man in training for the ministry who attended was so struck by the spiritual temperature that he found himself spending an evening in solitary prayer pleading with the Lord that he might give him some measure of the spirit he had found at the conference.

This year the central core of theology was provided by Bob Letham, who until recently has been Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary, Pennsylvania, and Bruce Ware of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. Bob Letham spoke vividly on the Trinity and the Ascension. Bruce Ware gave two scintillating lectures on the exclusivity of the gospel. The immense helpfulness of Bruce Ware's contribution cannot be overstated. The recordings of these sessions should be compulsory listening for every



*Bruce Ware and Robert Letham*  
evangelical minister.

If the volume of singing bears any relation to the blessing people receive then the

floodgates of heaven had certainly been open - we raised the roof several times!

These sessions were attended by everyone, but men and women split up for some periods. Ann Benton gave two immensely well received expositions for women from what are often categorised as two 'unspeakable books' of the Old Testament - Leviticus and Obadiah. Meanwhile the men heard from Ken Brownell of East London Tabernacle on the subject of multicultural churches and Ray Evans of Grace Community Church, Bedford on the great commission and the local church. 'How many missionaries has your church sent out?' Our minds should not immediately go to our overseas volunteers. The right answer should be, 'We send out all our church members as missionaries every Monday morning.' The multicultural and multi-age-range church is not easy to establish, but is the New Testament way of doing church.

Amidst all this Geoff Thomas of Aberystwyth also gave us the most spiritually sweet biographical sketch of the great John Newton, writer of Amazing Grace and co-worker with Wilberforce for the abolition of slavery, the bicentenary of which we celebrate this year.

Smaller conferences have the advantage that the coffee queues are shorter and anyone can actually get to talk to the main speakers personally. It also means there can be real conferring and discussion which not only gets to the nitty-gritty of issues but also fosters a deep and tender brotherhood and sisterhood which is invaluable.

*(This report first appeared in Evangelicals Now, and has been reproduced with their permission. Recordings of the Carey Conference addresses may be obtained from John Rubens: Tel: 07703 464971 e-mail: john.rubens@evangelicalpress.org)*

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## Meet the Puritans

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*Two books are reviewed, first a large volume of exceptional value consisting of brief biographies of English, Scottish, American and Dutch Puritans followed with reviews of their literature. In modern history C H Spurgeon and Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones exemplified Puritanism supremely. It is fitting therefore that a book of Dr Lloyd-Jones be reviewed.*

### **Meet the Puritans with a Guide to Modern Reprints**

Joel R Beeke and Randall J Pederson

896 pages hardback

Reformation Heritage Books, 2006

This beautifully produced volume consists of short biographies followed by reviews of the books written by the Puritans. Often the reviews take as many pages as the biographies. Altogether 123 English divines are included as well as twelve Scottish and twelve Dutch divines. All are valuable and all welcome. *Meet the Puritans* is comprehensive with respect to all literature by the Puritans or about the Puritans that has been republished during the last fifty years, that is since the resurgence of interest in Puritan literature began. Puritan books are not merely catalogued. They are evaluated and reviewed. That is a mammoth task and it has taken all of twenty years to accomplish. Portraits have been searched out and 61 adorn these pages.

The biographies in alphabetical order make thoroughly enjoyable reading. Most of them are two pages but others are more detailed. Examples are Ambrose 4.8 pages, Ames 7, Baxter 6, Bunyan 7, Cartwright 4.2, John Cotton 7, Thomas Goodwin 8, Joseph Hall 4, Philip Henry 4, Oliver Heywood 4, Thomas Hooker 7, John Howe 6, Christopher Love (who was executed by beheading) 4.5, Thomas Manton 4, John Owen 6, and William Perkins 7.

All the way through the authors have sought to edify and inspire. For instance the preface includes a section on how to profit from reading the Puritans. We are reminded that the Puritans were expert in teaching us how to handle trials and also how to live in two worlds, this and the one to come. The peculiar power of the Puritan pastors is outlined: 'They shape life by Scripture, they marry doctrine and practice, they confront the conscience, they engage the heart, they focus on Christ, as Thomas Adams said, "Christ is the whole Bible, prophesied, typified, prefigured, exhibited, demonstrated, to be found in every

leaf, almost in every line.” Advice is given to beginners as to where to begin. A seven-page lucid history of the Puritan period is provided which ends by reminding readers that the Puritans were banned from English churchyards even after their death which is why many were buried in a special nonconformist cemetery in Bunhill Fields, London. A nineteen-page glossary explaining words and terms adds value to the book. For instance The Solemn League and Covenant is explained.

Joseph Alleine and Matthew Henry are two examples of the usefulness of this book with regard to the inter-relationship of the biographies and the literature written by each Puritan.

Joseph Alleine (1634-1668) married his cousin Theodosia Alleine who early in their marriage ran a home school for about fifty pupils, half of them boarders. She wrote a biography of her husband's life. Joseph Alleine devoted four hours every day (4.00 am to 8.00 am) to the exercises of private worship. Theodosia recalled that he would be much troubled if he heard smiths at work before he was at communion with God.

Alleine was a passionate evangelist. One contemporary wrote, ‘He was infinitely and insatiably greedy of the conversion of souls, wherein he had no small success.’ After being ejected for nonconformity in 1662 he endured much persecution. His prison cell became his pulpit as he continued to preach to his people through prison bars. Ill through imprisonments he died at the early age of thirty-four.

The review section describing Joseph Alleine's literature tells us that his famous book of 148 pages *An Alarm to the Unconverted* (sometimes titled *A Sure Guide to Heaven*) has been reprinted an astonishing 500 times and has been used for the conversion of many souls.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714), son of Puritan Philip Henry (1631-1696), who suffered ejection in 1662, is the author of *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (6 volumes, 2,485 pages). Matthew Henry died shortly after sustaining injuries on falling from his horse. Thirteen fellow ministers worked from his writings and notes to complete his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. By 1855 this large work had been reprinted twenty-five times, and has been so many times since then. ‘Though superseded to some degree in exegesis, this *Commentary on the Whole Bible* has never been surpassed in its practical emphasis’ ( p.328).

The Scottish Puritans included in *Meet the Puritans* are Hugh Binning, Thomas Boston, David Dickson, James Durham, Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, George Gillespie, Andrew Gray, William Guthrie, Thomas Halyburton,

Samuel Rutherford and Henry Scougal. Of these I found the lives of Thomas Boston (1676-1732), Ebenezer (1680-1754) and Ralph Erskine (1685-1752) particularly fascinating. Even though they belong to a generation further on and are not in the same timeframe as the English Puritans it is helpful that they have been included.

The inclusion of the Dutch Puritans is a welcome enrichment of our knowledge of the Puritan period. Close bonds were formed when English Puritans fled for refuge to Holland. In the case of Willem Teellinck (1579-1629) it was the other way round; not that he had to flee, but he experienced the piety and power of the English Puritans during a stay in England where he also met his wife.

We are introduced to Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) the nearest equivalent in Holland to John Owen 'the Prince of the Puritans' in England. Voetius was the first of all the Puritans to address the subject of missiology. He was only 29 when he represented his country at the Synod of Dort. Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747) is wonderfully described. The section on his life includes descriptions of internal church conflict in New England where Freylinghuysen was an early recipient of spiritual awakening in the amazing 18<sup>th</sup>-century revival. His experience is fascinating because it was the practice to baptise all infants and then evangelise them as they grew up. Freylinghuysen was too explicit on the necessity of the new birth and that brought much opposition to his ministry. *Meet the Puritans* includes a fascinating biography of Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729) who like Freylinghuysen experienced powerful visitations of the Holy Spirit in his church at Northampton. Stoddard introduced the half-way covenant which can only happen in a church where all have been baptised as infants. In the case of Stoddard his policy of granting communion to the unconverted as a means of grace was to cause acute problems for Jonathan Edwards who followed Stoddard at Northampton. (Stoddard was the father of Esther Stoddard, Jonathan Edwards' mother, who married a minister Timothy Edwards.)

Valuable quotes are skilfully crafted into the book reviews as well as corrections of misconceptions. For instance the idea is corrected that Joseph Caryl only preached on the book of Job and that he emptied his church of hearers in so doing. (His commentary on Job is 8,000 pages!). There is no evidence for that. Caryl preached an average of three sermons on Job every two months. A beautiful summary of the entire book of Job is printed on page 136.

The authors provide definitions of Puritanism. Basically the Puritans sought to reform the Church of England. However from a theological perspective there

is a wider definition. A Puritan is a God-centred, Word-centred pastor or theologian who believes in the sovereignty of God and the doctrines of grace. This is important because in *Meet the Puritans* the authors go beyond the first definition and follow the second to include a number who lived outside the period of struggle which lasted from the time of Queen Elizabeth who reigned from 1558 to 1603 and then through most of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century up to about 1689. For instance this volume includes Jonathan Edwards to whom more space is afforded by far than anyone else in the book – eleven pages of biography and 28 pages reviewing his books. There is a scintillating description of every one of the 23 volume Yale edition of Edwards' works! On average each Yale volume exceeds 600 pages! I think of Edwards as belonging to a new age of revival. He lived in a different timeframe or environment as did Cotton Mather (1663-1728) and Increase Mather (1639-1723).

In the preface of *Meet the Puritans* the authors describe briefly the revival of interest in the Puritans that has taken place since the 1960s. They point out that there are now so many republished works that very few can afford to buy them all. Eighty publishers are listed with all necessary contact details to facilitate procurement. Of these publishers Don Kistler of *Soli Deo Gloria* stands out because of the sheer volume and quality of his work in republishing Puritan writings. A review of collections of Puritan writings is included which covers many items such as *The Morning Exercises* (sermons preached in the early morning) at Cripplegate (six large volumes). There is a bibliography with comments of writings on the Puritans and a 28-page list (bibliography) of secondary sources on the Puritans.

We hear that this outstanding book is already making an impact in America.

The first printing of 5000 copies of *Meet the Puritans* is depleted and a second edition of 7000 is on its way. The three largest conservative evangelical conferences in the USA are ordering large quantities of this 896 page book. This shows that a new appetite has developed. I will illustrate this with an incident in 1958. At that time I served as the newly appointed manager of the Banner of Truth Trust. One of the first books to be published by the Banner was *A Body of Divinity* by Thomas Watson. I took six copies to the then leading bookshop in the West End of London in Wigmore Street. Edward England was the manager. He kindly assured me that this old-fashioned book would not sell. I assured him that if he could not sell the six copies we would take them back. Reluctantly he took the books. About three days later he phoned to order another twelve copies! And not too long after that twenty-four copies! Such was the lack of books with theological meat that a spiritual hunger for clear Christian doctrine had developed among evangelicals. Geoff Thomas of Aberystwyth at that time procured a copy of Watson's *A Body of*

*Divinity* and testified, 'I found more distilled emotion and enlightenment in a single page than in many contemporary books.' During the 1960s and up to this time Banner of Truth has published many Puritan titles including whole sets such as Owen and Flavel. The Holy Spirit continues round the world to create a spiritual hunger for the truth.

Those early days marked the beginning of a theological renewal which over a generation has resulted in Reformed churches emerging, not only in the UK, but all over the world. For a couple of generations prior to the 1960s the Puritans were regarded as outmoded. Liberal theology held sway and in the name of scholarship held centre stage. The liberals used learning to disguise their horrible unbelief and apostasy. In the 1950s old volumes of John Owen were regarded as worthless and could be purchased at tuppence a volume or in the USA for ten cents.

J I Packer wraps up *Meet the Puritans* with a terse two-page perspective on Puritanism. The Puritans are compared with other evangelical movements. Packer suggests he can only raise two cheers for the best of other movements by comparison, 'seeing in this Puritan ideal, and in individual Puritan lives that I have studied, the most complete, profound, and magnificent realisation of biblical religion that the world has yet known', and, 'Those who are out of touch with their own history are in danger of being small and dry and lightweight and superficial and childish by comparison.' Packer's conclusion runs in similar vein to J C Ryle who is cited at the beginning of the book (page 2): 'The Puritans as a body have done more to elevate the national character than any class of Englishmen that ever lived.' This *magnum opus* bears that out absolutely.

## **Studies in John 17**

Assurance of salvation

### **Exploring the Depth of Jesus' Prayer for His Own**

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Crossway Books

662 pages hardback, 2000.

The 48 sermons in this book form part of a series on John 17 which Dr Lloyd-Jones delivered on Sunday mornings in 1952 and 1953. The publishers opted for a main title of *Assurance of Salvation* possibly because of the sermons titled *Our Security in God* and *Safe in His Eternal Kingdom*, but the heading in bold above more accurately describes the contents.

These sermons are a model for preachers.

Firstly they are a model of how to preach the doctrines of grace in such a way that they are irresistible. ML-J was a master of reasoning from the text so that the text does the work of convincing the hearers. In 1952 the congregation was by no means fully instructed or persuaded about these doctrines. For instance in the sermon 'Safe in His Hands' the doctor demolishes the idea that a person can go through stages of alternately being lost and saved.

Secondly these sermons are a model for pastors with regard to flexibility. When he reached John 17:17 'Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth', ML-J began a series within the series and preached fifteen sermons on progressive sanctification. He used 17:17 as a springboard for doctrinal and practical preaching on that theme. He did not hesitate to insert a sermon on verse 19 expounding the difference between progressive sanctification which applies to all believers and Christ's sanctifying himself, that is setting himself apart for his great work of offering himself up for us. Flexibility is noted by the fact that a sermon deemed helpful to the theme on John 14:26 is brought in at an appropriate time. Also the Doctor did not hesitate to interrupt the series with a topical sermon relevant to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. In that sermon he rejects pluralism and explains why Jesus is the only way of salvation. He explains the biblical doctrine of submission to rulers and authorities but at the same time insists on the doctrine of the separation of Church and State.

Thirdly these sermons are a model for preachers in the speed at which they move through a passage of Scripture. There is a skill in presenting well-reasoned discourses at a pace congenial to the needs and abilities of the congregation. These sermons are not over-packed and are never abstruse in content. Writing and preaching are very different disciplines. Readers must allow for the fact that this is preaching.

Finally in one very important aspect these sermons are *not* a model for most preachers. The doctor possessed an unction and style which compelled attention. He did not structure his sermons with headings and sub-headings. It is vital that preachers structure their sermons so that they know, and the congregation knows, exactly where they are going. Main headings and sub-headings need to be repeated and kept very clearly in view so that the hearers can digest and retain the sermon.

Note. Other available books on John 17 are by the Puritans George Newton, a large bound volume published by the Banner of Truth, and Thomas Manton in the complete set of his works, 22 volumes, (see volumes 11 and 12). Manton on John 17 was published by SGP in 1958, 550 pages.

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## News

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### Brazil



*The FIEL Conference in Brazil*

There is an exciting movement of God going on in the land of Brazil. The truth of God has been proclaimed and distributed powerfully over four decades now through the labours of our missionary brother, Richard Denham, bringing about a relatively recent reformation in that nation. Portuguese-speaking Reformed Baptist churches have begun to spring up in that land, and they have been willing 'to suffer for his Name's sake'. The truth has cost these brethren dearly in fellowship and in support of different types, but they love the truths of our God's free and sovereign grace...no matter what. Now there has risen a valuable fellowship among those holding to that 'like precious faith', which has formed the *Comunhão Reformada Batista no Brasil*. The *Reformed Baptist Fellowship in Brazil* was organized in June of 2004. It

is a fellowship which unites individuals (men and women) belonging to different backgrounds, but who subscribe largely (but not necessarily 'strictly' or 'fully') to the 1689 *Baptist Confession of Faith*. Beginning such a group that is to be organized and regular in its fellowship is not quite as easy as it sounds. There are many issues that potentially could divide them, but they realize how much they need one another.

The Fellowship's Third Annual Conference was held in the city of *Volta Redonda* in the state of *Rio de Janeiro* from June 14-19, 2006. The main themes for this conference were *The Covenant* and *Ecclesiology*. Those of the Fellowship understand that the doctrine of the covenants is central to understanding the Reformed faith. While some of the

brethren there are well versed in the Reformed faith, the doctrine of the covenants has been a matter of confusion among many who know something about it, while it is a completely new subject for others. A good understanding of its relationship to a Baptist ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church) would be a great help to the brethren anywhere. In addition, a study of those aspects involving the *law and the gospel* is crucial. The brethren of the Fellowship desired a balanced treatment of the *Covenant* and *Ecclesiology* themes according to the standards of our *1689 Confession of Faith*. They wanted teaching sessions showing the essentials of our faith on these matters with regard to being Reformed as well as being Baptist.

Their main concern has been to define their identity and to more fully establish their doctrinal foundation with the *Confession of Faith*. It has been a challenge to determine who they are as a Fellowship, and how much of the *Confession* they require members to subscribe to. For this reason the *Executive Committee* considered it important to focus their attention on the central themes of the *1689 Confession* and their relevance in Brazil today. Establishing this common foundation and allowing for dialog on issues where they may differ was the goal for this, and will be for subsequent congresses.

They decided to ask their older sister association, Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America (ARBCA), for one of its leaders to provide this needed teaching. They suggested Rev Robert B Selph, ARBCA's Coordinator, who is known to many in Brazil from earlier visits there. Because of his years pastoring a Southern Baptist church, they felt that he has a denominational experience similar to some of their own cases in regard to the Reformed faith.

To answer their desire to have a balanced treatment of the *Covenant*, the *Church* and the *Confession*, the following subjects were addressed from the *Scripture* in the speaker's teaching sessions: the *New Covenant* in *Covenant Theology*, the *Church* in the *New Covenant*, the *Christian Sabbath* in the *New Covenant*, *Church Order* in the *New Covenant*, the *Church's Worship* in the *New Covenant*, and *Gospel Missions* in the *New Covenant*. The *Confession* relative to each of these areas was read and explained. Also covered were current areas of controversy, such as the relationship of the *New Covenant* church to the state, to baptism, to elder authority, to the cessation of the apostolic gifts, to the *Law* and the *Sabbath*, to the regulative principle of worship, etc. There were brethren present holding a variety of positions in these areas; however, these brethren are true men of God who were genuinely appreciative of the consistency of the *Confession* regarding these doctrines. The speaker ended up with a very cordial relationship with the brethren of the Fellowship, and everyone left expressing joyful love for one another, with many hugs and tears and laughs, hoping to see each other again some day soon as the Lord wills. There was also at the conference a well-stocked book table from FIEL (Christian Literature Advance).

To the praise of our Redeemer, on Saturday after the conference ended, the assembly of brethren who had hosted this meeting there in Volta Redonda was constituted as a self-governing local church. It was a church plant of the Grace Baptist Church in São José dos Campos (where the Denhams live and serve) and is a full-subscription Reformed Baptist church. In formal ceremony 32 charter members joined together in a covenant relationship. Brother Selph spoke for that constituting meeting, and he highly commends that pastor and work.

The Reformed Baptist movement in Brazil is obviously in its formative stages. A few of the main leaders would like the group to be united on a full-subscription position to the Confession, but they have come to realize that they are not close to being ready to form an association like ARBCA, with a membership of churches and a definitive confessional stance. Richard Denham has done an unbelievable job in Brazil in setting out the Reformed faith through literature and conferences, but the movement is young. Most of these Baptist churches have come out of the Baptist Convention of Brazil, which is connected to our Southern Baptist Convention and very much like it. These brothers have suffered much because they have embraced the doctrines of grace, and for that this writer is deeply humbled and in genuine admiration of them. They are hungry for the Word of God, but there are scriptural issues that will take time for them to think through. They enjoy the able leadership of Pastor Gilson Santos as president of the Fellowship. Brother Santos, who pastors the Grace Baptist Church in São José dos Campos, has very clear and strong convictions concerning the Reformed faith and applies those convictions among the brethren with kindness and humility.

Brother Denham's annual conferences are pulling in 1300-1400 men and women every year, and an amazing number of good books are being sent out all over the Portuguese-speaking world through FIEL. God is using these Herculean efforts in great ways. FIEL has also begun conferences in Mozambique, Angola, and Portugal. They send out 22,000 copies of a Banner of Truth type magazine, *Faith for Today*, every three months (\$10,000 worth). The 'Adopt a Pastor' program provides pastors with a book each month, the quarterly magazine, and the registration cost for the annual FIEL conference. Very encouraging things are happening. However, this Reformed movement, in the hand of God,

will take time to generate a confessional association. They need all the encouragement we can give to them.

During the closing session of the conference Brother Selph spoke honestly with the brethren of some of the mistakes American Reformed Baptists have made over the past 25 years. These include elder authoritarianism, Sabbath legalism, an oppressive preaching of the Law, an ultra-rigid worship, excessively high standards for church office, a practical hyper-Calvinism, and an elitist pride. It was a joy to be able also to say that some of the extremes that had been adopted early on in our movement are now gradually being mellowed. Those in attendance appreciated such candor. We do have much in our own movement here that should humble us, and in many ways we have much to learn from these brethren.

Sitting under multiple sermons regarding the Covenant and Ecclesiology during the conference helped pastors, deacons, and ministerial students to see how much they need to deal with, and it also gave them more of a needed picture of what the Scriptures and the Confession call for in order to consider themselves full-subscriptionists. The website for this Fellowship is [www.crbb.org.br](http://www.crbb.org.br). It may be visited in English.

Prayer requests for our brethren in Brazil as the Reformed Baptist movement develops include asking God to raise up leaders with theological strength who can continue to guide the movement, wisdom for the RBFB to proceed in addressing Confessional matters, reformation balance with the aforementioned knotty issues, and that the power of the gospel, the life of God, may rest upon them as they serve our King in Brazil and beyond. Thank God for another tangible demonstration that Christ's truth and grace march on in our generation. (*This report by Pastor Bob Selph is published here with the permission of ARBCA.*)

## Moldova



*Class with translator Irini (far left)*

Moldova is a country of around 4 million people, situated between Romania and the Ukraine. I visited for 2 weeks in November to teach at the Baptist Mission School under the auspices of the Slavic Gospel Association.

This is the poorest country in Europe, and signs of deprivation are everywhere. The roads are in bad repair, and buildings often dilapidated. Many homes depend on wells for water supply and have no mains drainage. The national income is about 100 dollars a month; in the country villagers might live on half that amount and widows on much less. One of the main industries is farming, but there is a chronic lack of investment and methods are primitive. Able young people emigrate to destinations like Moscow where they can find work. It is only because they

send money home that many families survive. Part of SGA's ministry is support of widows with an annual payment which helps them make it through the winter.

Spiritually Moldova is dominated by the Orthodox Church. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union there has been openness to the gospel and a time of rapid growth. Many have been converted, and new churches have been planted in the villages; more recently however growth has slowed and evangelistic outreach is less fruitful. There is continued opposition from the Orthodox Church. Ministry in a typical Baptist church is quite basic; music ministry and poetry readings feature prominently and sermons are simple. There is no tradition of systematic expository ministry.



*View of Balti*

The SGA Mission School operates at the invitation of the Baptist churches in the north of the country, based in Balti (pronounced Beltz). It provides a 2-year part-time course of study, made up of 8 modules of 2-weeks each. In each module 2 lecturers visit from the UK (usually a full-time SGA staff member accompanied by a pastor or other volunteer), and 50 one-hour lectures are given. The course is intensive and demanding, but is very much appreciated by the students. Our class of 20 consisted of young preachers and church planters from villages around. Lectures were translated into Russian. The curriculum provides a mixture of theological, biblical and practical instruction to give a good foundation for spiritual ministry. This is the only training most will receive, and is especially valuable as literature resources are limited and usually unaffordable for the students.

The commitment and sacrifice of many of the students is humbling. They labour in difficult and discouraging circumstances, especially in the villages where numbers are small. We need to pray that the Lord would give perseverance in gospel work, and fruitfulness. We also need to pray that the Lord would enable them to grow in understanding and wisdom and minister the whole counsel of God to their people. One young pastor has started a new work in Balti and is preaching systematically through Bible books; this is considered to be a real novelty, but his ministry is attracting students from the university. Who knows what fruit this work might bring, as some of us remember the roots of the Reformed Baptist movement in Zambia? Do pray for the reformation and revival of the Moldovan church, and the salvation of many.

*Bill James.*

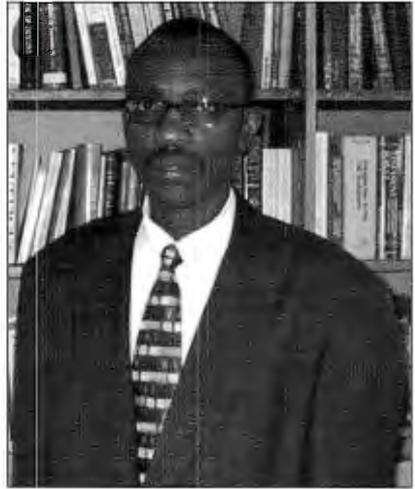
## Namibia

Report of 5th visit to Namibia Oct-Dec 2006, by Bob and Hilary Davey

This visit, with my wife Hilary, had the purpose of encouraging the Reformed Baptist churches of Namibia. A year ago there were three established Reformed Baptist Churches in the capital, Windhoek, one in each of the black, white and coloured communities. The close cooperation, fellowship and prayers have led to four more established works in Windhoek, one of which is among the Herero people. I have a copy of a remarkable letter from the leaders of this church of forty, placing itself under the oversight of Eastside Baptist Church (Pastor, Joachim Rieck). 'We realise that we have reached a point in the life of the church where we need a more mature and established church to assist us to be in line with Scripture and to move in a direction that will build a strong, biblical and healthy church.'

During the first week there was a tent mission led by Pastor Laban Mwashekele in an area called Babylon. There was also the first women's national conference for the black churches hosted by his church, Monte Cristo Evangelical Baptist Church, where Hilary led the five morning studies on 'the place of women in God's plan, the home and the church'. Twenty-five were able to attend, and all were greatly encouraged by their week together.

From 13th to 29th November there was a non-stop schedule of visitation of 10 of the black churches in the townships on the west coast and up in the north, in Ovamboland. Daily preaching was called for, and for the first time Laban and I could work in some areas in tandem, rather than together. The increase in the numbers of young men was noticeable. Laban encourages them to learn English



*Laban Mwashekele*

so they can read good Christian books. I was privileged to be the preacher of the gospel at the first public services at two newly planted works. One had a meeting of five persons, the other three hundred and fifty persons!

This year, of great encouragement to our Namibian brethren were the 6th Namibian Grace Ministers' Conference and the 2nd Sola 5 Conference following directly on, held in Windhoek late August/early September 2006. SOLA5, (<http://www.sola5.org>) has the vision of drawing together Reformed Baptist Churches across Southern Africa. It has developed from the Spurgeon Fraternal which started in 1997 as a Reformed Baptist Pastors' prayer and support group. In all over 200 church delegates from seven countries attended - Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Swaziland, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. Eastside Baptist Church and her sister churches in Windhoek did well to provide free hospitality to all. In all it has been a notable year of consolidation for Reformed Baptist Churches in Namibia and across Southern Africa.

## South Africa

### AFRICA STYLE CONFERENCES

JANUARY 2007

The purpose of these conferences is to provide a high standard of expository preaching and supply books at affordable prices for pastors.

The primary ambition is for these conferences to become annual events and so become spiritually organic and grow to provide great inspiration, fellowship and expository literature which is like gold to the majority who have very few books. This ambition can only be fulfilled if there is a powerful work of the Holy Spirit creating soul-thirst for Scripture truth and a high standard of unity in gospel truth.

We hope we will receive sufficient funding during this year to spend on the conferences next January 2008. Evangelical Press gives generous discounts and grants the goodwill for us to fly under the name EP but EP does not finance this work. Gifts have come from churches.

Raymond Zulu, who is pastor of High Wycombe Evangelical Church in England accompanied Lyn and myself from England.

The three conferences just completed in early January are reported as follows:

*A one day conference in the Hillcrest Baptist Church, Kwazulu, 12 January*

Thirty came including Clement, a pastor from Empangeni, a two and a half hour journey up the north coast.

The day before the conference we set out all the books marking down the prices. Some parcels had not arrived from the

UK so we were short of supplies. We were thankful for divine providence because Sya, a member of Hillcrest Baptist Church, came to the rescue. She drove down to Pinetown to get a variety of titles from Christian Book Discounters. Willem, the manager of that store, not only supplied books but came up to Hillcrest the next day and manned a second book table for us. On the morning of the conference the books from England did arrive. We needed them all. On average each conferee purchased seven books at greatly reduced prices and in addition received a gift pack of five books.

Raymond Zulu was the preacher. Ernest McAmbi was the chairman. Everything was in Zulu.

Hartmut Dedekind was the chief organiser. Ernest McAmbi as chairman will invite three senior Zulu pastors to join the committee. A three-day residential conference at Koinonia Conference Centre near Hillcrest on the Old Main Road is planned for next year. Hartmut plans to personally visit pastors in Newcastle, Ladysmith, Escourt and the environs of Hillcrest, to explain the ministry of the conference and encourage pastors to come and also discuss travelling arrangements. Most African pastors do not have their own cars and travel by minibus taxis.

*A residential conference at SUMCAY Conference Centre near Port Elizabeth 15 to 17 January*

The outstanding feature of this first conference attended by 65 is the way in which the organisers gelled together, Kiphiwe from the platform, Dr Paul Stoltz operating as overall director, and Toza (who is the librarian at the Bible Institute of Eastern Cape) running the



*Kiphiwe and Paul Stoltz*

booktables. The books flowed out like a river of life.

The Sumcay Conference Centre was ideal in every way.

The Eastern Cape economically represents the poorest part of South Africa with a high rate of unemployment. The work to supply basic education is enormous. Vernon Light, principal of the Bible Institute of the Eastern Cape (BIEC), has persevered for 13 years in providing theological education. BIEC was the centre out of which this first conference in the Port Elizabeth area was born.

*A residential conference at Ora et Labora<sup>1</sup> Conference Centre near Pretoria  
18 to 20 January*

This could have been a complete failure because planning was very late. 30 came. Six travelled from Swaziland which is a three hour road journey away. 25 attended the morning prayer meetings. There is an excellent spiritual base on which to work for next year.

*Ora et Labora* is a run down centre on an undeveloped farm 20 km from Pretoria.

Coming off the main Garsfontein road there is a rough farm road running for about 1km to the centre which is adorned with some huge trees. The main hall is set in a pleasant environment. An Afrikaans police officer, Neil by name, was in charge of the centre. He also acted as chief chef. The food was first class. On the third and final day a whole sheep was

roasted on a spit to form the base of the last meal.

Ronald Kalifungwa expounded the subject of pastors and their wives and treated in detail how husbands should lovingly care for their wives according to biblical injunctions. Raymond Zulu expounded on what it means to preach the Word so as to change lifestyles. He also addressed the subject of the dangers of syncretism. Ken Brownell of East London Tabernacle in London, England spoke on ministering in the city. Erroll addressed the subject, What is a church?

The book tables were served by Bev Rowlands. Bev gained experience in book business at the now famous Africa Style Conference in Nampula, Mozambique. That is a residential conference now in its 8<sup>th</sup> year. Steadily the numbers have increased. 170 pastors came last year.

Irving Steggle and Nick and Sheila were very encouraged by this first conference near Pretoria and are already planning for next year. To accommodate 50 to 60 will involve upgrading of the *Ora et Labora* Centre which we were allowed to use free of cost by the Christian owner.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ora et Labora* means *Pray and Work*.

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