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Editorial Note

Arminianism is an issue which every Christian will face sooner or later. It is a subject which affects the ministry and life of every local church. To take the matter further every candidate for the ministry has to make up his mind where he stands concerning the doctrines of grace. He will need to investigate the doctrinal foundation of the Bible College or seminary where he studies. The Synod of Dort represents a remarkable event in the history of the Christian church. This Synod is the only international conference on record devoted solely to the subject of Arminianism. The historical background to the Synod, a brief summary of its formularies, what Calvin himself believed concerning particular redemption, and an article describing the impact that the doctrines of grace can have on believers, is included in this issue forming a mini-series related to Arminianism and free grace.



Wes Johnston with his family

Front cover picture – *The Houses of Parliament, Westminster, London.* Anti-Christian legislation emanating from the House of Commons in recent years is unprecedented. The editorial describes the latest shocking anti-Christian legislation being enacted. This is very depressing especially in the light of Romans chapter one. However we need to remember the place of prayer. Churches up and down the country need to unite in prayer for revival. We must never forget the 18th-century spiritual awakening. When England was in an appalling moral state the Holy Spirit was poured out abundantly and a mighty change was wrought.

Editorial

In an article *Homosexual Revolution* published in *Reformation Today* 205 Pastor Brian Robinson of Faith Baptist Church, Toronto, describes how Canada has been overwhelmed by legislation forcing the populace to accept homosexuality as normal behaviour. In that article he laments the failure of Christians in Canada to resist immoral legislation. He also described one example of how litigation has already ruined a lawful business and blighted the lives of those concerned.

The legislation in process of being imposed by law on the citizens of the UK is the Sexual Orientation Regulations (SOR). The SOR are strongly opposed by Christians, Jews and Muslims. But, as in Canada, the secular majority, strongly influenced by the homosexual lobby, will inevitably force these laws on the land. The wisdom of centuries will be bypassed. The plain teaching of the Bible that homosexual behaviour is sinful will be opposed.

Opposition has been expressed to this legislation in the House of Lords. Part of Baroness O’Cathain’s speech is printed on pages 19 and 20.

The Christian Institute in the UK has given outstanding service in alerting the Christian constituency in the UK. What are the implications of this legislation which is being imposed on the citizens of our country?

Just how these laws will affect us is well summed up by The Christian Institute as follows:

The regulations affect:

Schools

Whatever the Government says, the regulations will be interpreted as applying to teaching in schools. Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights has called for the regulations to make clear that they apply to the curriculum – to stop schools teaching that homosexuality is sinful or morally wrong. The Committee said that schools should not be able to teach ‘a particular religion’s doctrinal beliefs as if they were objectively true’.

Parallel *religious* discrimination laws have exceptions for the school curriculum and acts of worship, but the Government has refused to provide such exceptions in the Sexual Orientation Regulations.

Without clear exceptions for the curriculum and acts of worship, schools will come under huge pressure to endorse homosexual lifestyles. Education bodies are already training teachers to use pro-homosexual resources. Moreover, an aggrieved pupil could sue a school which does not endorse homosexuality in sex education or citizenship lessons.

Interpreted in this way, the regulations would also undermine devolution. The Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales are meant to be responsible for the school curriculum.

The regulations apply to all schools – state and independent. The Government argues that the regulations only apply to school admissions and exclusions, or to access to school trips. But the Joint Committee on Human Rights, whilst not giving a legally-binding interpretation,

has shown that homosexual activists will interpret the regulations as applying to teaching in schools.

Old people's homes

A Christian old people's home which refuses a double bed to a homosexual couple could also be sued under the regulations. The operators of a Christian home could face an action for discrimination under the regulations if the claimant or the home is funded by the state. Although such homes restrict double rooms to married couples only, and also refuse unmarried heterosexual couples, the regulations require a person in a civil partnership to be treated like a married person. Even if the legal action is unsuccessful the expense of defending themselves could be huge. *A Christian conference centre may be protected by the exception for religious organisations. No such protection has been given to Christian B&Bs or guest houses because they are 'commercial'.*

Adoption agencies

Publicly funded adoption agencies that refuse on principle to place children with homosexual couples will breach the discrimination provisions under the regulations. These agencies could be forced to close, particularly if an expensive legal action is mounted against them.

The Government has refused to grant them an exception, giving the agencies until the end of 2008 to comply with the regulations.

Doctors

A Christian GP who refuses on moral grounds to refer a lesbian couple for IVF treatment will be unlawfully discriminating under the regulations. The medical practice to which he belongs or the NHS trust which funds the practice

may face litigation. Even if the medical practice is based on a publicly stated Christian ethos, it could still face a legal action. It would not be able to use exceptions for religious liberty because it is deemed to be 'commercial' and it receives public funding.

Professionals involved in weddings

A Christian wedding photographer could be sued if he refuses to attend and take pictures of a civil partnership ceremony. A florist could be sued for not providing flowers. Caterers, hoteliers, car-hire firms, tailors could all face expensive lawsuits if they refuse to provide their facilities, goods or services for a civil partnership ceremony. Christians working in these professions should not face crippling legal actions simply because of their religious beliefs on sexual ethics.

Printers/media

A printing firm owned by a Christian could face legal action for refusing to print 'gay rights' literature. A Christian newspaper could be sued for refusing to place an advert promoting homosexuality. A Christian website designer could be taken to court for refusing to design a pro-homosexual website that encourages young people to 'explore their sexuality'.

Church premises

A church will be able to refuse to hire out its hall to a 'gay rights' group. In order to qualify for the exception it must not operate on a 'commercial' basis and it will have to be clear and consistent in applying its doctrinal standards.

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Are You Justified?

Wes Johnston

Introduction

At heart we all yearn for justice. This should not surprise us, for this is how God made us, as moral beings, conscious of right and wrong. Sadly we are all too familiar with the frailties and weaknesses in the justice system in our land (although it must be said that in the UK we are truly blessed when we think of the fate of other people in other nations). Human justice is not perfect justice, but God's justice is perfect, absolute, and will never result in a miscarriage of justice. Every human being has to reckon with the justice of God. This is a sobering thought.

What kind of person does God approve of? How is it possible for a transgressor like me, one who has wilfully broken God's law, to be forgiven? How can I be justified before God?

These are crucial questions. One day we must all stand before our maker. None of us are exempt from that final date with destiny. We are all answerable to God. In fact the time of that great day of judgement has already been fixed. Imagine what it will be like to stand before God, and give an account of yourself? On what basis can a God who is pure and holy justly and fairly allow a sinner like you or me to enter his presence and live there forever? Paul addresses this vital issue in Romans four. In that chapter he emphasises four truths:

1. We can be justified only through faith in Jesus Christ 4:1-8

The Jews that Paul spoke to in this letter were sure they had the right answer. To their way of thinking, God would accept the person who kept the law in its entirety – that is those who were scrupulous about observing the details of the law. The average devout and religious Jew believed that he could rise to the challenge set by the Ten Commandments and meet the standard God had set mankind.

Many modern people make very similar assumptions. They deceive themselves into thinking that religion is about morality: live well and you will pass the test; God has prepared heaven for everyone who tries their best. Back in the first century many Jews were also convinced that they were being faithful to their religious legacy. The typical Jew believed that no one was greater than Abraham, the friend of God, the pioneer and founder of their faith. The majority of Jews took the view that Abraham was just the kind of man pious Jews should seek to emulate; he had kept the whole law, or so several of the most learned Hebrew scholars had said. To have Abraham on your side was a powerful argument!

This is what makes Romans 4 a key chapter in this epistle. So far the apostle Paul has been at pains to point out that morality is *not* in fact the way to God. The way to heaven is barred to the person who boasts of or relies upon his own achievements. Rather, the person who will be considered acceptable to God on the day of judgement is the one who has trusted in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. We are justified, not by works, but by faith!

Furthermore, Paul believed that Abraham was actually on his side! ‘What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” ’ (4:3). Paul takes us back to Genesis 15:6. Abraham was feeling sorry for himself. Already in his eighties, there was no human prospect of his fathering children. So he had written one of his servants, Eliezer of Damascus, into his will. Just then God drew near to him and made a staggering promise. Abraham was watching the night sky, with millions of stars sparkling across the heavens. And what was the promise? God would guarantee that Abraham’s natural descendants would be more in number than the stars in the Milky Way! And how did Abraham respond to this staggering promise? He was willing to stake his entire future on it! He put his trust in God and the Almighty granted him the status of a righteous man.

Many assume that a place in heaven is like a spiritual ‘good conduct medal’. That would be true, if it were possible to be justified by works. The text says, *‘Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.’* If this were the way to get to heaven, heaven itself would be no more than what we deserve. We would be

entitled to it. We would earn the right to be there by our good behaviour. Or, if you like, God would be obliged to let us in because of how well we've done.

If that is the way you think, argues Paul, then the case of Abraham presents you with a problem. Great as he was, he was justified by faith not by works. His place in eternity was secured because he did not rely on himself but on God!

At this point Paul draws our attention to another example, namely, King David: *'However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sins the Lord will never count against him." '*

The point Paul is making is that both David and Abraham were made right with God in exactly the same way! In 4:7-8, he quotes from the opening verses of Psalm 32. In that particular psalm David does not rejoice in his own achievements or his own religious merits, but in God's free and generous forgiveness. The person who really experiences the blessing of God is not the individual who claims he has passed God's test with flying colours but the person who is deeply conscious of his sin and yet rejoices because God will not count his sins against him.

There is a very important point here, which we must not miss. In defence of the gospel of justification by faith Paul has referred us to two of the leading characters in the Old Testament. In spite of the differences in emphasis between the Old Testament and the New, the Bible is one book with a unanimous message. *There is and always has been just one way of salvation!* Old Testament kings and patriarchs along with every modern Christian come to be right with God in the same way. Paul and Abraham were both justified by faith in the same Saviour. Abraham trusted in a Saviour who was promised, Paul in the same Saviour after he had come, but both men loved and relied upon the same Jesus Christ. Having underlined the truth that sinners are justified by faith alone, in Christ alone, Paul now emphasises what justification is not.

2. *We cannot be justified through any religious act or ritual 4:9-12*

At this point Paul anticipates how some of his fellow Jews might respond, 'But surely it is necessary to be circumcised?' The rite of circumcision was inaugurated with Abraham and from his time onwards every Jewish male received the mark. It was not enough to have Jewish parents. Remain uncircumcised and you were not a Jew. When Hebrew people wished to speak dismissively of the Gentiles they referred to them as 'the uncircumcised'. Yahweh himself had established circumcision as the covenant sign, so how could anyone who ignored it hope to secure the favour of God? The idea that an uncircumcised man could get to heaven was unthinkable to the average Jew. To them circumcision and God's favour went hand in hand. As a result one of the most delicate issues in the early history of the Christian church concerned this very issue. What about people from non-Jewish backgrounds who came to faith in Christ? Must they undergo the operation?

To our ears this might all seem like a dispute over trifles that are best left in the past. Actually the issue hasn't gone away. Circumcision itself may not be the present issue, but then the ritual/act itself was never the central issue. For many first-century Jews circumcision was merely a convenient way of putting their works back onto the agenda. It was as though people could be saved through faith in Christ plus one work. That attitude has not gone away. Many people feel that they have to add something of their own to the sacrifice of Christ. Faith plus christening, faith plus church attendance, faith plus communion; it takes many forms.

Martin Luther came in for some criticism when he translated the Bible into German. Whenever he met the phrase 'justified by faith' he added the word 'alone'. This, of course, is not present in the Greek text. By the standards of strict accuracy, Luther was wrong to do as he did; yet he had grasped something that so many have failed to see. Faith and works cannot be mingled or fused. Either we are justified by what we do, or God accepts us because of what Christ has done on our behalf.

Paul's response was to point out that '*Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness*' (4:9b). Now when did this happen? Before he was circumcised or after? *It was not after, but before!*

In fact fourteen years separated the two events. If that is the case, and clearly it is, how can anyone argue that this or indeed any other ritual is essential to salvation? Circumcision was actually a seal and sign of the righteousness that Abraham had already received from God while he was still uncircumcised (4:11). Pedigree is important, but which matters most? To be able to say with pride that you have undergone the same operation as Abraham, or to humbly admit that you share Abraham's faith in Abraham's Saviour?

3. *We cannot be justified by observing or keeping the law (4:13-16)*

'It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be the heir of the world' (4:13). This statement suggests that Paul was alert to another possible objection to this teaching: surely God, who himself gave the law, must favour those who keep it now and in the world to come?

Paul could have answered this argument just as he did with circumcision, by pointing out that Abraham knew God's blessing over four hundred years before the law was given through Moses! The problem here was that some Jewish scholars were actually advocating that Abraham was so closely attuned to God that he had *instinctively known* what God wanted and had kept the law in detail without actually knowing what its provisions would eventually be!

Paul's response was to take a different approach. His argument here is that Law and grace are incompatible. The two cannot co-exist. The one will always exclude the other. Suppose, for instance, that we become heirs of God by keeping the law (4:14). In that case *'faith has no value'* and the promise is *'worthless'*.

To put it another way, if it is possible for a person to earn his way to heaven there is no need for him to receive the mercy of God in Christ. But this is just not possible. All the law can do is tell us where we stand (4:15). The law will leave us in no doubt that we are guilty and we deserve to face God's anger, but because our sinful nature is such that we cannot keep it, we are no better off.

Therefore, if salvation cannot be earned through the law, it can only be ours through grace. Grace is the loveliest word in any theological dictionary. It describes God's covenant kindness to the undeserving. It tells us that salvation is a gift and that God gives it freely to people who deserve the very opposite. A gift, however, *cannot* be earned. Work for it and you have earned it; pay for it and you have bought it. Receive it by faith, on the other hand, and you automatically give up the right to claim any of the credit. Faith is an empty hand stretched out to receive a gift, nothing more. Yet those who are right with God are in that position because they exercise faith and for no other reason.

What do you want from God? What you deserve or what you don't deserve? That will speak volumes about you.

4. *The faith that justifies is not a human work (4:17-25)*

It is a big mistake to think of faith as a force in its own right. The last thing on Abraham's mind was faith. His thoughts were all focused upon God. He had reached certain conclusions about his God. For a start, he had a settled conviction that God could give life to the dead: '*God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were*' (4:17). This is not a reference to the sacrifice of Isaac. It actually has to do with the promise that God would make him the father of many nations.

Fourteen years had passed since the starlit night when the covenant was made and Abraham knew that God was his friend. He was now almost one hundred years old. Men at his time of life did not father children and even in the rare event that this was possible, his wife Sarah was as old as he. They were as good as dead when it came to the whole matter of human fertility. All the odds stood against them except for one stubborn reality. God had said that it was going to happen! If anyone else had predicted that a baby would soon be on its way, it would be easy to dismiss it as a piece of fantasy or even cruel mockery, a sick joke. But the one who was Abraham's shield and great reward had spoken the

words and in spite of everything Abraham still believed. He remained convinced that his dead loins would produce a child from Sarah's dead womb.

God does not play cruel tricks on us. He means what he says. Some people talk about faith as though it were 'the power of positive thinking'. Don't be one of them! Faith is not able to make things happen it is not a matter of 'mind over matter'.

The real issue is not how strong your faith might be, how much of it you have and whether it is more or less intense than the faith of someone else. What matters is the object of your faith. God is greater than your faith and if you trust him, he will save you. Abraham trusted his heavenly friend and in doing so found that God was willing to regard him as a righteous man.

These things have been written down (4:22) for our benefit (*all of us*). In effect, Paul is holding up Abraham before us and saying, 'Be like this man! follow his example.' Then he points us to the God who raised up Jesus from the dead and he tells us that if we believe in him we will be considered righteous by God: '*But also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead*' (4:24).

Don't you think that a God who can do that is worthy of your trust? Failure to believe in the God of the Bible, the God of creation and resurrection, is the greatest folly, the greatest mistake made by any human being. Don't be counted among the fools – believe on Jesus and you will receive the forgiveness of God as a free gift of grace. Abraham was justified by faith alone. King David was justified by faith alone. Are you justified by faith alone?

This is an outline of a sermon preached on Sunday 11th March 2007 at Leeds Reformed Baptist Church, the tenth in a series on Romans, by Wes Johnston senior pastor at Leeds Reformed Baptist Church. He acknowledges indebtedness to Pastor Phil Arthur of Lancaster for access to his work on the Book of Romans as yet unpublished.

The New Perspective

A review

The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ

– An Assessment of the Reformation and New Perspective on Paul

Cornelis P Venema,
Banner of Truth Trust, hardback,
337pp, £16.00.

This is a book for which I have been waiting. The subtitle describes it as ‘An Assessment of the Reformation and New Perspective on Paul’. Having heard many recent references to the New Perspective and lectures on the subject I found myself somewhat confused. What exactly is this New Perspective? Well, here is a thorough treatment of it and an answer to it which shows how unbiblical this dangerous new heresy is.

The doctrine of justification is a vital one. Luther described it as the ‘article of a standing or falling church’ and Calvin as the ‘main hinge of the Christian religion’. Become unhinged here and the Christian faith will collapse. Venema begins by giving an excellent presentation of the classic understanding of this doctrine and shows how James’ justification by



William Macleod

faith and works fits in with Paul’s justification by faith alone. He then describes the New Perspective. This is followed by a careful treatment of several of the critical passages in Paul’s writings. While bearing in mind the findings of modern scholarship he shows that the New Perspective writers fail to do justice to the Pauline Scriptures. These new ideas on justification are appealing in an ecumenical age which wishes to downplay the Reformation and the radical difference between the Reformed position on justification and that of the Roman Catholics.

The New Perspective began with the publication of a major work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) by

E P Sanders, Emeritus Arts and Science Professor of Religion at Duke University, North Carolina. In this book he draws on many primary sources from the period 200BC to 200AD to argue that the common view held by the Reformers and their followers that Palestinian Judaism in the time of Jesus and Paul was a religion of works, was wrong. Instead he argues it was a religion of grace. He shows that the Jews understood that they were chosen by grace and so had their place in the covenant. Also it was by grace their sins were forgiven. However the people of Israel were obliged to obey the law to maintain their covenant relationship and secure a place in heaven. So it is a religion of grace in some ways and of works in others but Sanders emphasised the grace aspect. Building on this New Perspective, J D G Dunn and especially Bishop Tom Wright of Durham argue that Paul's writings need to be reinterpreted and that the Reformation understanding of justification by faith alone is quite wrong. Wright argues that the 'works of the law' are boundary markers, and include such things as circumcision and dietary laws, which mark the Jews as the covenant people. The Jews demanded that the Gentiles be circumcised etc. before they obtain a place in the covenant community. These 'works of the law'

or 'boundary markers' as they call them are what Paul was opposing. Faith in Christ is the new boundary marker or way of entry into the covenant community. Because their religion was one of grace it is wrong, they argue, for the Reformers to equate the Jews and Pharisees with the medieval Roman Catholics. They reject the idea of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. Wright states, 'Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom.' He sees it simply as God's faithfulness.

However the medieval church did not believe in salvation by works alone (i.e. Pelagianism – which is in reality very rare) but believed that it is by grace that we are saved along with a contribution from our own works (known as semi-Pelagianism). Just like the Pharisees they too believed in grace but also believed that their own works were necessary to ultimate salvation. It is faith plus works that is the problem with both and the researches of Sanders do not change that. Sanders admits that there is a place for works in the Jewish understanding of the way of maintaining their place among the covenant people. But it is this place given to works in saving ourselves that Paul will not have. While the New Perspective gives some useful insights in reality it only confirms

the similarity between the Judaisers and the Roman Catholics (both were semi-Pelagians with a grace plus works salvation).

While the New Perspective writers argue that Paul was simply concerned about the boundary markers which excluded the Gentiles they fail to see that Paul appeals to the law as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal 3:24). The law is not just a boundary marker but exposes human sinfulness and the inability of all men, Jews and Gentiles, to fulfil God's demands (Rom 7:7-12). Paul, contrary to the views of Tom Wright, clearly teaches imputation, for example in the case of the adulterer David: 'God imputeth righteousness without works' (Rom 4:6, 22-25). The New Perspective sees justification as an ecclesiological doctrine (showing who belongs to the church) rather than soteriological (setting out the way for the individual to be saved).

The New Perspective does not explain the connection between the work of Christ and justification. The righteousness of God is seen simply as his covenant faithfulness and not also as something imputed to the sinner. Yet Paul uses the language of imputation especially in Romans chapters four and five. Further in the clearest of words he says that God 'hath made him to be sin for us, who

knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' (2Cor 5:21). In the New Perspective faith is simply a badge of the new family and not the instrument of justification which receives Christ and every blessing in Christ (Gal 3:13-14). Paul in Romans 8:1 states that there is now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus but the New Perspective authors argue that everything depends upon a judgment of works at the end of the day which threatens the heart of Paul's gospel of grace.

The New Perspective as Venema says 'is tantamount to "another gospel" which merits Paul's apostolic "anathema" of Galatians 1:8-9'. Beware of this new teaching which is simply a modern rehashing of the old heresy of Semi-Pelagianism – justification by grace plus works. Let us rather hold tenaciously to the Reformation watchword: 'faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone'. Though well written this is not the easiest book to read. However, I would strongly recommend all ministers, elders and lay preachers to get a copy and familiarise themselves with the arguments.

This review by William Macleod, editor of the Free Church Witness, appeared first in that periodical.

The Legacies of John Huss

Frederick Hodgson

In the last issue of *Reformation Today* some of the exciting story of pre-Reformation history in Bohemia was described. The way in which a nation was awakened by the preaching of Huss and Jerome was encouraging to those of us who are deeply saddened by the spiritual dearth in western countries. The main issue in the preaching of Huss and Jerome was the supreme authority of the Word of God. As men recognised this, they saw that the Word of God brought justice and liberty from oppressive, power hungry religious leaders who lived lives of luxury and greed. Huss and Jerome loved the truth and suffered martyrdom for the Truth. Their countrymen had rejoiced in the light and liberty that the truth brought them and took to arms in order to protect their new-found religious liberties. Warfare is a grievous, destructive and wearisome business. The Bohemians and their enemies longed for peace. The terms for peace were agreed at the Diet of Prague in 1434. Peace agreements are usually based on compromise and not all parties are fully satisfied. On the Bohemian side there were two distinct groups.

After the 1434 settlement the gulf between the Calixtines and Taborites became enormous. The Calixtines (focused on giving laity as well as clergy the right to drink the wine from the chalice at communion services) were legally recognised as a semi-autonomous church, alongside a Roman church for the minority. The Calixtines effectively became obedient to Rome. The Taborites rejected the arrangement insisting that Scripture is the sole source of authority.

Of the Taborites Wylie wrote, that the 'defence of their religion was their first concern, that of their civil rights and privileges the second....The Calixtines on the other hand, had become lukewarm so far as the struggle was one for religion.... They had secured the cup, not reflecting that they had got transubstantiation with it.' It was believed that Rokycana the Calixtine leader was tempted with the thought of being made bishop and used his influence at Basle and Prague to secure terms that were pleasing to the Roman Catholic party. Eventually he became archbishop and continued to attack ecclesiastical corruption with strongly worded language, but never separated from it.

Procopius, a Taborite and the recognised leader of the Bohemians before the Diet of Prague, saw that the Bohemians had been beguiled. He decided that he

should fight against the Calixtines in order to preserve his country from returning to spiritual slavery. The Battle of Lipany was fought in May 1434 and despite early success Procopius was let down by his cavalry which deserted the cause. Procopius was then overpowered and killed along with the bravest of his soldiers as they fought on against all the odds. The Taborites had lost their leader and the Calixtines succumbed to the craft of their enemies.

During the leadership of Procopius national arts, literature and agriculture flourished. Prague University prospered along with the schools of the nation. Aeneas Sylvanus admitted that every woman amongst the Taborites was well acquainted with the Old and New Testaments. He also had to admit that the Hussites had the merit of loving scholarship.

Sigismund ascended the throne of Bohemia, having sworn to observe the four points, but he failed to observe his oath and proceeded to restore the previous dominant position of the church. However, he only ruled for just over a year. Surprisingly when Sigismund became ruler of Bohemia, he treated the Taborites very well and gave them the city of Tabor and some of the land in its vicinity. He allowed them to worship freely. They prospered in their agricultural and cultural endeavours.

The Taborites had lost their military power, but they now began to search for clearer religious convictions. In this they were led by three men, Wenceslas Koranda, originally close to Ziska, the erudite Nicholas, sometimes called the 'little bishop' and Peter Payne.

Subsequent monarchs of Bohemia failed to uphold the Prague agreement, but eventually King Vladislav became king and as he was too young to rule, George Podiebrad a Calixtine nobleman became regent, seizing power in 1448. He had the policy of reconciling Catholics and Calixtines and restoring the Prague agreement, but it was proved to be at the expense of the Taborites and he captured Tabor in 1452. He was eventually elected king in 1459. He was consecrated king by the Catholics, but at his coronation communion was celebrated in both kinds to satisfy the Calixtines.

In 1463 Aeneas Sylvanus became Pope Pius II. George Podiebrad had reason to think that Pius II would be supportive of the Prague agreement as he had been the secretary to the Council of Basle. However, his hopes were disappointed in that as soon as he became pope he excommunicated Podiebrad. The following pope published yet another crusade against Bohemia

and George Podiebrad drove out the invaders yet again, but his attempts at reform were opposed by the intrigues of the priests who had again become established in the land. His reign closed in 1471.

Back in 1419, when Ziska called the Hussites to fight against the imperial armies, a Bohemian follower of Huss called Peter Chelcicky opposed him on the basis that war was wrong. He believed in the complete separation of church and state and taught that the bargain struck between the Roman Emperor Constantine and the church caused 'poison to enter the blood of the church'. Chelcicky taught that believers should not serve in the army or take part in government either at state level or that of town council. In fact he thought that towns were evil and that Christians should try to live in the country and work in agriculture or horticulture. He was scathing of religious leaders who turned a blind eye to sin. He said that priests 'prepare Jesus as a sweet sauce for the world, so that the world may not have to shape its course after Jesus and his heavy cross, but that Jesus may conform to the world; and they make him softer than oil, so that every wound may be soothed, and the violent, thieves, murderers and adulterers may have an easy entrance into heaven.' Peter found grievous faults in all sects, but was always respectful towards the Waldensians. His pacifism and call to holy living within the community of the godly was attractive to Rokycana, who encouraged his pious nephew Gregory to study his writings, especially his most famous book *'The Net of Faith'*.

Gregory heard of a village called Kunwald, on one of the estates of Podiebrad. It was almost deserted but several people of the same mind as he lived on the estate. He spoke to his uncle Rokycana and persuaded him to ask Podiebrad for permission to set up a community of the faithful in Kunwald. The result was the formation of the 'United Brethren' in 1455. They were made up of Waldensians, evangelical Taborites, and some of Rokycana's hearers. The Brethren used bread for communion rather than wafers like the Catholics and Calixtines. This led to their being suspected of sedition. Round about 1460 Gregory was visiting students in Prague. He was accused of stirring up rebellion and he and the students were apprehended by a magistrate and soldiers of Podiebrad. As the magistrate threw open the door to where the students were meeting, he announced, 'All who wish to live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. Follow me to prison.' Gregory and the students were immediately tortured on the rack and the students pleaded guilty in the Thien church to all the charges laid against them. Gregory, who was growing old, almost died under the treatment and Rokycana, filled with pity, interceded

for him before Podiebrad resulting in his release to Kunwald where he recovered.

Podiebrad nonetheless was incensed that the brethren did not follow the accepted form of communion, even though the elderly Michael, a Calixtine priest, conducted it. Podiebrad issued the order that anyone conducting communion in the blasphemous manner of the Brethren should be put to death. Michael was cast into prison and four of the leading Brethren were burned alive. The remaining Brethren fled to woods and mountains and lived in dens and caves for two years experiencing bitterly cold winters.

Despite the persecution their number grew daily and eventually Podiebrad was persuaded that his policy of persecution was not working and they were allowed to return to their homes, but they had Calixtine priests in their pulpits and they officiated at communion. Hutton wrote, 'The Brethren realised that if they were to be godly men themselves, they must have godly men in their pulpits...They must be pastors after God's own heart, who should feed the people with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15).'

In 1467 sixty or seventy of their chief men, with the encouragement of the godly, personally unambitious Gregory, met at Lhota and prayed and fasted for weeks. Wylie described how they humbled themselves in prayer and tears before God and selected nine men from among themselves. From these nine lots were drawn and three pastors were selected. These three pious and learned men were ordained with laying on of hands. The Brethren had searched widely for a suitable man to ordain their pastors and eventually they settled on a respected Waldensian pastor, who was believed to have been part of the succession from the original apostles. One of the three Matthew, was chosen as their bishop. All Brethren were rebaptised whether they were converted from a Catholic or Calixtine background. Despite their practising rebaptism, the Brethren were not credo Baptist. They baptised infants and viewed this as marking their entrance into the church. Confirmation was practised when they reached the age of 12. Ian Randall suggests that their view of baptism stopped them from linking with the Hutterite Anabaptist movement in neighbouring Moravia in the following century.

On the death of Podiebrad the United Brethren enjoyed freedom from persecution and their numbers grew. Round about 1482 Brother Luke (1458-1528), who was to become its major theologian, joined the United Brethren from the Calixtine party. His theology included a mix of medieval sacraments

along with the belief in salvation resting wholly on election. Luke believed that faith arose from hearing the preached Word and that preaching was not automatically redemptive, for its success depended on the free activity of the Holy Spirit. He realised the importance of godly instruction and published a catechism for children in 1502. The Lutherans subsequently published this again after making some alterations.

However, returning to the fifteenth century, divisions occurred within the Brotherhood and in 1490 it split into a major and minor party. The former had its strength in the towns and was characterised by its members being involved with civic life and making a contribution to the state. Its pastors settled down and lived in parsonages and were led a little reluctantly by Bishop Matthew until 1500 when four elders replaced him.

The minor party was based in the rural areas. Its leaders, Jacob Stekensky and Brother Amos, adhered to the ideals of pacifism and sharing of goods taught by Brothers Peter Chelcicky and Gregory and were scathingly critical of the urban party. Sadly after a spiritual relapse of Brother Jacob, the Amosites became Unitarian under the influence of Brother Matthew of Lanskoun. He had been previously expelled from the United Brethren in 1488 for denying the divinity of Christ, but in 1496 was accepted by the minor party as its chief spokesmen. The minor party then went on to suggest that the major party was seditious to the government in Prague in 1503 resulting in several of the major party being burnt.

The Bohemian Brethren were renowned for their humble, peaceful godly communities. They were able to declare, 'We are one in this purpose. We hold fast the faith of the Lord Christ. We will abide in the righteousness and love of God. We will trust in the living God. We will do good works. We will serve each other in the spirit of love. We will lead a virtuous, humble, gentle, sober, patient and pure life; and thereby shall we know that we hold the faith in truth, and that a home is prepared for us in heaven. We will show obedience to one another, as the Holy Scriptures command. We will take from each other instruction, reproof and punishment, and thus shall we keep the covenant established by God through the Lord Christ.'

Great care was taken in the selection of men to work as pastors among the Brethren. Although knowledge of the Bible and some ability of teaching were required, the behaviour and godliness of the candidate were paramount. The Brethren despised university education because they associated it with Rome.

They did not demand an academic training or knowledge of Greek or Hebrew. They insisted that their pastors earned a living by manual labour so they did not have time to study. This lack of learning was a weakness in that it perpetuated the inability to successfully challenge the doctrinal system of the Catholic Church. This task was left to the Reformers of the following century. Arguably their leaders were less well equipped to deal with heretics that arose within their own midst such as the Unitarian Amosites.

The Bohemian Brethren are a challenge to us however, because of their godly behaviour, which drew others sickened by the depravity of the times. In the fifteenth century the Bohemians were not driven to outward going evangelism by their understanding of grace as taught by the apostle Paul. Hutton says, ‘With Luther, St. Paul’s theology was foremost; with the Brethren (though not denied) it fell into the background. With Luther the favourite court of appeal was St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians; with the Brethren it was rather the Sermon on the Mount and the tender Epistles of St. John.’

Much later, after undergoing many refinements and persecutions, the successors of the United Brethren found refuge in Herrnhut in Bavaria in 1727. Moravian missionaries from this base were to have an immense impact in the 18th-century revivals. Their role in the unfolding history of bringing the gospel to all the nations of the world is sadly neglected and worthy of careful study.

The struggles and divisions of the Bohemian people in the 15th century involved numerous issues, including that of ultimate authority, the relationship between church and state, the composition of the church and the nature of godly living in this world. All these matters continue to be live issues for believers today, not least in countries such as the UK. The 15th century was a violent century and Christians were caught up in violence. They had to decide whether or not it was right for them to go to war in order to protect their liberties. Are there occasions today when Christians should adopt political methods to secure gospel liberty? Are there situations when military means are justified? These are questions to be addressed and discussed – perhaps in future issues of *Reformation Today*.

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*

A Courageous Speech

On March 21st in the House of Lords Baroness O’Cathain delivered a powerful and courageous speech highlighting the outrageous legislation proposed which will destroy our fundamental freedom and in due course wreck many lives. The following is extracted from that historic speech. See Editorial.

7.52 pm **Baroness O’Cathain** rose to move, as an amendment to the above Motion, to leave out all the words after “that” and insert “this House, having regard to the widespread concerns that the draft regulations compromise religious liberty and will result in litigation over the content of classroom teaching, and having regard to the legality of the equivalent regulations for Northern Ireland, declines to approve the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007”.

The noble Baroness said: My Lords, the Government first issued the regulations dealing with sexual orientation under the Equality Act on 7 March. They were then withdrawn and, after that, twice re-tabled. They are before us today and I believe they are seriously flawed. Furthermore the other place has had no opportunity to debate them other than in a hastily arranged committee off the Floor of the House. Surely that is not acceptable.

In the regulations, the Government is rushing headlong into the incredibly sensitive area of a clash between gay rights and religious freedom, and doing so by secondary legislation which does not allow for amendments and permits only very limited debate. I believe this circumscribing of people’s fundamental freedoms is outrageous. Parallel discrimination laws covering religion are in primary legislation. They were debated at length and substantially amended in their passage through Parliament. Why has such a procedure not been adopted in this case? ...

... I turn to the fundamental issues raised by the regulations and how they impinge on people’s religious beliefs. I venture to suggest that most religious believers hold that sex is only for marriage. That rules out adultery, sex before marriage and homosexual practice. Churches have believed that for thousands of years. It is profoundly dangerous of the Government to decide to use the law to force religious believers to change their beliefs.

The Christian churches are deeply fearful of what these regulations will mean for them. In the main churchgoers are sensible, kind, devout people who subscribe to the Second Great Commandment that you should love your neighbour, but believe that love sometimes means saying no. The religious view means a Christian old people’s home must say no to two civil partners who want married quarters, just as they would refuse cohabiting heterosexuals. They believe love means not helping people to do things that are morally harmful and against biblical teaching, from the

Old and New Testaments. That is their belief. It may not be the belief of all noble Lords, or of Government Ministers, but it is their religious belief. Are we to ride roughshod over it because we think we know better? Is it right to say, "You must do business our way or not at all"? There is not much tolerance or diversity in that. Surely tolerance means freedom to disagree.

At the end of January, we had the unsightly spectacle of the Prime Minister effectively announcing that it is Government policy to close down Catholic adoption agencies for not organising gay adoptions. His idea of a compromise on the issue is that the death sentence will not be carried out until the end of December next year. It is not just the Roman Catholics who will be affected. Many Christian denominations have protested about the regulations. It is not just adoption agencies that are affected. Countless Christian welfare projects will be affected, including old people's homes, residential drug rehab centres and community centres, to name just three.

At another level businesses run by Christians would be affected, including wedding photographers, who could be sued for refusing to attend civil partnership ceremonies, which, as I have warned previously, are now commonly called "weddings". In these areas, the Government are effectively putting up a sign saying, "No Christians allowed."

The Merits Committee of our House has drawn special attention to the regulations, making specific reference to the concerns expressed by religious groups that they will infringe on their religious freedom. Of course, in many areas the laws will make little difference; there is no problem in most business contexts. It is only where religious people are asked to endorse or promote a lifestyle which is counter to their beliefs that there is a problem. That does not mean that homosexuals are deprived of any service; they have the choice of many businesses which do not operate on strictly Christian principles. Some people of strong religious beliefs are simply saying there are some things that would involve them in moral compromise or in acting against their conscience.

A Christian printer would be quite content to print materials for people who happen to be gay, but would not want to print the *Gay Times*, or leaflets promoting gay marriage. That is a crucial distinction which Christians make, but which the regulations will not permit. Others are allowed to carry on in business and keep their freedom of conscience intact: a staunch socialist can refuse to print a Tory election leaflet; a vegetarian printer can refuse to print flyers for his local butcher; and a pacifist can refuse to print a sales brochure for an arms manufacturer.

...The human rights committee also says that the regulations could result in litigation against a school if a teacher says homosexual practice is wrong. If a priest is asked a direct question in an RE lesson, there could be litigation if he divulged what he really believes.

The Synod of Dort

An understanding of the historical background and origin of the five points of Calvinism is essential. A key player in that background is Arminius.

Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) from whom Arminianism as a system of thought receives its name was born in Oudewater, South Holland. He lost his father when in infancy and was cared for by a godly converted priest. When he died Jacobus was only 14. He moved to Marburg, Germany, where news reached him that Oudewater had been sacked, and his mother, sister and two brothers had been massacred. Arminius then found a home with Peter Bertius a pastor in Rotterdam. A deep friendship developed with Peter Bertius Jr. The two went to the newly formed University of Leiden where they studied for six years. Arminius was so talented that funds were provided for him to study at Geneva where he studied under Theodore Beza (1519-1605).

In 1588 Arminius returned to Amsterdam where he was ordained. In 1590 Arminius married the daughter of one of Amsterdam's magistrates. It was about that time that he found himself in trouble when he expounded the man of Romans seven as an unregenerate man. In the course of his lectures on Romans he came to Romans nine and here he denied the doctrine of predestination and reprobation. Charges on several counts were brought against Arminius all of which he answered well, but not so in the case of predestination. He displayed exceptional penetration in his arguments. Dominant was his concern to avoid any scheme in which God might appear, even by implication, the author of evil.

Arminius admired the English Puritan William Perkins. However when he read Perkins' work on predestination Arminius reacted strongly against it. He rejected the supralapsarian position of Perkins and also disagreed with the general implications of the doctrine of predestination. (Infra- and supralapsarianism have to do with the order of God's decrees. Infralapsarianism is 1. Decree to create man, 2. Decree to allow fall, 3. Decree of election and reprobation, 4. Decree to send Christ to die for the elect. Supralapsarianism is 1. Decree of election and reprobation, 2. Decree to allow fall, 3. Decree to send Christ to die for the elect, 4. Decree to create man. The majority of Calvinists in the history of the Church, perhaps 75 percent have been infralapsarian). Arminius wrote a critical reply but when in 1602 Perkins died Arminius withheld the publication of his treatise which was published posthumously in 1612. Richard Muller suggests, 'We must hypothesize a fairly

long development of Arminius' thought. Not only did Arminius intentionally work through a series of key biblical and theological loci related to the problems of grace, human will, and predestination; he also became acquainted with a series of Lutheran and Roman Catholic views in which alternative approaches to those problems were to be found. Thus he later commented that "the Lutheran and Anabaptist churches as well as that of Rome" view the Reformed doctrine of predestination as erroneous, and he noted in particular the teachings of Melancthon and of the Danish theologian Hemmingsen, as offering an alternative view.' (*The Grace of God/the Bondage of the Will* in two volumes edited by Thomas R Schreiner and Bruce A Ware, Baker, 1995, vol 2. p. 255.)

In 1602 plague desolated parts of the Netherlands. Arminius served his people faithfully throughout without fear of his own life. The ranks of the University of Leiden were depleted by the plague and Arminius was appointed to teach there although not without dispute over his doctrinal position. Subsequent to Arminius' teaching at Leiden there was much unrest because students began to show aberrant tendencies. Arminius wrote extensively and his works were published after his death in 1609 aged only 49. He left nine children. His ideas continued to spread pervasively and widely in all sectors including the common people.

A famous and influential leader of the Remonstrants was Johannes Uytenbogaert (1557-1644). He championed the cause of freedom of speech. Upon the decease of Arminius Uytenbogaert called together forty Arminian pastors who met at Gouda and drew up the Five Articles of the Remonstrance on January 14, 1610.

Arminius' views represented a marked departure from Reformed teaching. He was synergistic inasmuch as he sought to combine the effectual grace of God with the free will of man. Following his decease his disciples contended for his principles. The mantle of leadership was taken up by Johannes Uytenbogaert, the court preacher, and Simon Episcopius who filled Arminius' place at the University of Leiden. In 1610 the Arminians drew up five propositions known as the Five Arminian Articles. These were 1. Election is conditioned on foreseen faith, 2. Universal atonement, 3. The need for regeneration, 4. The resistibility of grace, 5. The uncertainty of the perseverance of believers. Some of these such as the need of regeneration seem unexceptionable but it was the context in which they were set that caused widespread controversy. These disciples were known as Remonstrants.

Prince Maurice the political leader whose role was crucial in this whole affair remained neutral until 1616 when he joined the Calvinist party. The Prince was

encouraged to call for a National Synod which in fact became unique in Protestant history because of its international character.

The issues debated at the Synod of Dort were played out within a political context and have reference to the Twelve Year Truce signed between Spain and the United Provinces in 1609. The War Party wanted to renew the War of Independence in 1621 whereas the Peace party desired to renegotiate the Truce and extend it. The Grand Pensionary of Holland (Prime Minister) was the political patron of the Arminians and also the leader of the Peace Party, whereas the Stadholder (Head of State) Prince Maurice referred to above became the patron of the Calvinists and also the leader of the War Party. Only by maintaining theological precision and discipline would the Calvinists be able to defend and preserve their cause. They saw the Remonstrants as representing a party which stood for a leniency which would drift back to Rome and the Empire out of which they had found a refuge. (Dr Charles A McIlhenny, Case of Professor James Arminius and the Synod of Dort. *Reformed Theological Journal* November 2002. This is a 14 page compact very well-researched overview of the background to the Synod and summary of the five points.)

The political situation was tense. Did this affect the way in which the statements of Dort were formulated? The answer is no. Certainly there was pressure for a clear outcome but the contents of the formularies was an entirely theological matter. (The role of the Oldenbarnevelt the principal political leader who worked for the cause of the Arminians is described by Groen van Prinsterer in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches – essays in commemoration of the great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619* edited by Peter Y De Yong published by Reformed Fellowship, Grand Rapids, 1968.)

The composition of the Synod of Dort

The Arminian controversy, wrote Philip Schaff, 'is the most important which took place within the Reformed Church'. Those who gathered to confer and respond to the five points of the Remonstrants included fifty-six ministers and ruling elders from the Dutch churches, five professors of theology, and twenty-six foreign theologians from eight other nations including representatives from Switzerland (Zurich, Berne and Basel) and from Germany. Eighteen political commissioners who were not members of the Synod supervised the proceedings. Five delegates were appointed from England by King James who rejected the Presbyterianism of Scotland which explains why there was no one from Scotland at Dort. Four highly esteemed theologians from France were appointed to attend, but when it came to it they were forbidden by the king of France to attend. However, after the Synod of Dort the French Church

enthusiastically approved the Canons of Dort and made them binding on their ministers.

From its inception the Remonstrants were treated as an accused party. At the 22nd session thirteen Remonstrants appeared before the Synod. Episcopius was their leader and spokesman. He stated their case with eloquence but gave offence by being too bold and dogmatic. He also lacked finesse and diplomacy. For instance it was not necessary for him to declare the assembly to be schismatical. Thereafter the Remonstrants were excluded. Subsequent to Dort and as an outcome of it 200 Arminian ministers were deposed from office in the Church. During the discussions the issues were by no means clear-cut. Delegates from other countries argued persistently for the universal sufficiency of the atonement and for the sincere intention of God in the free offer of the gospel.

The Synod was inaugurated by a service in 'Die Groote Kerk' in the city of Dortrecht and concluded with a closing service in the same church on 13 November 1618. There were 154 sessions held in a hall which was heated throughout the winter by a great fire on a hearth. But as extra protection against the cold and damp, (about which many complained), each delegate was supplied with a 'stoofje', a small oven filled with hot coals to be placed under the feet. Numerous candlesticks and three great chandeliers provided adequate lighting. 24 pounds of tallow were consumed every evening. Two galleries for spectators could accommodate between 400 and 500.

It is interesting to compare the Synod with the Westminster Assembly in London which convened by request of Parliament from 1643 to 1647. There were 151 appointed to Westminster nearly all English Puritans. An average of 70 met in 1,163 sessions. Some days were given wholly to prayer and fasting. Every Monday morning a vow was read aloud on behalf of all attending delegates, a promise to be faithful in every respect to the Word of God. The Westminster Assembly produced a full confession of Faith of 33 chapters which runs to about 100 pages. In comparison the Synod of Dort produced a statement confined mostly to the subject of salvation which runs to about 26 pages. The Westminster divines also produced the Larger and Shorter Catechisms and the Directory for Public Worship.

Through the Synod of Dort the crucial issue of sovereign grace was powerfully affirmed as necessary biblical truth. At the same time Arminianism was firmly rejected. The Protestant churches were strengthened. For instance the Protestant Church in France required all her ministers to subscribe to the formularies of Dort. However very strong resurgence of Arminianism was on the way in England under the leadership of Archbishop Laud.

The Formularies of Dort

Foundational to our understanding of the Synod of Dort is the Confession of the Remonstrants. The inspiration behind the five points of the Remonstrants is that God must be protected from the charge of injustice. Calvinism according to the understanding of the disciples of Arminius represents a view that advocates that God determines man's destiny without any regard whatever to man's works. Is this not sheer arbitrariness? Does this not make men pawns? If God's decree is all that there is then all history is a video game representing what has been present and predetermined.

The first point of the Remonstrants is that election is based on faith foreseen. This includes perseverance. Those who God foresaw would persevere to the end will be saved.

The second point is that Christ's atonement gained reconciliation for all men equally and without exception. It is up to individuals to make this good for themselves.

The third point was that man's free will makes the way for regeneration. When man by his free will submits then the Holy Spirit is free to work. Free will is the cause of regeneration.

The fourth point is that grace is resistible. This is an extension of the former point. The sinner on his own initiative must will to be acceptable to God.

The fifth point concerns final perseverance. Only those who persevere by faith will be saved. On the face of it no

one would disagree with that but the point is by what power will that faith persevere?

In response to these five points the Synod formulated the Canons in five chapters and ninety-three articles. These were signed on 23 April and solemnly promulgated in 'Die Groote Kerk' on the 6th May 1619. Three days later the theologians from other nations took their leave after six months of hard work. (A complete copy of the Canons can be obtained from http://www.reformed.org/documents/canons_of_dordt.html These make up 24 pages single spaced A4 size sheets.)

The formularies as well as the Scriptures are translated from the Latin in which they were first published. It is important to have a brief sketch of the formularies as follows.

The first main point of doctrine concerns divine election and reprobation. 18 articles follow. The first points to the fact that all mankind is condemned (Rom 3:19). This is followed by the citation of John 3:16 and also Romans 10:14-15 which declares the necessity of gospel preaching. The question of unbelief and gospel rejection is then addressed. This leads directly to the subject of divine election which truth is declared in Ephesians 1:4-6. Article 9 concerns the fact that election is not based on faith foreseen. Article 12 is experimental. 'How does a person recognise election? Answer: not by inquisitive searchings into the hidden things of God, but by noticing within themselves spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God's Word.'

Tremendous pastoral sensitivity is expressed toward those who may have difficulty with regard to reprobation.

Article 17: The Salvation of the Infants of Believers reads as follows, 'Since we must make judgements about God's will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.'

The first main section concludes with nine paragraphs which state the errors of the Arminians and repudiates them.

The second main point of doctrine addressed has to do with particular redemption. Having asserted the absolute necessity of the death of Christ as an atonement for sin article three states, 'This death of God's Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.'

Article 6 stresses that the command to repent and believe ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, and article 8: It was God's good will through the blood of the cross to effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those to whom he should grant faith.

Seven paragraphs refuting the errors of the Arminians follow.

The third and fourth main points of doctrine address the subject of human corruption, conversion to God and the way it occurs. Seventeen articles of

explanation follow. Article 8 is particularly important since it corrects a hyper-Calvinist distortion. Article 8 reads: 'Nevertheless, all who are called through the Gospel are called seriously. For seriously and most genuinely God makes known in his Word what is pleasing to him: that those who are called should come to him. Seriously he also promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who come to him and believe'. Hyper-Calvinists reject what they term 'well meant offers of the gospel'. They succumb to human rationalism and the question, How can God seriously offer the Gospel to all men when he knows that he will confine its effect to the elect only?

Sections four and five conclude with nine paragraphs repudiating Arminian errors. For instance the substance of paragraph 8 is the rejection of the notion that man 'completely thwarts his own rebirth; and, indeed, that it remains in his own power whether or not to be reborn.'

The fifth main point of doctrine concerns the perseverance of the saints. Fifteen articles follow. Article 4 concerns the danger of true believers falling into serious sins. Constant watchfulness is exhorted and the case of David and Peter is recalled. Article 5 addresses the effects of serious sins 'By such monstrous sins, however, they greatly offend God, deserve the sentence of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound the conscience, and sometimes lose awareness of grace for a time – until, after they have returned to the way by genuine repentance. God's fatherly face again shines upon them.'

Article 11 points to 1 Corinthians 10:13. 'The Father of all comfort does not let them be tempted beyond what they can bear, but with the temptation also provides a way out.'

The Views of John Calvin Himself

Even though John Calvin (1509-1564) died 54 years before the Synod of Dort his name has been associated with the five points and the five points are nearly always called 'The Five Points of Calvinism' even though Calvin had nothing to do with the formulation of them.

On October 16 1551 a dramatic confrontation occurred in Geneva between John Calvin and Jerome Bolsec over the doctrine of predestination.

Jerome Bolsec, a Carmelite monk and doctor of theology in Paris, was drawn to the Reformation and so forced to leave France. By early 1551 he had settled in the canton of Geneva working as a physician. He became critical of Calvin's doctrine of predestination. It was a Friday evening when one of the Genevan ministers at a regular meeting for a sermon and discussion preached on predestination. Bolsec who seemed to think that Calvin himself was absent criticised Calvin and his doctrine of predestination very sharply. In response Calvin rose and gave a brilliant defence of predestination. Calvin's teaching on this subject is clearly unpacked in his Systematic Theology popularly known as *The Institutes*.

As we would expect, Calvin's teaching endorses the formularies of Dort including the doctrine of common grace, God's love for all mankind and the free unfettered and uninhibited offers of the gospel to sinners. This is important as Hyper-Calvinists Herman Hanko and Homer Hoeksema endorse the five points described in the previous article, but then go on to affirm classic Hyper-Calvinism which denies common grace and the free offers of the gospel.¹

In his commentary on Romans 5:18 Calvin writes: 'Paul makes grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive him.' Note Calvin uses the word offered. Also noteworthy is his concept of God's goodness which is consistent with his belief in common grace. The goodness of God is given to all mankind not the elect only. In Calvin's comments on Matthew 23:37, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing,' he suggests that we have here a lament which expresses a 'maternal kindness'. 'In a manner of speaking, God bares his breast to us in the overtures of the gospel.' ... 'Indeed, it is precisely the tender-heartedness of God's lament in the Person of his Son that renders human unbelief in response to the Gospel such a monstrous thing. For this reason – the sinner's stubborn refusal to respond appropriately to God's kind overtures – a dreadful vengeance awaits us as often as the teaching of his Gospel is put before us, unless we quietly hide ourselves under his wings, in which he is ready to take us up and shelter us.'²

In his lectures on Ezekiel Calvin expressly states that God announces through the prophet 'his wish is that all should be saved' (Ez 18:23,32). Likewise on 1 Peter 3:9

Calvin observes, 'Though God has secretly determined to save the elect alone, he declares in the Gospel that he desires the salvation of all. The only solution open to us is to acknowledge that in his revealed will God stretches out his hand to all alike, even though secretly he has determined to save one and not another. Nonetheless, there is no ultimate disharmony between God's purpose of election and the universal call of the gospel, however difficult this harmony may be for us to comprehend.'

Calvin does not expound the extent of the atonement. Efforts have been made to determine Calvin's view on that subject by referring to his commentaries. Dr R T Kendall claimed that Calvin believed in an unlimited atonement which is the view of Paul Van Buren, J W Anderson and Curt Daniel. A A Hodge, Robert Godfrey, Roger Nicole maintain that Calvin did believe in a limited atonement. S J Hayhow in an article in the Banner of Truth magazine (Issue 330) maintains that Calvin implicitly held to particular atonement. His citation of Calvin shows that Calvin certainly held to the sufficiency of the atonement for all. In another article in the same magazine (Issue 398) Iain Murray refutes firmly Dr Alan Clifford who seeks to build a major theological structure on his view that Calvin held to a universal atonement.

Robert A Peterson Sr in his book *Calvin and the Atonement*³ points to the fact that both sides can select evidence to support their position. Peterson observes that there are two strains in Calvin and these reflect the Bible's own antimony between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. It is refreshing to see in Calvin's commentaries an insistence to allow the text to speak for itself even when this would seem to contradict limited atonement. Examples are John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2. In contrast John Gill in his book *The Cause of God and Truth* works on these texts in such a way that they cease to possess the plain meaning they are intended to convey. Sadly this reveals a scholastic and rationalistic mentality. Spurgeon is correct when he accuses Gill of 'hacking and hewing terribly to bring the Word of God into a more systematic shape'.⁴ Arminians on the one side and Hyper-Calvinists on the other cannot live with antimony. Both impose human reasoning on the text of Scripture. Both attempt to understand the inscrutable.

Robert A Peterson Sr confesses, 'I have resisted the temptation to read my view into Calvin. I hold to a position of limited atonement but continue to think that the evidence is too ambiguous to allow a definitive answer to the question of what Calvin taught on the matter (p. 118).' In this view Peterson is followed by Robert Letham.⁵

1 Herman Hanko, Homer C Hoeksema, Gise J Van Baren, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, P O Box 2006, Grand Rapids, Michigan 4960, 95 pp., 1976.

2 With regard to the tender heartedness of God Don Carson speaks of God's yearning, inviting, seeking love and he refers to John 3:16 and Ezekiel 33. Don A Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, Paternoster, 2002, page 15.

3 Mentor 1999, ISBN 1 85792 377 4.

4 C H Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, Kregel, 1954, p. 9.

5 *Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort*, 2 vols (Ph.D dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1979) 1:125-126.

The Experience of Free Grace

In times of revival sinners experience a deep conviction of their sinful condition. Sometimes this experience can be agonising. As souls first discover their appalling condition of lostness and guilt and then are led to search for and find salvation by faith in Christ, the glory of God's grace shines resplendently. The hymns which stem from revival times well express admiration for God's saving grace. John Newton's expression of gratitude is well known,

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see*

The sense of former wretchedness, lostness and blindness is replaced by an overwhelming sense of joy and praise.

That the apostle Paul should receive grace and apostleship when his activities as a persecutor warranted nothing but wrath gave him a sense of indebtedness to which he constantly testified in his preaching and writings.

The experience of grace in the soul of Martin Luther was the base out of which the Lutheran Reformation was born. Luther studied under Johannes von Staupitz who was vicar general of the German Augustinian monasteries. Von Staupitz wished to free himself from the responsibility and it was obvious that he prepared Luther to be his successor. Under his spiritual guidance Luther graduated through all levels of theological study up to and including his doctorate – and this within the shortest time frame possible. Five years of study was the minimum requirement. All this took place in spite of the fact that Martin was in spiritual turmoil. He was tormented having no assurance of salvation. He tried everything including fasting and confession of all known sin. At any rate in 1513 he began lecturing on the Psalms. He went on to expound Romans and then Galatians and Hebrews. This intense study of the Scriptures was the means of his conversion. He wrestled with the meaning of the word

'righteousness' in Psalm 31 and followed that up by studying the New Testament equivalent in Romans 1:17. When he saw that God's righteousness is a free gift received by faith he was instantly liberated. He declared, 'Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.' (*Here I Stand*, Roland Bainton, p 65). Luther's was a free grace experience born out of a tremendous struggle in which he came to see passionately that salvation was not by free will, not by works, not by religious rituals, not by confessing sins to a priest, but by grace alone.

George Whitefield, the most remarkable preacher in English church history, tells of how he came to experience free grace as a young man aged twenty-four. This was during a sea voyage to America. As an immensely successful preacher the temptation to pride was as wide as the sea and sky around him because there was no preacher as eloquent as he was. Yet it was then that he was overcome by conviction of sin and a wretchedness so intense that he even contemplated giving up the ministry. This time of conviction, according to his own testimony, helped him to understand the doctrines of grace: election and adoption. This experience of humbling served to deepen and strengthen him and cause him to lean more upon God. This was not the last time Whitefield was to experience such conviction.

After a prolonged time of deep conviction C H Spurgeon came to embrace free grace. He describes his experience as follows:

'Well can I remember the manner in which I learned the doctrines of grace in a single instant. Born, as all of us are by nature, an Arminian, I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul and when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron, and I can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man and that I had made progress in Scriptural knowledge, through having found once for all, the clue to the truth of God. One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking

much about the preacher's sermon for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, "How did you come to be a Christian?" "I sought the Lord." "But how did you come to seek the Lord?" The truth flashed across my mind in a moment – I should not have sought him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, How came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures? I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then in a moment I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that he was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, "I ascribe my change wholly to God." '

Turning to our day I think of a close friend, Martin Holdt. He is a well-known pastor in South Africa. He embraced the doctrines of grace when he had been in the pastorate for only a little more than a year. He had been struggling with the doctrine of election. Martin was given excellent books to read in the early days when he lived in Pietersburg. His coming to the doctrines of grace was not an intellectual step only, but rather consisted of profound spiritual experience. One morning in his study he realised that just as the doctrine of the Trinity is beyond comprehension, so is the doctrine of election. When Martin embraced the doctrines of grace, peace flooded his heart. He went to the kitchen to announce to his wife Beryl that he now believed the doctrine of election. She was shocked! 'What about my Dad?' she asked. Her father was a hardened unbeliever. Unpremeditated, Martin responded with the following words, 'If it is up to your Dad, you know as well as I do that he will never be converted. But if it is up to God, there is hope.' She saw that. Gradually she too came to love and to believe the doctrines of grace. Sovereign grace has been an anchor and source of strength in Martin's ministry.

The story of Drew Garner and his wife Frances illustrate the transforming power of free grace in the soul. Drew Garner was a young pastor of a large Southern Baptist Church with about one thousand members. Behind an impressive facade of highly organised and efficient evangelistic activity lay a disillusioned and theologically disorientated pastor. Drew confesses that he was far along the road of liberalism in his heart and heading straight in the direction of total scepticism and abandonment of the faith.

Nevertheless the machinery had to be kept going, and the machinery of churchly activity kept him going.

One Sunday he was tipped off to visit a newcomer into the area who might, if visited, be drawn to swell the ranks of the church. Southern Baptists are renowned for speed of movement when it comes to making additions to their churches! Early Monday morning Drew knocked on the door. In his own words, 'the ugliest man I have ever seen appeared unshaven and in his dressing gown'. The man informed Drew that there was time only for a few words.

'Do you make altar calls?' the ugly man growled.

'Of course I do,' said Drew.

'Why do you make them?'

'To give people a chance to decide!'

'Do you think people have to have a chance? Does God save by chance?'

Just as Drew began to think, 'What kind of a nut have I got on my hands?' the ugly man said, 'I would like you to see my library.' He showed Drew inside. A magnificent array of Puritan books was unveiled before Drew's eyes. Although at sea theologically Drew had been well educated. He knew instinctively that he was with someone who knew what he believed, who studied those books, and who was well grounded in Christian doctrine and life. Bringing the short meeting to a close the ugly man said, 'I want you to read two books.' He gave him Pink's *The Sovereignty of God* and Loraine Boettner's *Predestination*.

Drew made a few more calls and returned home. 'A strange man called this morning on his way to work,' said Frances. 'He said he was new to the area and that he would like me to read John chapter six.' 'Was he a big ugly man?' asked Drew. 'Yes, he was' replied Frances. 'He's a nut!' said Drew, and went into his study.

As he sat down the old familiar feeling of theological desolation came upon him. He had run dry and was desperate. Apart from evangelistic gimmickry he was doctrinally and spiritually bankrupt. His eyes fell upon the two books he had brought in. He began to read. The ugly man dropped in next day to see Frances about her progress in John six. Her studies were going well and by Wednesday she was having a major change of mind. On

Thursday Drew's reading of the two books brought him suddenly and dramatically to the point of revelation. Suddenly his eyes were opened! He saw it all in an instant! Leaping in the air he shouted as loudly as it is possible for a man to shout. The whole plan of God, his sovereignty and his purpose had fallen into place. He rushed out to share it with Frances. She too had seen it. They rejoiced together. Life had begun anew. The theological desert, the barren spiritual wandering, the doubt and scepticism had all gone, and gone forever. A new life had begun.

The future years were to prove hard but rewarding. Drew Garner has never ceased to thank God for sending that excellent man and using him so decisively. In the place of evangelical tradition has come a full and rich ministry not only in the realm of soul-winning and evangelism but in pastoral work and church planting.

The blessings that result from the free grace experience are many. It is a great help to have a strong, clear grasp of God's overall plan of salvation. To be able to understand theology and rejoice in God's sovereign purpose as it is unfolded in Scripture is most helpful. As we have just seen in the case of Drew Garner, doubt was expelled. Clarity and strength of faith replaced uncertainty and doctrinal shallowness. A potent grasp of the sovereignty of God can transform a pastor's entire ministry. This was Drew Garner's experience. The change in his life is typical of those who come into deep heart experience of God's free grace.

An appreciation of the sovereignty of God in salvation results in humility. From evangelical humiliation come two essential attributes, namely, the fear of God and a humble, contrite mind. The fear of the Lord receives little if any attention in evangelical circles today. We still have the phrase 'a God-fearing man', although it is not used as much as it used to be. The fear of God lies at the very heart of true Christianity. Both Old and New Testaments speak much of this fear. Indeed, there are hundreds of direct or indirect references to this matter in Scripture.

How does one discern a true fear of the Lord? The answer is that it is accompanied by a reverence for Scripture, a repudiation of all lightness, frivolity and flippancy, a conformity of heart to the precepts of the Word. A true fear of the Lord is often experienced in awful stillness: 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Ps. 46:10). Such a fear leads to a thoughtful and

living relationship with God in which those beautiful attributes described by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount are developed, namely, sorrow for sin, meekness, purity, mercy, peacemaking and joy (Matt 5:1-12).

One of the practical effects of the fear of God is humility. The Prodigal Son was brought to humiliation. He soon squandered his substance and his gifts of character, thus bringing himself both to profligacy and penury. The backward slide was permitted in order to bring him to an end of himself. He showed true repentance when he determined to return to his father. That he was humbled was seen in his words, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' The case of the Prodigal illustrates well God's purpose in the humbling of all his people. Can you think of one saved character in Scripture who was not humbled?

Free grace causes us to leave every reliance upon ourselves or dependence on what we have done and to look to the Lord alone to save us.

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress,
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

Augustus Toplady

Appreciation of free grace is the source of intense joy, a joy which inspires profound worship which is perhaps best expressed in the hymns we sing,

*Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding
Ransomed souls, the tidings swell;
'Tis a deep that knows no sounding;
Who its breadth or length can tell?
On its glories
Let my soul for ever dwell.*

John Kent

The fruit of the experience of free grace is love, worship, gratitude, humility, joy, dedication, zeal, meekness, gentleness and compassion towards others. Those who deeply appreciate that they have received so much so freely are the most thankful to God and the most ready to seek the good of others.

Haiti



Jean Claude of France, a director of Europresse, reports as follows: The Lord opened up the way for me to go to Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. Only an hour and a half from the USA, this little French-speaking country is one of the poorest and most unstable in the world. Kidnappings and murders are daily news. Many Haitian preachers have enrolled on our Preachers' Correspondence Course. Communications have been very difficult, with many letters and parcels being lost. Until now we have not been able to develop proper channels to make books available there. Haiti has been on my heart for a long time, so the opportunity to go and be introduced to contacts was not to be missed. It

seems that we may have found ways to make our books regularly available in Haiti. A number of logistical aspects are still to be worked out, but it is very positive. This will also help us to have more regular interaction with our students there. I preached in a few churches despite an ever present insecurity and was asked to give a lecture on 'Predestination from Romans 9' at a local Bible Institute – quite an experience for me and for them!

Before going to Haiti, I was in Philadelphia for a convention of Haitian church leaders living in the US. Although I had only a few minutes to present the work, there was a lot of interest. This highlighted the need to make the books available to these people. I came away with a list of about 60 names, and great expectations for this open door.

Kenya

Keith Underhill reports that the Reformed Baptist Association meetings took place on 26th February to 1st March. Over 30 brethren from all over Kenya (and one from Tanzania) gathered for the three days, representing local churches planted from Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi. Six of the eight

provinces of Kenya were represented. Almost all of the men have been through the training programme in Nairobi. It was again encouraging both to see so many, and to be hosted by one of the 'daughter' churches, which is now seeking independent registration with the Government. There were papers on the Pastor and the Church, the Family and the Community. Every local church represented presented a report followed by prayer – 22 reports covering 38 churches in various stages of life. None have large memberships, only three having more than 50 members. Only seven have a functioning eldership, with a further two only one official elder. We have a long way to go in terms of leadership. What we do is so new to people in Kenya. When a meeting has about ten converted and committed participants we are ready to constitute a church. It is eventually these members who choose their elders. This is almost unheard of in a country where leaders are imposed by a higher body than the local church. We are seeing our brethren grow in maturity and we trust a firm foundation is being laid in many places for the growth of strong churches. Everywhere the 'health and wealth gospel' heresy is being promoted. Few understand what it really means to be converted to Christ.

Iran

One of the top Islamic leaders in Iran accepted Christ and left the country after facing death threats and imprisonment, according to an Iranian pastor living in the U.S. 'This man has been watching Christian TV programmes for the past two years,' said Pastor Elnathan Baghestani, founder of 'Iran for Christ Ministries'. Pastor Baghestani and his wife provide Christian programming to the Mohabat Network satellite, which broadcasts 24/7 into Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. The imam called one of the phone counsellors connected to 'Iran for Christ Ministries' and prayed to receive Christ in early February.

'This man knows all the verses of the Qur'an by heart,' Pastor Baghestani added. 'After he began watching, doubt began in his heart about the Islamic faith.' The man spent nine months in prison after he questioned the violence of radical Islam. Following his release from prison, he faced numerous death threats and escaped the country. Several other religious leaders may follow suit. 'He knows four other high-ranking imams that are in the same condition and want to leave Iran,' Baghestani said. While it is illegal to own satellite dishes in Iran, many hide them on their roofs or other locations on their property. 'They

arrest people for having satellite dishes because they know the Christian programming is effective,' he added.

The imam who fled left everything behind. 'His salary was 700,000 of their monetary units every month,' Baghestani said. 'He was honoured and respected, but when the gospel came to him he lost everything,' he noted. 'Now he is a poor refugee in a foreign country.' 'God is shaking the foundation of Islam in Iran,' he said. 'We have been praying for some of the main government officials to come to Christ and God is answering us,' he reports. 'I pray God will open more doors for us to send the gospel to the Middle East.' [ANS]

Malawi

About 15 years ago Mirfield Evangelical Church sponsored a student at what was then Likubula Bible Institute (now Evangelical Bible College of Malawi, situated in Blantyre). At the time it cost just over £100 p.a. to keep Moyo Kumpola and his family at Likubula. The following unedited extract of a letter from Moyo shows how in the providence and plan of God this small investment has borne fruit. We can rejoice in the way that God has used Moyo in Malawi and Mozambique (Moyo is presently pastor of a church in Zomba, having



previously pastored a church in Lilongwe).

In February 2006 Moyo was approached by a delegation of Christians from Mozambique. They wanted help with the Word of God



over a period of some weeks. These people knew the church in Zomba from the time when there was a civil war in their country. Some of them

were amongst the refugees who camped in Malawi and joined the church during that period. When they went back to their homeland they sat down and agreed to continue in their own church, but they had no one to lead them so they came to Moyo for assistance. They had a very good conversation with Moyo and he asked permission from his congregation to go to Mozambique. They allowed him to go there and spend a month with them. That was the end of February 2006. The journey from Zomba to the church in Mozambique took 4 days to cycle there, pedalling from early in the morning to afternoon each day. Moyo said, 'I thank God that I managed to cycle without any problems on our way.' When he reached there he realised that only one month was not enough because there were 10 churches involved and each church wanted him. The churches were far apart and he failed to cover all the churches.

He was asked to extend his time in Mozambique because there was so much to do, but he declined because of responsibilities to his own family and his own church in Zomba, Malawi. The congregations in Mozambique pressed him to return and he agreed to go back to Malawi and plan a fresh programme with permission from his own congregation. He took a letter back

to Zomba with him at the end of March. Happily on his return to Zomba he found his family well and the church to be functioning well. He presented the letter to the church. This outlined the work that he had done and the work that still remained along with the request to return for a further month. His church then asked him a very difficult question. They asked, 'Pastor, if we can give you another month will you manage to complete the whole work there?' He replied that no single person could complete God's work in that time. He explained that there were people who had requested baptism and baptismal classes would require six months and in addition to this there was need for leadership training in all the churches and this could not be done in a day.

One of his elders suggested that he should spend a year in Mozambique and many agreed on that point. Moyo did not agree because he had a family to look after in Zomba and no one else could do that. He stressed that the journey to the churches in Mozambique was long and that communications were poor, and that there were no hospitals and no reliable water supplies. Transport was not available apart from the bicycles that they had. He asked his church if he could be allowed to go there for periods of 2 or 3 months. The idea was welcomed and he went

back to Mozambique in May and stayed until August and then spent a further time in Mozambique between October and early December. He is planning a further visit in August for baptism and a conference.

The population is almost evenly divided between the Spanish-speaking Metizo people and the native Amerindians. The official language is Spanish but a large percentage do not use Spanish as their first language.

Guatemala



The Guatemalan economy is highly dependent on agriculture. Decades of civil war have impoverished the people, but the economy has improved since the fighting ended. Hurricane Mitch in 1998 was devastating, but the economy has slowly recovered. There remain large disparities in the distribution of wealth between landowners and the workers. Guatemala gained independence from Spain in 1821.

Guatemala has been dominated by the Roman Catholic Church for much of its history, but that dominance has been shaken in recent years. After decades of war and suffering there has been a large harvest of evangelical believers.

The latter half of the 20th century was marked by political instability and 36 years of civil war. The war ended with the signing of a peace treaty in 1996. The war brought extreme suffering with over 100,000 killed and over 1 million refugees.

Guatemala is located in Central America immediately to the south of Mexico. It also borders on Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. Guatemala traditionally claims Belize as part of its territory. 14.6 million people live in Guatemala.

There is freedom of religion in Guatemala. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest group with 60% of the people. This number is down from nearly 100% early in the 20th century and continues to decline.

Evangelicals have prospered in recent years. Their numbers have grown at an astonishing rate and now account for more than 25% of the people. The people continue to demonstrate a genuine openness to the gospel, and missionary efforts to reach people have been highly effective.

Evangelicals have gained increasing influence in governmental affairs. Pray that they will govern wisely and that Christians will bring lasting peace and stability

Pray that the Lord will raise up more native pastors to match the rapid growth of churches, and pray for the Bible schools that train them.

Pray for outreach to the native Indian people. Traditional pagan religions are still a strong influence on the people, including some Christians. Pray also for Bible translation works as they aim to reach more groups in

their native languages. *This report by Brad Garrison.*

Uzbekistan

An Uzbek criminal court has sentenced Christian pastor Dmitry Shestakov to four years in a prison colony for alleged 'illegal' religious activities. Judge M Tulanov of the Andijan Criminal Court handed down the harsh verdict against Shestakov on Friday (March 9th), nearly three weeks after his trial began in the Ferghana Valley region of eastern Uzbekistan. Yesterday one of the nation's leading evangelical pastors said Shestakov's unexpected conviction could have 'grave consequences' for Protestant Christians in Uzbekistan. 'Perhaps it already has,' the pastor told Compass, saying that over the past weekend many more incidents had been initiated against Christians in a number of places across the country.



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