

# REFORMATION TODAY



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**2008 Carey Conference**  
**January 8 - 10 Swanwick - Derbyshire**  
*The Church in the World*



*Dr Russell Moore*

It is alarming to observe the increasing hostility to the gospel in the UK. How do we respond? Dr Russell Moore who is Vice President of Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, will address the subject of *Jesus is Lord*. Michael Haykin's subjects are, *Doing all the good we can: evangelical views from Edwards to Spurgeon and Why Nonconformity? Baptist perspectives in the 'Long' 18th Century 1688-1837*. The conference will begin with a biography of Oliver Cromwell by Phil Arthur. Dr Robert Letham will speak on *Christ and Culture*. Bill James is set to address the subject of *The Lord's Supper and qualifications for coming to the Table*. Steven Curry will preach the conference sermon. In addition to the main programme, women delegates will also have the opportunity to attend two special sessions by popular author Faith Cook.

Further details, booking information and brochures are available from  
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John Rubens,  
1 The Saddlery, The Chase, Newton Aycliffe, Co. Durham, DL5 7LX, UK

Dr. John F. Thornbury has been senior pastor of Winfield Baptist Church, Winfield, Pennsylvania, for 42 years. He is the author of several books including *The Doctrine of the Church* published by Evangelical Press in 1971, a biography of Asahel Nettleton titled *God Sent Revival*, and of the biography of David Brainerd titled *David Brainerd, Pioneer Missionary to the American Indians* (Evangelical Press, 1996).

Dr. Derek W H Thomas is the John E Richards professor of Systematic and Practical Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary and a minister of teaching at First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi. He was minister at Stranmillis 1979-1996.

Bob Davey trained under Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He has pastored churches in Coulsdon and Croydon and is now co-pastor of Looe Evangelical Church in Cornwall. This enables him to devote more time to ministry abroad and to writing.

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Front cover picture – *There are hundreds of unreached people groups in China, about one hundred million peoples who occupy over sixty-five percent of the land. At one time there was a thriving Jewish community in central China. This community is in decline. The photo shows members of the group holding their street sign written in Chinese, Hebrew and English. The photo is by courtesy of Operation China by Paul Hathaway which is a 705 page work packed with information including 704 photos in colour describing 490 people groups. Operation China was published by Piquant in 2000.*

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## Editorial

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To believe in heaven but not in hell is to declare that there were times when Jesus was telling the truth and times when he was lying.<sup>1</sup> J I Packer puts it this way, 'An endless hell can no more be removed from the New Testament than an endless heaven can.'<sup>2</sup>

In some churches the subject of hell is never preached. The only time hell is ever mentioned is when the Bible is read audibly. The demise of the doctrine of hell is due to a massive crisis of confidence. Faced with a culture that simply ignores God, the Church has lost its confidence in the gospel which actually saves repentant believing sinners from eternal punishment. Spurgeon declared, 'I greatly fear that the denial of the eternity of future punishment is one wave of an incoming sea of infidelity.'<sup>3</sup> J C Ryle said, 'Once let the old doctrine about hell be overthrown and the whole system of Christianity is unsettled, unscrewed, unpinned and thrown into disorder.'<sup>4</sup> W G T Shedd put it this way, 'The existing demoralisation of society and politics ... is due, mainly, to a disbelief in the doctrine of endless punishment.'<sup>5</sup> and Geoffrey Gorer, 'If there is no belief in hell the concept of judgement also becomes meaningless; and then all that is left is a system of ethics.'<sup>6</sup>

In an article in *Reformation Today* 156 'Why did they stop going to church?' the astonishing figure of 39 percent is given for regular church attendance in England in 1851. In that article the main reason given for the decline in attendance was the Liberal soft pedalling, reinterpreting, ignoring and rejecting of the doctrine of eternal punishment. In the downgrade controversy C H Spurgeon objected to the omission by the Baptist Union of this doctrine. When Liberal theology captured the seminaries and permeated the churches they emptied. If there is no hell there is nothing to fear.

Is eternal punishment a central truth? In 1999 Sinclair Ferguson gave a paper 'The Judgement in Puritan Preaching'. He showed that English Puritans uncompromisingly preached eternal heaven and hell. As a body of pastors they held that a great part of the horror of hell lies in the everlasting consciousness of it. Geoff Thomas of Aberystwyth who was chairman on that occasion asked Dr Ferguson afterward whether hell was 'a trunk and

branch doctrine' or 'a leaf and twig doctrine'. Sinclair was insistent that it was 'a trunk and branch doctrine'.

This truth has a major influence on the way we approach missionary work. In this issue we have a biography of Robert Morrison. As were the other pioneer missionaries he was driven by a passionate concern for the eternal lostness of those without Christ in China. Also in this issue John Thornbury describes the missionary theology of David Brainerd who died aged only twenty-nine. Brainerd was driven by a passionate concern for the lost condition of the Indians.

This same concern is seen in Richard Baxter who in *The Reformed Pastor* wrote, 'The plight of unbelievers is so great they deserve our greatest sympathy. Can we be unmoved by the needs of those heading for judgement and eternal condemnation? I can almost see them entering hell at this moment! I can almost hear their desperate cries for help! Their plight is particularly tragic because they have no desire to ask for help themselves. Have we the same spirit of Christ who was moved to weep over the impenitent? How little do we value souls if we keep quiet while sinners go to hell! Would we allow our worst enemy to suffer like that and not make the least effort to help? Whatever else you may neglect, make sure you do not fail to plead, persuade and urge sinners to turn to Christ for salvation.'<sup>7</sup>

When Jesus viewed Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives just six days before he was crucified he wept over it with convulsive weeping. With divine foresight he could see the city of peace surrounded by Roman armies and the devastation that would follow. He wept not over buildings but over the people and their leaders, who, blinded by sin, had rejected him and the salvation which he brought. We must weep over the careless generation around us who are blinded by sin.

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<sup>1</sup> John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, Evangelical Press, page 295

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, page 296

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, page 297

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, page 296

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, page 297

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, page 295

<sup>7</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, page 94, Banner of Truth. This classic has been published in simplified form by Grace Publications as *The Ministry We Need*; see page 31.

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## Eternal Punishment or Annihilation?

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*Editor*

We are indebted to J I Packer for the following compact historical contemporary survey of theology on the subject of annihilation, five paragraphs packed with information.

‘Annihilationist ideas have been canvassed among evangelicals for more than a century but they never became part of the mainstream of evangelical faith, nor have they been widely discussed in the evangelical camp until recently. In 1987 Clark Pinnock authored a punchy two-page article titled *Fire, Then Nothing*, but this, though widely read, did not spark debate, any more than the 500-page exposition of the same view, *The Fire That Consumes* (1982) by the gifted Churches of Christ layman Edward William Fudge, had done. In 1988, however, two brief pieces of advocacy came from Anglican evangelical veterans: eight pages by John Stott in *Essentials*, and ten by the late Philip Edgecumbe Hughes in *The True Image*. These put the cat among the pigeons.

At Evangelical Essentials, a conference of 350 leaders held at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, in 1989, I read a paper portentously titled ‘Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation: New Challenges to the Gospel: Universalism and Justification by Faith’. In that paper I offered a line of thought countering the view of these two respected friends. It turned out that the conference was split down the middle over the annihilation question. The *Christianity Today* report said:

Strong disagreements did surface over the position of annihilationism, a view that holds that unsaved souls will cease to exist after death . . . the conference was almost evenly divided as to how to deal with the issue in the affirmations statement, and no renunciation of the position was included in the draft document.

After this, at the request of John White, then president of The National Association of Evangelicals, the late John Gerstner wrote a response to Stott, Hughes and Fudge under the title *Repent or Perish* (1990); and in 1992 the papers read at the fourth Edinburgh Conference on Christian Dogmatics came into print as *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*. Included were John W Wenham, ‘The Case for Conditional Immortality’, and Kendall S Harmon, ‘The Case Against Conditionalism: A Response to Edward William Fudge’.

Nor was this all. Semipopular books reaffirming the reality and endlessness of hell began to flow: Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions About Hell* (1991); Eryl Davies, *An Angry God?* (1991); Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News* (1992); William Crockett, John Walvoord, Zachary Hayes and Clark Pinnock, *Four Views on Hell* (1992); David Pawson, *The Road to Hell* (1992); John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (1993); David George Moore, *The Battle for Hell: A Survey and Evaluation of Evangelicals' Growing Attraction to the Doctrine of Annihilationism* (1995); Robert A Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (1995). All these books argue more or less elaborately against annihilationism. The debate continues.'

The above by J I Packer gives us a most helpful overview.

The Evangelical Alliance reduced the creed under which they would gather evangelical Protestantism to as few articles as possible; but they retained the doctrine of endless punishment as indispensable to the integrity of an evangelical faith.

The subject of eternal punishment as with all other biblical doctrines is decided by exegesis. What did Jesus mean when he declared these will, 'go away into eternal punishment' (Matt 25:46)? Did he really mean an ongoing state of alienation from God and the conscious pain of the wrath of God or did he mean annihilation? In another place Jesus quotes the last verses of Isaiah and warns of hell, where 'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched' (Mark 9:48). Here are two factors: an internal factor of conscience and an external factor of fire. This fire was complained of by the rich man in hell who said, 'I am in agony in this fire' (Luke 16:24).

Mainstream Christianity has always affirmed the doctrine of eternal hell. Recently the Pope of Rome affirmed that he believed it and that it is the belief of the Roman Catholic Church. But Liberal theologians deny the doctrine. They agree with many Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists in rejecting the doctrine of eternal punishment and in affirming annihilationism.

The view developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and followed by annihilationists today is that those in heaven will be redeemed humans, that is all who are left after the others have been annihilated.

In defence of their position annihilationists use emotive words about hell such as savagery, sadism, cruelty or vindictiveness. But hell, according to the gospel, is not immoral ferocity but moral retribution.

We must be thankful that we are guaranteed protection from Satan and his demons as well as from Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot. Hitler will not be permitted to start up his Nazi regime again. 'Nothing impure will ever enter heaven' (Rev 21:27). The enemies of God will be tormented day and night forever (Rev 20:10).

### *Arguments for Annihilationism*

The argument used by John Stott is that the adjective *aionios* in Matthew 25:46 describes not a something which goes on but rather a result of an action. Thus the saved are rescued and the lost are annihilated. The *result* not the process is eternal. In the one case it is life forever and the other unconscious dust forever. However this is grammatically unacceptable. It is not what the text is saying. No layman reading Matthew 25:46 would naturally come to that conclusion.

Annihilationists argue that souls will be extinguished. Biblical texts such as Jude 6-7 and Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30 show that this is not the case. Those who gave themselves over to sexual immorality and perversion will not be snuffed out. They will suffer 'the punishment of eternal fire'. Jesus warned of weeping and gnashing of teeth in those cast out. That can only be the case for those who continue to exist.

In Scripture death signifies not extinction but departure into another mode of being. If annihilationists are asked to preach on such passages as Jesus' words in Matthew 13:40-43 or Revelation 14:9-12 their whole effort will inevitably be taken up in explaining that these words and texts do not really mean what they appear plainly to mean.

Further when we examine 2 Thessalonians 1:9 we find that the meaning is inescapable. 'They will be punished with everlasting (eternal, *aionios*) destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord.' This exclusion zone, 'shut out from the presence of the Lord', denies and rules out the idea that 'destruction' means extinction. Only those who exist can be excluded. In Greek the natural meaning of the destruction vocabulary (noun, *olethros*; verb, *apollumi*) is wrecking, so that what is destroyed is henceforth non-functional rather than annihilated.

Annihilationists argue that for God to punish the lost endlessly is disproportionate and unjust. Writes Stott: 'I question whether "eternal conscious torment" is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice,

unless perhaps (as has been argued) the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity.' Indeed we do reason that hatred of God, impenitence, rebellion and cursing continue. In Revelation we read of judgements under which 'they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him' (Rev 16:9). 'Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done' (Rev 16:10-11). There is no repentance in hell. 'They did not repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts' (Rev 9:21).

Annihilationists have to face the question, Does God's justice require no more than extinction? How does that fit into Revelation where the martyrs cry out, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' (Rev 6:10). Is the answer to their cry that their tormentors will simply be snuffed out? Is it not rather that they will be brought to justice? How indeed does the extinction argument stand up to the scrupulous justice of a holy God? Everyone will be judged according to his deeds (Rev 20:13).

A further argument comes from annihilationists which is that heaven cannot be a happy place if at the same time there is hell. The solemn concluding verses of Isaiah demonstrate that hell will not be hidden from the inhabitants of heaven. Heaven in the form of the New Jerusalem and the purified new heavens and new earth will be a permanent monument to the holiness of God. So too will hell be a permanent monument to the holiness of God.

The cost to redeem us by the blood of Christ from hell was awesome. Our salvation from hell is a massive salvation. It is huge. It is salvation from eternal hell where sin is punished. 'To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen' (Rev 1:5-6).

The biblical foundations for annihilationism are inadequate. The doctrine of eternal punishment is clearly stated in the concluding chapter of the 1689 Confession of Faith as well as in evangelical church constitutions. How do we respond when church members reject that doctrine in favour of annihilationism? The Anglican view could be taken which is that all views have a place and it is not necessary to be contentious about it. The Anglican view is the same as the Liberal view which really means that truth does not

matter. The reason why I became a Christian is because truth does matter. I do not understand eternity but I believe it.

The view that truth does matter is the evangelical view. The truth of eternal punishment has always been an integral part of evangelical faith and we cannot really call ourselves evangelical if we deny it. In previous years when the doctrine of eternal punishment was preached the churches were full. As Liberal theology took over the churches emptied and Liberal churches like the Methodists still continue to empty and close.

There is a lesser issue sometimes referred to in the 1689 Confession of Faith, namely a sentence in paragraph four chapter 26 which describes the Pope of Rome as antichrist. That is based on the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:2-9 which I expounded in a paper given at the Westminster Conference in London 1999. Difference over how to interpret that passage belongs to a different league of importance compared to the subject of man's state in eternity and certainly should not be used as though we can cherry-pick what we accept and do not accept in the Confession. The subject of the Pope must be read in the context of the Confession paragraph four chapter 26 that Christ is head of his Church not the Pope. Those living in those times were threatened by the Inquisition and the possibility of being burned alive at the stake which was the experience of about 270 Marian martyrs such as John Bradford and bishops such as Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer.

There are doctrines of central importance which influence our whole understanding of God and salvation. Eternal punishment is one. That is why with a dozen or so other truths it has been woven into our church constitution as a summary of essential belief. Preaching the gospel of deliverance from eternal hell is central. This is seen in the progress of revivals which make up much of the history of the Christian Church. It is impossible to imagine the Reformers and the Puritans and the revivalists such as John Wesley and George Whitefield denying the doctrine of eternal punishment.

If church officers are not willing to maintain and implement their confessional standards to which they have publicly pledged their loyalty they should resign. Anglican bodies such as Church Society and Reform and Proclamation Trust are firm in their doctrinal position but there are theologically Liberal churches which will accept those who reject the orthodox doctrine of eternal punishment. Weak doctrine usually begins with the rejection of the infallibility of Scripture and that leads to compromise including the devaluation of the awful nature of sin. That is integral to this subject of judgement and it nearly always leads in turn to compromised practice.

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## A Young Pastor's Testimony

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*Glen Thompson*

It is with trepidation that I respond to the editor's invitation to share my testimony.

### *The Spiritual and Cultural Climate of Port Elizabeth*

Port Elizabeth with a population of 1.2 million is a wonderful coastal city in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Typical of our nation there is a wide diversity of culture groups: Black, White, Coloured, Indian and Chinese and others. Generally the people are friendly and humble in their demeanour. It is, in fact, known as the 'friendly city'. As we would expect there are many religions represented, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics, Christadelphians, Old and New Apostolics and many others.

Apart from CESA churches ours is the only distinctly reformed church in Port Elizabeth. (CESA is the Church of England of South Africa, separated from the large main Anglican Body which consists of a mixture of views from Anglo-Catholic to Liberal).

### *A Brief Personal History*

In 1995, on the ninth of June, at one o'clock in the morning, the Lord, after working on me over a few months, through the faithful agency of a dear friend, saved me and made me his child.

I was a heavy drug user and into excessive alcohol. My life was morally appalling, so wicked that I am deeply thankful that our Lord draws a veil over it as he says, 'I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more' (Isa 43:25). I was expelled from three schools and made no progress in study. But a great change came when the Lord in his matchless mercy and grace gave me faith and repentance. At the same time there was born in my heart a desire to serve in the full-time ministry.



*Glen Thompson*



*Sydenham Baptist Church*

Initially I attended a little Baptist church in the West Rand of Johannesburg and shortly after joined a radical Charismatic assembly.

At that time I came to a complete change in my theology. A W Pink's *Attributes of God* and Thomas Watson's *The Ten Commandments* made a major impact. I was rescued from Charles Finney, whose writings I almost made into the 67<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible.

I began to attend Honeyridge Baptist Church and to sit under the pastoral oversight of Leigh Robinson. He soon became and remains a mentor. Here I, for the first time, was fed with expository preaching and application of the Word from the pulpit!

In 2001 the Lord blessed me with my dear wife Antje and in the following two years with our precious little daughters Amanda and Rachel.

In 2002 I was called to Christ Baptist Church in Polokwane to be part of the pastoral team, my focus being on the youth and young adults. Here I was taught by and rubbed shoulders with many wonderful elders who faithfully expounded the Scriptures and shepherded us all in an exemplary manner. It was here that I learned about church government. Nicki Coertze of Polokwane is a mentor to me in this.

### *Sydenham Baptist Church*

In 2005 I was called to become the pastor of Sydenham Baptist Church in Port Elizabeth. The previous pastor had led this flock for 28 years. His theology is diametrically opposite to mine.

In my youthful optimistic zeal I hoped soon to convince those of opposite views that they were wrong. Before long however we were in turmoil and anguish at every turn. Some folk left the church. Others were supportive and began to embrace the doctrines of grace. I resisted the idea of preaching through Romans and John which have such strong doctrinal delineations and chose instead Genesis in the mornings and Matthew in the evenings. Little did I realise that I would soon face the doctrines of grace as well as man/woman issues. After preaching through Genesis 1-11 and the first few chapters of Matthew's Gospel, I took a brief break and took a series on, 'elders, deacons and other church members' and 'The Trinity'. The former caused great offence, as I see it, especially since I demonstrated the deficiency of our inherited constitution, which knew nothing of elders. Painful though that was it paved the way for the adoption of a new constitution and the 1689 Confession of Faith.

Thereafter I returned to Genesis and Matthew. I am now busy with a series on Daniel in the evenings and the Pastoral Epistles in the mornings. I have also preached exegetically through the first twenty Psalms.

In spite of our then deficient constitution we called a second elder, the first time in decades. Glenn Schentke is a veteran and brought rich resources of experience, love, wisdom and hard work in the role of elder and assistant pastor. Without this we would not have made progress and reached unanimity in the church for the new constitution which includes the 1689 Confession as our basis of faith. All the members had three months to study the constitution and Confession. This was after at least a year's notice that we were working on this document.

On 12<sup>th</sup> September 2007 the members unanimously accepted the new constitution and the 1689 Confession which assures us humanly speaking that this church will always be led by men of God who adhere to the reformed/biblical faith of the Apostles and our Lord himself. It also helps to safeguard us from the rampant doctrinal errors of our day

This has been a dream come true and a major part of my vision realised. I fall prostrate before our God and Father, and say with fullness of joy, 'Surely God is good to Israel'!

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## David Brainerd's Dynamic Theology of Mission

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*John F Thornbury*

Jonathan Edwards' *Diary of David Brainerd* has probably done more to inspire missionary endeavour and instruct missionaries on the field than any human writing. Brainerd became the model for several generations of evangelists and missionaries. A few examples can illustrate how Christians looked to his life of dedication and sacrifice as a model. When the American Board of Commissioners for Missions established its first Indian mission among the Cherokees in 1817 the missionaries named the post Brainerd. Early biographers of Adoniram Judson, who brought the gospel of Christ to Burma, could think of no higher tribute for him than to style him 'The Baptist Brainerd'. The Northampton grave of Brainerd became a hallowed spot, where, as the nineteenth-century historian William Sprague reported, pilgrims beat a well-worn path. Joseph Conforti says, 'On one occasion at mid-century when the General Association of Massachusetts met at Northampton, the ministers marched en masse to Brainerd's grave.'<sup>1</sup>

Although Brainerd (1718-47) is eternally fixed in the shrines of missionary heroes, I believe that not enough attention has been given to Brainerd's theology. It is not

uncommon for historians to focus on his personal dedication to God, his humility, his self-denying spirit, and his intense love for the souls of the 'savage' Indians. Brainerd richly deserved this homage, and I would not want in any way to disparage the place his godly character has when we regard him as one of the great believers of Church history. But I also believe that we cannot really separate Brainerd the Christian and Brainerd the missionary from Brainerd the theologian.

First let me point out, as one can very easily see by reading his published writings, that he was a man who was very sensitive theologically. Nowhere do we find David Brainerd acting in such a way as to leave the impression that he believed that what a person believes about God, the Bible and conversion is not important. I know that he was primarily an evangelist, and that he did not produce any major theological works, but he believed that correct views of the great themes of the gospel were important in establishing a valid experience in the life of the believer. He expressed at times strong disagreement, not only with the Jesuit missionaries, but also the Quakers and the Moravians. He corrected those who were converted under his ministry when they were apparently being misled by what he considered false teachers.

### *The 'New Lights' movement*

We need to understand that Brainerd was a part of a powerful movement that came in the wake of the First Great Awakening known as the 'New Lights' movement, or sometimes it is called, when its theological positions are considered, the 'New Divinity'. It was Puritanism with a certain slant or certain emphasis. A few of the primary leaders in this movement need to be mentioned. They knew each other intimately, fellowshipped and shared pulpits with each other, and for the most part agreed on certain great principles.

We must begin with Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) who is generally regarded as the greatest theological and philosophical mind ever known on the North American Continent. He was pastor of the Congregational Church at Northampton, Massachusetts, later a missionary to a group of Indians while pastoring in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and finally, for only a few months before his untimely death, president of the College of New Jersey which eventually became Princeton University.

Another figure in this school was a disciple of Edwards, Samuel Hopkins. He studied in Edwards' home and imbibed his thought. He pastored several churches in New England and came finally to Newport, Rhode Island, where he developed his theological system known as 'Hopkinsianism'. Hopkins was a man of strong conviction and integrity, but his personal presence

was so austere and forbidding that he was not a successful pastor.

A third name that needs to be mentioned is Joseph Bellamy. He was probably Edwards' most intimate friend and associate. Bellamy was a brilliant student who graduated from Yale at age 16. For fifty years he was pastor of the Congregational Church in Bethlehem, Connecticut. This church was organized under his ministry and met at first in a barn. Bellamy was a powerful orator and commanded a large following.

We need also to include in this group the evangelist Gilbert Tennent. He was born in Ireland and emigrated with his father to America in 1718. He was educated by his father and was awarded an honorary Master of Arts by Yale. In 1740 George Whitefield asked him along on one of his preaching tours; this was one of the great events of Tennent's life. He became to resemble the English evangelist. His preaching was very spiritual, arousing and personal. Thousands were converted through his evangelism.

Brainerd was a personal friend of all these men. Edwards stood with Brainerd in his dispute with the authorities at Yale College and mentored him after he was expelled. Brainerd personally led Hopkins to the Lord when they were students at Yale. He shared close fellowship with Bellamy and preached for him on numerous occasions. Brainerd admired Tennent when he preached at New Haven during the Great Awakening and went to hear him,

against the injunction of Yale officials.

In comparing these men, all of whom had their peculiar talents, we can say that Edwards was the theologian, Hopkins was the social reformer (one of the first American pastors to denounce the slave trade), Bellamy the pastor, Tennent the best preacher, and Brainerd the missionary.

For the most part the New Divinity preachers were frowned upon and denounced by the 'standing order' who were the established clergy in New England. Even Whitefield was not welcome in their pulpits, so he had to preach in the fields and marketplaces. The authorities at Yale, such as Thomas Clap, were opposed to evangelists like Gilbert Tennent and forbade the students to attend their meetings. Brainerd defied this directive and went to the prayer meetings and supported the New Lights preachers in New England. Because of a critical remark he made concerning a professor, he was expelled from school.

What was the controversy between the standing order clergy and the New Lights? One difference was that of style. The leaders of the established churches and schools were sophisticated and educated men who had studied at Yale and Harvard. They promoted a calm, intellectual type of Christianity which consisted of faithfulness to the ordinances of the church. But the New Lights preachers such as Bellamy and Tennent had come from a largely rural background. Their preaching was

more emotional and forceful. A hearer of a 'standing order' preacher might feel very comfortable while faithfully attending the church. But the revivalists preached so as to cause strong conviction. The term 'First Great Awakening' was so named for a very good reason. People by the thousands were awakened to their lost condition and sought God with great intensity. They often fell under deep emotional distress when they confronted their lost condition. All this was disturbing to the standing order. They passed off revivalists as 'enthusiasts' who were upsetting people unnecessarily. They were seeking to promote a calmer, more sedate, kind of faith.

But the differences were more than stylistic. There were some underlying theological and philosophical differences. Jonathan Edwards moved to Northampton in 1724 to serve with his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, for five years in the Congregational Church, before assuming the pastorate in 1729. Stoddard earlier had begun the practice, later adopted by other Puritan churches, of permitting people sprinkled in infancy to take communion, even though unconverted. The implication was that communion was a converting ordinance, and that through this means an unsaved person could draw closer to God or actually be forgiven. This was known as the Half-Way Covenant. God, in other words, is in covenant with the visible church, that is, with people who had been baptized in infancy.

This was definitely not the position of the original Puritans in New England. They maintained that communion was only for those who had formally professed their faith and gave evidence of a change of heart. One can easily see how Stoddard's theology would tend, over a period of time, to fill the churches with unsaved people. If multitudes of people are told that by 'using the means', or by submitting to the physical ordinances of the church, they are thereby made Christians, then a significant delusion has been introduced into the church. People think they are Christians because they commune at the sacrament.

This false notion was attacked vehemently, not only by pulpiteers such as Bellamy, but more importantly by the astute and brilliant Edwards. While as a loyal Presbyterian he upheld the rite of infant baptism, he denied that it is a converting ordinance. And he refused to serve communion to any but the openly converted. From the standpoint of the New Lights preachers the churches had been seriously compromised by false teaching on the design of the ordinances. So they looked upon the church not just as a mission agency but also as a mission field. The scandalous lives of the clergy showed, in their viewpoint, that they were dead and worthless as spiritual leaders. Tennent, a fiery Irishman, scathingly denounced the standing order as being caterpillars, 'devouring every green thing'. His most famous sermon was 'The

Danger of an Unconverted Ministry'. Such preaching was 'eaten up' by the young New Lights students at Yale, and of course it was reflected in their attitudes. It is not surprising that those who were defending the status quo wanted to stifle the new revivalism.

### *Brainerd's theology*

I come now to the main focus of this article: the dynamic of Brainerd's missionary vision. The word 'missions' comes from the Latin word referring to sending. A missionary is one who is 'sent'. Historically, missionary enterprises have involved a huge and complex scheme promoted by many denominations, thousands of people and certainly a great amount of money. Missionary work, if done properly, and if it is successful, involves a great deal of hard work, much time and usually great sacrifice. Some people have a rather romantic view of taking the gospel to the world, but they soon learn that missionary work necessitates study, sweat and suffering.

Mission are driven by some kind of a motive. The missionary and those who send him or her have a vision, a goal to accomplish. In recent years, however, in the modern church scene which has become not only complex and pluralistic, the traditional missionary vision has been clouded a great deal. In many cases it is still driven, but not driven by a strong enough motive to be sustained. The truth is that in America there has been

a decline in investment in the foreign missionary force on the part of what we call the Main Line Church-the traditional Protestant denominations which grew out of the Protestant Reformation, such as the Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, the Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Church, and the various Baptist groups.

If you were to ask the average person in an American Main Line Church why we go to the trouble and expense to finance missions abroad and at home you would get different answers, again depending on the vision or motive. If we start at the extreme left we immediately see that for some, missions is a form of cultural exchange. For many traditional Protestants, any thought has long ago vanished that the so-called 'heathen' or pagan peoples of the world, who have different forms of religion from ours, are lost, condemned and in danger of eternal destruction. We face tremendous pressures today both within and without the Church in the direction of tolerance and acceptance of all religions. This is reflected in the way religion is studied today in most schools, including schools with a religious background. The thought is that all religions have a core of values that are fundamentally the same. Although the rituals and forms and shrines of Buddhists, Muslims, Confucianists, Jews and Christians may be different, at heart they are all the same. They are concerned about loving our neighbours and being kind

to each other. The business of the missionary is not to change people from one religion to another, but rather to understand and relate to others. We occasionally hear of groups of leaders of the great world religions getting together at some prominent place and passing joint resolutions about the need for world peace and understanding, and how they are seeking to cooperate to bring this about.

There is a great push for unity today among the peoples of the world. The United Nations was established so that various national communities could get together and talk about mutual problems and avoid war. No doubt there is some good in that. It is better to talk than to drop bombs. In this century we have witnessed the rise of ecumenism. Many religious leaders are convinced that the great problem of the denominations of Christianity is their differences. They are working hard to unite all religions under one umbrella, so that the sectarian distinctions are blurred.

This ecumenism extends not merely to so-called Christian groups, such as Protestant and Catholic, but to non-Christian groups as well. The ecumenical gurus pontificate loudly from press and platform about how we need to 'reach out to' and cooperate with people of all religious faiths. An ecumenical gathering might see a local Buddhist monk as a 'guest' or even as a participant.

Needless to say David Brainerd belonged to a distinctly Puritan and

evangelical tradition which saw the situation very differently. When Brainerd saw the pagan tribes of Indians in New England, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, he saw them as hopelessly and miserably lost. He, Bellamy, Edwards and others who laboured among the Indians referred to them as the 'poor heathen' and 'pagan'. They had great concerns for them and compassion to be sure, but their stated and undisguised intention was to 'convert' them, not just to learn about them and relate to them.

There are others in Main Line religion who would not go so far as to say that Christianity is just another of the great religions of the world. They put it like this: The teachings of Jesus Christ are by far the highest moral and ethical system ever devised by the mind of man. Jesus was the great reformer, teacher and prophet who came to lift the nations of the world by his ethical system. In a world of cruelty and hate Jesus came to teach the truth of one loving God who is the Father of mankind, and that all men are brothers. He urged people to cease their strife and armed warfare and live together in peace. He established a system of teaching, which, when truly understood, will change the world by education, psychological enlightenment, and moral reform. Christianity, in other words, is the best of all religions, because it does the most for people. The social gospel, rooted in the thinking of the Baptist pastor and educator, Walter Rauschenbusch, illustrated this approach.

This view of Christianity, though better than the first one I mentioned, was certainly not the one that David Brainerd held. For Brainerd the only way to know God is to be savingly changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. This experience of regeneration leads people to trust in Jesus alone for salvation, for he alone is the way, the truth and the life. Christ is not a better way, or even the best way; he is the only way to heaven. And of course the primary purpose of the gospel is not to change the world and make it a better place but to prepare people for heaven. There may be secondary results from gospel preaching, such as education, medical advance, or such things, but these are only secondary.

There is a third form of motivation or driving force behind missions which I believe is better than the other two, because it has at the core of it an evangelical truth, though it falls short of the full-orbed robust gospel motive. Some Bible-believing churches understand that missions are not just cultural exchange. It is not merely social reform. For them, soul-saving is a rescue operation. The reason missionaries are sent to foreign countries where the gospel has never been preached is to deliver men and women, boys and girls, from the clutches of Satan. They understand that they are in a pitiable and dangerous situation. They are sinking down, down, down to hell unless we reach down with the gospel net and pull them out. This outlook is captured quite well in a gospel song:

*Rescue the perishing, care for the  
dying,  
Snatch them in pity from sin and the  
grave;  
Weep o'er the erring ones, lift up the  
fallen;  
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to  
save.*

This is a realistic and correct approach to evangelism and missions as far as it goes. We find missions in the Scriptures presented in just this light. Jesus called his first disciples to become fishers of men. On one occasion Jesus looked on the multitudes and felt compassion for them, 'because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd' (Matt 9:36). He then gave this powerful exhortation to the disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest' (Matt 9:37-38). Jesus was a perfect model here for compassion and sympathy for lost men in their natural condition. The Hebrew prophet Jeremiah and the apostle Paul expressed their deep concern for their lost countrymen. Jeremiah lamented, 'Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!' (9:1). Paul exhibited great emotional trauma when he said, 'Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation' (Rom 10:1), and he claimed to be doing everything in his power to 'save some' by the gospel message (1 Cor 9:22).

But if we understand that the only purpose of the gospel is to meet the needs of men, we are falling far short of comprehending what it is to be a herald of the cross. Yes, one of our motives, a very important one, in doing missions is to save souls, to rescue people from sin and hell. Yes, we are to be moved by sympathy for the lost, and we are to feel their profound needs. But in the diary of David Brainerd we find that this was not the primary thing that drove him to missions. He was induced by a higher, more profound, goal than simply to do something beneficial for the lost Indians.

Let me explain to you now the vision of this marvellous man who spent and was spent to preach the gospel. For him the goal of missions was not only to relate to or to understand the pagan religions, or to promote a better way of life for them by improving their social conditions, or even to deliver them from the spiritual dangers they were in. The great driving force behind Brainerd's missionary work was to enlarge the visible kingdom of Jesus Christ. He saw missionary work as warfare in which he was a foot soldier who had invaded the enemy territory and had come to stake out a claim for the sovereign Son of God. One of the most significant statements he made in his diary (and it is one which is often repeated in one form or another) was on August 22, 1743, when he was labouring at the first Indian settlement assigned to him. He wrote, 'My soul was concerned, not so much for souls as such, but rather for Christ's kingdom,

that it might appear in the world, that God might be known as God, in the whole earth.<sup>22</sup> In June 1745, when he was ministering to the Indians at Crossweeksung in New Jersey, he said, 'To an eye of reason, every thing that respects the conversion of the heathen is as dark as midnight; and yet I cannot but hope in God for the accomplishment of something glorious among them. My soul longed much for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom on earth.'<sup>23</sup>

When Brainerd went into an Indian village where the worship of the earth, or the heavenly bodies, or even demon spirits, prevailed, and where the natives behaved weirdly in their ritual dances and sacrifices, he saw a situation where Satan had set up his own authority. 'Satan reigns here,' he said to himself. But as he opened the Bible and preached the great truths of the faith, such as the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the claims of God's law and the hopes of the gospel, he was invading the enemy territory in the name of the Lord. When a community of converted Indians was gathered in a town, to Brainerd this was the setting up of the kingdom of God. The Devil was being driven out and deprived of at least some of his space. In other words, evangelism is a form of warfare, a battle not for land or gold or buildings, but for the hearts of men.

This is a biblical vision. Jesus clearly portrayed conversion as an invasion of the sovereign power of God into the area of Satan's dominion. After he had cast out a demon from a man who

was mute, he said, 'But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Luke 11:20). Then he gave this illustration or parable. 'A strong man, fully armed, guards his own homestead.' But one 'stronger than he' comes and overcomes him, takes from him his armour and divides his plunder. Clearly Jesus is saying that this is a picture of conversion. Satan is the strong man who guards his territory, his property. Satan's territory is the heart of man, which is being protected against any outside invader. But Jesus is the One 'stronger than he' who comes into the life of a sinner and challenges the Devil's domain. He overcomes the Evil One, casting him out and dividing his plunder.

A somewhat similar picture is given by Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:4 where he portrays the gospel ministry as a kind of warfare. He says, 'For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.' What are these fortresses? He explains: 'We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God' (v. 5). The strongholds are in the realm of the thought, or the mind. He seeks to take 'every thought captive to the obedience of Christ' (v. 5). This is a powerful description of the 'battle for the mind'. The sinner is in rebellion against the rightful sovereign, Jesus Christ. With his heart and mind he defends himself against the claims of Christ by arguments and thoughts that are contrary to the gospel. But Paul

says that we are to bring these thoughts into subjection to Christ.

David Brainerd, taught as he was by the Spirit of God, and saturated as he was by the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, went forth among the 'savage' Indians, whose minds were the citadel of Satan's control. But he challenged these fortresses with the power of God's Word. He called on the Indians to submit to Jesus and accept his proffered mercy. In many instances, especially at Cross-weeksung, he was successful. He saw the Devil driven out, as it were, and Jesus establishing his own rule in the darkened hearts of these people formerly in bondage to demons.

#### *Brainerd's doctrine of conversion*

There is another aspect to Brainerd's theology which deserves some attention, one which is seldom noticed. The New Divinity ministers, Edwards being the most brilliant thinker in the group, were convinced that any religion that arises from nothing more than self-interest is spurious. Edwards taught that regeneration is a divine light within the soul whereby the sinner, whose mind was once darkened by sin and ignorance, sees the glory of God and dedicates himself to that end. Brainerd's own experience of conversion demonstrated this ideal. When Brainerd came to the Lord he was preoccupied with God's glory, God's kingdom and God's attributes. Here is how he put it:

My soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable, to see such a God, such

a glorious Being; and I was inwardly pleased and satisfied, that he should be God over all and for ever and ever. My soul was so captivated and delighted with God, that I was even swallowed up in him; at least to that degree that I had no thought (as I remember) at first, about my own salvation, and scarcely reflected that there was such a creature as myself.

When Edwards read this account of Brainerd's conversion, he saw a perfect illustration or model of what he had been teaching about the nature of 'true grace'. Any person with a conscience or any person who believes in heaven or hell can set about to gain salvation or eternal life for personal profit, much as a person would pursue any selfish interest such as making a profit in business or killing game on a hunt. There is nothing, said Edwards, religious or righteous about such endeavours. But true grace or true conversion is when a soul, lost in spiritual darkness and in love with the flesh and the world, is turned from selfish interests to devoting itself to the glory of God. But to do this, one must first see God as he is and worship him for who he is.

Now one might ask, 'Well, since the unconverted sinner is dead in sin, and cannot have any holy aspirations, and since all his interests are obviously self-directed, on what basis can we appeal to him? How can we motivate the sinner to seek God when he has no relish for spiritual things?' Edwards and Brainerd would answer that this is exactly the point that the sinner needs to see. He needs to be

convicted of his sin of self-will and recognize that the very crux of his lostness and rebellion is his blindness to the glory of God. He should seek from God a revelation of the beauty and loveliness of Christ from God. He is to know and feel that he is undone without God's direct intervention in his life.

Perhaps we might quarrel with the New Divinity ministers about their extremely zealous opposition to 'selfish religion'. We might argue that Jesus and the apostles did appeal to selfish interests when they went forth calling on men to 'strive for the meat that does not perish' and 'flee from the wrath to come'. Did not Jesus seek to induce people to come to the Lord from the motive of avoiding 'losing one's soul'? Yes, this is true. And yet when we come right down to it, whatever motive a lost soul might have in seeking God, and no matter how much we may legitimately appeal to man's own personal interests, we cannot deny that the essence of a regeneration experience consists in having the divine image planted in the soul. And that image is the reflection of God's own devotion to his own glory. As Edwards and Brainerd would say, God is supremely devoted to his own honour and glory. That was the reason he created the world and devised the scheme of redemption. So logically God would seek to bring his own children, his own redeemed people, into conformity with his own purposes.

In short, if we are regenerated, if we are truly saved, then our dominant

motive is to bring praise, honour and glory to the Redeemer. If our religion rises no higher than securing an escape from hell and a ticket to heaven, we have missed the point. A purely selfish religion can do much for a person. It can cause him to strive, work, and give. It can cause him to sacrifice much, even his very life. But without *agape* – divine love – working in the heart, it is all in vain. It profits nothing.

In many places there is today a revival of interest in Puritan theology, particularly the teachings of Jonathan Edwards. Since Edwards thought that David Brainerd epitomized the qualities he extolled in *The Religious Affections* we ought to reinvestigate Brainerd's life and ministry. And since Brainerd was totally in agreement with Edwards' view of the kingdom of God and conversion, and since he implemented this in his evangelistic labours, Brainerd's life and teachings should be carefully studied and evaluated.

*This paper was delivered on April 6, 1997, to a regional meeting of the FIEC (Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches) in Horsley (Woking), England.*

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards most popular work: *The Life of David Brainerd and Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Culture*, Church History, 201.

<sup>2</sup> John Thornbury, *David Brainerd, Pioneer Missionary to the American Indians* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1996), 104.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 123.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 55.

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# Open Theism

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By Derek Thomas

Open theism in 850 words! Quite a challenge! Especially for a complex and shifting philosophical view of the relationship of divine sovereignty to human freedom said by many to be the most heated debate within evangelicalism since the debate over inerrancy in the 1970s. Known variously as ‘Open Theism’, ‘Free-Will Theism’, and ‘The Openness of God View’ and ‘Open-View Theism’, the issue – divine foreknowledge – has been a topic of theological debate since at least the time of Augustine (who wrote a famous treatise on the subject *Freedom of the Will*). How God knows events that (to us) are still future raises more than one issue. To begin with, it clearly affects how we understand God *in himself* – is he *really* sovereign? If we should draw the conclusion (as open theists do) that there are aspects of the future that God does not know then clearly God’s sovereignty is limited in some way; there are things over which he does not have ultimate control. Additionally at issue is the nature of human freedom and the meaningfulness of prayer. How ‘free’ are we in making choices or asking for things to change? Is it merely an apparent freedom but not a genuine one? If God orders all things (plans and brings them to pass) does not this imply that human freedom is a smokescreen that covers what in effect is a view that makes us automatons?

Open theism asserts that God knows the future only as a set of possibilities – what would happen within a set of parameters. God knows how free agents would act within any possible world, a view sometimes referred to as middle-knowledge (first asserted with philosophical passion by a sixteenth-century Spanish Jesuit priest named Luis de Molina).

Its contemporary advocates – Greg Boyd, John Sanders, William Hasker, Richard Rice and Clark Pinnock are five of its ardent exponents – argue that God does not exercise control of the universe in any absolute sense but leaves it open allowing for truly ‘free’ human decisions to take place. The argument of the relationship of determinism to freedom is of special interest to Calvinists in its disagreement with Arminianism, especially on the nature of predestination and foreknowledge (though to be fair, the issue is more nuanced in that the sixteenth-century debate and classical Arminianism never affirmed some of the things currently asserted by

Open Theists). To allow for real choices, God cannot therefore determine the future (as in election and providence) and therefore is not omniscient in any meaningful definition of the term. Calvinists have always suspected that Arminians (consistent ones at least) in their attempt to salvage true freedom have in the process paid a high price – the loss of God’s control of the future and therefore the loss of any possibility of assurance of lasting salvation, a sustaining providence in difficult times, and (ultimately) any guarantee that good will triumph over evil. The advocacy of what has been called ‘a risky future’ in the interests of sustaining absolute human freedom is, well, *risky*! There can be no ultimate guarantee of a certain future.

Of course, Open Theists do cite Scripture. Among the passages they appeal to are passages such as Genesis 6:5-6 where God regrets that he has made man. Jeremiah 3:6-7 is cited where God sounds surprised by the fact that Israel has turned to worship idols. Passages which describe God’s testing people are quoted. Greg Boyd even cites Romans 9 (citing Jeremiah 18). When Paul says that God is the potter and we are the clay, he doesn’t mean (as the passage suggests!) that God is determining the shape of how things will be. He means that God is very *flexible*. He is a flexible potter. If we choose one thing, he will make us one way, and if we choose another way, he will make us another way.

The traditional response to these passages, from John Calvin onwards, is to insist that God only speaks this way because we are too frail and finite to understand the ways of God. For example, God does not really repent; he only appears to do so because he speaks to us as though we were children. And if we baulk at the appearances of divine sovereignty and say, ‘But that’s not fair!’ then the Bible has already stated the question for us. And it has also answered it: ‘But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?’ (Rom 9:20-21).

Perhaps the Psalmist put his finger on the real problem of open theology when, in another context, he penned God’s accusation of a wayward people by saying, ‘You thought that I was one like yourself’ (Psalm 50:21).

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## Robert Morrison (1782-1834)

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*Pioneer of the Gospel to China*

*By Bob Davey*

In 1800 there was no gospel work east of India. Robert Morrison was the pioneer of the gospel to over a quarter of the world's population.

Two hundred years ago on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1807 Robert Morrison, aged 25, arrived by ship at Canton (Guangzhou), China. He had been sent by the London Missionary Society (L.M.S) with the task of learning the Chinese language, compiling a Chinese Grammar, an Anglo-Chinese Dictionary and translating the Bible into Chinese. Being alone in this task he was given full freedom to act 'on every occasion according to the dictates of his own prudence and discretion'.

It had been intended to send three or four men, but it proved impossible to obtain them.

For more than 2000 years China had shut itself away from the rest of the world. The mountains of Tibet bound it upon the west, a wall thirteen hundred miles in length protected the north, and the sea its east and south. China, haughty and self-sufficient, had at least one quarter of the world's population, then as now. China had not the slightest wish to allow the 'barbarians' to penetrate her shores. Determinedly a closed country for foreigners, only the most tenuous links for trade were allowed. Teaching Chinese to foreigners was outlawed on pain of death.

Chinese historical records go back as far as the times of the biblical patriarchs. A virile, hard working, volatile race, the core of China's culture was fashioned on cultured Confucianism, the magic and ancestor worship of Taoism, and imported Buddhism with its rampant idolatry. The long succession of ruling dynasties was in slow terminal decline, the last of which, the Ch'ing (Manchu) Dynasty would finally give way to the Republic of China in 1912 A.D. The world owes to China paper, gunpowder, silk, porcelain and tea.

Robert Morrison was born on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1782 at Morpeth in Cumbria, north-west England. His father, James, was a Scot who married a godly Northumbrian girl, Hannah Nicholson. Robert was the youngest of eight children, and mother's favourite. The family moved to Newcastle upon Tyne in

north-east England in 1785 for James to start a business, making tools for the footwear trade, in which he was both hard-working and a success. He was a godly man, of Presbyterian views, and joined such a church in Newcastle, in which he became highly regarded. He was a worthy elder in that church. James took pains in holding family worship daily and catechizing his children.

Robert was a serious boy with a good deal of the dour Scots character. He received only an elementary education and showed no obvious talents, except dogged determination and a very good memory. When he was twelve, one Sabbath evening in church, he repeated from memory the whole of Psalm 119 without a single mistake.

He went to work for his father when he was fifteen and was very diligent, working from six in the morning until seven or eight in the evening.

According to his own testimony Robert was converted in 1798, aged sixteen. He had a very real sense of sin in his life and yielded himself decidedly to Christ in repentance and faith. He sought church membership and joined a prayer meeting in his father's workshop, which met on Monday evenings. From the time of his conversion Robert would settle down in the evening after work to Bible study in his workshop where he also set up his bed. He had a desire for wider learning and did all he could, as his limited time and opportunities would allow. Certainly Sabbath days were a delight for him and he sought every opportunity of spiritual fellowship. At this time, he regularly borrowed the 'Missionary Magazine' from a friend.

As a matter of interest Robert Morrison from childhood was a friend of Robert Stephenson, the future inventor of the railway steam engine. The families were neighbours. Robert Stephenson regularly visited Robert Morrison at his workshop and learned the trade as a hobby! What influence these two have had in the history of the world, secular and spiritual, will only be fully revealed at the Day of Judgment.

At the beginning of 1801 Robert Morrison knew without a shadow of doubt a call to the ministry of the gospel. He set himself to learn Latin (to gain access to higher education) which he paid for out of his little earnings. He also started on Greek and Hebrew. It was clear he had an exceptional gift and love for learning languages. After the death of his mother Robert applied for entrance to Hoxton Academy, London, on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1802. This was a training college for Congregational ministers. He was accepted at once, and much against the will of his father he set sail from Newcastle to London. James Morrison's wife had recently died and also he had come to rely on Robert in the family business. No sooner was Robert settled into his studies than he

received a heart-rending summons from his father and family to return home. His letter in reply has survived. Expressing the tenderest affection and respect for his father and family, Robert goes on to say ‘What can I do? I look to my God and my father’s God . . . . my father, my brothers, my sisters, I resign you all and myself to his care, who I trust careth for us. Are not our days few? . . . . You advise me to return home. I thank you for your kind intentions, may the Lord bless you for them. . . . having set my hand to the plough, I would not look back. It has pleased the Lord to prosper me so far, and grant me favour in the eyes of this people.’ His family was still not satisfied with his decision, and continued their opposition. It was very painful for Robert and a running sore, but he was clear in his mind where his first duty lay.

For two years Robert Morrison studied at Hoxton Academy. Dr. Clunie, a fellow student at the time, later wrote concerning him, ‘He was an exemplary student. Few have ever entered more fully into Martin Luther’s great axiom “to pray well is to study well.” Others possessed more brilliant talents, a richer imagination, a more attractive delivery or more graceful manners but there was no one who more happily concentrated in himself the three elements of moral greatness – the most ardent piety, indefatigable diligence, and devoted zeal in the best of causes’. It was during this time of study and prayer that a definite and ruling purpose for foreign missionary work developed in Robert Morrison.

His tutors sought to dissuade him from this purpose, by representing to him the arduous nature of the work. This persuaded him the more. They noted the great opportunities for him in the home field, even promising to get him a place in a Scottish university. They advised him to think carefully and pray the matter over. He did so, with the result that on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1804, Robert wrote to the London Missionary Society (L.M.S) offering himself for work in the foreign mission field.

The committee called him to an interview and he was at once accepted without the customary second examination. He was to be sent to the Missionary Academy at Gosport on the south coast of England which was presided over by the famous Dr. Bogue. Robert Morrison set off immediately after a united meeting of the students for prayer on his behalf at the Hoxton Academy. No time was to be wasted. At this time Robert had no idea as to his eventual field of service, but he had inclination toward Africa.

It is at this point in time that we see the extraordinary providence of God at work. The great modern missionary movement springing up toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was still in its infancy and there had been no great attention

paid to the needs of China. Yet over a quarter of the world's population were there, all without knowledge of the gospel and the way of salvation. But there was one man, a Congregational minister, Dr. W Moseley, who for six years had tried to form a society for the translation of the Bible into Chinese. Dr. Moseley had discovered a Chinese folio volume of transcript manuscripts dated 1737 and 1738 hidden away in the British Museum. It was found to be a large part of the New Testament, obviously the work of some Roman Catholic missionary of an earlier time. He approached bishops, clergy and ministers of all sections of the Protestant Church. Everyone was interested and sure it was a good and necessary thing to be done, but did not see how it was possible. The problem of translation seemed almost insuperable as there was no knowledge of Chinese in the institutions of learning, and even if there were, the cost would be far more than could be spared.

However, the L.M.S took up the idea of sending suitable men to China to learn the language and translate the Bible there. Dr. Bogue saw in one of his students, Robert Morrison, just the man with the right qualities for the task. Dr. Bogue recommended him to the L.M.S, who accepted him. So it was that in August 1805 Robert Morrison was on his way back to London to gain useful knowledge in astronomy and medicine and as much knowledge of the Chinese language as he could, before going to China.

Again, we see another extraordinary providence of God at work. A chance meeting in a City of London street with a young mandarin Chinaman by Dr. Moseley led to Yong Sam Tek agreeing to teach Robert Morrison the Chinese characters. Yong Sam Tek had come to England to learn English, so they could help each other! It was not easy, for Yong Sam Tek had a fierce and domineering spirit but Robert bore patiently, determined to forge ahead. It was agreed that Robert and Yong Sam Tek should transcribe the whole of the British Museum manuscript and also a manuscript of a Latin-Chinese Dictionary belonging to The Royal Society. These were for use in China. After a brief visit to his family in the summer of 1806 Robert Morrison was ordained to the work of the ministry of the gospel, in the Scots Church, Swallow Street, London, on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1807, two days after his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. Now he was ready to go to China even though no helpers had been found to go with him.

The East India Company was opposed to all missionary work and flatly refused even passage in any of their ships. What they feared was loss of their lucrative trade with China, because all missionary activity was banned and the Chinese authorities strictly enforced this ban. The Company dare not compromise its position. So Robert Morrison had to travel by ship via New York, then around Cape Horn to China. The stopover in New York was

providential, because he found powerful friends who obtained for him a letter from Mr. Maddison, Secretary of State, asking the American Consul to help Morrison all he could. This saved his mission at a critical time in China.

The journey took eight and a half months by sailing ship. On more than one occasion they were in danger of their lives from violent storms. Robert Morrison arrived in Canton (Guangzhou) in September 1807.

Canton (Guangzhou) was opposite the island of Hong Kong, which had little importance at that time. At Canton (Guangzhou) were the buildings of the various trading companies, American, Dutch, English, French and Spanish. These were the only trading posts in China and trading was only allowed in the trading season of six months in the year. No women were allowed to live there. The trading area, known as the Factories (after Factor, meaning trader), was outside the city walls on mud flats beside the river. Hostility and insults constantly surrounded the traders. No foreigner was permitted to stay there unless a *bona fide* member of staff of one of the Factories. Permanent residences for traders and their families were at Macao (Macau), an island ninety miles distant and, at that time, controlled by the Portuguese. Even for a Protestant missionary to live there was deemed impossible due to the vigilance and extreme hostility of the Roman Catholic clergy.

With timely help from a few individuals Robert Morrison managed to gain a precarious foothold in Canton (Guangzhou), almost in hiding. The financial cost for lodging, books and helpers was enormous as every Chinese person took full advantage of his situation. Even his health was in danger from the climate and lack of hygienic conditions. After eight months Robert had to move back to Macau and thereafter it was a matter of shuttling back and forth, just to keep a toehold. Yet he tirelessly worked at his studies and made remarkable progress. Even at this stage Robert managed to collect over a thousand books in Chinese. Two young men helped him. One was Abel Yun, who could speak Latin and Mandarin Chinese (the official language) but who could neither read nor write. The other was Lee Seen Sang, who could read and write and spoke Cantonese. These two ran the real risk of death in helping a foreigner to learn Chinese. They were willing, because they had some protection from the traders and because of the lucrative salaries they were able to extort. Robert thought seriously of leaving Canton (Guangzhou) and Macau to go to Penang (Pinang) or elsewhere in Malaya, where he could work unmolested among expatriate Chinese.

Robert Morrison became more convinced of moving when he married Mary Morton. He had become acquainted with Dr. Morton and his family at Macau. They attended a service of worship he regularly held. Not only did his

witnessing lead to the conversion of the son and daughter, he also married the daughter on 20<sup>th</sup> February 1809. For her sake they must move to Penang (Pinang). However, again, another remarkable act of providence happened that led them to change their minds and stay. On the very wedding day Robert received an official offer to become Chinese Secretary and Translator for the East India Company at a salary of £500 p.a. – the exact sum he had spent during his first year in China. In all, Robert Morrison had been in China less than two years! His honest, cautious character, tireless work and absolute genius at language learning had become evident to all, including the highest officials of the Company. Robert recognised the hand of God at work in this and he accepted the post, subject to L.M.S approval. His official status would make his position in Canton (Guangzhou) and Macau safe, his duties would help him considerably with the Chinese language and he would be less of a financial burden on the missionary society, leaving more money for the literature work. The L.M.S readily approved.

The appointment turned out to be a mixed blessing. It was very much a full-time job and very demanding, due to the care needed for official communications. This left only a limited time for his missionary work. Robert did not spare himself and worked constantly late into the night on the Chinese Grammar, the Anglo-Chinese Dictionary, the translation of the Bible into Chinese and tracts. In 1812, Robert's official workload was increased, and his salary doubled.

At last, in 1813, Robert Morrison received much needed help by the arrival of the Rev. and Mrs. William Milne sent by the L.M.S to help him. From this time things moved rapidly. At the end of 1813 the New Testament in Chinese was ready and 2000 copies printed. This was followed by the printing of the Chinese Grammar, which was so well thought of that the Company paid for it. William Milne was unable to get permission to stay in either Canton (Guangzhou) or Macau, so it was seen as the right time to expand the work by going on a tour of the chief Chinese settlements on the Malayan Peninsular and Java, which he did in 1814. He took with him the 2000 copies of the New Testament, 10,000 tracts composed by Robert Morrison and 5000 copies of a Catechism in Chinese. It all had to be arranged very secretly for fear the authorities at Macau found out and took action to destroy the literature, as they had done before. During the tour William Milne found time to help in the translation work of the Old Testament. The whole tour, though very difficult, led to the founding of the first missionary college at Malacca (Melaka) in Malaya, with a Chinese Free School, a printing press, a magazine in Chinese and religious services in Chinese. The foundation stone was laid on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1818.

While William Milne was away, Robert Morrison had the joy of baptizing the first Chinese convert, Ts'ai A-ko, at Macau on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1814, 'at a spring of water at the foot of a lofty hill by the seaside, at Macao... Oh that the Lord may cleanse him from all sin by the blood of Jesus, and purify his heart by the influences of the Holy Spirit! May he be the first fruits of a great harvest – one of millions who shall come and be saved on the day of wrath to come.' This prayer for a great harvest has been answered.

In 1817 Volume 1 of the Anglo-Chinese Dictionary was published and the University of Glasgow honoured Robert Morrison with the degree of Doctor of Divinity, in acknowledgment of the great value of his labours as a philologist and a Christian teacher. This was followed in 1819 by the completion of the whole Bible in Chinese. The University of Glasgow honoured William Milne for his part in the translation of the Old Testament with the degree of Doctor of Divinity also.

By 1822 the perils of health in an eastern climate had taken a full toll. Mary Morrison and both Mr. and Mrs. Milne were dead. Robert Morrison wrote, 'I have been fifteen years in this country and one-half of these years quite alone, but God has borne with my infirmities and has blessed the labour of my hands. I did not at first suppose I should live as long as I have. I hope I, too, shall die at my post.' He also wrote 'My parents have all been long dead – all of you (family) are far from me. Those I loved have been taken away. The heathen around me are inhospitable and void of affection for strangers. Yet, oh how much I have to be thankful for... I enclose £300 for the benefit of my dear children. I wish to adopt little Robert Milne as my son and support him with my own (John) Robert. This must be arranged with the executors.'

In 1823, on 5<sup>th</sup> December, Robert Morrison sailed for England on a well earned two year furlough. He took with him his Chinese library of over 10,000 books and, at last, the printed and complete Anglo-Chinese Dictionary in six large volumes. In London Robert Morrison was presented to King George IV<sup>th</sup>, who accepted a copy of the Bible in Chinese. He was elected a Fellow of The Royal Society (F.R.S). He was so much in demand around Britain, in Ireland and France that he worked as hard as he had in China. He still found time to court and marry Elizabeth Armstrong, by whom he had four more children. While in London Robert Morrison formed what was to become eventually the School of Oriental Languages and endowed it with his Chinese library. It is now part of the University of London. He returned to China with his new wife and his two surviving children, Rebecca and John Robert.

The rest is soon told. Robert Morrison died 'at his post' on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1834, aged 52. On the last Sunday of his life, five days before his death, after his last sermon, Lee, one of his original helpers confessed he believed in Jesus.

His son, John Robert, buried Robert Morrison at Macau and, gifted like his father, continued his work. He was appointed Chinese Secretary and Interpreter to the British Embassy, in succession to his father, although he was only 20 years old! John Robert was engaged as chief interpreter in all negotiations with the Chinese authorities during both war and peace. He was a devoted Christian, who used all his influence to forward the cause of the gospel. He was elected a member of the Legislative Council of Hong Kong and appointed the Colonial Secretary. He died of fever on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1843, only nine years after his father's death.

Between 1810 and 1836, just two years after the death of Robert Morrison, 751,763 copies of tracts and books had poured from the presses of the Chinese Mission, most of which had come from the pen of Dr. Morrison. All these were distributed within Chinese communities and within China itself.

As far as Robert Morrison is concerned, though much of his technical work was to be superseded, it might be said of him as of the apostle Paul, 'According to the grace given me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation and another builds thereon.' There are many millions of Christians in China today, the fruit of a spiritual awakening and revival within Communist China over the past fifty years.

Our prayer must be that this revival will continue to grow unabated and also mature. So that, from a spiritually and morally renewed China, will come a host of missionaries to the decadent West, and to the rest of the world. This would be, in love, the fitting repayment of the debt they owe, under God, to Robert Morrison, *the* pioneer of the gospel to China.

### *Sources*

William John Townsend, *Robert Morrison, The Pioneer of Chinese Missions*, L.M.S. ed. 1892.

A J Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor & China's Open Century, Book One*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1981.

Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, Monarch Books, 2000.

Lambert assesses there to be 30-50 million evangelical believers in China in the year 2000 (see p.179). However, in 1998, leaders of ten house church groupings issued a public statement calling on the Chinese government to cease persecution and enter into dialogue. They stated the total number as near 90 million (see p. 56). It is generally recognised that in 1952, when all foreign missionaries had left, the number of evangelicals was about 900,000.

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## The Rise of Paganism

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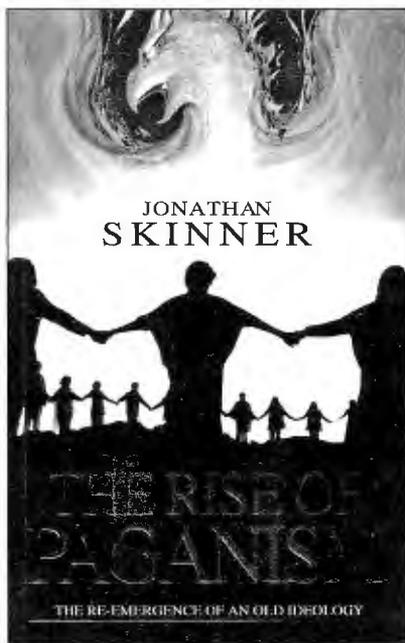
### *A review article*

*The Rise of Paganism*, Jonathan Skinner, Evangelical Press, 240 page paperback, 2006.

John closed his first letter with the words; 'Dear children, keep yourself from idols.' One needs only to read about Paul's visit to Athens to see how pervasive and multifaceted idolatry was even in the intellectual capital of the ancient world. John's exhortation was clearly necessary at his time of writing, but does his warning have relevance to Christians today?

Jonathan Skinner details the alarming rise of the tide of paganism in the UK during the last 40 years, but he also shows that the tide began to turn much earlier than this. Its growth was barely perceptible in the late nineteenth century, but the forces driving it became stronger as the twentieth century progressed. Naturalistic thinking leading to materialism created a void that man, a religious creature, needed to fill. The multicultural society of the UK has provided the perfect environment for a plethora of religions. Reaction to industrialisation has prompted a desire to go back to ancient ways of life that were 'enjoyed' in Britain in earlier times. Modern ideas in Biology and Physics have also lent support to an interest in paganism.

It would be a mistake to think that only the UK has been susceptible to a



growth of interest in ancient religions. The US based Christianity Today.com highlighted growth in worship of the 'female goddess' in its issue of 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2007. It quoted from *Today's Christian Woman*, 'According to a recent American Religious Identification Survey, 200,000 to 300,000 women actively practice it (goddess worship) in the U.S., with numbers growing steadily. Many more nibble around the edges, intrigued by the promise of a religion that empowers women and values their spirituality. In fact, the Internet features thousands of websites devoted to goddess worship, as well as books, magazines, training

camps, college courses, fairs, and membership groups, often called covens or groves.

Goddess spirituality, goddess worship, the sacred feminine, and the feminine divine all refer to a deity most often identified as 'Mother Goddess' or the 'Great Goddess'. Other names used include Mother Earth, Gaia, Sophia, Artemis, Diana and Isis. Often associated with the earth, the moon and fertility, the goddess is usually described as an energy force inside every living and nonliving thing.'

It barely needs stating that paganism thrives among the tribal peoples described by David Sitton in his valuable book 'To Every Tribe with Jesus'.

Jonathan Skinner's book although seemingly written for the UK reader is a goldmine of information and reasoned argument that will arrest readers' attention elsewhere in the world.

His book is divided into 3 sections:

Part 1 Understanding the Times

Part 2 Understanding Contemporary Paganism

Part 3 The Biblical Answer to Contemporary Paganism

In Part 1 he outlines how paganism is spreading. An indicator of this is provided by the way High Street bookshops have often replaced the label 'religion' by 'mysticism' and instead of the shelves being filled by Bibles and books on Christian living, they are stocked with titles like 'Spells for

Teenage Witches', 'White Witching and Angel Healing' and 'White Witching: The Good Magic-Maker's Guide to Spell Weaving'. These are clearly the books that sell and are in demand. Obviously bookshops devoted to pagan or New-Age material will be fully stocked with this sort of material.

He outlines the way Hindu ideas are being spread in the West by aggressive evangelism. This evangelism is made effective by changing the terminology but keeping the ideas so that they are acceptable to westerners. On the whole people are not becoming Hindus or being converted to paganism, but they are slowly taking on Eastern thought forms into everyday life in areas such as business management strategies, martial arts, ecology, health, interior design and counselling.

Skinner uses the powerful analogy of how live crabs are cooked. If live crabs are put into boiling water they get out, but if the water is heated up slowly, the crabs are unaware of what is happening and they are cooked! Neo-paganism does not ask people to become 'paid up members'; it simply encourages its victims to bolt on its tenets to whatever they believe already.

Part 1 opens by highlighting how pagan ideas are spread through environmentalism. What child hasn't heard about 'Mother Nature'? How many of us have watched TV documentaries that leave us gasping at the wonders of evolution? Fewer of us will have drawn any link between Lovelock's Gaia model of the earth and the pantheistic views of neo-pagans

who see the earth, including ourselves, as part of an integrated whole. Skinner writes, 'The link between veneration for Mother Earth and environmental concern is very strong. Pagans believe that not only can the Earth's energies be used to heal us, but also, by connecting in with her forces, we can heal her.'

A whole chapter is devoted to the link between some aspects of holistic medicine and the underlying ideas of paganism. Skinner draws attention to the 'Health Magazine' given out in many pharmacies and even some doctors' surgeries. Most of its content is legitimate, but one article titled 'Shantan's Stars' explained how stresses and strains of life can be reduced by 'working with the astrological phenomena'. Skinner mentioned how the reputable (London) Times magazine, *Body and Soul*, occasionally delves into neo-paganism exemplified by encouraging its readers to 'tap into your meridians'. He instances other books which are largely common sense but contain references to therapies based on various sorts of 'hidden energies' including hypnotherapy, reiki, shiatsu, reflexology, crystal therapy, ayurveda, colour therapy, dream therapy, feng shui, meditation, tantric sex and Tibetan healing etc. In one book recalled by Skinner, readers are asked to address figures they dream about. Many pagan therapies involve the experience of altered states of consciousness in which the mind is stilled to 'regulate psychic energy'. In these states the healer or patient is orientated towards optimum health, the healer receiving information from a higher mind or spirit guide.

Various alternative therapists 'attempt to realign or unblock the energy channels'.

A further chapter in Part 1 describes how eastern ideas infiltrate western thought patterns and behaviour through martial arts (harnessing hidden energy), yoga, stock market decisions (astrology) and business training seminars (visualisation). Visualisation as a technique for gaining what you want is prominent in our culture. The CBS news of Sept 06, 2007 focuses on 'The Secret', New York's number one bestseller. The author of this, Rhonda Byrne, writes, 'Thoughts are magnetic, and thoughts have a frequency. As you think, those thoughts are sent out into the universe and they magnetically attract all like things that are on the same frequency. Everything sent out returns to the source. And that source is you.'

Skinner shows that paganism is 'on the march'. He mentions the formation of the Pagan Federation in the UK in 1971. This facilitates communications between the various pagan groups in the UK, publishing a quarterly magazine *Pagan Dawn* which deals with Wicca, Druidry and Shamanism. Similar organisations exist in the US (The Midwest Pagan Council and the Pagan Front). As Christianity has weakened in the West, paganism has become more acceptable to the public. In 2004 a Satanist was allowed to perform Satanic rituals on board a Royal Navy ship.

Part 2 of his book describes the essential meaning of paganism and

commences by giving a historical overview starting from OT biblical times, including the persecution of pagans by the church. A key to understanding the growth of neo-paganism and the New Age ideas is the appearance of the theosophists in the nineteenth century. They taught that all religions had common truths that were much more important than any differences. Theosophists were often pantheistic (God is All. All is God.). Theosophists believed in the existence of 'masters' who were either spirit beings or men who had 'evolved' more than most. (Are there elements of theosophy present in Dr Who and Star Wars?) Rudolph Steiner and Thomas Edison were attached to this society. From the beginning the society was hostile to Christianity. Skinner points out that the founder of this society, Helena Blavatsky believed, 'Christians and scientists must be made to respect their Indian betters. The wisdom of India, her philosophy and achievement must be made known in Europe and America and the English made to respect the natives of India and Tibet more than they do.' The Scottish community of Findhorn comes from this background and is a 'horticultural Mecca for communication with so-called nature spirits, devic presences, fairies and other such postulated beings'.

Skinner quotes a New Age view of itself – 'New Age...is used to describe a nebulous, quasi-religious set of beliefs encompassing...spiritualism, astrology, the occult, reincarnation, parapsychology, ecology and planetary

awareness, as well as a commitment to complementary medicine and pseudo-scientific applications of the 'healing powers' of crystals and pyramids... Despite hostility from the popular media and the establishment, New Age ideas now permeate many areas of mainstream culture, notably awareness of behavioural medicine, physics, psychology and even business.'

Central to all these neo-pagan ideas is the view of the universe as having an energy or force. Since Einstein energy and mass have been viewed as different aspects of the same thing. Energy can be converted into mass and vice-versa. All that is needed is for us to have techniques to tap into this energy and we will have both power and understanding.

Skinner brings the threads of neo-paganism/New Age ideas together by summarising, 'In many forms of paganism, this great Oneness or Cosmic energy of the universe is utterly impersonal, in others it may be conceived of as a personal reality of some kind, but totally beyond our comprehension. It is believed that this ultimate reality that permeates everything sometimes concentrates, or 'congeals', producing inanimate objects; in a special way it can also focus and form various life forms. These range from the simplest protozoa, through the plant and animal kingdoms, human life and beyond, to more 'advanced' life forms than our imaginations could possibly conceive. These 'higher' forms of life are given a whole range of labels and descriptions:

ascended masters, angels, gods, aliens, fairies, demons, elemental spirits and so on. Here, science fiction, beliefs in UFOs, ancient religions, the New Age movement, animism, polytheism, spiritualism and many more all manage to coalesce and synthesise into one world view.' This is the ultimate way of justifying the post modern thinking that all religions have a value, but it is far from Christianity.

Skinner writes on the similarity between what the world calls 'mind power' and what Christians sometimes call 'faith'. In the prosperity movement 'faith' is viewed as a power that is directed at God, which 'forces him to do what we want'. Prayer is no longer God-centred, 'focussing on his revealed will and submissive to his hidden will' but if accompanied by sufficient 'faith', prayer is a means of becoming successful and rich. This is 'christianising' the pagan teaching of 'visualisation'.

Historically there has been a tendency for paganism to infiltrate the church through seeking involvement with 'inferior beings' rather than the most-high God who is viewed as being inaccessible. This has been obvious in Mariolatry and the elevation of saints in Roman Catholicism. The Colossian Christians were warned against the worship of angels. The Old Testament is full of examples of the syncretism of true worship and paganism. Skinner highlights a modern tendency of some professing Christian teachers to interest themselves and others in guardian

angels, personal angels and spirit guides etc.

He also warns of pagan beliefs and practices 'worming their way into the Church', through some counselling techniques and traces the thoughts of Mesmer, Charcot, Freud, Reich and Jung and points out how their ideas, rooted in pagan ideas have influenced those who have written for the popular Christian market.

The final section of the book is designed to build up Christians so that they will not fall prey to neo-paganism/New Age ideas. He has helpful chapters on God as Creator and author of Scripture. He writes on the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ and the way men can be truly brought into a knowledge of God. If the first two sections warn of the danger of pagan thought dominating society and infiltrating into the church, the final section is full of refreshing, positive Christian teaching on the God who has revealed himself as the one to be worshipped and trusted and obeyed.

At the end of every chapter there are helpful discussion questions linked with appropriate passages of Scripture and designed to get the reader to think about what is happening in the world around him. The book provides an excellent jumping off point for those wishing to study the subject in depth. There are hundreds of references to the writings of pagans and to relevant scriptures.

We have been told to 'watch and pray'. This book encourages us to do both of these things.

### **Namibia and Southern Africa**

It was a joy to be able to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> Namibian Grace Conference, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reformed Baptist Youth Camp, both held in August 2007 and also learn of progress in the work of the Reformed Baptist constituency in Namibia since my last visit.

At the Grace Conference nine churches were represented and at least eight mission stations. Over eighty attended. The main speakers were Christo Beetge (Brackenhurst Baptist Church- South Africa) and Horst Pietzsch (SIM [Serving in Mission] – Muslim Evangelism). Their themes were Biblical principles of the pastoral ministry and Understanding and evangelism of Muslims. Both speakers were excellent, particularly for the mainly black hearers. The warmth of the love of Christ permeated all the ministry, including additional exhortations given by Pastor Laban Mwashekele, whose church hosted the conference, and Pastor Joachim Rieck.

The ministry of the churches to youth has been strengthened by the emergence of the youth conference led by Marinus de Bruijne of Walvis Bay Baptist Church. 93 children representing nine local churches came over a long weekend. The themes were studies in the book of Daniel. Greatly gifted youth leaders are rare (we tend to have to get by with what we have) but the Lord, with Marinus, has raised up a man not only greatly gifted but also

with a great heart for the gospel to youth. The emergence of this youth camp, when others are closing, is a great opportunity for the local churches. Marinus states the ‘non-negotiables’ to be – centrality of God’s Word, centrality of preaching, the doctrines of grace, God-centred and doctrinal worship and singing, and also follow-up work in the local churches. Amen to all that! Please pray for the future of this ministry.

The title SOLA5 points to the five solas of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation. In 2007 an association of Evangelical Churches in Southern Africa united as SOLA5 churches. Twenty-three contemporary core values are embraced by SOLA5 churches. These core values were published in RT 207.

The emergence of the SOLA5 fellowship of Reformed Baptist Churches in Southern Africa has already begun to bring a practical benefit to the churches in Namibia, in particular, with timely ministry help for Pastor Laban Mwashekele, who has been overstretched with the mission work and training of leadership. This help needs to be developed. Also, Eastside Baptist Church is in the course of appointing an intern, who has the remit of developing a ministry among the students of the University of Namibia in Windhoek.

I was able to attend the Zambian conferences and meet many of the SOLA5 pastors for the first time.



*Family Rieck, from left to right: Marcelle, Kezia, Joachim, Martin and Jonathan.*



*Reformed Family Conference in Zambia.*

During the AGM of SOLA5 the good news came that the Zambian Minister of Education agreed to the official recognition of the University of Africa, which is being set up through the vision of SOLA5, whose membership consists of eighteen churches at present and a number of other churches in the membership pipeline. Joachim Rieck, in his report following, states, 'We are indeed stunned to see what the Lord is doing.' I, personally, was deeply humbled and blessed by what I saw and heard during this visit to Southern Africa. *Bob Davey.*

### **Zambia: Reformed Family Conference and SOLA5 Conference**

*25<sup>th</sup> August - 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2007*

Lameck & Susan Mwewa, Conrad Kromberg, and the Rieck family left on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2007 to represent Eastside Baptist Church at the annual SOLA5 Conference that was to be held in Lusaka. We left a little earlier to also attend the Zambian Reformed Family Conference, which preceded the SOLA5 Conference.

The trip by car took us via the Caprivi, crossing the majestic Zambezi River at Katima Mulilo, entering via Sesheke

into Zambia. Having covered 1400 kilometres on the first day, we arrived (somewhat tired) in Livingstone.

The next day, being the Lord's day, we worshipped at Trinity Reformed Baptist Church in Livingstone (a church plant from Lusaka Baptist Church). The pastor there is Michael Bwembya.

We had an opportunity to briefly visit the Victoria Falls at Livingstone, and were greatly moved by the majesty of God's creation. From there we drove on to Lusaka for the remaining 600 kilometres.

We were warmly welcomed at Kabwata Baptist Church by Charles Bota (Conference organizer) and Pastor Conrad and Mrs Felistas Mbewe. We were allocated to our very gracious hosts Amon and Yvonne Silwimba, who operate a Lodge and Theme Park (Dream Valley) on the outskirts of Lusaka. Zambian hospitality during this week was warm and generous. We thank God for many visible tokens and evidences of Christian love. Our children were thrilled to have space and such pleasurable surroundings.

Monday evening saw the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Reformed Family Conference.

Emmanuel Sakala was the keynote speaker on that occasion. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday saw 900 people gathered together for the Family Conference. We marvel how four churches managed to provide food for so many people. What was truly amazing is that visitors from outside Lusaka were not expected to pay at all! The costs of feeding the multitude were borne by the hosting churches.

The Family Conference truly catered for the whole family. The young people had their sessions, and the women were ministered to by Martha Peace from the USA, best known for her good books that have helped so many women. The other speakers (also from the USA) were Voddie Baucham and Jeff Noblit. Voddie and Jeff alternately spoke to the youth and to the School of Theology (another facet of the conference). The preaching was powerful and relevant. We knew that we were in the hands of God. The rousing singing of great hymns (a capella!) will not be forgotten.

The third SOLA5 Conference began on Thursday morning. Our theme 'Biblical Love' was rooted in an exposition of 1 Corinthians 13. Whatever we may fail to be or to have, we must not fail to have the distinguishing marks of the Church as outlined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Voddie Baucham, Jeff Noblit, Christo Beetge (Brackenhurst Baptist Church, South Africa) and myself shared in the expositions of this great chapter.

250 delegates attended this Southern African conference. The delegates came from Zambia, Namibia,

Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Swaziland and South Africa.

One of the components of this conference was the feedback concerning common projects undertaken by SOLA5 churches. It is good to see our churches joining hands in meeting the needs of our suffering brethren in Zimbabwe. Some churches have joined hands to do church planting in Botswana. The South Africans are leading us in the establishing of a new Seminary (Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary, in Pretoria) in association with the University of Africa. The Namibians and Zambians rejoice to see the growth of their churches in their respective countries.

When we sit back and survey the progress of the last 4 years - since we had first met in Heidelberg (South Africa) to consider the constitution of SOLA5, we are indeed stunned to see what the Lord is doing! I am certainly very encouraged by these developments. As we survey these developments we also remember that no growth happens without pain. No genuine spiritual growth takes place without being fiercely resisted by Satan, the archenemy of God's church and kingdom.

We rejoice however that light is greater than darkness, and that the truth of God's Word is greater than all the lies that Satan sows in God's field. We know that prayer is a great gift from God, who says: 'Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession' (Psalm 2:8).

*Joachim Rieck, September 2007.*

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## Pope Benedict's Denunciation

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*By Richard Bennett  
and Michael de Semlyen*

On July 10, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI released a new decree. In it he has restated his conviction that the Roman Catholic Church is the one Church founded by Jesus Christ and that other churches are either defective or not true churches at all. What is new in this document is the authoritative statement that 'Christian Communities *born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century*' cannot be 'called "Churches" in the proper sense'.

Prior to this, in September 2000, when Benedict was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Guardian of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he had stunned the ecumenical movement by launching an assault on all other churches with the Vatican decree, 'Dominus Iesus', prepared by his office. As an arch-conservative, true to the pre-Vatican II doctrinal rigidity that viewed Bible Christians as heretics rather than 'separated brethren', Pope Benedict has long sought to correct what he describes as erroneous interpretations of Vatican Council II's ecumenical intent.

Thus the 2007 document is formulated as five questions and answers to set the record straight on the real intentions of the Second Vatican Council. Benedict's mission is to rescue its teaching and conclusions from Catholics who in

their association with Christians are drifting away from the old hard-line Catholic dogma. In the context of this catechetical decree, the last of the five questions is of specific importance:

'Why do the texts of the Council and those of the Magisterium since the Council not use the title of "Church" with regard to those Christian Communities born out of the Reformation of the sixteenth century?'

The response, which closes the decree, states,

'According to Catholic doctrine, these Communities do not enjoy apostolic succession in the sacrament of Orders, and are, therefore, deprived of a constitutive element of the Church. These ecclesial Communities which, specifically because of the absence of the sacramental priesthood, have not preserved the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic Mystery cannot, according to Catholic doctrine, be called "Churches" in the proper sense.'

*Biblical Truth Lays Bare the Papal Decree*

In declaring the universal primacy of the Church of Rome and denying the faith of the Reformation, the Pope denounced all those Churches and

Christians whose lives are committed to the Lord Jesus Christ and to his everlasting gospel. Benedict is unable to see that these whom he is denouncing are the true Church founded upon the Rock, who is Christ Jesus himself '*the Son of the living God*'. They are his people, his bride, the true Church; believers who adhere to God only and his written Word; who are saved before the all-Holy God by grace alone through faith alone, and in Christ alone and all glory and praise is to God alone. This is the Bride of Christ, the temple of the Living God, and his dwelling place forever. This is the Church, which Christ Jesus loved, and these are his disciples for whom he gave himself that they might be washed in his own blood. It is the Church sanctified and cleansed by his Word 'that he might present it to himself a glorious Church'. It is the 'general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven'. As a Roman Catholic Benedict must reject the gospel rediscovered by the Reformation out of the darkness of the Papacy. Ironically, in seeking to re-establish hard-line Catholic dogma, he has in fact revealed his own Church as biblically counterfeit and apostate.

The basis for Benedict's denunciation is given in his answer to the second question posed in the document:

Christ 'established here on earth' only one Church and instituted it as a 'visible and spiritual community' that from its beginning and throughout the centuries has always existed and will always exist, and in

which alone are found all the elements that Christ himself instituted. This Church, constituted and organised in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.

The presumption here is that the Apostle Peter went to Rome, and that each Pope is the successor of Peter. This conjecture is groundless. The Scripture makes mention neither of Peter's ever being at Rome nor of successors to Peter or to any other Apostle. The criteria for apostleship are given in Scripture. The position of the Apostles was unique to them and to Paul - all directly chosen by Christ Jesus with no hint of succession. In the New Testament, the Apostles appointed elders and deacons rather than other Apostles. Yet the biblically unsubstantiated claim of 'apostolic succession' is the very foundation of the Papacy. Papal primacy and authority are based on it. The Lord God never entrusted his truth to a personal succession of any body of men. Such a concept is hopelessly flawed. If one link failed, the whole sequence after it would be invalid. Yet, Benedict has again hitched his star to the notion of apostolic succession. The Papacy as usual rules by fiat; this time it is via Benedict's dogmatic statement.

*This is an abridged article. The full version with documentation can be obtained on the Internet under Richard Bennett and scroll down to Berean Beacon.*

<b>Editor</b>	ERROLL HULSE, 75 Woodhill Road, Leeds LS16 7BZ
<b>Assistant Editor</b>	BILL JAMES, 9 Epsom Road, Leamington Spa CV32 7AR
<b>Associate Editors</b>	DAVID KINGDON, UK, TOM NETTLES, USA, JOHN CAMPBELL, AUSTRALIA, MICHAEL HAYKIN, CANADA

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