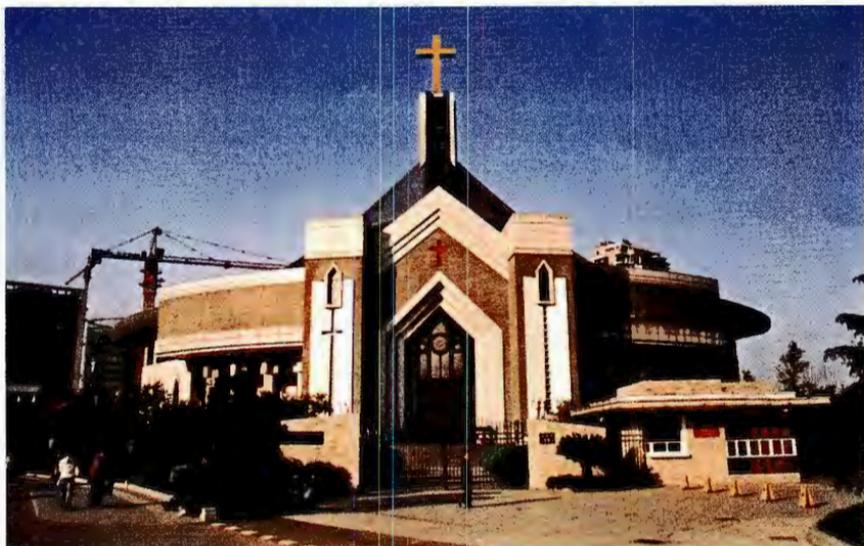


REFORMATION TODAY



MAY - JUNE 2008

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Featured above is Chong Yi Church, the largest recognised Christian Church in China situated in Zhejiang Province. Built in 2005 this evangelical church seats 5,000. There is hope that permission will be given for similar mega-church buildings to be erected in other Chinese provinces.

Similar tensions exist in Communist China as did in the former Communist Soviet Union, that is tension between the government and non-registered churches. There are at least ten major networks of unregistered house churches representing millions of believers. Persecution varies from province to province. In the case of the coastal province of Zhejiang Christian work has a long history which goes back to 1840, a factor which favours the recognition of the church.

The photo above represents one face of Communist China. The other face is the persecution of unregistered house groups and the imprisonment of house group leaders. With major media coverage of the wide-scale unrest about oppression in Tibet the situation in China has tightened. We need to pray that with the run-up to the Olympics there will not be a further clamp-down on Christians all over China. The government fears instability. It is rumoured that some overseas Christian groups are planning provocative aggressive evangelism at the Olympics. Chinese government sources equate that with terrorist activity. Much is at stake.

Front cover picture – *These pictures from the BBC website remind us of hope and distress in Zimbabwe. The media reports that Tendai Biti, the Secretary-General of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), said that at least ten people had been killed and hundreds injured in post-election violence unleashed by Robert Mugabe's regime. Biti accused the Government of engaging in a policy of 'deliberate starvation' by cutting off food supplies to areas known to be opposition strongholds. About 400 MDC activists had been rounded up and arrested, he added. 'The situation is desperate. We are not able to function because of those arrests'.*

Editorial

In his review of Christopher Wright's book on mission Bill James says, 'Wright is most insistent that the mission of the church must be both evangelism and social action, and he is reluctant to assign evangelism the priority in the partnership.'

David J Bosch's writing is more helpful on mission than anything else in print today. In his *magnum opus*, *Transforming Mission – Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*,¹ Bosch writes, 'There can be no doubt that the last decades have seen a surprising escalation in the term mission. Surprising, that is, in light of the fact that these decades have also witnessed unparalleled criticism of the missionary enterprise.' The inflation of the concept of mission has both positive and negative implications. One of the negative results has been the tendency to define mission too broadly – which prompted Neill to formulate his famous adage, 'If everything is mission, nothing is mission.' See 'Is everything mission?' (Bosch chapter 13, page 511).

There are three reasons why Bosch's book leads the pack. First he provides a brilliant exposition of what the Scriptures teach on mission. For instance if you have wondered why his home-town kinsmen tried to kill Jesus when he spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4) read Bosch page 108ff. Second he reviews the whole of Church history from the standpoint of mission, and third he analyses accurately and fully where we stand internationally on mission today.

On the second point, the overview of mission through the centuries, Bosch suggests six paradigms as follows:

1. The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity
2. The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period
3. The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm
4. The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm
5. The modern Enlightenment paradigm
6. The emerging ecumenical paradigm

Each paradigm offers a distinctive understanding of Christian mission.

From observation through travels abroad and prompted by Bosch I see the characteristics of the sixth missionary paradigm as follows:

1. An increasing sense of unity of Evangelicals across the world
2. An increasing appreciation of the place of evangelical theological education and the value of evangelical literature and reformed books
3. An increasing appreciation that the Church is multi-racial and that the great commission will be fulfilled by international co-operation and unity
4. An increasing awareness of the need of compassion and good works – relief of pain and suffering accompanies the gospel
5. An increasing realisation that the completion of the missionary task is actually within reach – a re-appraisal of eschatology
6. An increasing awareness that Christians cannot ignore politics. Information regarding the persecution of Christians by oppressive regimes calls for action as does anti-Christian legislation by secular governments

Elsewhere (see RT 205) I have criticised David Bosch for his endorsement of ecumenism which surged through the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa of which he was part. That should not diminish at all the benefits of his book. Bosch suggests six major salvific events: the Incarnation, the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, Pentecost, and the Parousia. 'These six christological salvific events may never be viewed in isolation from one another. Each of these events impinges on all the others. Unless we hold on to this we will communicate to the world a truncated gospel.'

Our paramount need is for missionary vision and motivation. Where are our candidates for missionary service on the front lines of world need? Where is the zeal to support missionaries in prayer and practice? On three occasions recently I have asked seminary leaders if they had a missions department. The answer in each case was muted. If you are called to be a missionary you would surely wish to have a firm grip on what the Scriptures teach, possess an overall view of the history of mission as suggested above, and then gain specialist training alongside an experienced missionary in the field to which you are called.

Apology to Professor James Renihan

James Renihan is Academic Dean and Associate Professor of Historical Theology at the Institute for Reformed Baptist Studies in Escondido, California. His book *True Confessions: Baptist Documents in the Reformed Family* is reviewed by Crawford Gribben. While on a farm in South Africa I wrote the editorial on church planting in RT 220. The first page of that editorial comes from writing by Jim Renihan, material which was shared with me by a fellow South African. I apologise for not acknowledging the source.

¹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission – Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. 584 page large size paperback, ORBIS BOOKS.

The Encouragement of Pentecost

Next to the day of Jesus' birth and the days of his death and resurrection the day of Pentecost is the foremost in human history.

Pentecost is a great encouragement to the churches. Whenever the going is hard, the world dominant and hostile and believers fearful and disheartened we should be reminded of Pentecost. For myself I constantly derive heart from Pentecost, first by viewing it as a great unique historic occasion, a Trinitarian event. And secondly I see Pentecost as completely relevant for the 21st century because it was the first revival. Pentecost is the guarantee of many more outpourings of the Spirit to come. As the promise stands, 'In the last days I will pour out my Spirit.' This is the age of revivals. Indeed revivals explain the growth of the Church and more so than ever since the 18th century.

In what way is Pentecost Trinitarian? First it is an event ordered and given by the Father. Second it is a powerful vindication of Christ's ministry. The Sanhedrin counted Jesus as dead. Pentecost affirmed that he was alive and more active than he was before. As Peter expressed it, 'Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.' Third Pentecost tells us of the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell God's people and guide and inspire them to the end of time.

Pentecost was the gift of the Father

The sovereignty of the Father in his rule of the history of the world is seen in his creation of our 365 day year and within that framework the creation of the Jewish calendar. Fifty days are set within the calendar year of 365 days. The Father ruled that there should be a special period beginning with the Passover and finishing fifty days later with Pentecost Day. The Feast of Weeks began at the end of the barley harvest from which time seven weeks were counted out as the Feast of Weeks ending on the fiftieth day (Lev 23:15-22). Into that time structure from the Father came Jesus, God's Passover lamb. 'Christ our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed' (1 Cor 5:7). On Passover day Christ was sacrificed, a sacrifice which brought to an end the need of any further sacrifices of the Levitical sacrificial system.

We should always hold the fifty days from Passover to Pentecost in our minds. On day one Christ was crucified. On day three he was declared to be the Son

of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. On day 40 he ascended into heaven. 'He was taken up to heaven before their very eyes' (Acts 1:9). Ten days later on day 50, Pentecost Day, the Holy Spirit was poured out in mighty power.

The Father's rule of time is seen in that Pentecost represents the beginning of the new covenant age called The last days (Acts 2:17). This is the turning point in redemptive history. 'The outpouring of the Spirit is clinching evidence that the last days have arrived' (Num 11:29; Is 32:15; 44:3; Ez 36:27).¹

In the farewell (valedictory) discourses recorded in John 14-16 we should note the centrality of the Father who is mentioned forty-two times while the Holy Spirit is mentioned four times as Counsellor, twice as Spirit of Truth, and once as Holy Spirit. This emphasis on Jesus' oneness with the Father is paramount. Everything is from the Father who will send the Holy Spirit. This valedictory passage, John 14-16, is a cogent corrective of many who cry for Christ-centredness. If Christ and his cross is not being preached that is truly fatal and we sympathise fully with that complaint. However sometimes the call for Christ-centredness can lead to shallowness. We must be Trinitarian. That is the best way of being evangelical. We are faithful Evangelicals when we preach Christ and him crucified within a clear Trinitarian framework. Sadly that framework and infrastructure are sometimes missing and so the message of the gospel is less clear. Christ is never on his own. He stresses this in John 14-16. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt chapters 5-7) is a similar passage to John chapters 14-16 in that there is the same emphasis on the believer's relationship by adoption to the Father.

Pentecost affirms the exaltation of Christ

The valedictory discourses occurred at an exceedingly painful time. For Jesus it was an agonising time leading to the ordeal of Gethsemane and then the series of humiliations in his public trials ending with the crucifixion at Calvary. For the disciples it was a time of distress and confusion. They did not have the remotest idea what they would do if Jesus left them. He had been their leader in every respect. He was their shield from danger and for the last time fulfilled that role in the garden of Gethsemane when he was arrested. It was terrifying for the disciples to think of being on their own. Threat of arrest and execution increased their fear. The antagonism of the national body of Jews was cunning and vicious. All Jerusalem had been caught up in the drama of Jesus from his triumphal entry on a donkey to the gory scene of public execution by crucifixion at Golgotha.

From the nadir of defeat there was a complete reversal. Pentecost gave a public platform to the apostles. From hiding away behind locked doors the apostles were now bold witnesses to the supernatural event of Pentecost. Peter's explanation is clear, 'Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear' (Acts 2:33). The gospel continued to be preached in the weeks which followed. Imprisonment and floggings (Acts 5:12-42) did not deter the apostles who continued to occupy centre stage in Jerusalem. Pentecost is a triumphant vindication of Jesus as Son of God. He had been alongside his disciples but now another Comforter (*allos parakletos*), one similar to him but not the same as he, ministered to them. What was unfolding before their eyes was the continued ministry of Jesus. Uppermost in Peter's mind was Psalm 118 verse 22, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone' (Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:6-8).

Pentecost exhibits the advent of the Holy Spirit

As the Gospel passages describe the coming of God into the world by incarnation, so Acts chapter two describes the advent of the Holy Spirit. This fulfilled the promises of Jesus:

'He will be with you forever – I will not leave you as orphans' (Jn 14:15-16). 'The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you' (Jn 14:25). 'When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, – he will testify about me' (Jn 15:26,27). 'He will guide you into all truth. – he will tell you what is yet to come' (Jn 16:13). And what about the hostile, unbelieving world? On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit moved in to create conviction of sin. We see here a fulfilment of the promise, 'When he comes he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement' (Jn 16:7).

Three supernatural signs of the Spirit's advent were given on the day of Pentecost. He came with the sound as of a mighty rushing wind. He came with tongues of fire that came upon each one of the 120 gathered together. He came with multi-linguistic power in enabling the apostles to speak in a variety of languages used by the fifteen nations described in Acts 2:8-12. These languages included Persian which was spoken by the Elamites. It is completely supernatural for a Galilean to speak Persian fluently so as to be perfectly understood by those from Persia. I refer to just one language to press home the reality of the remarkable event.

What message is conveyed by these three supernatural expressions of the Holy Spirit's personality and work?

First we consider the sound of a mighty rushing wind. The wind did not bring havoc but order. It should be read with Ezekiel 37 in mind. In that vision Ezekiel witnessed the wind assembling the bones into skeletons and clothing them with flesh and skin and then raising them all up in an act of creation similar to when God 'breathed into (Adam's) nostrils the breath of life' (Gen 2:7). That requires divine intelligence and omnipotent power.

Second we consider the tongues of fire that sat on each one of them. John the Baptist predicted that Jesus would baptise 'with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Luke 3:16-17). Malachi declared of the coming Messiah, 'But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire'. 'Fire pictures the consuming holiness of the true and living God, not only because it radiates light, but also because it destroys through heat. His presence "burns away" all that is in conflict with his purity.'² 'Our God is a consuming fire' (Heb 12:29). The reality of this is seen in zero tolerance of dishonesty in the judgement of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

Third we consider the phenomenon of foreign languages. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit enabled different languages to be spoken simultaneously. I referred before to speaking a language like Persian. Arabic was another language spoken on the day of Pentecost. It would be an unforgettable experience to speak any one of these foreign languages fluently when you had no prior knowledge of that tongue. The words of Acts 2:5, 'Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven' suggest that the purpose of the gospel is to reach all Israel and with them all the Gentiles to the ends of the earth (Ps 67; 82:8). The fifteen or so nations of the world that are mentioned represent Jews and proselytes from far and wide (2:5-11) a widespread diaspora from Iran (Elamites) in the East to Rome in the West. When those newly baptised visitors to Jerusalem returned home they took the gospel with them. In this way the Faith began to spread widely.

The different languages of Pentecost day also proclaim unity in Christ. Now believers of all tribes and languages will be one in Christ. Originally many languages were created at Babel in order to divide and confuse a rebellious race. United with one language they would have employed their unity to conspire against God (Gen 11:1-9). That purpose was frustrated at Babel.

Speaking in other languages carries a sombre note as Sinclair Ferguson indicates when he writes, 'In discussing the question of tongues-speaking in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul cites Isaiah 28:11-12 ('Through men of strange tongues

and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me') and indicates that tongues are 'a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers' (1 Cor 14:21-22) The context of these words of Isaiah is one of covenant rejection – the hearing of foreign tongues is a sign of God's promised judgement on his covenant people (cf. Dt 28:49; Jer 5:15), an indication that the kingdom is being taken from them and given to a people who produce fruit appropriate to it (Mt 21:43).³

The Ongoing Significance of Pentecost

Four outstanding features are to be observed for our encouragement.

First Pentecost heralded clarity about the way of salvation. 'And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (2:21).

This declaration goes to the heart of the greatest and most urgent need of every lost sinner. What must I do to be saved? What was the answer to that question during the Old Testament dispensation? It could have been, 'Believe in the Saviour to come and trust in the sacrifice that God will provide in him.' But now the answer is clear. Salvation is provided in Christ. Ask him for it. Call upon him now and you will be saved. The criminal crucified alongside Jesus said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43). The Philippian jailer cried out, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household" (Acts 16:29-31).

For more than a generation over-simplification of salvation in the form of easy believism and decisionism has blighted sectors of evangelicalism. The idea that all you have to do is to repeat a simple sinner's prayer and you will be saved is widespread. Calvin in his commentary on Acts is helpful when on Acts 2:21 he reminds us that terror is involved. It is a terrible thing to be lost. The realisation of that dreadful reality is what compels the question, 'What must I do to be saved?' The Philippian jailer was terrified. This is not to say that we must now go around deliberately trying to terrify people into realising what a shocking thing it is to be lost. Yet the realisation of sin and lostness is imperative. The old way of preaching was to wound with the law (by which conviction of sin is given) and then heal with the gospel.

Again Calvin is helpful when on Acts 2:21 he comments, 'Notice that the word *everyone* is used. God invites *everyone* to himself for salvation, without

exception' (see Romans 10:13 and Psalm 65:2). Simplicity and universality are proclaimed in the words, 'And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' Absolutely all sinners are included, young and old, scandalous and regular sinners, men and women, rich and poor, those who esteem themselves as highly intelligent and those who do not so esteem themselves. The reason why this is simple and not complicated is that 'in Christ' everything required for salvation is found, 'righteousness, holiness and redemption' (1 Cor 1:30). The righteousness we need is the perfect righteousness of Christ and that is imputed to us when we are united to him by faith. When the Father sees that righteousness on a sinner, he justifies that person. No elaborate system of works is required for salvation. The law has been fulfilled for us in the person of Christ.

The second outstanding feature of Pentecost which goes forward throughout these last days is the gift of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Peter proclaimed, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-spring for all whom the Lord our God will call.' This promise means that every believer has all that is needed for the Christian life. Nothing is kept back or hidden with respect to the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. He is not commanded to seek a special experience which will unlock or unleash further powers of the Holy Spirit in his life. For instance much of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian is spelled out in Romans 8:1-17. That work pertains to all Christians and is not confined to a special class.

Many have understood Pentecost to be a pattern or example of how to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. They claim that conversion needs to be followed by a power experience which is called the baptism of the Spirit. The 120 in the upper room were baptised with the Holy Spirit and mightily empowered exactly as Jesus said they would be (Acts 1:8). They heard the mighty rushing wind, experienced the fiery tongues resting on each of them, and spoke in other languages. That was unique to them and not to the 3000 who were added to the church that day. The Pentecost event does not suggest a two-tier system. In other words Pentecost should not be used to teach the doctrine of subsequence, that is that subsequent to conversion and union with Christ we need a further special experience. A young South African, Brendon Naicker, has written a helpful booklet with the title *Doctrine of Subsequence*.⁴ In it he quotes Thomas Miller on the issue of the doctrine of subsequence. Miller notes that it is not merely a modern debate among Evangelicals and their

Pentecostal/Charismatic counterparts. It reaches into the roots of Roman Catholic faith, and was debated among the Wesleyans, their Puritan predecessors, and their Holiness descendants. It was a subject of contention between Keswick and Holiness teachers. 'In time, it became a major issue between Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals, as well as among Charismatics.'

The universality of the gift of the Holy Spirit is seen in the citation from the prophet Joel. Note this outpouring of the Holy Spirit is without discrimination against any group or race. It is on men and women, boys and girls, young and old.

I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

This apocalyptic language is not to be taken to mean that every believer in the last days will be a canonical prophet with ability or authority to write Scripture like Moses or Isaiah, but rather that every Christian in his or her work place or school or university will be able to tell forth the gospel in the clearest terms. Jesus' words about John the Baptist recorded in Matthew 11:11 help us understand the generous description above concerning prophecy. Jesus said of John the Baptist that he was greater than all his predecessors. 'Nevertheless the least in the kingdom is greater than John.' This means *not* that every believer will be more eloquent or powerful in preaching than John the Baptist but that every believer now enjoys a vantage point of clarity superior to that of John the Baptist who in turn enjoyed a better and closer vantage point to see Jesus the lamb of God superior to any of the prophets who preceded him.⁵

A third ongoing encouragement from Pentecost is that that day heralds the way in which church membership functions. 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer' (2:42). I will not expand on this except to observe that if each one of us shows this kind of zeal as faithful and zealous church members it will be an evidence that we are indeed partakers of the work of the Holy Spirit.

A fourth great ongoing encouragement from Pentecost is that it was the first Christian revival, the first of many more to come. Three thousand conversions and baptisms in one day was a work that exceeded anything similar in the life of our Lord. Jesus assured his disciples that they would do greater works than he did (Jn 14:12).

The day of Pentecost reveals that there is no limit to the power of the Holy Spirit. Jonathan Edwards maintained that ‘revivals are the most glorious of all God’s works in the world’.⁶ Pentecost certainly supports that claim. The next revival, although bearing the same character of an overwhelming sense of the holiness of God and the sense of sin and need, may be different in character. Far greater numbers have been converted in present-day China than were converted on the day of Pentecost, not 3000 or 30,000, or 300,000, or 3,000,000 but 30,000,000 and probably twice that. We must intercede for great outpourings of the Holy Spirit upon the nations. Revivals have been associated mostly with the West. But extensive revivals may now break out in such places as Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Japan. A revival began in Korea in 1907 with such ongoing effect that one secular observer in a radio program in April this year suggested that today one in every three in South Korea (population 47 million) is an Evangelical. The same observer described the evangelisation of Cambodia as being a mainly Korean enterprise.

I believe what began on the day of Pentecost will continue in these ‘last days’ on a global scale.

¹ Andreas J Kostenburger, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, Apollos, 2001, p.131. Pentecost is to be regarded as an event in the *historia salutis* and not to be understood as *ordo salutis*. In other words Pentecost is a once and for all event that can never be repeated.

² Dennis E Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*, page 59, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997.

³ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, IVP, page 61, 1996.

⁴ This work is available to our subscribers from brendon_naicker@yahoo.co.uk. For many Pentecost is the primary personal pattern or paradigm for the reception of power to preach or power to serve. Among leaders who have advocated this way to power are John Wesley’s successor John Fletcher (1729-1785), Charles Finney (1792-1875), D L Moody (1837-1899), R A Torrey (1856-1928), Andrew Murray (1828-1917), and Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981). For this view see Dr Lloyd-Jones in his sermons on Romans chapter eight, pages 218-399, and Ephesians chapter one, pages 243-311, books published by the Banner of Truth. The place of power and unction in the ministry is of paramount importance. That is not the issue. The foundation upon which we derive power is the issue as I argue in my book *Crisis Experiences*, Carey publications, distributed by EP. It is misguided in my view to use Pentecost as an *ordo salutis* (order of events in personal salvation) to try and create a two-tier Christianity of those who have a spectacular experience and those who do not. Pentecost is rather an event in the *historia salutis* as I have sought to show.

⁵ Sinclair Ferguson puts it this way, ‘Now all the Lord’s people possess the knowledge of God formerly experienced only by the prophets. This is exactly what Moses himself longed for, although it could never have been experienced under the Mosaic economy.’ *Ibid* p.63.

⁶ Cited in Erroll Hulse, *Give Him No Rest*, EP, page 44

Churches – Hospitals or Battlegrounds?

Preparation for extended reformation in France

Frederick Hodgson

The state of the churches in France by 1555

France was the scene of a mighty revival during the sixteenth century. The gospel spread through the country from at least two sources. One of these was from Germany and evangelical Christians in France were often known as Lutherans. Less well known was the preaching of native French men. A significant milestone in the history of Evangelicalism in Europe was the conversion of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, who published his Fivefold Psalter in 1509. Martin Luther himself was influenced by this work and it is of interest to note that the preaching of the gospel in France predated the conversion of Luther. Jean-Marc Berthoud¹ pointed out that Gérard Roussel, a companion of Lefèvre, and others preached the gospel to huge crowds in the early 1530s following the earlier revival at Meaux described in RT221. Many of the preachers at the time were determined to work for the transformation of the Roman Catholic Church from within. Sadly this produced a spiritual compromise and Roussel eventually became the Catholic bishop of Oloron. This setback was a vindication of the uncompromising policy of complete separation from Rome pursued by Farel and Calvin. The outworking of their policy is described in this article.

Lefèvre was instrumental in the conversion of Guillaume Farel whom he met in 1510 when he enrolled as a student in Paris. Farel became a zealous preacher, being involved in the proto-reformation in Meaux. After the enforced break-up of the group in Meaux he vehemently proclaimed the gospel in the east of France. He used every opportunity to denounce the idolatry practised by the Roman Catholic Church before going to Switzerland. He did not believe that the Roman Church could be successfully reformed so his strategy was to establish a sound base for Evangelicalism in the French-speaking part of this land, so that the gospel could then be transmitted into France. The base for this work was to be Geneva, but Farel had to fight hard in bringing the gospel to other parts of Switzerland before Geneva welcomed it. This thrilling story is not described in this article but is worthy of further attention.

Meanwhile Frenchmen who believed and taught the gospel continued to experience persecution, exile and martyrdom, with occasional quieter spells brought about by the intervention of the evangelical sister of King Francis I. Calvin believed that the future of the gospel in France was not secure when Christians were isolated as either individuals or small groups within the existing Roman Catholic churches. He saw the need for Reformed churches that were separate from the Roman Catholic system. He was dismayed at the tendency for Christians to live as believers in private and yet as Roman Catholics in terms of public worship. He aptly described these secret believers as *Nicodemites*, referring to Nicodemus, a member of the ruling party of the Jews who featured in John's Gospel.

Berthoud outlined the development of the poisonous spiritual, moral and political atmosphere that the believers in France found themselves in during the first half of the sixteenth century.² He wrote, 'The Church of Rome had succumbed to that exaltation of man typical of both Arianism and Pelagianism. The human authority of the Pope and fallible teaching of the Church had replaced the unique authority of God in his Word (*sola scriptura*). Man's works had replaced the sovereign and irresistible grace of God in salvation (*sola fide, sola gratia*). But above all the authority of man and that of the all too fallible tradition of the hierarchy had usurped the unique authority of God himself, manifested in his revealed, inerrant and inscripturated Word (*tota scriptura, soli Deo gloria*). The inevitable result, then as now, of such apostasy was a return to the pagan practices of idolatry: the cult of Mary and of the saints; the worship of the Eucharist; the divinisation of the *Magisterium*; and of magic; the pseudo-magical power of the priests in the use of the sacraments, the efficacy of relics and so on. This was indeed nothing less than the substitution of new mediators between God and men, man-made gods, for the unique, true and efficacious Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, become man for our redemption and that of creation to the sole glory of the Holy Trinity.'

He incidentally described how pagan ideas had led to absolutism in politics and led to the nobility and middle classes of France being dominated by an autocratic king following the model of an autocratic pope.³ Biblical teaching, which had the effect of moderating this absolutism, was particularly attractive to the upper classes of France. Berthoud argued that 'just as the Valois monarchy (Francis I and his sons) aimed at extinguishing the historical liberties of the French nation, in the same way the papacy was bent on the total extinction of the liberties of Christian men and women in the Church by making impossible all true preaching of the Word of God. Of course the disappearance of such faithful preaching

is bound to be accompanied by the extinction of those individual and public liberties that can only exist under the over-arching authority of God's Law.' Educated upper classes, nobles, magistrates, lecturers and businessmen saw these issues and embraced the biblical teachings. Some suffered exile, prison or execution for their faith. Out of fear of the consequences the *Nicodemites* kept their faith private and continued to act publicly as 'good Catholics'. For the most part, the private believers worshipping in their unreformed churches failed to reach the mass of the people. This weakness was to have serious effects during the coming years.



Calvin College was founded in 1559 by John Calvin. Boys as young as seven were able to learn Latin, Greek, logic, rhetoric and Calvin's catechism. With the huge influx of French Huguenots after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, Calvin's College played a vital role in their training as pastors, as well as that of many other young men who flocked to Geneva to receive tutelage there. At the time of Calvin's death it boasted fifteen hundred students. It is still used for education today.

Calvin's view of churches and the health of believers

Readers familiar with Calvin's Institutes will know that essentially this work is divided into 4 parts or books. The fourth part is devoted to the subject of the church, its officers, sacraments and discipline in the nourishment of the believer. Calvin begins his treatment with the words, 'Since, however, in our ignorance and sloth⁴ (to which I add fickleness of disposition) we need outward helps to beget and increase faith within us, and advance it to its goal, God has also added these aids that may provide for our weakness. And in order that the preaching of the gospel might flourish, he deposited this treasure in the church. He instituted "pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11) through whose lips he might teach his own; he has furnished them with authority; finally he omitted nothing that might make for holy agreement of faith and for right order. First of all, he instituted sacraments, which we who have experienced them feel to be highly useful aids to foster and strengthen faith.' He points out the dangers that individual private Christians are exposed to if they are not benefiting by these gifts of God in writing.⁵ 'For although God's power is not bound to outward means, he has nonetheless bound us to this ordinary means of teaching. Fanatical men, refusing to hold fast to it, entangle themselves in many deadly snares. Many are led either by pride, dislike, or rivalry to the conviction that they can profit enough from private reading and

meditation; hence they despise public assemblies and deem preaching superfluous. But since they do their utmost to sever or break the sacred bond of unity, no one escapes the just penalty of this unholy separation without bewitching himself with pestilent errors and foulest delusions.'

Calvin warns however, of the disastrous effect of men's disillusionment with the Church caused when true preaching, discipline and proper use of the sacraments disappear.⁶ He writes, 'There is nothing that Satan plots more than to remove and do away with...these marks to remove the genuine distinction of the church. Sometimes he tries by heaping contempt upon them to drag us away from the church in open rebellion. By his craft the pure preaching of the Word has in some ages disappeared: and now with the same malice he is striving to overthrow the ministry, a ministry Christ so ordained in the church that, if destroyed, the upbuilding of the church would fail.' He urges his readers not to be deceived by every congregation that claims the name of church.

We should scrupulously beware of the deception of a church 'devoid of Word and sacraments'. He grants that true churches may differ in non-essentials and may disappoint in behaviour, but urges⁷, 'We must not thoughtlessly forsake the church because of any petty dissensions' or conclude that 'no church exists where there are not perfect purity and integrity of life'. Nonetheless Calvin taught that pastors should diligently strive to reform what is offensive, drawing attention to the problems found in the Corinthian church.

Although these words were written in the sixteenth century, they have great relevance to those of us living in the twenty-first century when we see many despising the need for preaching and discipline in churches on the one hand. On the other hand the cause of the gospel is currently seriously weakened by those who proudly stand aloof from churches for trivial reasons despite the fact that these proclaim the essential truths of the gospel clearly and faithfully. Calvin saw the importance of recognising the enemy and regrouping the people of God.

Contrast between Calvin's initial work in Geneva and his work in Strasburg

As mentioned earlier, Farel had gone to Switzerland as a missionary with a view to establishing a strong French-speaking evangelical church. He did not believe compromise with Rome was possible and fearlessly used every opportunity to denounce the false teaching of that Church. The enthralling account⁸ of the progress of gospel preaching in French-speaking Switzerland was brought to a climax when the people of Geneva accepted

it. Geneva had previously struggled successfully but at great cost of blood and property for its *political* freedom from the Roman Catholic Duke of Savoy.

Originally its proud stubborn people opposed the forthright preaching of Farel, but the quiet, subtle Froment⁹ encouraged by Berne, opened the door as he taught French to the youth of Geneva. He used his classroom to preach and criticise the Catholic Church. The number of evangelical believers in Geneva increased and in August 1535 the political leaders of Geneva gave Farel and other Protestant preachers the authority to celebrate communion in the churches in Geneva and the Roman Catholic mass was banned.

However, Grier¹⁰ pointed out, ‘The Reformed cause was not by any means triumphant. The Genevese desired to be rid of papal abuses, but they were far from desiring with equal ardour to adhere to the new evangelical community formed in the city. There was a party which supported the Reformation merely from patriotic and political motives – out of opposition to bishop and duke.’ Much remained to be done if Geneva were to become the stronghold of the gospel that Farel intended. For the time being the evangelical preachers worked hand in hand with the Council to establish reform. There were no arguments about the distinction between the jurisdiction of the Church and that of the State. At some time however, clarification was needed in making this distinction. This spiritual battle had still to be fought.

A year later Farel heard that Calvin, the author of the Institutes, was passing through Geneva, wishing to quietly pursue his studies in Basle. The powerful, persuasive Farel convicted the unwilling Calvin that if he left Geneva he would be sinning against God. Farel went as far as pronouncing a curse upon the studies of Calvin should he move on to his intended destination of Basle. Calvin bowed in submission to what he perceived was the call of God.

Wylie¹¹ explained the urgency of Farel’s appeal as follows, ‘Farel had begun to feel the difficulty of the task he had in hand. To break these people from the habits of lawless indulgence, nurtured by the contests in which they had won their liberty, would indeed be no easy matter. They would spurn all attempts to coerce them, and yield only to the force of a stronger will, and the sway of a loftier genius. Besides, the highest organising skill was demanded in the man who should set up a moral tribunal in the midst of this licentious city, and found on this unpromising spot an empire which should pervade with its regenerating spirit nations afar off, and generations yet unborn.’ Farel was in no doubt that God

brought Calvin to Geneva. We might not entirely agree with his forceful persuasion of Calvin to submit to his demand of supporting him in the work.

Stickelberger described the population of Geneva as including a mixed multitude including ‘Libertines;¹² those whom travelling preachers had won to Anabaptism; those who in their hearts were still followers of Rome; old Genevans to whom the regimentation of foreign clergymen did not appeal; and all those people who are always present to oppose any existing government.’

The confusion about the boundaries between the authority of the Church and State had to be addressed. Geneva had a Little Council of 25 members including 4 mayors and a Council of Two Hundred that was the legislative body. Calvin drew up a confession of faith and this had to be submitted to this Council for acceptance. The confession of faith commenced, ‘We confess our faith based alone on Holy Scriptures, without any additions from human wisdom; to desire as the only doctrine for our spiritual welfare the Word of God, without diminution or addition, according to the command of our Lord.’ It included theses concerning the Lord’s Supper and the church ban and marriage.

Grier recorded the words of Farel in presenting the document to the Council: ‘Most honoured lords, it is certain that a church cannot be called well-ordered and regulated unless in it the Holy Supper of our Lord is often celebrated, and attended – and this with such good discipline that none dare to present himself at it save holily and with singular reverence. And for this reason the discipline of excommunication, by which those who are unwilling to govern themselves lovingly, and in obedience to the Holy Word of God, may be corrected, is necessary to maintain the church in its integrity.’

The Council accepted this confession. According to the confession of faith, ‘The Little Council had the right to punish any trespass against the law of God; the ministers were to assist the Council therein.’ Calvin and Farel, having obtained the sanction of the law, ‘proceeded against vice, transgressors, and the unworthy’. The godly but aged, blind Courault who was a ‘penetrating’ preacher aided them. Grier described the methods used: ‘To help enforce discipline the ministers requested that there be appointed “certain persons of good life and repute among all the faithful” to keep an eye upon the life and conduct of the citizens. These were to report notable offences to one of the ministers and join with him in fraternal admonition to the offender and as a last resort proceed to excommunication.’ At first the people welcomed their discipline because

rich and influential men were subjected to the authority of the preachers as well as the less prominent members of society.

The services of worship were overcrowded and there were many of these. There were five every Sunday, two on each weekday and these were always at different times, allowing people to attend more than one if they wished. However, opposition to discipline was mounting from some of the citizens. Grier summarised the sources of opposition as being: '(i) those in sympathy with the old religion, (ii) those seeking to be rid of the restraints of the old religion but desirous only of living according to their own pleasure, and (iii) those to whom the demands of God were acceptable only in the measure in which they fitted in with their politics'.

Elections to the Council meant that the Council was no longer supportive of reformation. In fact all four mayors were opposed to the preachers. Anarchy broke out. Stickelberger described how 'loathsome songs were sung under the windows of the preachers, and the Lord's Supper itself was mocked and mimicked'. The Council was taken aback and announced punishments for the antisocial behaviour and insisted on a curfew after 9pm. The general state of turmoil was increased when France indicated its intention to annexe Geneva and the officials of Berne made demands that the Genevan church celebrate communion with unleavened bread. The Libertine party in Geneva, which opposed the Reformers, insisted that Berne's directive be followed, hoping to further discomfort the preachers. The Council insisted that the Lord's Supper be celebrated in Bernese style and Calvin and Farel were asked to give way. They refused and the Council forbade them to occupy the pulpit.

After a restless, noisy night before the day on which the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated (Easter Sunday, 1538) the city was tense. Calvin appeared as usual in the pulpit in the morning, even though many of the listeners were armed. In measured, moderate, careful, reasoned language he said the important question was not whether leavened or unleavened bread be used, but urged that the congregation think of their strife and revolt against the gospel and their defiance against the Word of God. In another church in the city Farel spoke without the same restraint and had to be rescued from his enemies. In the afternoon sermon Calvin had the sad experience of the service being interrupted by a fist fight and seeing drawn swords. Miraculously no blood was shed. The Council met on Easter Monday and declared that because of the disobedience of the preachers in appearing in the pulpit, the preachers (Calvin, Courault and Farel) were to be exiled and had to leave the city within three days.

They parted and Calvin went to Strasburg for three years and became the pastor of a French church there. The congregation was thrilled to have him. Essentially it was made up of those who had been obliged to live in exile from France for the sake of their faith. They were believers and they were open to biblical arguments for holy living. Calvin spent three relatively peaceful years there and had ample opportunity of conversing with the leading Reformers in Strasburg such as Martin Bucer who was held in respect by Reformers throughout Europe. Berthoud¹³ regarded Calvin's fellowship with Bucer as being 'decisive for his understanding of the full implications of the teaching of the Apostles concerning the character and organisation of a church faithful to the New Testament'. During this time he had conversations with other leading Reformers such as Melancthon, which also helped sharpen his mind.

Calvin's later years in Geneva

In Calvin's absence anarchy had broken out in Geneva. The mild, cultured, outwardly tolerant, irreproachable Roman Catholic Cardinal Sadoletto, at the instigation of the pope, tried to exploit the vacuum and anarchy that appeared in Calvin's absence. Sadoletto wrote to the leaders of Geneva about his veneration for Scripture, of Christ as the sole author of salvation and the doctrine of justification by faith. He tried to persuade the people of Geneva that they could be delivered from anarchy by returning to the security of the Church of Rome. Calvin showed his pastoral concern for the people of Geneva by opposing these overtures in writing an open letter. In the intervening years many of Calvin's enemies had been forced to leave the city and the Council pleaded with him to return. He somewhat reluctantly returned, having to be persuaded by others including Farel, but he did so on condition that the Council agree that the church be established 'in accordance with the Word of God'. His first job apart from preaching was to compose the church ordinances and persuade the Little Council and the Council of Two Hundred to vote for their acceptance. Care was taken to make some distinction between secular and spiritual jurisdiction.

Calvin believed the church should have four different types of officers. These were pastor, elder, doctor and deacon. Wylie describes the first three under the heading of elder or presbyter and commented that this group included those who both preach and govern and others who govern but do not preach. Deacons were responsible for administering the financial affairs of the church.

If a pulpit became vacant, a 'venerable company' of city clergy, professors of theology and rural pastors examined ministerial candidates (especially

in their ability to expound Scripture in the presence of magistrates). The company then elected one of the candidates as pastor. If approved by the Council, the result was announced to the congregation concerned. They were invited to send in objections to the Council. Silence was taken as acceptance. A week later the minister was ordained.

The 'venerable company' were also active in promoting and maintaining their own spiritual growth and ability to minister to others. Grier described how they met together weekly on Fridays for discussion of the Scriptures. 'The exegetical exercises at these occasions were open to the public.' Furthermore 'every three months the ministers were required to meet for criticism of one another'. Strict measures were taken against any who refused brotherly rebuke.

Church discipline was administered by the Consistory. This body was composed of ministers in the city and twelve laymen elected by the Little Council but confirmed by the Great Council. The people could object if any of the laymen were judged unsuitable. The Consistory met every Thursday. A person reported as being immoral¹⁴ in any way was summoned to the Consistory, who gently admonished that person and if no amendment of behaviour were promised, and the sinner remained obstinate, he or she was excommunicated. This meant that they lost membership of the church and were therefore barred from communion. There were three reasons why excommunication was practised. In the Institutes, Calvin¹⁵ made it clear that open scandalous sin brought dishonour upon the Church of Christ. Secondly if bad behaviour were tolerated, its effects would spread throughout the church and finally excommunication was viewed as a means of awakening repentance. It was the *Consistory* that Calvin used to separate the ungodly people of Geneva from the church. It should be noted that Calvin believed that the whole church should be involved in the application of excommunication and that its administration should not be left to 'the whim of a few'.

Calvin was concerned that the Lord's Supper should not be 'administered indiscriminately' and that there should be no respect of persons in barring the ungodly from it. Significantly he quoted Chrysostom who in this matter was determined not to fear men of whatever rank: 'I truly would rather give my body to death, and my blood be poured out, than participate in that pollution.'

The battleground was set against the *Libertines* of Geneva. This group included the old families of Geneva who loved 'the high life' and hated the moral constraints of the *Consistory*. They also included a group that wanted to root out the belief in God and overthrow morality¹⁶. A crisis

arose when the dissolute Berthelier, the son of a martyred patriot (who gave his life in the battle for the freedom of Geneva), was brought before the Consistory and was excommunicated. The Council instructed the clergy that he was to be allowed communion. When the day for communion arrived, a packed church was swollen with the presence of armed Libertines. Calvin¹⁷ addressed the tense crowd, 'As we are now about to receive the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, if any one who has been debarred by the Consistory shall approach this table though it should cost my life, I will show myself such as I ought to be.' Having blessed the bread and wine, he was about to distribute them to the congregation, but was disturbed by the Libertines who looked as though they would seize the bread and cup. Calvin quickly covered the elements with his hands and his voice rang round the church, 'These hands you may crush; these arms you may lop off; my life you may take; my blood is yours, you may shed it; but you shall never force me to give holy things to the profane, and dishonour the table of my God.' The congregation was awed in the presence of God. The battle had been won! The time had come to extend the Reformation into France.

¹ Jean-Marc Berthoud, *John Calvin and the Spread of the Gospel in France*, Westminster Conference Papers 1992, pages 10-11

² *Ibid*, page 8

³ *Ibid*, pages 5-6

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Edited by JT McNeil, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 2, Book iv, chapter one, page 1011

⁵ *Ibid*, page 1018

⁶ *Ibid*, page 1025

⁷ *Ibid*, pages 1026-1027

⁸ J A Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, Cassell Petter Galpin & Co, vol 2, pages 230-280

⁹ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, describes Antoine Froment(1508-81) as having a smaller role in bringing about the Reformation in Geneva. He became a pastor at the age of 33 and then took on a dual role of being a shop-keeper and preacher.

¹⁰ W J Grier, Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, December 1964

¹¹ *Ibid*, Wylie, pages 280-285

¹² Emanuel Stickelberger translated by David Georg Gelzer, *John Calvin*, James Clark & Co Ltd

¹³ Berthoud, *op cit*, page 13

¹⁴ Grier wrote that from 1541 disciplinary measures were taken for absence from sermons, criticism of the ministers, use of charms, family quarrels, cases of drunkenness, gambling, dancing, profanity, wife-beating and adultery

¹⁵ John Calvin, *op cit*, pages 1232-3

¹⁶ The universally acclaimed arch-heretic Servetus, who was executed by burning in Geneva saw the Libertines as allies (Wylie, chapter xxi)

¹⁷ Wylie, *op cit*, page 327

Our Good Works

By John Piper

Our only hope for living the radical demands of the Christian life is that God is totally for us now and forever. Therefore, God has not ordained that living the Christian life should be the basis of our hope that God is for us. That basis is the death and righteousness of Christ, counted as ours through faith alone. All the punishment required of us because of our sin, Christ endured for us on the cross. And all the obedience that God required of us, *that he, as our Father, might be completely for us and not against us forever*, Christ has performed for us in his perfect obedience to God.

This punishment and *this* obedience (not all obedience) is completed and past. It can never change. Our union with Christ and the enjoyment of these benefits is secure forever. Through faith alone God establishes our union with Christ. This union will never fail, because in Christ God is for us as an omnipotent Father who sustains our faith and works all things together for our everlasting good. The one and only instrument through which God preserves our union with Christ is faith in Christ – the purely *receiving* act of the soul.

The Place of Our Good Works in God's Purposes

Our own works of love do not create or increase God's being for us a Father committed to bringing us everlasting joy in his presence. That fatherly commitment to be for us in this way was established once for all through faith and union with God's Son. In his Son, the perfection and punishment required of us are past and unchangeable. They were performed by Christ in his obedience and death. They cannot be changed or increased in sufficiency or worth.

Our relationship with God is with One who has become for us an omnipotent Father committed to working all things together for our everlasting enjoyment of him. This relationship was established at the point of our justification when God removed his judicial wrath from us, and imputed the obedience of his Son to us, and counted us as righteous in Christ, and forgave all our sins because he had punished them in the death of Jesus.

Therefore, the function of *our own* obedience, flowing from faith – that is, our own good works produced as the fruit of the Holy Spirit – is to make visible the worth of Christ and the worth of his work as our substitute-punishment and substitute-

righteousness. God's purpose in the universe is not only to be infinitely worthy but to be *displayed* as infinitely worthy. Our works of love, flowing from faith, are the way Christ-embracing faith shows the value of what it has embraced. The sacrifices of love for the good of others show the all-satisfying worth of Christ as the One whose blood and righteousness establishes the fact that God is for us forever.

All the benefits of Christ – all the blessings that flow from God being for us and not against us – rest on the redeeming work of Christ as our Substitute. If God is for us, who can be against us? With this confidence – that God is our omnipotent Father and is committed to working all things together for our everlasting joy in him – we will love others. God has so designed and ordered things that invisible faith, which embraces Christ as infinitely worthy, gives rise to acts of love that make the worth of Christ visible. Thus, our sacrifices of love do not have any hand in establishing the fact that God is completely for us, now and forever. It's the reverse: the fact that God is for us establishes our sacrifices of love. If he were not totally for us, we would not persevere in faith and would not therefore be able to make sacrifices of love.

Our mindset toward our own good works must always be: these works depend on God's being totally for us. That's what the blood and righteousness of Christ have secured and guaranteed forever. Therefore, we

must resist every tendency to think of our works as establishing or securing the fact that God is for us forever. It is always the other way around. Because he is for us, he sustains our faith. And through that faith-sustaining work, the Holy Spirit bears the fruit of love.

Avoiding the Double Tragedy

There would be a double tragedy in thinking of our works of love as securing the fact that God is completely for us. Not only would we obscure the very reason these works exist – namely, to display the beauty and worth of Christ, whose blood and righteousness is the only and all-sufficient guarantee that God is for us – but we would also undermine the very thing that makes the works of love possible – namely, the assurance that God is totally for us, from which flows the freedom and courage to make the sacrifices of love.

Our obedience does not *add to* the perfection and beauty and all-sufficiency of Christ's obedience in securing the reality that God is for us; it *displays* that perfection and beauty and all-sufficiency. Our works of love are as necessary as God's purpose to glorify himself. That is, they are necessary because God is *righteous* – he has an eternal and unwavering commitment to do the ultimately right thing: to make the infinite value of his Son visible in the world.

This material was extracted from the Desiring God messages posted on the internet.

First Chinese Evangelist

Bob Davey

Liang A-fa (1789-1855) was the first Chinese Protestant minister and evangelist. He was ordained by Robert Morrison in 1823. Later he was the first pastor of the Chinese Church in Canton (Guangzhou). To this day he is regarded as one of the most notable Chinese Christians of all time. He willingly suffered much for the cause of the gospel of Christ.

Liang A-fa was born to a farming family in the Ko Ming District to the southwest of Canton in 1789. Coming from a poor family he left the village school at 15 years of age and went to work as a pen-maker and then as an apprentice engraver-printer.

By 1812 Liang A-fa had come into contact with the gospel, when Robert Morrison sought his help in printing the Chinese version of the New Testament which he was in the process of translating. Initially hostile toward the gospel of Christ, A-fa began to show an interest and his understanding grew steadily.

In April 1815, when Rev. William Milne moved to Malacca (Melaka) in Malaysia to continue his missionary work among the expatriate Chinese there and set up a printing press. Liang A-fa went with him to use his printing skills but also to help protect Milne from the ever-increasing suspicions of the Chinese authorities. It was a capital offence to print and distribute Christian books in China as well as to teach foreigners the language. He was baptised by William Milne on 3rd November 1816. He was the second convert in the mission, nine years after the arrival of the pioneer, Robert Morrison, in 1807.

Liang A-fa returned to his home village in 1819 to build a house for his father and also to marry. He had written a tract of thirty-seven pages to explain his Christian beliefs to his clan. It was seized by the police. Before the magistrates A-fa pleaded that the pamphlet exhorted to virtue. But under the law against fraternising with rebels and enemies he was imprisoned, fined, and beaten on the soles of his feet until the blood ran down his legs. His bride price was taken, as also his savings for the house. Even his clothes were confiscated. However, Liang A-fa refused to turn his

back on Christ amid all these pressures, and the marriage took place. Robert Morrison made the observation, 'It is not impossible that this land must be watered with the blood of many martyrs before the Gospel prevails generally.' This indeed has proved to be the case. The marriage was a long and happy one in spite of many enforced separations.

After his release from imprisonment Liang A-fa was sent back to Malacca for safety where he was ordained as evangelist by William Milne in 1821. Whenever he returned to see his wife and family, A-fa continued boldly and fearlessly the work of colporteur and evangelist. His Christian character, understanding and zeal were exemplary. Following the death of William Milne in 1822, Liang A-fa went to Macao (Macau) with his wife and young son to see Robert Morrison and to testify to his wife's conversion to Christ. She and the young son A-de (A-te) were baptised on 20th November 1823. Here was the first Protestant family in China. Before Robert Morrison left for England in December 1823 on a two-year leave of absence, he ordained Liang A-fa as minister of the gospel, in association with the London Missionary Society (L.M.S) and left him in charge of the work of the mission at Macau and Canton (Guangzhou).

Robert Morrison, on his return to China in 1826, reported to the L.M.S, 'Liang A-fa has been most faithful and diligent in the discharge of the important duties with which he has been entrusted. A-fa presented me with a small Chinese volume containing explanatory notes to the Book of Hebrews, also a small essay in favour of the Christian religion entitled *The True Principles of the World's Salvation*. He gave a most interesting account of conversations he had held with his countrymen. One of these took place in a passage boat. A-fa happened to be reading the Evangelist Mark. 'A fellow passenger took up the book and cast his eyes over chapter nine, verse nine, "until the Son of man be risen from the dead". The enquirer asked what the rising from the dead meant. A-fa declared the death and resurrection of Jesus to make atonement for the sins of man, confessed his own faith, and preached salvation for all who would believe on his name. He also spoke of the miracles of mercy done by Jesus. His companion asked if he had seen these miracles with his own eyes. "No" said A-fa. "they are related in the sacred books which were published in the land of Judea, situated in the western world, and many nations believe them to be true." "Have you never read," said the critic, "what the sage Mang-tse said – it would be better for mankind to have no books, than to believe everything contained in books? Although the Western nations believe these books, it is not necessary that we Chinese should believe them. Do you

believe them?" To this A-fa replied, "Although I never saw the things recorded, I most firmly believe the principles and doctrines contained in the Bible. I know that I have been a very wicked man, and if there be no Saviour to make atonement for sin it would be impossible for me to escape the righteous judgment of God." '

In 1828, Liang A-fa opened a small school in his home district. It was not a success and was soon closed because of suspicions and prejudice against foreign ideas being taught. A-fa continued to preach and teach from house to house and distribute literature. All this was done at great risk because Christianity was still outlawed in China.

Two years later in 1830, back in Canton, A-fa saw the conversion of a young printer, Qiu A-gong (Chiu A-kung, Kew A-kang). Together they read through the whole Bible in ten days! They then printed tracts as fast as they could. Some of these were written by A-fa. Supplied with these and the Scriptures, the two men set out on an expedition to win young Chinese literati to Christ. It was a remarkable providence that opened up this amazing opportunity. A-gong had a relative in the Literary Chancellor's retinue which toured the province holding public examinations for literacy and the civil service. Literacy and good prose and poetic style were, and are, highly valued in Chinese culture. A-gong and A-fa obtained permission to join the retinue and hand out literature among candidates leaving the halls. They also distributed literature in the towns along the way, on the four hundred mile trip. Three literati came to faith as a result of this work. Back in Canton they did the same, without permission, hiring coolies to carry the books into the hall and handing them out as fast as they could to twenty thousand students as they left the Imperial Examinations. One candidate who took a set of tracts, including one written by A-fa called *Good Words to Admonish the Age*, and read and thought about them, was a young village school teacher, Hong Xiu-quan (Hung Hsiu-chuan), whose quasi-Christian 'Taiping Rebellion' was to dominate events in China from 1853 to 1864 and which almost unseated the Manchu dynasty.

By 1832, twenty-five years after Robert Morrison's arrival in China, there were still only ten Chinese from the Canton and Macao mission, most of whom had been baptised by Liang A-fa. During this time strong foundations for the future gospel work had been laid with the literature work and the work among expatriates in the East Indies, where there was a handful of professing Christians. The vision of the six foreign missionaries in East Asia – three British, two American and one German –

was the conversion of the whole world to Jesus Christ in accordance with Scripture promise. Their hearts were full of love for the glory of God. They knew they were pioneers, ploughing up virgin ground. It would be left for others to water the seed sown. They also had strong faith to believe God would give the increase of a great harvest for the gospel in China, but in his own good time. Liang A-fa fully entered into this vision.

In 1833 Liang A-fa was publicly denounced as a traitor in a decree, and the 'vile and trashy publications of the outside barbarians' were again denounced and prohibited for printing or sale. Liang A-fa continued his work undaunted and managed to evade arrest for a time. However, the next year saw him betrayed by a false convert who sold A-fa and his family to the authorities. A-fa was arrested at the American mission press at Canton but escaped and fled to the American missionary, Elijah Bridgman, who put him on a ship to Malacca, via Singapore. His family escaped punishment, but A-fa's travelling companion received a hundred lashes to the body and a hundred more to the face. He survived to continue his gospel work with undaunted spirit.

At Malacca all was peaceful. There Liang A-fa struck up a close friendship with Samuel Dyer the printer who encouraged him to write, and who soon reported that A-fa had written nine very good tracts. In addition A-fa had plenty of scope to preach and pastor among the emerging church of Chinese there. Apart from the worries about his family (who were being well looked after back in China), A-fa was happy, seeing the good development of the work in which he had been involved at the beginning.

Apart from one brief surreptitious visit home Liang A-fa was not to be reunited with his family in Canton until 1839, at the dawn of the infamous first 'Opium War' (1839-1842). He did not support this war – 'If Britain wage war, the Chinese will not believe in the Bible nor ever listen to British missionaries.'

Certainly the war added fuel to hatred of the foreigner, especially after the humiliating defeat and the terms of the peace treaty, the first of what the Chinese call 'the unequal treaties'. Missionaries later became known as 'the running dogs of the Imperialists'. This identification of the missionary with official political policies was almost inevitable due to the absolute reliance the authorities had on missionaries as translators during the first half of the nineteenth century.

During the war the leadership of the small group of Christians in Canton, only twelve strong, fell to Liang A-fa and he became the first Chinese Protestant pastor of a church in China. He was left in peace by the authorities because his son Liang A-de was employed by the Imperial Commissioner as a translator. Liang A-fa served this church in Canton until his death.

In 1845 A-fa barely escaped with his life when a mob smashed his rented house and possessions in a Canton suburb. He joined Dr Peter Parker as an evangelist at his hospital in Canton. Dr Peter Parker had started this work in 1836 as first medical missionary to China. He was also American chargé d'affaires in China. The first time Liang preached at Parker's hospital, eighty attended. The next time there were one hundred and eighty. Dr Parker reckoned that in three and a half years over fifteen hundred persons heard the gospel in A-fa's meetings. When the London Missionary Society hospital of 'Merciful Love' was opened in 1848, A-fa, as a LMS worker, transferred there, where he preached daily to congregations of two hundred and fifty persons. But to the end he saw very few outward results from all his many years of effort and suffering for the gospel.

One encouragement A-fa did see was the emergence of a leader for the next generation, Ho Tsun-shin. He was the son of one of A-fa's former printers. A graduate teacher in the Anglo-Chinese College, now transferred to Hong Kong in 1843, Ho could read the Old and the New Testaments in the original Hebrew and Greek and was an eloquent preacher. He became the first pastor of the Chinese church in Hong Kong (now Hop Yat Church on Bonham Road, where there is a marble plaque of him and his wife Lai She).

Liang A-fa died on 12th April 1855 at Honan, a suburb of Canton. On his death-bed he exhorted his son to serve the Lord and held his eight-year old granddaughter's hand and talked about a golden sedan chair coming to carry him to the King's palace.

In 1905 Liang A-fa's remains were reburied at a place of honour in the centre of Canton Christian College campus on Henan Island, which became the Lingnan University, now Zhongshan University.

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Reviews

Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission

Andreas J Kostenberger & Peter T O'Brien

ed D A Carson, NSBT series

IVP 2001, 351pp, pb.

ISBN: 0-85111-519-5

This is another valuable volume in the NSBT series, tracing biblical themes through the Scriptures.

First, the theme of mission is shown from the Old Testament. The covenant with Abraham is seen as of fundamental importance, with the promise for all nations to be blessed through him. However, there is no imperative for Abraham (and his descendants) to engage in active missionary endeavour; rather it is anticipated that the nations will be drawn to Israel and their spiritual light. The Old Testament records how Israel came into contact with other nations, and various individuals such as Ruth the Moabitess were drawn into the covenant community. There is an eschatological hope that Gentile nations will ultimately come to worship the true and living God of Israel.

In Judaism there does not seem to have been a great missionary imperative (in spite of Matthew 23:15). So the missionary activity of the NT church is an innovation brought about through the coming of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Great Commission is obviously foundational: Christ's command to go and make disciples makes mission the primary task of the church, and Luke/Acts give powerful

instruction in and examples of the missionary enterprise. John's Gospel also gives great encouragement to mission, showing that as we proclaim the finished work of Christ we serve a sovereign God and engage in a mission that cannot be thwarted. (Kostenberger has written much on this Gospel elsewhere).

The central figure in the church's mission is of course the apostle Paul, and his ministry is examined at length. His ministry as an apostle was unique, and he self-consciously continued the work of the Servant of the Lord in gathering the Gentiles – notice for example the most significant passage Romans 15:14-33. However, Kostenberger and O'Brien help us to see how Paul drew other believers into the work. Sometimes the argument is used that evangelism and missions are only for those specially called and gifted for this work. But while Paul understood his own unique role, he also encouraged and commended the work of mission generally amongst the churches. For example, in Philippians 1:5 he commends the believers' partnership in the gospel, and it is clear that this is not just financial help and prayers, but their own evangelistic outreach. They were engaged in the 'same struggle' 1:30, holding fast the word of life 2:16, proclamation of the gospel to outsiders 1:27, 30, and suffering for the gospel's sake 1:30, 4:14-15 (p.194).

Paul also presented himself as an example for other believers. Kostenberger and O'Brien highlight

1Corinthians 11:1 in this regard, seeing it in the context of seeking the good of others – especially their salvation – 1 Corinthians 10:33. His exhortation to the Ephesian church to be ready for spiritual battle by having ‘feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace’ and his commendation of wielding the sword of the Spirit are both seen as indicating a willingness to share the gospel.

Practically Paul’s encouragements about the advance and progress of the gospel are a great stimulus to evangelistic and missionary activity. We do well to encourage the churches that even when local evangelistic endeavour bears little evident fruit, yet there is great advance in other parts of the world.

There is much helpful and encouraging material in this volume, which is warmly commended. Bill James.

The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s grand narrative

Christopher Wright

IVP 2006, 581pp, hc

ISBN:978-1-84474-152-6

This is not just another Biblical Theology of mission. Wright’s objective is more ambitious; it is to demonstrate that ‘mission is what the Bible is all about’. Immediately we might object that surely all the Scriptures speak of Christ, and he is their central theme. But we are reminded that Jesus expounded the Scriptures on the road to Emmaus to show that they speak not only of him, his death and resurrection, but also that the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations. In other words, not only the person and work of Christ

but also his proclamation to the nations are central to the Bible’s message.

A ‘missional hermeneutic’ can then be developed, in other words reading and understanding the Bible in light of the fact that mission is its central message. This is helpful, in that we don’t just see evangelism and mission as an obedient response to a single command of Christ (the Great Commission). Rather, we see the whole of Scripture as describing the reality of God, his world, his saving work, and his people, which then forms the basis for our own experience of salvation and of proclaiming the good news to others.

Having made a case for his approach, Wright then proceeds in Part 2 of the book to consider the God of Mission. The Old Testament is robustly monotheistic; the Lord is the sovereign God of all the nations of the world. Then in the New Testament the focus is on the Lord Jesus Christ and he is presented as YHWH the One True God. So once again the imperative is to make God known as the Lord. Richard Bauckham is quoted approvingly, ‘The mission to the nations in the New Testament also is directed to their acknowledgement and worship of the True God even before it is directed to the salvation that accompanies this’ (p.129).

The focus of Part 3 is the People of Mission. The covenant with Abraham is seen as foundational, with its purpose to bring blessing to the nations. While Abraham was taken out of his situation of idolatry in Ur and set apart for God, yet his separation was with the purpose of being a blessing to all nations. Similarly Israel was God’s personal possession, set apart and distinct from

the idolatry of the Canaanites, but again with the purpose of being a light to the world. While Wright affirms that election is to salvation, he asserts that it is first of all election to mission. And that mission must be embraced; he highlights Abraham's obedience to God's command to 'Go!' as the means by which Abraham becomes the instrument of God's purposes in mission. So in a New Testament age the Great Commission provides us with a parallel challenge.

The Exodus is seen as the great defining event of God's saving a people for himself. It is noted that Israel's redemption was holistic, that is it affected their spiritual, political, economic and social experience. This does not mean that we should adopt a political or social interpretation as in liberation theology, or prosperity theology. But equally we are not to regard salvation as only providing a 'ticket to heaven' affecting only our 'spiritual' experience. Rather we are to be a transformed people who have concern for issues of justice, physical or social needs all around us. The salvation of God is ultimately comprehensive, and will involve the restoration of the whole creation order in the new heavens and the new earth. So it is right that today we live as the people of God who have a concern for the suffering and injustice of the present world. Wright is most insistent that the mission of the church must be both evangelism and social action, and he is reluctant to assign evangelism the priority in the partnership.

The fourth and final part of the book considers the arena of God's mission, namely the earth. All the nations are

included in God's purpose of salvation. Wright points towards the ultimate purpose of redeeming all creation. He therefore argues that ecological projects are also part of Christian mission, even describing 'Creation care' as a 'prophetic opportunity for the church' (p.416).

In response there are a number of questions raised by Wright's approach. First of all the question must be asked whether it is legitimate to identify mission as the overall, overarching structure of Scripture. Wright expresses it like this: 'The whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation' (p.51). Could he not have said that all of this is 'for God's glory'? Could he not have included some reference to the centrality of Christ? There is much God-centred material in this book, and I would not want to be churlish, but I was sometimes left with the feeling that the focus was so much on the 'purpose' that the central 'person' of God himself was sidelined. This was evident, for example, when the cross was described as '...the unavoidable cost of God's mission' (p.312). Is that all that we can say about the cross? Is it even the greatest thing we can say about the cross? Was it just an unfortunate means to the necessary end of achieving God's mission? Surely the glory of God is revealed at the cross; this is at the very heart of his purpose, and here are God's justice, love and grace most clearly revealed.

Next is Wright's very strong advocacy of holistic mission. There is much good material here, and we certainly want to avoid a 'super-spiritual' approach which

is unconcerned for physical and social needs, or for consistent discipleship in every area of life. But when the point is pushed even to insisting that ecological work is Christian mission, and that we should not insist on a 'primary place' for church planting or evangelism, then we have to question whether the balance is correct. Once again we return to questions about the fundamental thesis: is it correct to describe every aspect of Christian life and discipleship as 'mission'? I am called to worship God, to serve him, to be obedient and Christlike in every sphere of life. All of these activities may make an impact on the world around, both directly and indirectly, but are they all 'mission' in the same sense as church planting and evangelism?

It would be easier to accept the emphasis on holistic mission if we were presented with a robust theology of sin and salvation. Sadly this is lacking. In such a substantial volume on the subject of mission we might have expected some serious treatment of the cross; in other words, what is the central problem of the human condition and how does God act in Christ to bring salvation? In the current climate of evangelicalism when justification and substitutionary atonement are widely questioned and a 'Christus Victor' model of salvation is promoted, these are matters that cannot be taken for granted. In particular Wright's interpretation of salvation in the Exodus raises questions. He maintains that Israel was not being rescued from their own sin at all, but from the sin of those oppressing them. He then goes on to point to the NT fulfilment of salvation in Christ which triumphs over the principalities and

powers which hold us in bondage. But all of this forgets the Passover. The point is surely that God was judging both the Egyptians and the Israelites; the difference was that the Israelites were provided with a substitute to bear the wrath on their behalf – namely the Passover lamb. In the NT the notion of the breaking of the grip of the 'principalities and powers' is inseparable from the forgiveness of our sins; the chains by which we are held in Satan's thrall are the guilt of our sins and the threat of God's wrath against us (Colossians 2:13-15). The defeat of evil powers cannot be divorced from the atoning sacrifice for sin.

Wright does argue for the importance of a robust biblical doctrine of sin (p.433) but it is in the context of seeing sin in the framework of all personal and economic relationships rather than just individual human wrongdoing. One might have expected, then, a direct approach to the subject of sin in the issue of HIV/AIDS which is presented as a major example of an opportunity for holistic mission. Eight key points are given to outline a Christian response; they range from compassionate care, through education and counselling, through to sensitive evangelism. All of these are commendable, and it is true that there is a multitude of innocent victims. But for all the emphasis on prevention and tackling the causes of disease, there is no mention of moral instruction regarding sexual behaviour.

In conclusion this substantial volume includes much helpful and stimulating material. But I am left with a number of concerns, and some questions as to whether the overall thesis hits the target.
Bill James.

**Salvation belongs to our God:
Celebrating the Bible's Central Story**

Christopher Wright

IVP 2008, 208pp, pb.

ISBN: 978-1-84474-243-1

This is not just an abbreviated version of Chris Wright's larger work, but provides helpful insight in a much more widely accessible format. It is part of the 'Global Christian Library' series, intended to bring global insights to theological and biblical themes.

Wright takes as his starting point Revelation 7:10, and seeks to unpack the great theme 'Salvation belongs to our God'. He begins by exploring what is meant by 'salvation' and shows how that refers to both physical and spiritual rescue both in the Old Testament and in the New. But primarily the theme is one of salvation from sin.

The author of salvation is always God alone (salvation belongs to our God). Wright pushes this point, and insists that it is not just that God is a deity who saves from time to time, but rather that salvation speaks of his very nature. In other words salvation is inseparable from his own identity. Put another way, salvation consists in coming to know God. (A point well made by John Piper 'God is the Gospel'). Enjoying salvation entails belonging to God in covenant relationship. Our relationship with God is then in turn with the purpose of becoming a blessing to others, cf. the Abrahamic covenant (as might be expected for the people who belong to a saving God).

As salvation belongs only to the One True God, salvation through other religions is rejected. However, Wright is

inclusivist, that is to say he believes it is possible for some to be saved through Christ without ever having heard of him or having consciously repented and put faith in him.

A God-centred understanding of salvation means that Wright is always critical of 'prosperity theology' and also a 'Jesus-will-meet-your-needs' approach to evangelism. Rather he reminds us that we are called to be 'witnesses' ie proclaimers of God and what he has accomplished in Christ. Most of all, he insists on the centrality of the proclamation of the cross as the confident declaration that sin and evil have been defeated and the day of God's salvation has arrived. *Bill James.*

**The Dawkins Letters – Challenging
Atheist Myths.**

David Robertson

Christian Focus 2007 143 pages £4.00
ISBN 978-1-84550-261-4

Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* which appeared in 2006 was written with the clear purpose of converting theists into atheists (p.141). It is not a considered scientific study but rather a passionate and emotional attack on anyone who believes in God, especially Christians. Dawkins and his friends are deeply worried about the 'recent trend in the Church of England to take religion seriously again', with reference to the growing numbers and influence of conservative evangelical Anglicans and the increasing involvement of evangelical Christians in the public arena in the United States (p.63). Dawkins' fellow zealot for the cause of atheism 'Sam Harris' produced in the USA his own Darwinian evangelistic

tract *Letters to a Christian Nation*. American Christian Douglas Wilson produced an able response to Harris in *Letters from a Christian Citizen* (2007). In the UK there have been three main works produced as Christian responses to the Dawkins' volume. As expected Anglican Christian Alistair McGrath, an Oxford professor, produced a work on this subject *The Dawkins Delusion* (2007) following on from his earlier work *Dawkins' God* (2005) which is a fuller critique of Dawkins' thought as expressed in a number of his previous books. Andrew Wilson who serves at King's Church in Eastbourne has produced a more popular Christian response in his Kingsway title *Deluded by Dawkins?* (2007) and David Robertson, minister of St Peter's Free Church of Scotland, Dundee, has produced *The Dawkins Letters*.

In contrast to the ugly and confrontational style of *The God Delusion* Robertson has written a carefully considered series of ten 'Letters' addressing myths promulgated by Dawkins and his fellow atheists. The ten myths are those of the Higher Consciousness; Godless Beauty; Atheistic Rationality and Tolerance; the Cruel Old Testament God; the Science/Religion Conflict; the Created God and the Uncreated Universe; the Inherent Evil of Religion; Godless Morality; the Immoral Bible; Religious Child Abuse; followed by a final letter to the reader entitled: Why Believe? The style of Robertson's book is popular but his arguments are undergirded by references to weighty academic texts to which he refers readers who wish for more information. The breadth of Robertson's reading is exceptional and those readers of this review who have read both the

Dawkins and Robertson books will quickly discern that only one of the two men actually understands the subjects covered in their books. It was of real concern to a number of respondents on Dawkins' website that Robertson had produced such a well-argued and considered response to *The God Delusion*.

For ministers who wish to commend to their congregation one easy to read work on this subject that is relatively inexpensive to purchase, the Robertson book is the best on the market. It goes beyond the Science/ Religion debates to address much broader issues of the credibility of belief in God and the coherence of a Reformed understanding of the Christian faith in the modern world. *Brian Talbot, minister of Broughty Ferry Baptist Church.*

'At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word'
Andrew Fuller as an Apologist,
Volume 6, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought*, Michael A G Haykin (ed.), Paternoster, Carlisle 2004, 255pp. ISBN 1-84227-171-7 £19.99

In this volume a series of essays on Fuller's life and ministry explore the significance of the work of this influential Baptist minister. Peter Morden provides a first rate biographical sketch of Fuller's life and work. He has already produced a major book on Fuller in this series in 2003 and is well placed to evaluate the increasing amount of studies in this field. He also contributes the chapter on Fuller as an Apologist for Missions. Gerald Priest offers a thorough examination of the contribution made by this theologian to the controversy over Hyper-Calvinism and the 'Modern Question', and

provides a reliable path through the extensive secondary literature. Curt Daniel in a short chapter considers Fuller's discussion of Antinomianism. His previous work in this field ensures a clear grasp of the issues raised. Clint Sheehan evaluates Fuller's defence of Calvinistic opinions against Arminianism. He makes the important point that Fuller never wrote a treatise on this subject, and suggests that other topics had a higher priority for him, such as rebutting the arguments in favour of Hyper-Calvinism. Michael Haykin produced two of the chapters, Fuller's response to Deism and his contribution to the Sandemanian Controversy, both thorough and convincing treatments of these subjects. Tom Nettles provided a lucid exploration of Fuller's contest with Socinianism and Barry Howson did likewise for his consideration of Universalism. Robert Oliver addressed the exchanges between Fuller and Abraham Booth providing much needed clarity over their exchanges.

This book is an excellent addition to this series and advances our understanding of the opinions of this distinguished theologian. *Brian Talbot.*

True Confessions: Baptist Documents in the Reformed Family, James M Renihan, Owensboro, Kentucky: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2004, ISBN-13 978-0-9760039-1-5, 294pp., soft cover spiralbound.

Did you know that some of the most significant differences between the 1689 Confession and the Westminster Confession occur with reference to the doctrine of God, revelation and the incarnation? Did you know that the 1689 Confession does not teach that divine

truth can be found in the 'good and necessary consequence' of Scripture, as the Westminster Confession had put it? Did you know that the 1689 Confession includes the imputation of Christ's active and passive righteousness as an element of justification, but that the Westminster Confession does not? Did you know that the 1689 Confession moved back from the Westminster Confession's teaching on reprobation? Or that the 1689 Confession removes most references to the 'covenant of works', all reference to the religious duties of the magistrate, the Westminster Confession's teaching on engagement and divorce, and the Westminster Confession's forbidding of private communion?

In what must be a candidate for the book of the year, James Renihan, a professor in the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies at Westminster Seminary California, has prepared an incredibly thorough study of the origins of four seminal Calvinistic Baptist documents – the documents best known as the 1644 Confession, the 1689 Confession, the Baptist Catechism and the Orthodox Catechism. Each of these texts is presented in a single column, with earlier documents in columns alongside, allowing the reader to easily identify changes across the tradition of Reformed confessional texts. The whole book is full of surprises, but effectively demonstrates that the Calvinistic Baptist confessional and catechetical documents emerge from the mainstream of English Reformed life. This is an outstanding work that should be carefully studied by everyone with an interest in Puritan theology and its contemporary application.

*Crawford Gribben,
Co Laois, Ireland.*

The Plight of Zimbabwe

Much intercession has ascended to the throne of grace for Zimbabwe where there is increasing suffering. These prayers have not been answered in the way we expected, but we have to accept that God is working out his purposes. The economic melt-down in Zimbabwe continues. The AIDS catastrophe is similar to that of other southern African countries. The economic collapse is traumatic with an estimated 260,000% annual rate of inflation. The break down of health services is tragic. The average life expectancy of men has been reduced to 34 and for women to 37.

The recent elections were ludicrous because millions of Zimbabweans who would vote against the 84 year-old Mugabe have fled the country. No one can say for sure how many Zimbabweans have fled the country but it is thought to be over three million with most of these in South Africa. Those who remain live in a country under the tyranny of the ruling party. The opposition party clearly won the election despite massive election rigging and intimidation.

The Daily Telegraph, April 3, 2008, records the misrule of Mugabe. Here is a short extract: 'In the 1970s, he commanded a rebel army that murdered thousands of innocent civilians, singling out black villagers as often as white farmers. Dozens of his own commanders were also jailed and tortured on suspicion of disloyalty. Yet his greatest crimes came after he won power in 1980. The massacres which took place in the Matabeleland region of south-west Zimbabwe between 1982 and 1987 form an indelible scar on Mr Mugabe's rule.' His attitude is a tribal one in which opposition or criticism is not to be tolerated.

'The violence began when he tried to secure his grip on power by crushing his black opponents. Joshua Nkomo the leader of the Zapu party, was the key rival. Using the presence of armed dissidents as an excuse, Mr Mugabe deployed a new military unit, the Fifth Brigade, to Zapu's stronghold in Matabeleland. This arid area is the home of Zimbabwe's minority Ndebele people. Here, the Fifth Brigade promptly unleashed a brutal terror campaign, burying decomposing bodies down mine shafts. Investigators later compiled a meticulous report, *Breaking the Silence*, that recorded the atrocities of mind-numbing horror.' (The Fifth Brigade was trained by North Koreans). To the crime committed in Matabeleland must be added the rendering homeless of 700,000 in the township demolitions in 2005.

The Daily Telegraph, April 9, reports that following the refusal to publish the recent election results a new round of oppression has begun. There were approximately 4,000 white farmers who helped make Zimbabwe the bread basket of Southern Africa, but forced land expropriations of the past several years reduced

their numbers to around 300. Now many of these last remaining farmers are being evicted, further destroying the remaining commercial production of food and dairy products.

Ezekiel chapter 34 is the key to understanding Zimbabwe

“The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.” ’

Such deliverance is awaited. In the meantime the grim reality is that a self-serving regime is firmly in place, a regime that knows only one response to defeat and that is violent subjugating of opposition. Mugabe and his Politburo have been shown on TV. The filming shows people in ruling positions who use the system for their own advantage, psychopaths who are self-servers. It reminds us that when Stalin was applauded for a speech the camp followers clapped on and on because it was dangerous to be seen as the first one to stop clapping.

The situation in Zimbabwe reminds us of Hitler who never ceased even to the very end of his life to pull down his own nation in ruins around himself. He was destitute of compassion or concern for the lives of his own people. A similar situation pertains in Burma where a corpus of military leaders rejected the democratic process and placed Aung San Suu Kyi (the leader of the winning party by a long way) under house-arrest. That military junta has ruled only for themselves ever since. Many were killed in the recent uprising led by Buddhist monks. Opposition was ruthlessly stifled.

Two temptations can take hold of us. The first is resentment (fretting) and the second is despair. Psalm 37 deals with both of these. That psalm forbids fretting. 'Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.' The psalmist goes on to say, 'I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a green tree in its native soil, but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him he could not be found' (verses 35-36). The AV reads, 'I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree, Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea I sought him, but he could not be found.' This wicked man was firmly and deeply established like a green bay tree which is continually green and flourishing even in the winter season. Yet 'he was gone in an instant like a tree blasted and blown down, or cut off, and rooted out, and carried away in a moment. There was no monument or remainder of him left' (Matthew Poole).

When wicked tyrants rule and prevail over long periods of time the second temptation after fretting is despair. Psalm 37:18 assures us that 'the days of the blameless are known to the LORD, and their inheritance will endure forever'. What is a long time to us when tribulation prevails takes on a new measurement when it is compared with eternity. The teaching of Psalm 37 is similar to that of Psalm 73 where the psalmist was vexed and fretting over the fact that the wicked prospered and the righteous suffered. But when he entered the sanctuary he saw everything in the light of eternity. He saw the awesome final destiny of the wicked (Ps 73:17).

We must remember the words of our Lord that in this world we will experience tribulation but we must be of good cheer because he has overcome the world (Jn 16:33). We know that in spite of grievous hardship in Zimbabwe the churches there for the most part are in good spiritual shape. However Mugabe's regime has successfully neutralised the prophetic voice of the Church, Evangelicals included, by encouraging division. We in the West live in a secular atmosphere in which material prosperity and happiness in this world are everything. Therefore it is especially scandalous when we see poverty and physical suffering. In Zimbabwe and in Burma the Lord's people for the most part have their priorities right. They are poor and struggle to survive but are spiritually rich. Sufferings and afflictions are used by the Lord in his providence for our growth in holiness. A spiritual church with a testimony of patience and perseverance in Zimbabwe is to the glory of God. They pray as we do for divine intervention but sometimes answers take a very long time. We must never forget the text, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord' (Rom 12:19).

Note *Gratitude is expressed to Patrick Johnstone, who lived in Zimbabwe for a number of years, for checking and improving this article. See News for an update on OPERATION WORLD.*

Burkina Faso

Pastor David Vaughn of France writes: I was in Burkina Faso teaching courses to about 25 pastors or men training for the pastorate. It was a wonderful time and the men were very receptive to the teaching given. My friend Josias Sanogo, who runs the Logos Bible Institute, which is a Pentecostal institute, gives me complete liberty to teach according to my Reformed convictions. There were men from ten denominations present, including everything from Pentecostals to Mennonites to the national director of Campus Crusade for Christ. The Logos Institute is the only one in Burkina Faso that is presently attracting men from outside its denominational ties. That is due to the seriousness of the program of teaching there. Josias, who is part of the Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Burkina Faso, is finishing his master's degree at the Reformed Faculty of Theology at Aix-en-Provence, France. He is a young man of sterling character and is growing by leaps and bounds in his understanding of biblical truth. He told me that recently he taught a course on Church History. At the end of the course one of the pastors, a man who has been in the ministry for many years, came to him and said that he needed to repent of many things he had believed and practised during his pastoral ministry. He lamented that he had not studied Church History sooner and said he realised that many churches in Burkina Faso have today fallen into errors that the Church has already faced and corrected in its past history.

Please pray for these men. Some of them said during the course in November that what I was teaching them would mean, if they accepted it, a radical transformation in their ministries because of the way that it would change their view of what a true Christian is and who the true Christians are in their churches. A couple of weeks ago I sent to each of these pastors a copy of a new book written by Pastor Olivier Favre which is a popular level Systematic Theology book based on the 1689 Baptist Confession. Please pray that this book will be, in God's hands, a great blessing and help to them.

South Africa

An African Pastors' Conference took place in East London on 3rd and 4th April organised by pastors Boyce Seleni and Angus McKee. This was the first APC in East London – indeed one of the pastors, who had been in ministry for over 30 years, gratefully commented that this was the first local conference in all his time as pastor which was aimed at meeting his needs.

The theme was 'The local church – its nature and its leadership'. Angus McKee, pastor of Beacon Hill Baptist Church in East London, opened with an exposition of Acts 6: 1-7 on 'Keeping the focus on the Church'. Irving Steggle, pastor of Birchleigh Baptist Church, Kempton Park, spoke twice on 'The nature of the local church' and Ronald Kalifungwa, pastor of Lusaka Baptist Church, Zambia, spoke three times on 'Leadership in the local church'.

Some of the 25 or so pastors who attended came from considerable distances, a few travelling in daily and others staying the night. Many were pastoring in lonely rural situations and valued the fellowship and help in teaching – they were particularly keen to apply the truths taught in their situations. The vibrant question sessions after the main talks and in the formal Q and A session showed the real problems being faced on the ground. It was especially moving to hear of those pastors who were not allowed to lead in their churches because of powerful figures who wanted to retain control. We all longed for biblical churches and to be able to support each other in fellowship to attain this.

We thank God for the provision of a good meeting place in the church in Duncan Village, where we were well fed. The conference was provided free of charge to delegates, thanks to generous sponsorship for the catering by Sola 5. The free books for the pastors could not be available at the conference but are being sent on. We are grateful for the sponsoring publishing houses and churches overseas.

Turning from East London in the Cape to Pretoria we learn from Antipas Reformed Baptist Church that Nico Van der Walt left the congregation at the beginning of this year for Ceres in Cape Province where he is preaching and teaching amongst the Afrikaans-speaking people of the Cape. Jacobus de Koning was called as the new full-time pastor at Antipas. He will give his final answer to the call within the next few weeks. Ten elders serve with him on the pastoral team. Please pray for them in this new situation for wisdom and guidance.

The membership is still more or less at 200 plus. There are of course always

people moving and immigrating to other places. However the Lord is still adding new members on a regular basis. A man who did not attend church for the last 20 years, in whose life God has done a wonderful work, is one of the new applicants for membership – he found the church on the website and is overflowing with joy and gratitude for his new spiritual home.

There are a lot of vibrant activities and ministries in the church. During the week various cell groups come together – everyone with their unique way of fellowship and outreach. There is ministry in hospitals and prisons and outreach to Stalshoogte – a block of flats with very poor and needy people. Here we reach out by both preaching and practical help, like food supplies. Then of course there is our literature outreach where tens of thousands of *Antipas Heralds* and sermons are being sent out monthly all over South Africa and the rest of the world. Please pray for Antipas. We are entering a new phase in the history of the church, with all the problems but also with all the excitement that goes hand in hand with such a new phase. Please pray for love and unity amongst members and leaders.

Algeria

Police ordered two Algerian churches to cease activity in March, the latest in a series of ten church closures and further court cases against foreign and local Christians. In Tizi Ousou, 100 kilometers (62 miles) east of Algiers, security police on 9 March notified pastor Salah Chalah to close his 1,200 member church. Police issued notice to a second pastor, Mustapha Krireche, to close down his church in Tizi Ouzou's Nouvelle Ville

district. 'They are trying to establish a minority, which might give foreign powers a pretext to intervene with Algeria's domestic affairs,' Religious Affairs Minister Bu 'Abdallah Ghoulamullah told reporters. Written police orders called on both churches to 'cease all activity until [their] situation could be regularised and brought into conformity' with a 2006 religion law governing non-Muslim worship.

Passed two years ago, the law forbids attempts to convert Muslims to other religions and bans the production of media intended to 'shake the faith of a Muslim'.

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Laos

Laos Arrests 58 Christians, Sentences Church Leaders

Laotian officials arrested 15 Hmong Christian families in Bokeo district on 22 February, a day before a court sentenced nine area Hmong church leaders to 15 years in prison for conducting Christian ministry and meetings that had grown beyond acceptable levels for Communist officials. The day before the sentencing, Laotian authorities arrived in Ban Sai Jarern village in Bokeo district with six trucks in which they hauled away eight Christian families. Authorities also arrested at least seven families from Fai village three miles away. 'It seems they are rounding up all Hmong Christians from Vietnam to send them back to Vietnam,' said one Christian source. 'What will happen to them is greatly feared and unknown.'

The nine church leaders sentenced for conducting prominent Christian ministry and meetings had been rounded up during a police and military sweep of suspected rebels last July that left at least 13 innocent Christians dead.

Zimbabwe

Religion Today reports that eight church leaders, including a blind pastor, were arrested during a church meeting and detained in police cells in Kadoma, in what is seen as continuing persecution of the church by the ZANU PF government according to a February report. One pastor is reported as saying: 'The meeting was for Christians who felt they cannot remain silent while the country burns, with companies closing, inflation (26,000%) hitting everyone hard and the majority of people suffering.'

OPERATION WORLD

Patrick Johnstone was the leader behind six editions of OPERATION WORLD from 1974 up to the most recent edition published in 2001. Jason Mandryk who co-authored the 2002 edition is now the leader who, assisted by a research team, is planning to have the next edition ready by September 2009. This very valuable project is worthy of our prayers.

Patrick is involved in research with John Robb, of the Unreached Peoples Track of the AD2000 and Beyond Movement. He also works closely with Dr David Barrett in researching the reachedness of every ethnic group on earth and in the preparation of the next World Christian Encyclopedia. Further details can be found through Google. Type in Patrick Johnstone.

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