

REFORMATION TODAY



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NUMBER 12

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Family Conference

THE FACILITIES OF THE LARGE OLD MANSION AND MODERN EXTENSIONS AT Pilgrim Hall proved ideal in every respect for the comfortable accommodation of about 80 adults and 50 children at the first Carey family conference.¹ A striking feature of this week long gathering was the attention given to the spiritual nurture of the children. Russell Williams and John Davison assisted the main speakers in giving an Old and New Testament survey to the 7-11 year olds, covering Creation, the Exodus, the Prophets, the Life of Christ, and the Early Church. It is to be hoped that the material prepared for these will stimulate the emergence of more books for children, since the need is still very great in this area. Virtually nothing has been produced by writers of free grace persuasion on this side of the Atlantic. The main sessions began with a paper on the "Pilgrim Fathers" by Douglas Jones of Trinity Baptist Church, Gloucester. Though the more romantic parts of this story are well known, Mr. Jones high-lighted the less obvious facts about the principles of these men. They were motivated by a strong opposition to the idea of the state church and sacral society. Refuge was taken in Holland where a church and publishing house were formed. From Leyden they began to set their sights upon the new world.

In the paper which followed, Bernard Honeysett, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Tenterden, outlined some practical points on the local church. He described Arminian churches as being mainly easy-going, light and tending to easy-believism. The people gave the impression of being shallow, worldly, and lacking in godly fear. Social activities predominated. Hyper-Calvinist churches, on the other hand, produced people who were introspective, restricted, and tending to isolationism. Preaching centred on experimental themes, and there was no effort to reach the unconverted. Calvinist or Reformed churches, he said, avoided these serious errors and sought to develop systematic and expository preaching, combining doctrine, experience and practice and evangelism in a balance that was scriptural.

Evening sessions at the conference were devoted to preaching, visitors from local churches coming in to fill the new auditorium at Pilgrim Hall. Wayne Mack preached with convicting effect on the doctrines of Heaven and Hell. He also dealt with the subject of the Sabbath in two very profitable sessions. He proved from Scripture that the Sabbath is a

¹ Pilgrim Hall has been booked for a similar conference next year. The staff at Pilgrim Hall are evangelical and it is not surprising that already this new centre is very much booked up, but not so during mid-week times. We mention this should others be on the lookout for centres.

(Continued on inside back cover)

Editorial

WRITING IN "THE WITNESS", WHICH IS PROBABLY THE BEST KNOWN monthly circulating among the Open Brethren, a correspondent deploring dogmatic insistence upon dispensationalism among the Brethren, declares:

Elders of assemblies have a clear responsibility fully and scripturally to instruct their flocks and I fear they are not all doing so, largely because of their own limited acquaintance with the teaching of Scripture.¹

A lack of teaching and doctrine exposes young believers to every wind of doctrine. Recently an Assembly lost thirty young people to neo-pentecostalism. It is sincerely hoped that the article in this issue, prepared by those who can speak from experience and who have fellowship with those in the Assemblies, will be widely read and result in closer fellowship especially with those Brethren who love the doctrines of grace.

Wayne Mack is welcomed as an associate editor. He specialises in the history of Calvinistic Baptists in the U.S.A. We pray that his ministry at the third Carey Conference to be held at Liverpool University from the 9th to 11th next January will be used to edify, as was the case at Pilgrim Hall (see cover). Conferences in which there is a high standard of teaching (see details of the forthcoming Puritan Conference, page 11) are a source of spiritual renewal, especially for weary ministers. Knowledge and wisdom gleaned from a study of Church history and biography are helpful, especially when there is opportunity for discussion. The Carey Conference believes in maintaining evangelical unity and those who attend express this in many different ways. A wider unity should never impede progress in working out the implications of the doctrines of grace within the context of local churches in which discipline is maintained in respect of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper. It would be tragic if evangelicals repeated the mistake of the liberals in becoming doctrinally supine and flabby. The church issue is the central issue of our times, being brought about by pressures because of the Ecumenical movement and by the disintegration of old denominational structures. Those in the ruins who think to build on minimal statements of faith may well experience frustration.

(Continued on p. 29)

¹ Sept. 1972, p. 346.

With deep sorrow we learn as we go to press of the home call in his late sixties of Pastor Tom Daniel, our agent in the south of America.

John Davison our associate editor in Scotland is interviewed by one of the editorial team. The result has been perused, and approved by an experienced brother who spent over twenty years in fellowship with the Open Brethren. The views expressed are personal and frank with the sole purpose of being constructive. We, too, have our traditional ways. When we cease to be willing to examine these with improvement in view it will be a serious sign of declension.

Reformation and the Brethren

It is often said, John, that generalisations about the Brethren are invariably wrong because the movement varies so much from place to place. Does this rule our discussion out of court from the start?

Although the Brethren do vary considerably there are certain overall characteristics and tendencies, some of which are derived from the original thesis of the Brethren, and others which have developed and become established traditions. It is not always easy to disentangle these in the minds of some Brethren, but to do so is, I believe, the key to Scriptural reformation among them. Every church needs constant Scriptural reformation; when we feel we have "arrived" in matters of doctrine or practice we are in fact on the way out.

As the movement split into two camps at an early date it would perhaps be easier to keep to a consideration of the Open Brethren, or Christian Brethren as they increasingly prefer to be termed. An estimated 100,000 of these in the British Isles alone, to say nothing of the large following throughout the world, calls for more than casual interest.

Not all our readers know about the beginnings of the Brethren movement. Could you say a little about this and how they have grown to the present day?

The Brethren movement commenced in the late 1820's with a fairly general discontent, mainly amongst Anglicans, over the doctrine of the Church and especially over the problem of fellowship between believers. We have little idea today of the height and impregnability of denominational barriers in the early 19th century. The evangelical awakening of the previous century was over, the denominations were busy consolidating their respective positions, and sectarian strife was rife. Contemporary evangelicalism runs across the denominations and is manifested by the

proliferation of interdenominational societies. In the 1820's these hardly existed. Added to this there were, during this period, a large number of secessions amongst the Anglican clergy. Some, like J. C. Philpot, found refuge amongst the nonconformists, while J. N. Darby and others took up a new non-denominational position in which all true believers, without distinction, were treated as "brethren". The first such "assembly" was formed in Dublin in 1830, closely followed by the Plymouth assembly which at one time had 3,000 in fellowship. In essence this early Brethren movement was an answer to one of the burning issues of our day—true Christian unity. Their thesis was that all and only true Christians have a place in the local church, and that each church is an independent body ruled directly by Christ as the Head.

Other factors also contributed to the early Brethren position; notably a strong movement in favour of simplicity and spirituality in worship; an anti-clerical reaction against the increasing priestcraft of the emerging Tractarian movement; and a universal enthusiasm for the pre-millennial scheme of prophecy.

From the beginning the movement has been missionary minded in the broadest sense. Anthony Norris Groves, one of the early leaders, was a missionary in India, and up to the present day the Brethren have been to the forefront in the work of church planting. In Britain there is hardly an area where they have not set up an assembly, and often these have been commenced by families deliberately moving into an area to create a witness. What is most significant is that this is achieved without any missionary society or centralised committees but purely as an outreach from local churches.

Initially the movement was largely concerned with the upper middle class and the nobility. Lord Congleton was one of the early missionaries. Lord Radstock and the Earl of Cavan were prominent in the Brethren. Moreover, several noted scholars have been produced by the Brethren. J. N. Darby was recognised as one of the most accomplished linguists of the century, producing new translations in English, German and French. S. P. Tregelles, the textual critic, and Thomas Newberry who produced the Newberry annotated Bible, were also Brethren. The Brethren have also produced outstanding "doers of the Word" such as George Müller and James Fegan with their children's homes.

Now what about the more important aspects of their doctrinal position? Has this always been the same or have they shifted their ground? Perhaps you could outline how you see the situation now.

The difficulty is that the Brethren are very anti-credal in the written sense, although in practice there is a very rigid verbal creed. Henry Groves

summarised their position as, "1st, the oneness of the Church of God involving fellowship large enough to embrace all saints and narrow enough to exclude the world; 2nd, the completeness and sufficiency of the written Word in all matters of faith and pre-eminently in things affecting our church life and walk; 3rd, the speedy pre-millennial advent of the Lord Jesus".¹ Comparing this with the confessions of historic protestantism it becomes immediately apparent that the emphasis of the early Brethren shifted from the doctrinal to the practical, leaving a large area of truth undefined. In course of time this has allowed an unconscious departure from the doctrinal position of the early Brethren over the doctrines of grace. Many of the early leaders were upholders of these truths. Darby wrote defending predestination and election, and it is recorded of R. C. Chapman that he "habitually opened up the doctrines of grace".² Chapman ministered for 70 years to a company of Strict Baptists who adopted the Brethren position. In Plymouth J. L. Harris is reported as being "a very powerful exponent of the doctrines of grace".³ It would appear that in attempting Scriptural reformation in the realm of Christian practice, the Brethren became unbalanced. The centrality of the Reformed doctrine of the Gospel—the total depravity of man including his will; unconditional election (not subject to God's foresight); particular redemption of the elect (not of all men); and the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit, though held, gradually gave way to secondary matters, especially prophecy. Thus today Brethren assemblies hold to the Arminian "gospel", despite their claims to be Calvinistic; claims which are based solely upon their belief in the final perseverance of the saints.⁴ In the February 1972 edition of the *Witness*, G. J. Polkinghorne reviewing *Preaching and Preachers* by Dr. Lloyd-Jones challenges the author's charge that the Brethren form of ministry is linked with Arminian theology, "an association", declares Mr. Polkinghorne, "hardly true of Brethrenism!" And yet in hundreds of their "Gospel services" each week the Arminian message with its emphasis on decisions, and the supposed ability of man ruined by the fall to determine his eternal state, is invariably put forth. Especially to be regretted in view of their strong Christological emphasis is their insistence on the central Arminian doctrine that Christ died for every soul that ever lived. They do not appear to stop and consider that because many souls are in fact lost, this doctrine makes the work of Christ a partial failure. Isaiah states the position held by Reformed theologians when he predicts: "He shall see of the travail of his soul and *shall be satisfied*".⁵

You say they are now largely Arminian. Does there appear to be the same awakening of Reformed doctrine among them as there has been, say, among Baptists in the last decade or so?

Yes, I am constantly coming across Brethren who have come to see the Scriptural teaching known as Reformed doctrine. This usually comes

about through reading Reformed literature. The experience is often painful, as anything resembling independent enquiry is not welcomed in traditional Brethren circles, and almost inevitably the new Calvinist has to seek fellowship with those outside the assemblies. Brethren tend to regard themselves as having seen all the light of Scripture in 1830 and nothing is left but to propagate this. I have not come across any Reformed assemblies as such, though in at least one assembly quite a number have had to leave as a body on this issue. It is frequently the elders who first rediscover these truths.

There are three possible human reasons why whole assemblies do not come to the Biblical position. Firstly, the itinerant form of ministry leads without doubt to mental laziness, as reliance is placed on a small stock of well worn sermons. Secondly, in their reaction to a one-man ministry they have gone so far that unconsciously individual initiative is discouraged. The assembly will only act together, and in some circles unanimity is insisted upon. Thirdly, the itinerant ministry means that a number of assemblies would need to grasp the truth simultaneously or isolation would occur. Such isolation would be disastrous for, in spite of loud disclaimers to the contrary, the Brethren are now one of the most sectarian groups of believers. The fact that they have no centralised headquarters or Union in no way delivers them from denominationalism.

Could you give us, John, a brief history of your own involvement with Brethren assemblies?

I was brought up first in Methodism and then in Presbyterianism, but a few years after my conversion I left the latter because of their modernism, and joined a small group of Brethren who had started a witness in the area. My attraction to them was their firm adherence to the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture. I was at that time most opposed to believers' baptism, holding tenaciously to the covenant theory of paedobaptism. Nevertheless I was welcomed to the Lord's Table, and after some time I began to examine seriously the Scriptures regarding baptism. With the help of a most patient elder I slowly came to see the teaching of the New Testament. In this group we made attempts to replace the itinerant system with something more systematic, and the worst excesses of Arminianism were avoided. I also became associated with the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship which is concerned with investigation of all aspects of Brethrenism, particularly the historical. However, upon removal to another area I came into collision with the full force of Brethren "traditionalism" and legalism, and before long sought refuge among Reformed Baptists.

One of the main features of the movement is the emphasis on the Communion service or "Morning meeting". For many this appears to be

their spiritual lifeline, and I'm wondering whether you missed it a great deal when you left?

Not at first. My soul was so starved of solid Biblical exposition that I was even content to forego the Lord's Table for some time. You see, the second assembly which my wife and I attended was dominated by one man. If he had nothing to contribute we starved and froze in silence for long periods. Sometimes the Scriptures were not read at all in the meeting, and ministry of the Word was minimal if not completely lacking.

This of course raises the whole question of the "open" type of service which usually centres around the communion. The fact that it does centre around this sacrament, and not around the Word, as you indicate, might suggest a subtle type of sacramentalism, but that apart it is worth considering the basis on which this kind of "spontaneous" meeting is justified. Do you look on I Cor. 14 as crucial, and if so how do you understand it yourself?

The Brethren contention is that I Cor. 14:26 teaches that spontaneous worship should be the pattern for every worship service, and they also believe that the Lord's Supper should be the central feature of this service. Hence everyone sits in silence until one brother or another "feels led" to give out a hymn, pray, read the Scriptures, or deliver a short exhortation. At length one brother will break bread and pass the wine, and this will be followed in the less traditional assemblies with a short, ostensibly unpremeditated exposition. The idea is that the Holy Spirit should be allowed to motivate the worship; a desire incidentally which is surely not limited to Brethren circles! But there is no direct mention of the Spirit in this passage in I Cor., although the enlightening of the Spirit would, by implication, be required. Moreover, it is difficult to establish this as a pattern for *all* churches; the New Testament is singularly lacking in detailed *teaching* on the format of public worship, although there are basic principles laid down. In this very passage (v. 1 and v. 39) Paul states that prophesying, which would be in the form of preaching, should be the primary ingredient. Furthermore, two factors are to govern public worship; edification (v. 26), and decency and order (v. 40). I would grant that any church has the right to worship as did the church at Corinth, but I feel we must not read into this a binding command for all churches for all time. Having said this, I do think that Baptists have often become too rigid. Especially do I deplore the 10 to 15 minutes hurried, formalistic communion service stuck on the end of the main service giving the appearance of an afterthought. Surely here is an area where Baptists may profitably learn from Brethren.

From Scripture as well as experience I am convinced that the Brethren morning meeting should be more associated with preaching than is normally the case. John records a very lengthy sermon by our Lord given

when the supper was ended (ch. 13-16). In Acts 2:42, Luke carefully records the pre-eminence of preaching over the Lord's Table when he says that the Pentecostal converts "continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine" (first priority was preaching), "and in fellowship (and) in breaking of bread (secondly the Supper) and in prayers". At Troas (Acts 20) "on the first day of the week when the disciples came together (specifically) to break bread (communion) Paul *preached* unto them" (v. 7) *before* and clearly *in association with*, the Supper (v. 11). Paul's exposition did not consist of a few random thoughts recollected on the spur of the moment. He "was long preaching" (v. 9)—long enough for even a young man to go to sleep! From these and other passages it is evident that the historic non-conformist emphasis upon the centrality of the preaching of the Word is Biblical, and other aspects of worship should be subservient to this.

From what you have told us, there seems to have always been in the Open Brethren both a strain of exclusivism and a strain of unusual "ecumenism". Do you see either of these beginning to dominate, or do they neutralise one another?

The early Brethren ideal of the "oneness" of the Church of God was rudely shattered in 1848 when they split in two over the issue of handling cases of discipline. The Exclusive party insisted that all assemblies must act together, the Open party contending for the right of each local church to decide for itself. The original policy was inclusive of all believers irrespective of details, and exclusive in relationship to the world and the worldly church. In course of time the exclusive policy began to dominate and the very sectarianism that the movement was founded to overcome has in fact overcome the movement. The Brethren founded (unconsciously) a sect to overcome sectarianism! This was due to their apparent refusal to allow that any other believers had any real light—a danger of which reformed Baptists of today need to beware. In recent years Brethren have tended to become increasingly involved with inter-denominational campaigns. This has brought them more in contact with other believers and, alas, with the liberals as they too have joined the "Campaign" bandwagon. There are ominous signs that some of this liberalism is rubbing off onto Brethren, and the old adherence to Scripture is not so tenacious as it was a generation ago.

What of prophecy? You've already referred to this and I'm wondering what your opinion is of the effect which a major emphasis on prophecy has had.

Brethren came on the scene just at the point when pre-millennialism was on the ascendency. Certainly, prophetic accord is sometimes regarded as a sign of orthodoxy. I shall never forget being ostracised by an

assembly when, as an A-Millennialist, I stated that we are now in the millennium! I feel the subject has been given far too much prominence; balance has again been lost; and I am not convinced that their views match up with Scripture teaching. Moreover, I cannot see any Biblical justification for prophetic charts which used to figure prominently, though which happily are less in evidence nowadays. Every passage dealing with the second coming has a practical note warning believers to be ready; whereas charts are liable to produce, not holiness of life, but largeness of head!

John, I know that you believe strongly in plurality of elders in the local church. The Brethren also, as you have mentioned, are noted for their opposition to the "one-man ministry". Do you in fact stand with them on this or are there significant differences which are not apparent?

Yes, I do agree with their position in general. The New Testament constantly bears witness to such a plurality, e.g. Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17; Phil. 1:1. Moreover, from Acts 20:28 it is clear that elders, bishops and pastors are one and the same office, although these terms describe different aspects of their work. Paul addressing the Ephesian *elders* says that the Holy Ghost has made them overseers (episkopi=bishops) and that their work is to feed (poimaino=to *pastor* or shepherd) the church of God. It has recently become fashionable in some Baptist circles to recognise a plurality of elders in each local church, but these are usually treated as a third category of officer—somewhere between a Pastor and a deacon. This is quite unscriptural. Some Baptists, in defence, point out that there were two types of elder in the early churches—teaching and ruling (I Tim. 5:17), which is granted, but this fails to get over the fact that Paul clearly addressed those from Ephesus as being equal with one another. Too much can be made of this distinction which was only one of emphasis, not of essence. It is inconceivable that the communion table at Ephesus had one chair with a higher and more ornate back than the others! Such a two-tier hierarchy is unknown in the Brethren. There is a clear *parity* as well as plurality of oversight which reformed Baptists would do well to study.

I would differ from them in some respects regarding their present day practice. For example, the early Brethren taught that eldership was essentially connected with the possession of the gifts and graces stipulated in Scripture, but today many Brethren elders do not appear to possess these. Sometimes several elders are appointed though only one man has the gifts, merely to make it look as unlike a "one man ministry" as possible! This is folly. Furthermore, the necessity of an inner call to the work of shepherding is generally overlooked.

The Brethren application of the doctrine of eldership has several advantages. In the first place it is based upon recognition of the gifts and

graces which the Head of the Church has sovereignly given to the local assembly. If the Lord places certain gifted leaders in a church He surely has work for them to do, and in order for them to do it fully these should be clearly recognised and not wasted. How many Baptist deacons are really doing the work of pastors! Secondly, a plurality of oversight eliminates the hiatus which hits the life of the local church when "vacancies" occur, as they do every three or four years in many Baptist churches. "Career" pastors are often guilty of a form of slow itinerancy due to their stock of sermons running out or their unwillingness or inability to tackle the work of discipline and reformation needed. The continuity obtained by the Brethren application of plural oversight avoids such upheavals. Moreover, existing elders recognise and call others, who are suitably gifted, to the oversight, thus avoiding bitterness and party factions when the church is called upon to choose the next pastor. Thirdly, Brethren have traditionally been disinterested in that short cut to the ministry—the theological college—and so their elders have been preserved from the blight of Modernism and have remained firm in their adherence to the Bible throughout what has been the churches' most dangerous period since the Reformation. In the last 100 years many Baptists and others have fallen into the disastrous errors disseminated via these colleges. It is a remarkable fact that Brethren are usually far more knowledgeable in the Scriptures than is the average Baptist.

What interests me in this question of plural oversight is that it has often been practised by Baptists in the past. In 1662 the Old Meeting in Bedford "did jointly make choice of brother Samuel Fenn . . . and brother John Whiteman, for their pastors and elders to minister the Word and ordinances".⁷ In 1671 the same church did "call forth and appoint our brother John Bunyan to the pastoral office or eldership"⁸ alongside the two existing pastors just mentioned. In 1675 the church in Petty France, London, had Nehemiah Cox and William Collins as joint pastors.⁹ The Old Baptist Chapel at Bradford-on-Avon had two pastors in 1722, both of whom followed a secular calling¹⁰—an arrangement which exists once again in this church. In Scotland, and various parts of England and Wales, the Scotch Baptist denomination always had a plural pastorate.¹¹ I believe it is high time we re-examined the Scriptures in regarding the recognition of elders. A minister's only credentials are the gifts and graces bestowed by the Lord together with the inner call of the Holy Spirit, and the outer call of the local elders confirmed by the church. John Gill, one of the most thorough of Baptist theologians, contended that "the election and call of them (pastors), with their acceptance, is ordination . . . and this is done among themselves" (the local church).¹²

Where do you see the greatest needs for reformation in the Brethren?

As I see it the crux of the matter depends on their view of the ministry. A drastic curtailment, or better still an abandonment of the itinerant

system, is essential if progress back to the Scriptural position is to be achieved. Of course the churches will always have the outstanding men like Paul who will itinerate, but what is needed is elders preaching regularly and systematically in their own churches. This was their original position, but since the breakdown of their doctrine of a stated ministry (i.e. certain men recognised or "stated" in each assembly as having gifts of ministry), and virtual adoption of an "every man" ministry, and, furthermore, their acceptance of Sunday travel, some lesser men have begun to view themselves as potential Pauls. In the early days at Plymouth there were two men recognised—B. W. Newton and J. L. Harris—as particularly gifted. They were the "stated" ministers, though not the exclusive ministers. One Sunday would be "Newton's day", and the next would be "Harris' day".¹³ The same practice prevailed in Bristol where George Muller and Henry Craik "preached alternately in Gideon chapel".¹⁴ If men were to preach systematically and regularly in their own assemblies they would be forced to study the Word in greater depth in order to produce new material, and this is likely to lead to a confrontation with the doctrines of grace. Once bring the ministry back into line with the Word of God and, under the hand of God, the course of Reformed truth is sure to prosper. Such a return to the old faith is, I believe, the only hope for sustaining the Brethren in the present subtle ecumenical and evangelical drift.

Reformation is also called for in respect of the morning meeting where preaching in association with the Lord's Table should be encouraged. Moreover, clear cut principles of fellowship with other believers are necessary as there are signs of a lack of discernment in some areas today, especially in regard to co-operative evangelism.

Do you regard these improvements as a real possibility?

Many assemblies are now introducing Sunday morning "family services" in addition to the breaking of bread service. Because itinerancy has been confined to Sunday evenings and mid-week meetings there is a tendency for the local elders to minister at these Sunday morning services and this ministry is a "planned" ministry. I have even heard of one assembly calling a man for a year's ministry as a full-time elder, who is nevertheless on a par with the co-elders. Such signs are encouraging, but there is a long way to go if full Scriptural reformation is to become effective.

I should like to say that in spite of the above criticisms, which are intended to be friendly and constructive, I have a great admiration for the Brethren position even though I am unable to go along with some of their teaching. There is perhaps, in some ways, no body of believers nearer the reformed Baptist position than these conservative evangelicals, and I can see that, in the will of God, as reformation proceeds amongst both groups the days could well come when there is virtually no difference

between them. May the Lord yet send forth more light from His inspired and infallible Word!

¹ *Chief Men among the Brethren*, p. 1 compiled by H. Pickering.

² *Brother Indeed*, Life of Robert Cleaver Chapman, pp. 50-51 by Frank Holmes.

³ *The Local Assembly*, p. 85 by G. H. Lang.

⁴ For a fuller discussion of the radical difference between these two "Gospels" readers are advised to read J. I. Packer's Introductory Essay to John Owen's *Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, and then proceed to read the work itself. Dr. Packer says there "are two coherent interpretations of the Biblical gospel, (Calvinistic and Arminian) which stand in evident opposition to each other. The difference between them is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content". Page 4.

⁵ Isaiah 53:11.

⁶ *The Churches of God, their Constitution, Government, Discipline and Ministry*, by G. H. Lang. Chapter 11.

⁷ *The Bunyan Meeting, Bedford*, by H. G. Tibbutt, pp. 19, 20.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *The Strict Baptist Chapels of England*, Vol. 5 p. 70 by Robert Oliver.

¹¹ *History of Baptists in Scotland*, Edited by Geo. Yuille. Introduction—The Baptist Faith by C. E. Shipley, p. 13 (Quotation from Rippon's Register 1795).

¹² *A Body of Divinity*, by John Gill, p. 867.

¹³ *Chief Men among the Brethren*, p. 19.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 34.

1972 PURITAN CONFERENCE

WESTMINSTER CHAPEL. Chairman: Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12

10.30 a.m. "Becoming a Christian—1. Covenant Theology: a Historical Survey." Rev. Geoffrey Thomas, B.A., B.D.

2.00 p.m. "Becoming a Christian—2. In the Teaching of John Calvin." Rev. Graham Harrison, M.A., B.A., B.Litt.

5.00 p.m. "Not in Word Only . . . The Forgotten Doddridge." Rev. Alan C. Clifford, B.A.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13

10.30 a.m. "Becoming a Christian—3. In the Teaching of Heinrich Bullinger." Rev. David W. Marshall, B.D., M.A.

2.00 p.m. "Becoming a Christian—4. In the Teaching of Richard Rogers and Richard Greenham." Rev. Paul Cook, B.D.

5.00 p.m. Closing Address by the Chairman.

A fee of £1 for all who attend should be paid to David Bugden, 75 High Street, Warboys, Huntingdon, PE17 2TA. Cheques made out to "The Westminster Conference". Details re lunch and tea from Mr. Bugden. The printed report for 1971 is available, *Evangelical Press*, 35p. It is full of vitamins. Those who wish to sample the Puritan view of prayer can read Peter Lewis's study in this report which has the title "The Good Fight of Faith".

Geoff Thomas describes the example set by Mrs. Spurgeon in the promotion of expository books and gives some explanation of why books like "Run, Baby, Run" are the top sellers today.

The Want of Books

WHO CAN CALCULATE THE INFLUENCE OF BOOKS IN THE HISTORY OF THE gospel? It is immeasurable. Of course we are not amongst that company who urge a reverence for books in and of themselves. But when they carry gospel truth, then the printed page can throb with power. This was the confidence of Charles Spurgeon and his life is a remarkable demonstration of the power of good literature. In the first chapter of his autobiography, *The Early Years*, entitled "Childhood at Stambourne", there is a recollection self-disparagingly referred to as "One bit more of rigmarole". Opening out of one of the bedrooms was a little room in which the windows had been blocked up to avoid paying the window-tax. He writes, "It was a dark den—but it contained books, and this made it a gold mine to me. Therein was fulfilled the promise, 'I will give thee the treasures of darkness'. Some of these were enormous folios, such as a boy could hardly lift. Here I first struck up acquaintance with the martyrs, and especially with 'Old Bonner', who burned them; next, with Bunyan and his 'Pilgrim'; and further on, with the great masters of Scriptural theology, with whom no moderns are worthy to be named in the same day. Even the old editions of their works, with their margins and old-fashioned notes, are precious to me . . . I wonder whether some other boy will love them, and live to revive that grand old divinity, which will yet be to England her balm and benison" (*op. cit.*, pp. 10 and 11). And even to Wales, to Scotland and to Ireland!

Through these books Spurgeon learned his theology, and reading the sermons of the Puritans and of earlier contemporaries of his like Joseph Irons he conceived of a day when his own sermons might be published as a "Penny Pulpit". When he was only 20 that dream was realised, and the following year the first volume of the *New Park Street Pulpit* made its appearance. In a sermon preached that year he cried, "Oh, to think that I may write and print books which shall reach poor sinners' hearts! . . . Oh who can tell, when these words are printed what good they may effect!" Little did he dream of the 62 volumes of sermons that would be printed and reprinted containing 3,563 sermons, and the incalculable influence these sermons would have. For example, they were sent together with some literature of the Scottish Tract Societies, over all European Russia from Archangel to Odessa, and from Riga to Siberia. Every month 300 were sent to the Russian interior. Then in the south of Africa in Natal a missionary working among the Zulus could write to say, "The glorious light of the gospel is breaking through the darkness

of the long and dreadful night. In many English and Dutch farmhouses in the country Mr. Spurgeon's sermons are regularly read every Sunday morning in the family service".

When Spurgeon preached on the text II Tim. 4:13, "The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments" (Nov. 29, 1863), he had this to say: "*Even an apostle must read.* Some of our ultra-Calvinistic brethren think that a minister who reads books and studies his sermon must be a very deplorable specimen of a preacher. A man who comes up into the pulpit, professes to take his text on the spot, and talks any quantity of nonsense, is the idol of many. If he will speak without premeditation, or pretend to do so, and never produce what they call a dish of dead men's brains—oh! that is the preacher. How rebuked they are by the apostle! He is inspired, *and yet he wants books!* He has been preaching at least for 30 years, *and yet he wants books!* He has seen the Lord, *and yet he wants books!* He has had a wider experience than most men, *and yet he wants books!* He has been caught up into the third heaven and has heard things which it was unlawful for a man to utter, *and yet he wants books!* He had written a major part of the New Testament, *and yet he wants books!*"

"You need to read. Renounce as much as you will all light literature, but study as much as possible sound theological works, especially the Puritanic writers, and expositions of the Bible. We are quite persuaded that the very best way for you to be spending your leisure, is to be either reading or praying. You may get much instruction from books which afterwards you may use as a true weapon in your Lord and Master's service. Paul cries, 'Bring the books'—join in the cry."

With such exhortations ringing in her ears it may seem that Mrs. Spurgeon delayed a long time in launching the Book Fund in 1875, but it was sparked off by the appearance of the first volume of *Lectures to my Students*. Mrs. Spurgeon was so delighted with it that she bought 100 copies and sent them to some poor Baptist ministers. The work increased so much that by 1884 there were 12,000 ministers who had received books from the Fund. (So if you think your autographed copy of the *Lectures*, or *Treasury of David*, is rare you had better take into account the many ministers who received such copies in the last century!). In the year 1884 Mrs. Spurgeon dispatched 9,149 books and during the 20 years of the Book Fund's existence nearly 20,000 were distributed.

Mrs. Spurgeon was continually confronted with the attitude of those who had little place for any books but the Bible. She was told of the remark the Welsh preacher Williams of Wern made to a fellow minister who loved to read: "You read too much. My plan in preparing sermons is to examine the connection of a passage, extract its principle, and think it

over in my own mind. I never look at a commentary except when completely beaten". Mrs. Spurgeon was far more down-to-earth in her view of the preparation of sermons and could not see that approach as either normative or possible to most men. There were so many demands on a minister's time; the care of his family, the demands of his congregation, the struggle to get by with only a small salary—such things made it difficult for ministers to prepare sermons with the untrammelled ease of unassisted reflections. Besides that, such an attitude showed a neglect of one of the means the Spirit of God uses to enlighten a preacher's mind, "That the Holy Spirit constantly uses the writings and expositions of godly men for this purpose is a fact known to all; and often does His gracious influence decree to refresh the spirit, strengthen the soul, enlighten the understanding, and draw forth the powers of heart and mind, while God's servant is engaged in searching through the treasure house of wise and holy books".

There can be no doubt of the potential for good in the spread of Reformed literature today. Much has been done, and solid literature is now reaching places where it has never appeared before, but still it is hardly scratching the surface of the English-speaking world. What are the religious best-sellers among evangelical Christians? The U.S.A. best-seller lists show sales of a million copies of *Run, Baby, Run*, by Nicky Cruz, available in ten languages, and a million copies of the books of Keith Miller. They tell us that Billy Graham sold 203,000 copies of *The Jesus Generation* in five weeks, and *The Late Great Planet Earth*, by Hal Lindsay, ex-Campus Crusade worker, has sold 650,000 copies in 19 months, whilst *The Cross and the Switchblade* has sold in its millions and in almost a score of languages.

If these are the kind of books most American evangelists read it certainly reflects on the condition of their churches. I heartily endorse the sentiments of Morgan Derham who wrote in the Scripture Union magazine *Outreach* last year, "One of the serious symptoms of our present spiritual malaise is the kind of reading which features in the living of many a Christian; it is often superficial, journalistic, and sensational".

Why do believers think in terms of impressing non-Christians with the idea that Christianity is sensational or terrific in a kind of worldly sense—rescuing drug-addicts, smuggling Bibles, strumming guitars, escaping from African civil wars or penetrating the undergrowth to Stone Age tribes in remote jungles! Literature describing these things often tends to be little more than a printed version of a newspaper. There is no substitute for solid reading whether it be in the most important department regarding our knowledge of Scripture and all the truth it contains or of church history and inspiring biography. Mrs. Spurgeon certainly set an example in promoting edifying literature of which we do well to take note.

What is revival? Concepts of revival are various and often confused. The Bible itself furnishes us with all the materials we need for defining revival. The following by the editor consists largely of an examination of the different kinds of revival which are described in Scripture.

What kind of Revival?

REVIVAL IS AN EXTRAORDINARY WORK OF GOD IN REVIVING BELIEVERS and adding to their number. It finds its expression in the renewal of churches. The results are spiritual and practical in nature. Needless to say revival is not merely organised excitement or the quickening of feelings and emotions which have their origin in animal nature. The organisation of large evangelistic campaigns has sometimes been confused with revival, especially when reports have been circulated describing large numbers of decisions. Time should elapse before claims of revival are made so that history may give the verdict.

Genuine revival is so powerful in its effects that the whole fabric of society is affected. Renewal begins with God's people. Their worship, prayer life, family life and work life is renewed. Such is the power of their witness and influence that all stratas of the community are affected. This can be illustrated by the revival which came to Northampton under the ministry of Jonathan Edwards. In narrating the effects of this revival Edwards declares, "There was scarcely a single person, old or young, left unconcerned about the great things of the eternal world. Those who were wont to be the vainest and loosest, and those who had been most disposed to think and speak slightly of vital and experimental religion, were now generally subject to great awakenings. And the work of *conversion* was carried on in a most *astonishing* manner, and increased more and more; souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ."¹

Charles Hodge said something about revival which is controversial but nevertheless very important for us to remember. He declared that it is a false view to imagine that revivals are the only way in which true religion can be promoted.² This is an important observation as a spirit of defeat and despair is fostered in some quarters. That we might not live to see revival is a horrifying thought but must not be allowed to enervate us and deprive us of effort and zeal. It is a fact that thousands of ministers have never experienced revival but have nevertheless sustained fruitful and faithful ministries.

But then Hodge goes further and asserts something even more controversial. He says there are greater mercies than revival. "When there

have been years of famine a superabundant harvest is a great blessing. But it had been better had each harvest been good. There is a better state as well as a greater amount of good in the latter than in the former case. A regular normal increase is better than violent alternation. General permanent health is better than exuberant joyousness alternating with depression.”³

Now had Hodge said that a revival spread over a period of time is better than a sudden revival he would be more readily understood, for the Bible certainly supports the idea that revivals need not take place suddenly and spontaneously, but can take place over a period of several years. In other words we must make room for what we may call a gradual revival. How then is the objection met that this then is not extraordinary and hence cannot be revival? We answer that if the effects and results are extraordinary, even though time has elapsed, then it is revival. For example Israel coming out of Egypt is a vastly different Israel from that entering Canaan. Not only are they highly disciplined and devoted but they possess the tabernacle, priesthood and law.

This leads us to the consideration of different kinds of revival. Believing that the Scriptures provide all that we need by way of material to establish a Biblical doctrine of revival, it could be shown that there are establishing revivals and sustaining revivals.

1. Establishing revivals.

There are dispensations in history when foundations of truth have been laid and at these times God has poured out His Spirit in measure equal to the particular needs of those times. “It is observable”, declares Edwards, “that it has been God’s manner in every remarkable new establishment of the state of his visible church, to give remarkable outpourings of his Spirit.”⁴

2. Sustaining revivals.

Where true religion has been in danger of destruction and when it would appear that the foundations may be removed God has appeared for His people and revived them. Thus they have been sustained and His cause of truth preserved on the earth.

It can be argued that there have been revivals of increase which fit neither of the categories explained above. This is true but it does not affect the exposition which follows.⁵

With the two main categories, establishing revivals and sustaining revivals, in mind the following outline of revivals in history can be established:

i The revival of Genesis 4:26

1 MOSES AND JOSHUA

- ii *The revival of Judges 2:1-4*
- 2 SAMUEL AND DAVID
- iii *The revival under Ezra and Nehemiah*
- 3 CHRIST AND HIS APOSTLES
- iv *The pre-Reformation revival under Hus, Wycliffe and others*
- 4 THE REFORMATION under Luther and Calvin and the expository ministry of the Puritans which followed.
- v *The revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries*
- 5 THE REVIVAL OF ROMANS II for which we should earnestly pray.

Some parts of the above thesis (establishing revivals 1 to 5 printed in capitals and sustaining revivals i to v printed in italics) will be more disputed than others and therefore an exposition follows in support of the revival of Genesis 4:26, the revival of Judges 2:1-4 and the establishing revival under Samuel. The revival of Romans 11 may well be contested. Arguments from Scripture in support of it have been outlined in my book *The Restoration of Israel*.⁶

i *Genesis 4:26. "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord."* The expression "to call upon" is elsewhere used to denote all the appropriate acts and exercises of the stated worship of God. Gen. 12:8, 13:4, 21:33, 1 Chron. 16:8—as Calvin says, "it embraces the whole worship of God." And so in this first example of revival we find that against a background of the utmost profanity in which Lamech defied God to His face with the most terrible blasphemy, it nevertheless pleased God to send a spiritual quickening. In so doing an example of revival is provided at the dawn of history.

"Call upon" is comprehensive in its meaning. Nevertheless it is worthy of note that revival has its genesis in prayer, for God pours out the spirit of grace and supplications. (Zech. 12:10)

ii *Judges 2:1-4*

The book of Ruth is a jewel reflecting the holiness of life which was to be found among God's people even during the period of Judges which is renowned for Israel's backsliding and spiritual decline. From where did the momentum come for the sustenance of such godliness and consistency? Few of the judges or deliverers were leaders of outstanding spiritual calibre, and some like Samson seemed to provide precious little moral example at all.

The revival at Bochim may well have provided an impetus to the spiritual life of Israel which gave her enough momentum to endure very dark days until the raising up of Samuel.

If we take the angel of the Lord here to be the Lord Himself, and certainly his speech is the speech of God, then this occasion is unique. In other theophanies the Lord appears to individuals such as Joshua (Josh. 5:13, 14), Gideon (Judges 6:11) or Manoah (Judges 13:17-21) or at most a limited group such as Moses and his elders. Here the mighty preacher is the Lord and he preaches to the great assembly. Hearts are broken up. Repentance is accompanied with tears. The place is called Bochim because of the weepers.

Illustrated here is a cardinal principle of revival. The truth is declared and carried with convincing power right into the hearts of the hearers. The recovery of powerful doctrinal and applicatory preaching is the urgent need of our times. When blessed by the Holy Spirit the glory of such preaching is that it is as though the Lord is speaking Himself—as He was literally on that occasion at Bochim.

Note that in true preaching the earnest appeal to turn and live is from Christ Himself; the fiery indignation against sin is from Christ Himself; the warm affection and compassion is from Christ Himself; the melting of the hearts is the melting which comes from Christ Himself.

2. SAMUEL AND DAVID

The contrast between this time and the closing period of the judges is marked. Judges chapter 19 forms perhaps the grimmest chapter of the Bible. The vileness of the men of Benjamin was as bad as that of the inhabitants of Sodom. War followed and the tribe of Benjamin was almost annihilated. This civil war was not the only decimation of the nation. Forty two thousand Ephraimites had fallen by the sword of Jephthah of Gilead. (Judges 12). The period is aptly summed up by the editor when he concludes the book of Judges with the words “every man did that which was right in his own eyes”.

And so when we come to the end of that period we read “The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision”. (1 Samuel 3:1). After a period of decline there was a lack of purpose and direction. Not only was decline and immorality rife as seen in the adultery of Eli’s priest sons, but Israel was smitten before the Philistines and the ark of God was captured.

A profound change was brought about through Samuel’s ministry, a change which was gradual and based upon a teaching ministry. From

year to year throughout his life he went in circuit to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpeh. (1 Samuel 7:16).

We trace the idea of the school of prophets to Samuel (1 Samuel 10:10) and such was the spiritual basis established by him that the subsequent work of the great prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, rests upon the foundation laid by him. He is described by Peter as the first in the line of a new succession of prophets, "Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after—have foretold these days". (Acts 3:24.) Saul being a failure, Samuel was commanded to seek out God's choice of a king and anoint David. Thus began a time of great expansion and prosperity which was soon to reach an unprecedented level in the nation's history.

We are concerned with spiritual revival. Materials to prove that a high water mark was reached in David's time are available.

A key chapter is 1 Samuel 7. Through Samuel's ministry idolatry is put away in the land (verse 4). The repentance of the people is symbolised in the pouring out of water, and fasting. The Lord's hand and presence is expressed in awe inspiring thunder and the discomfort of the Philistines (verse 10). That the repentance wrought at this time was of a godly sort may well be indicated by the words, "and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord". Says Matthew Henry in opening this verse, "a general disposition to repentance and reformation now appears throughout Israel."

In contrast with the anarchy of the previous era we read that "all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel." When Jonathan is condemned unjustly by Saul, soldiers rise up in indignation and rescue him (1 Samuel 14:45) and as a further indication of spiritual sensitivity, we read of the elders of Bethlehem trembling when they hear Samuel is to visit them. When last did you tremble upon hearing of the visit of a certain preacher?

That salvation was the order of the day can be established by the reference to David's tabernacle at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:16, 17 and Amos 9:11-15). The tabernacle referred to was the tent to which the ark was brought (2 Samuel 6:17). The ark symbolised both the presence of God and salvation. You remember that when the ark was brought up David danced before it with all his might. This tent of salvation was broken down first by a division in the kingdom after only seventy three years and ultimately by the Babylonian conquest of Judah. We are prevented from viewing David's tent in a purely secular light by the employment of the text. If the raising up of the tent denotes great harvests of souls to the extent that the plowman overtakes the reaper (Amos 9:13),

then it is surely consistent to conclude that the original tent was a visible expression of such spiritual blessing as we associate with revival.

If we take the restoration of prophecy to begin with Samuel then it is of note that this is sustained right up to the time of Daniel. "In Samuel", writes Edwards, "was begun a succession of prophets that was maintained continually from that time, at least with very little interruption, until the spirit of prophecy ceased, about Malachi's time."

Daniel's prophecy in particular embraces in detail the period of revolution among the nations preparatory to the coming of Christ and formed a source of knowledge and comfort which sustained the faithful during the four hundred years of silence. The parallel between Daniel's prophecy and John's is noteworthy, the one being the apocalypse of the Old Testament the other of the New.

Application.

Different lessons apposite for our times can be drawn from any one of the revivals described in the Bible, or, for that matter, helpful conclusions could be drawn from a study of any revival which has taken place in the history of the Christian church.

Some application, particularly from the revival under Samuel, would be helpful for us today.

i. We ought never to despise the day of small things.

Whole chapters are devoted to the birth of Samuel and details are given about the answers to prayer received by Hannah, Samuel's mother. Here in the prayer life of one woman we find the seeds of revival. In our day we are very often obsessed with carnal glory, with the spectacular and the sensational, whereas God is concerned with the outworking of holiness in everyday life. The revival under Moses began on the backside of a desert with a burning bush. A bush is a very insignificant thing. Certainly a burning bush which does not consume is phenomenal, nevertheless we can learn the lesson that the deliverance wrought by Moses had a very small commencement in the wilderness at a most unexpected time. Likewise in illustration of the point note that details are provided concerning Simeon and Anna in regard to Christ's birth. More and more emphasis today is upon young people and less and less thought is given to the elderly. Here two people, Simeon and Anna, in advanced age, are brought to the fore. Their intercession and faithfulness is acknowledged at the commencement of events which would bring salvation to all peoples.

ii. Notice the place of prayer in the ministry of Samuel.

Samuel's ministry is summed up in his own words, "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you:

but I will teach you the good and right way." (1 Samuel 12:23). Whether we can truly anticipate revival can be measured in large part by the earnestness and humility of the prayers of God's people. Humble prayer is more encouraging than much hustle and bustle in which prayer is an afterthought.

iii. *Teaching.* "But I will teach you the good and the right way."

Note that Samuel worked systematically in circuit going from Bethel to Gilgal and to Mizpeh. (1 Samuel 7:16). The whole world today is in desperate need of this kind of expository ministry which is "in circuit". There is no indication of Samuel either weakening in his doctrinal position or in his systematic method. A thorough training in the ways of the Lord and how to live the godly life is desperately required in all countries. We are to "exercise ourselves unto godliness". Multitudes are suffering for want of a revival of teaching in the power of the spirit. The restoration of this is not likely to take place quickly but rather as it did under Samuel as he worked "in circuit." Why should the idea of revival be divorced from systematic teaching in "the good and the right way." Excitement, zeal and enthusiasm about righteousness and godly living is surely the best kind of fervour.

iv. *The Shekinah glory (Exodus 40:35).*

If we are to look for a distinguishing feature essential in all revivals, if they are to be called such, then it is this. The shekinah glory represents the presence and majesty of God. God Himself must attend our prayer meetings and come down by His Spirit upon our worship services. He must anoint the preaching and teaching to give it unction and efficacy.

When He comes we will know what revival is, for we will be filled with the sense and knowledge of His majesty and holiness. Samuel's ministry was a ministry in which he constantly experienced the authority and presence of the Lord. It was this that caused the elders of Bethlehem to tremble when they heard that he was coming to visit them.

The very essence of revival is that the Lord should visit His people in using the means of grace to reform them, revive them and add to their number. May we see this soon in our times.

¹ *Select works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. 1. First edition p. 75.

² *Princeton Sermons* p. 340.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *The History of Redemption.*

⁵ In all these revivals God is pleased to give a measure of increase, some more than others. Sprague for instance declares that the revivals in America from 1800-1832 showed a much greater numerical increase than those under Edwards and Whitefield, although the latter were more crucial and vital in the history of the church in America.

⁶ Second edition. Henry E. Walter Ltd. 192 pp. 50p.

Children of God

STANLEY VOKE, MINISTER OF A BAPTIST CHURCH IN WALTON-ON-THAMES, is known as a vocal supporter of the Jesus Movement. It is therefore of great interest to read in the *Baptist Times* (Sept. 7, 1972) his report of how he has become disillusioned with one segment of that movement—the Children of God. He begins with a personal incident relating to a young man named Tony, aged 17, recently converted, who had brought his family to church. An urgent 'phone message was received that Tony was suddenly leaving home to join the Children of God. Mr. Voke lost no time in seeing Tony.

I tore over to the house at top speed. He was almost unrecognisable—his face twisted and his eyes tortured-looking. He kept repeating as though hypnotised "God has spoken to me. God has called me—I've got to leave everything and join the revolution".

That afternoon he and a friend had gone to Windsor Great Park. Near to a much publicised pop festival, he noticed a bus with the words "Children of God" on it and was greatly impressed by a group of shining "Christians" dishing out free food to luckless hippies and witnessing boldly to them, Bibles in hand.

So he got himself involved. Soon a trained COG leader was on to him and finding he was an open young Christian belonging to a Baptist church, at once faced him up with Luke 14:26, plus the story of the rich young ruler. Was he a true disciple? Did he want to inherit the kingdom of God? Then he must "hate" his parents, forsake them and all else. And do it straight away. Then they plugged the Lord's condemnation of the Pharisees. And were not the churches the same as them? Finally with all his resistance beaten down, he left them with the promise that he would return that night with all his possessions and join their buses back to Bromley and go into their commune.

Fortunately I had enough documentary material with me to convince him of the evils of the movement and the dangers of his decision. It took me three hours, but when I left him he was himself again.

Why is Stanley Voke, formerly an admirer of the dedication of the Children of God, now so much against them? Doubts had been gathering for some time over their intolerant attitudes, and a few weeks previously these misgivings had been confirmed.

A young man was found in a Bromley cafe in a state of near physical and mental collapse. He proved to be a responsible member of the Bromley commune of the COG, expelled for questioning certain things he felt in conscience were wrong. Subjected to more than five hours of morale-breaking pressure, he was then parted from his wife and two young children who were sent off to a remote commune in Denmark, and put out of the commune as one possessed by Beelzebub and under the curse of God.

Investigation into the movement began in earnest, including the gathering of evidence from America.

We then had two meetings with the leaders of the movement with whom we tried to share our concern in a calm reasoned manner, only to be met with evasion then condemnation and abuse, with shoutings and ravings the like of which none of us had ever encountered with any other group.

The facts are these. What appears to be a joyful, spontaneous youthful evangelistic crusade aflame with healthy ardour to win modern youth for Christ turns out to be a tightly knit system, commenced and now controlled by the Berg family (with what real motivating power God only knows) and managed from some secret hiding place by the father, 52-year-old David Berg, known as "Moses".

From his secret hideout (probably in London), which no one knows save his children, their spouses and a select few, he manages the whole movement by means of secret letters, read almost daily in all the communes. While the Bible is claimed as the sole authority, in actual fact the "MO letters" as they are called, are treated with a regard akin to that given to apostolic communications in the Early Church.

The contents of some of these letters are reproduced, and the following points are made in the article.

The movement is clearly anti-state. Out of the mass of MO material I quote the following:

"The fiendish, devilish economic system, we hate it and we teach the kids to hate it—and the false church system" (PR9).

Again, "Kids have been kidnapped from their homes by the laws of compulsory school attendance, drugged to damnation by modern godless and useless education . . . child labour laws, parental laws, marriage laws, minor's laws . . . its slavery and death" (S27).

It is also virulently anti-church. "We hate the hypocrisy, self-righteousness, lies and deceit of those who claim to be the church. We hate the spiritual system of the Devil behind it" (PR7).

"We were so bitter against the churches for their hypocritical do-nothing religions, their fancy church buildings that are robbing the rest of the world of salvation, that we were ready to declare war on the church system" (OS3). "Those damn-fool so-called Christians . . . in their so-called churches" (L3.44).

It is also anti-parent. "You parents are the most God-defying, commandment-breaking, insanely rebellious rebels of all time, on the brink of destroying us all . . . to Hell with your devilish system. May God damn your unbelieving hearts" (L2.49). Hardly the breathings of a Christian spirit—whatever the reason.

Worse than all this is the anti-Christian note of the movement, not only in its vitriol against other children of God, but acceptance of Moses' claim to a title that belongs only to Christ.

"I was prophesied over many times by many prophets of God, as having been filled with the Holy Ghost from my mother's womb, and many great things were foretold that I would do . . . that I would be like Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and even David.

"That our ministry would be a fulfilment of Deuteronomy 18:15-18, Psalms 89 and 132, Isaiah 55, Ezekial 34 and 37, Hosea 3 and Revelation 3:7-13. Many of these have already been fulfilled" (TS9).

The references to "David" and "the prophet like unto me" in these passages is taken to refer to himself, David Berg. Yet they are all prophetic references to Christ, the Seed of David, the Messiah, especially Revelation 3:7.

In his conclusion Mr. Voke has this to say of the Children of God.

Their image is charming, their enthusiasm infectious, their method thorough-going, their message radical, but their system is ruthless.

What can we learn of a positive nature from these alarming findings?

First, it is tragic that a young man like Tony should be so easily led by ideas of God speaking directly to him. Yet it is symptomatic of the mysticism of the evangelical church, in which the leading of the Spirit is thought of as being by inward voices rather than by obedience to Scripture. As the Roman Catholic Church puts tradition first, so the evangelical tends to place "feelings" first. But the Word of God must take the foremost place and all feelings must be tested by the principles of Scripture.

Second, for decades evangelicals have neglected the doctrine of the local church and have channelled their energies into extra-church or inter-church activities. The rejection, by the Children of God, of the visible Church, is in some ways a logical extension of this way of thinking. It is a timely warning to review our whole approach to the local church and see that there is no other agent authorised by God for evangelism or spiritual growth.

Third, the elevation of 'Moses' can be traced to the process of the "personality cult" in which the statements and activities of outstanding personalities are treated with awe. Invariably these personalities encourage and promote their own image. Every man's work should be examined. Is he himself subject to the discipline of other elders? Is the thrust of his labour toward building up the body of Christ or is it to promote his own ego?

Fourth, rejection of the place of authority, particularly that of parents, shows appalling ignorance of God's moral law. One of the most pressing needs is the re-establishment of the Ten Commandments as the rule of life for the Christian. Untaught believers tend towards antinomianism (anti-law), and the attitude of the Children of God reflects the outcome of this spirit.

The predominant requirement is the building up of healthy local churches where there is systematic instruction in the need for humble obedience to the Word of God.

Assurance—Unpublished Correspondence of A. W. Pink

THE PROBLEM OF "ASSURANCE" MAY BE SUMMED UP IN THE QUESTION: "How can I be certain I am saved?" Because of confused teaching on the subject, many believers have the impression that to have assurance is to have an inner experience which is inexplicable, cannot be measured by any of the senses, and with little if any doctrinal content. Honest believers may well confess to being without this, and may be in terror of judgement. We have recently received some correspondence of A. W. Pink's on this subject.¹ Several helpful extracts are included here.

Speaking of the alternating periods of joy and despair experienced by some Christians who are unsure of their salvation, he states:

"It is my studied conviction that the faulty teaching they have received is responsible for not a little of their up and down (mostly down) experience".

Later he elaborates on the point:

"The faulty teaching to which I alluded varies considerably in different cases according as the teachers are found among hyper-Calvinists, Plymouth Brethren or rank Arminians".

Concentrating particularly on the hyper-Calvinist teachers, he continues:

"The impressions obtained by those who sat or sit under their ministry are something like this . . . I must have a feeling sense of my lost condition, a feeling sense of Christ's suitability and sufficiency for my desperate case, a feeling sense that I have trusted in Him and that I am clothed with His righteousness: ratified by a peace which passeth all understanding possessing my heart. Under some powerful sermon, or alone in my room, that feeling sense is granted to me, perhaps accompanied by a voice which says, "*Thy sins are forgiven thee*", and I go on my way rejoicing. But soon the joy is dampened. I am conscious of sin raging within, and perhaps breaking out in open act, and now I have serious cause to fear that sin still has "dominion" over me. I am staggered. Yet I still find some satisfaction in prayer, and in meeting with God's people; and I ask myself, could *this* be the case if I were still unregenerate? I am sorely perplexed. I read and hear sermons which have not a little to say about the perplexities of God's people, about their ups and downs, about their walking in darkness etc., and I am somewhat comforted, hoping this may partly at least, explain my contradictory behaviour . . . Thus my assurance is like a see-saw".

Having described the effects of this hopeless search for some kind of assurance, Pink goes on to analyse how this condition is bound to come about:

“Now let me try and show why this ‘experience’ is (inevitably) such, and wherein the preaching he sat or sits under is defective:

1 Because only a one-sided view of the gospel and way of salvation has been presented to him. Nothing, or next to nothing, was told him of the claims and requirements of Christ: that there must be a forsaking of sin (Is. 55:7.), a complete surrender of ourselves to Him, a receiving of Him as LORD (Col. 2:6.), a taking of His yoke upon us, a willingness and resolution that He should reign over us (Luke 19:14) in order to be saved!

2 Because only a one-sided view of the Christian life has been presented to him, nothing, or next to nothing, having been told him of Christ’s *demands* upon His people. Those demands are made known in His commandments and exhortations, but instead of dwelling upon the precepts they are largely side-tracked for the promises . . . (These) pastors do not instruct their members that the chief concern and business of the Christian should be—not seeking for ‘marks of grace’, nor making a god of inward peace and happy feelings, but—the *practice of obedience*.

3 Because an erroneous presentation of the ground of assurance has been made to them. My persuasion that I have been regenerated and accepted in the ‘Beloved’ is not to rest upon . . . peace within, but the testimony of a good conscience that I have the approbation of God, because I am genuinely and sincerely endeavouring with all that is within me to abstain from everything He hates and practise everything He enjoins. (see 2 Cor. 1:12).

In answer to an objection in reply, he makes further comments on this verse:

“Surely there is a vast difference between a genuine and sincere endeavour and a full attainment or complete realisation of the same: the testimony of a good conscience rests on the former and not on the latter. As the apostle says in another place, and as every genuine Christian must also be able to affirm; “We make it our aim whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him”. (2 Cor. 5:9. American R.V.). It is the consciousness that such is our honest aim (and the heart of each person knows whether or not it be so) which supplies evidence that we are not hypocrites, and which affords ground for assurance of our regeneration; for, no matter what his religious profession or pretensions, the ‘aim’ of every unregenerated soul is to please *self*. If then, my dominating desire, purpose and endeavour be the pleasing of God in *all* things (one sure proof of which is—paradoxically as it may seem—that I mourn and

confess when I have yielded to the pleasing of the flesh), then I must be regenerate, for such a disposition is in no man by nature”.

To substantiate the point still further, Pink quotes the following section from *The Religious Affections* by Jonathan Edwards. Edwards writes: “I had rather have the testimony of my conscience that I have such a saying of my Supreme Judge on my side as that, ‘he that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me’, than the judgement and fullest approbation of all the wise, sound and experienced divines that have lived this thousand years, on the most exact and critical examination of my experience as to the manner of my conversion . . . Whatever pretences persons may make to great discoveries, great love and joys, they are no further to be regarded than they have influence on their practice”.

Though much valuable insight is contained in the allusions to assurance, Pink makes it clear that he has not expounded the subject as such. However, in defining “assurance” he does give further reference to his work on this topic:

“I use ‘assurance’ in its ordinary scope, as synonymous with the conviction that a person possesses certain marks of grace, evidences of regeneration, proofs of a saving interest in Christ. In evidence thereof I would refer you to the following:²

1 The heart being occupied with a heavenly treasure: see *Studies* 1941, top of p. 5.

2 An experimental realisation that Christ’s yoke is easy: 1941, second half of p. 138 and top of p. 139.

3 In 1941, p. 187, first complete paragraph, I named no less than eight marks of God’s children.

4 On p. 227 of 1941, second paragraph, four marks of the regenerate are given.

5 The whole article, ‘An Honest Heart’, 1943, p. 90, etc”.

In speaking of tests and marks, Pink is plainly taking the view that assurance does not consist of locating inexplicable feelings. If assurance is by subjective experience, we then just ‘know’ that we are saved, and tests are ruled out, as is the use of understanding. Pink now turns to this subjectivism more directly:

“You complain that I say very little about such blessings as ‘a revelation of Christ to the soul, a special discovery of His love, or a direct witness of the Spirit to my spirit.’ Very true, and that for two reasons:

a. As these things were understood and defined by Mr. Philpot,³ I find scarcely any mention of them in the New Testament.

b. Because, according to the testimony of those claiming to be favoured with such experiences, they are worth very little—their influence speedily vanishes, and the soul is soon again in darkness, full of doubts and fears! Personally, I want, and, thank God, I together with thousands of others, have something more stable . . .

It would take me too far afield to enter upon a detailed discussion of Romans 8:16., but for your information I would say that I have never believed in the sufficiency of any “witness” of my spirit before—prior to—the Holy Spirit’s co-witness. The means used by the Spirit in witnessing, and the *only* means (so far as Scripture reveals, and I emphatically refuse to go one hair’s breadth beyond Scripture) is the written Word, and not the arguments, persuasions nor the *hymns* of fallible men. There is no reason why any believer should be at an uncertainty about the Divinely-made-known grounds on which a person may ascertain whether or not he be regenerate. God has graciously devoted one whole epistle to that particular subject, viz. 1 John, for near the close of that epistle we read, ‘These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life.’ (5:13.)—for it is the devil’s desire and aim, and not the will of God, that Christians should be either ignorant or uncertain about this essential matter. In that epistle a number of criteria are given, but they are of a radically different character from a subjective revelation of Christ to the soul, a special discovery of His love, or the direct witness of the Spirit to *my* spirit. Instead the first and foremost is, ‘And hereby we do know Him, if we keep His commandments’ (2:3.). Had John been on earth in his day, I fear Mr. Philpot had denounced him as a legalist!”

If assurance is subjective, a feeling which we have, we may ask why John gave the tests in his epistle? He does not give the impression that he is merely providing an inferior form of assurance. Other Scriptural tests are cited by Pink. For example:

“ ‘Blessed are they that mourn’: if I mourn over my sinful nature and over my coming so far short of the standard God has set before me, then I am clearly and divinely warranted in concluding that I am among the ‘blessed’. In such a case my assurance rests upon the Word of Him that cannot lie, whereas if I rest my assurance on some ‘direct’ and ‘immediate’ word or witness which I feel is spoken powerfully to my soul by Christ or the Spirit, saying, ‘Thou art mine’, ‘I have loved *thee* with an everlasting love’, I may be deceived by Satan coming as an angel of light and telling me a lie!”

In view of the confusion which still exists when assurance is discussed, it might be better to drop the term and substitute “confident hope”. At

any rate, the above extracts from correspondence of A. W. Pink may clear the air for some who have experienced unnecessary misery and anxiety, and lead them to the "full joy" of which the Apostle John speaks. (1 John 1:4.).

¹ We are indebted to Mr. Harold Bradshaw of Norwich for bringing this correspondence to our attention.

² *Studies in the Scriptures*, to which these references refer, comprise 32 vols. Desmond Roberts, from Swansea, has written with the following information: "I have obtained within the last three months vols. 1-31 inclusive. I have just completed a single index book to cover the whole of the 32 vols". He adds a comment on the editorial in R.T. No. 11. "Although you mention Pink's Dispensationalism, you should also make known his departure from this theory. A series of writings on Dispensationalism appear in vols. 12 and 13".

³ A leading Strict Baptist pastor of the 19th Century.

Editorial (*Continued from p. 1*)

When it comes to planting churches, those who work shoulder to shoulder must have substantial agreement. For instance statements such as "God is sovereign in creation and salvation" are meaningless unless it is spelled out what is implied. An evolutionist and an universalist will concur with a general statement of such a nature.

Two hundred years ago two events transpired upon which we may now reflect with interest. A small Baptist chapel was built in Cuckfield and at the same time the Seychelles islands were settled. This October the Seychelles celebrated their 200th anniversary. Throughout the same month each Sunday "the Church of the Air" was transmitted over FEBA-Seychelles, being recorded services from Cuckfield. The value of traditional anniversary services is doubted, for us anyway, and they have not been organised for several years. However, on Wednesday, November 15, at 8 p.m., Saturday, November 18, 7 p.m., and Sunday, November 19, 6.30 p.m. there will (D.V.) be preaching services, the aim being to reach residents. The pastor is due to preach since that gives local people an opportunity of observing existing practice. Despite vandalism the church at Crawley is making progress and now have their own mid-week meetings on Tuesdays at 8 p.m.

The circulation of *Reformation Today* is increasing and as we complete three years of publication we record our gratitude to the Lord and to those who have encouraged the work. The aim is to keep a high standard and rich material is awaiting print. The aim, too, is to keep the price at 10p for as long as possible, but it is inevitable that this will go up. A new cover is planned for the next issue.

One of the sessions at the Carey Family Conference was devoted to the subject of family worship. The edification derived from this can be judged from a section of the discussion here reproduced. The panel consisted of Bernard Honeysett, Douglas Jones, Wayne Mack and Erroll Hulse, with David Kingdon as chairman.

Problems in Family Worship

David Kingdon: I am sure you all agree that the subject of family worship is of great importance. I think we all would also agree that the conduct of family worship, particularly in making it meaningful and relevant to our children is not always easy. There is the problem of avoiding becoming stereotyped and therefore lacking in a sense of reality; the problem of avoiding boredom on the part of our children; and many other problems, and so first of all Erroll is going to lead off with some thoughts and then it's going to be opened out for discussion.

Erroll Hulse: Those of you who have the catechism might have read on the back cover a few suggestions for the enhancing of family worship. We have our family devotions in the morning. Those who have several children of different ages will know the difficulty caused by the late-comer, the one who has got out of the bed on the wrong side, or the one who has got a quarrel. To have all members of the family in harmony and all ready for family worship is an achievement in itself.

Order there must be because we are coming to God and really there is no greater act than coming to God in prayer. If you have a musical family, it means that you may call upon a member to lead with an instrument while the others sing.

For Scripture reading it is better to stick to the Gospels or the book of Acts or some part of the Old Testament that is straightforward, perhaps parts of Genesis. The catechism can be used from time to time by way of revision. Variation in what is done is helpful but we ought to complete what we begin in each instance, be it a section of the catechism or a book of Scripture. We should always have a reading of Scripture even if a short one. The order—prayer, Scripture, questions, catechism, singing—can vary. The head of the house will lead in prayer, but others should be encouraged to take part, even the youngest.

David Kingdon: Wayne, perhaps you will add to these suggestions:

Wayne Mack: One of the problems that we often face as parents in family worship is the difference in age among our children. Our little girl, Beth, is just six years of age, one boy is just about nine and the other is just about 12. Those who are older have a greater capacity for participation and also for understanding than the younger ones. So we have really two kinds of family worship a day, at least when we gather together with the entire family. Beth sits in and we try and make it as understandable as possible for her but many times it is over her head and so at sometime during every day my wife goes aside with the little girl by herself; they have either the children's catechism or "Leading little ones to God" which is an excellent help for young children in teaching them doctrine and giving assistance in family worship. In America we also have two other very fine devotional help books for the smaller children. One is called "The Tent of God" and the other "God with us". They are both written by Marian Radius who is the daughter of Catherine Vos. Most of you know Catherine Vos' Bible storybook and her daughter has written these two. We have found them to be even more helpful than Catherine Vos' book.

After my wife has read these books with the little girl we'll ask them questions to make sure that they have understood what they have read. As far as our other devotional time is concerned I think that variety as well as consistency is extremely important. In our family it is very difficult to have our own time of family devotions in the morning. Our children travel several miles to school and so they leave early in the morning. Usually our boys get up and have their own personal devotions in the morning and then I have the responsibility of driving them to school. On the way over we memorise Scripture or we talk about Scripture or I have one of the boys read a passage of Scripture. We read through a large portion of the book of Proverbs together. I suggest that the book of Proverbs is good for family devotions because there are so many practical and understandable things for children and we usually discuss them, and so we have a good time. We always have a time of prayer before I leave them for school and then on the way home I can have my own quiet time as I travel along. Then in the evening we try to have our main family worship when we have a little more time. I find it very difficult to rush through family devotions and really accomplish anything. Usually after supper we gather around in the living room or around the table on occasions, and we have our devotions. Now, we have done a number of things in our devotions—one of them is to use the catechism. We have asked questions and then we have given the answers and we have talked about the meaning of the answers. Then we have gone into the Scriptures which are found under the questions.

Then to vary it we will switch out of the catechism and sometimes we will go back to the Gospels. Right now we are trying to memorise the sermon on the mount as a family and we have memorised Matt. 5:1-20. Beth has memorised most of Matt. 5:1-20. Constant revision is the most essential thing in memorising Scripture.

I have bought the boys a one volume commentary by Matthew Henry and when we are going through a passage of Scripture and I know where we are going to be the next day I will assign the boys to do some investigation on their own. For example, when we were in Matthew, the fifth chapter, and we were talking about, "Whosoever will break the least of one of these commandments and teach men so, he will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven", I asked them to go to the commentaries and discover what Jesus meant when He talked about the least of these commandments. The next day they were supposed to bring this report back for our family devotions. We are trying to get them involved so that it's not just a one-way street where Dad does everything, but where they are contributing and are also involved. We have also used the "Little Pilgrim's Progress" for family devotions. Now I suppose you know about that. It's produced by Moody Press in the United States and it's Pilgrim's Progress adapted and rewritten on the level of a child so that it's not some big adult but little Christian. It's put in the language of a child and we have read through that two or three or maybe more times with our children. Now that Beth is coming along we are starting again and going through it again.

David Kingdon: Could you give us the publishers of those two works by Mrs. Marian Radius and then Douglas might like to contribute to the discussion.

Wayne Mack: Eerdmans is the publisher. "The Tent of God" is the Old Testament and "God with us" is the New Testament.

Douglas Jones: Well, I am in difficulty because we brought our children up in the times before we ever embraced Reformed doctrine, and our children were brought up on the Scripture Union portions. There are many things that one would seek to apply now that one of course didn't do in those days, but we did always try to make the time that we had together in reading the Word one of interest to the children and we did encourage them to take part and pray aloud. But there come occasional times when children become obstinate about these things.

It is important to differentiate between those who are pastors who are able perhaps to devote time in the morning, and others for whom this is not possible.

Wayne Mack: I was challenged some time ago about my own prayer life that perhaps I was ignoring some areas that I ought to be praying for. The Scripture says, "Ye have not because ye ask not". I decided to write out the various categories, the various areas that I ought to be touching in prayer and coming to God about. I had the home church and sister churches, and of course the churches in England were mentioned. I had a section for missionaries, for brother pastors, for the home, for the nation, for miscellaneous and so on. I had about seven or eight different categories under which I had listed a number of things. The children saw me doing this and they have adapted the idea for themselves, praying for the children in the neighbourhood and so forth. Now in our family devotions before we go to prayer we have a prayer request for every day, so that we are not always praying for the same things. We remember to thank God for the way He answers prayer and write down answers to mark the reality of answered prayer.

David Kingdon: I am reminded of C. H. Spurgeon who said that many prayers are like grocers orders . . . "ditto, ditto or as per usual!" Now Douglas has raised an important point.

A father may have to be off to work early before his children are up. He may come home quite late when they are just about ready for bed, if not in bed. What happens in such a case?

Erroll Hulse: I think that the subject of eldership is important at this point, since to the elders belongs the responsibility of seeking solutions for those who face extraordinary problems. The elders should encourage families in regard to family devotions. We have inherited such shallowness that you even find some believers resenting oversight as an intrusion. If the elders come along and enquire about family life—are you praying together, how are you getting on personally, what about the teaching of your children, are you overcoming the difficulties—there can be resentment. Now, it takes time for elders to instruct their people that this is required, and if the elders do not do it they are being negligent. But an answer to the problem of irregular hours is the construction of a time schedule which will provide for the making up of lost devotions and lost opportunities. The elders might have to make special provision and readjustments for meetings to accommodate those with shift times, and such believers should also make their own special schedule in the free time they do have to make good that which is deficient.

Wayne Mack: What Erroll has been saying about the eldership reminds me that there is another area where the elders should be alert. If there are men in the church who feel incapable, inadequate and insufficient in leading their families, the elders of the church should be getting together with these men on an individual or group basis and helping these men

to become the kind of men they ought to be in the home. We have developed a Saturday morning meeting at seven o'clock and have had as many as 20 men attending.

Also we have tried as elders, not only myself but the other elders in the church, to have every family in the church into our homes some time during every year. Of course after we have them in for a meal we always have our family devotions and so the men see us leading the family and leading the children in devotions. Where elders are, as they should be, given to hospitality, this can be one way of teaching by example.

David Kingdon: Well Wayne Mack's answer demonstrates that you have got to have the right kind of elders. I am afraid that one of the problems in some churches is that we have got the wrong kind of elders, and you need a top security pass to get into their homes! That is a problem that many face.

An important Scripture in relation to this subject is Deut. 6:4, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might. These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up". Now there are some very interesting things in that passage, first of all that instruction is to be centred upon the home; "thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children", and it is assumed of course that the man of the house would be responsible for instructing his family, though there are indications in the book of Proverbs that the woman, the wife, also did this. Then you have a beautiful combination of what you might call the formal and the informal approach here. This has already been brought out in the nature of the discussion. "When you sit down"—if you like this is the formal aspect of it, the gathering together. But also, "when thou walkest by the way"—when Wayne is driving his car!

Erroll Hulse: Proverbs 22:6 is also important. The word for train is *catechise*. "Catechise a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." This will involve instruction and correction, reproof and a guiding in all aspects of life—training them up as plants are trained to grow. This is a non-stop task.

Wayne Mack: II Tim. 3:15, Paul wrote to Timothy, "That from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus", and the word used for child

denotes a very young child—from birth. In this case, it was Timothy's mother and grandmother who taught him from the dawn of his understanding. Here is encouragement for mothers whose circumstances may be discouraging.

David Kingdon: Care has to be taken to avoid hardness, rigidity and austerity—in fact any form of inhumanity which is inconsistent and which can make the gospel exceedingly unattractive to our children.

Douglas Jones: I feel that there is an awful danger in manse life to give so much attention to other people's families and other people's children that one neglects one's own. I do agree also that it is most vital that the children realise that there is a very positive side to Christian living. It is very necessary to stress this so that children see that the Christian life and the home is not just a matter of negatives. I remember some years ago, a young curate from the local Anglican church came to see me. He had just come to the district and he had been installed in what would be termed a high Anglican church. He had been brought up amongst evangelicals, but he told me that his parents, all the time he was a child, used to tell him; "We are Christians; we don't do this; we don't do that; we don't go here; we don't go there". "My whole life," he said to me, "was a life of negatives". This was the result I feel. He had turned right away from the things that we would hold as precious. Perhaps I could just say in addition that we have seen in our own church this sort of restriction on children worked out in families. Some ten years ago, we had a whole group of people come from a Taylorite exclusive brethren assembly. They had either come out or been turned out. It has been tragic through the years to see the result among their children because it has just been a continual life of negatives. There has been a most awful reaction on the part of these children, and very few of them today, I would say, are truly regenerate.

Bernard Honeysett: As an older participant in this discussion I feel deeply moved by it. I have come from a very conservative background. I never knew true family worship though I lived in a godly home. This was not an isolated case. There are many churches, particularly in this area many Strict Baptist churches, very conservative churches, where there would be virtually no instruction of the children. My mother was a most godly woman and she taught me to say my prayers. She might have said a word at night, but not my father. He used to read a chapter and would pray, but nothing more. In a sense this is new to me, and my own children of course have grown up. Many of these people have virtually been taught that it was quite wrong to allow children to take any part in prayer at all. I am really moved and delighted that there is this concern for children in the home.

David Kingdon: Well, I think we must close now but this has been a very profitable hour.

Should all Christians be theologians? Herbert Carson answers in the affirmative as he defines the meaning of theology and explains its different aspects particularly in the realm of practice.

The Relevance of Theology

IT MIGHT SEEM ALMOST IRRELEVANT TO WRITE ON THIS SUBJECT WERE IT not for the lamentable tendency, so often apparent, to drive a false distinction between our doctrine and our devotion, between our theology and our practice. Nor is it unusual to hear ministers of the gospel announce from the pulpit, in a way which seems to imply that there is something commendable in the fact, that they are not theologians. Indeed, so much has this hiatus been allowed to develop, that now the very word "theologian" seems to conjure up pictures of an academic theologian, or teacher in a theological college. Of course there is a need for such specialists, but there is an equally great need for all Christians, and in particular all ministers, to be theologians. The contrast between the state of affairs today and that in former generations is a marked one. In Christian homes in the past Owen, Charnock and other great divines of the seventeenth century were read with understanding and spiritual profit. But in these days there is a dearth of solid reading and thinking. It is true that theology can become merely academic and intellectual, but to stop the stultifying effect of a barren theology we have ceased to study theology in any real way at all.

What is Theology?

It has been described as "the science of God", a field of study in which we consider God's revelation of His Person and His redemptive activity towards men. Some, objecting to such a pursuit, have argued that we should take the plain Scriptures, unsystematised. Theologians, they reason, have made the Scriptures lifeless by seeking to force them into theological patterns to which they were never intended to correspond. It is a sufficient answer to such people to point to the cults and sects which, claiming to follow "the straightforward approach to Scripture", arrive at so many unscriptural conclusions. The obvious need then for the study of theology arises from the fact that if we neglect it we lose all our perspective and lead ourselves into misinterpretation.

Now it has been customary to divide theological study into various disciplines and we must look at some of these.

1. *Biblical Theology.* The phrase is not a happy one since all theology ought to be, and all true theology is, Biblical. Geerhardus Vos preferred

to speak of "the history of Special Revelation", and in these words he was describing the study of the process of God's revelation, for when we come to Scripture we seek to see it as a developing organism in which God progressively unfolds His purposes. A true grasp of this will enable us to see something of the relation of the different parts of Scripture to the whole, and a proper use of this discipline will correct, for example, a wrong attitude among evangelicals to the Old Testament. Too frequently we either neglect it or allegorise it, and instead of regarding it as a revelation from God we treat it as a peg on which to hang all kinds of incredible theories. Biblical Theology will correct this neglect or misuse.

2. *Dogmatic or Systematic Theology.* It is by means of this discipline that we aim to see the interrelation of the parts of God's revelation, their logical as opposed to their historical connection. Of course it is frequently objected that when we systematise Scripture we slip into philosophy, vain speculation and barren discussion. Again, this is a possible but not a necessary consequence of the study. The true systematic theologian is not a philosopher but primarily a disciple. Unlike the philosopher who seeks to square scriptural data with his own preconceptions, the Biblical dogmatician seeks only to make explicit what is already implicit in Scripture. For example, in my preaching early in my ministry I was floundering in the Scriptures; they did not seem to fit together, and this confusion was reflected in my preaching. It was only when I began to understand the nature of the Covenant that I got an idea of the whole. Now the lesson of this is as obvious as it is important. We must preach against the background of the total view of Scripture, "rightly dividing the word of truth", else we will bewilder and confuse our people with unbiblical and illogical contradictions.

3. *Historical Theology.* Probably owing to our regard for the supreme and final authority of the Scriptures, Evangelicals have been dubious of the value of this study. We are doubtful of appeals being made to any source other than the Scriptures. But while it is true that this is as it should be, we must remember that we do not come as isolated individuals but as members of the body of Christ when we seek to understand God's truth. The right of private judgment does not include licence. If we are members of the body of Christ then this includes earlier ages as well. We have a heritage from the past and we must not despise what men of God have said in interpreting the Word of God. Looking over the centuries of Christian history we can see that God has led His Church to a deeper understanding of various truths at various points in the course of history. For example, in the time of the Arian controversy the Church was led to a clearer understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Then later the Chalcedonian Definition gave us a clear statement of the doctrine of the Person of Christ. Again in the sixteenth century Luther reaffirmed the doctrine of justification by faith with a clarity that had

been well-nigh obscured down through the Middle Ages. Thus in our theological enquiry we do not start from scratch. The errors and mistakes of the past reappear today, and although they may seem new we must realise that frequently they are the errors and mistakes of antiquity.

With this current tendency to ignore the past goes the fashion of believing unquestioningly what is generally accepted by present-day evangelical Christians. Indeed to question this seems to be tantamount to questioning the very truth of Christianity itself. And so it is that we regard old truths as new heresies, things to be regarded as dangerous rather than to be held as precious. It is at this point that Historical Theology is of such great value, and many who enter the ministry are ignorant just here. Too often our normative historical theology is that of the last 60 to 70 years instead of the last 2,000. So, then, a right historical perspective will be invaluable in that it will aid us to avoid the errors and to follow the truth of our predecessors.

4. Pastoral or Practical Theology. It is typical that this has tended to be called "Pastoralia"—a title smacking of techniques and methods. This is unfortunate since in many ways Pastoral Theology is the most important division of our theological study, for it represents the practical outworking and direct application of our theological principles in pastoral practice in the local church. These principles are of supreme relevance to our personal life and the life of the church. If you have an unbalanced diet then you suffer for it, and too many Christians today are the victims of spiritual malnutrition on the one hand, and of spiritual obesity on the other. To illustrate, in Christian conduct we do not want to find ourselves in legalism, and yet in our efforts to avoid this we swing over into antinomianism. The whole question of the relation of law and gospel and the place of the law in the life of the Christian is one on which instruction is sorely needed in many evangelical circles. But this is an aspect of Pastoral Theology.

Our Practice of Theology

In church life then our theology must have a direct bearing on our pastoral practice. We ought not to allow psychology to usurp its place, but beginning with God and God's revealed truth we must work that truth out in our daily practice. Many aspects of life in the local church will be affected by it. Let us consider just two: our approach to worship and the preaching of the Word.

(i) *Worship.* There are two widely-accepted approaches to the question of worship. That which holds that we should make our worship attractive to the outsider who is unimpressed by holiness, and a second, and somewhat higher view, which stresses that worship should be helpful to

the Christian as he comes from the difficulties of the past week with a consequent need to be strengthened and helped.

But surely the main thought in our minds should be God, and the question we should pose ourselves is whether or not our worship is acceptable to Him. Is our worship Biblical? If so, it will be helpful. But in order that our worship be Biblical it must be set against the total pattern of Scripture. First of all, against the doctrine of God to be found there. Our worship must reflect His righteousness, holiness and purity. We will come boldly, but to One who is on a throne, and so we will approach Him with a sense of awe and reverence which will be apparent in our worship. Here it must be said that our rallies and similar meetings often fail badly in this respect.

Again, our doctrine of man will be relevant. It is not that he is out of touch with God and needs only a knitting of the bond again. His very nature is wrong, not just his relationship to God, and it needs a work of God to remedy it.

Then we must remember that the believer still has the old nature within him, so that his worship is always liable to be perverted in carnal ways. As a result constant scrutiny of the externals of our worship is necessary in order to see what they will evoke. We must learn to be careful of our emphasis on the externals, since the more you emphasise them, the more you are likely to get an aesthetic response to an atmosphere. This question of atmosphere often receives a dangerous emphasis in that before we preach we condition the hearers. In this way our worship becomes man-directed and not God-directed. It is nothing more than an assault on people's minds under the alleged banner of the Holy Spirit, and as such it is wrong.

(ii) *The Preaching of the Word.* Today the ministry of the Word has fallen on evil days. There is a constant appeal made for brighter, shorter services and shorter sermons which are to be "practical" and lacking in doctrine. The result is some of the pitiful homilies we get on broadcast services. What is needed is a returning to theological, doctrinal preaching; not great hunks of undigested divinity, but preaching which emerges from a solid apprehension and application of divine truth. This will come only when we have authority and depth. The "thus saith the Lord" of the Old Testament prophets has vanished in favour of a tentative and apologetic advancing of man's opinions. And to speak with authority we must have a wide grasp of Scripture and its doctrine. If our preaching is to have depth as well, then it must cease being a series of blessed thoughts and begin to be an exposition of the Word of God. Our text will be dealt with as an organic part of the whole, and will require an understanding of the whole if it is to be understood itself.

There is too much repetition of stereotyped formulae about our pulpit utterances. True, we have one theme, Jesus Christ and Him crucified, but God forgive us if we make this monotonous when there is all the wealth and variety of Scripture at our disposal which it is our duty to bring to our people.

The polemic element will not be absent if we are preaching the gospel positively and resisting error. Now this is not popular. We live in an ecumenical age which has influenced many people's thinking. "Various insights" have replaced truth and error. Liberal, Catholic and Evangelical all have their "contribution" to make, it is argued; but any one on its own is narrow. Correspondingly the reaction has proceeded against the concept of propositional theology since we are told that "truth defies definition". This view seems to be far removed from the New Testament view which regards truth not merely as an insight but as something which stands over against error. But when we have said this let us remember that in the New Testament there was a clear distinction between the enemy of the gospel and Christians who are in error. In these days, however, controversy is looked on askance. The one thing we must not do is to rebuke error. But as we have seen it is our duty to do so. Now, clearly, to engage in such a ministry we must have our own position thought out, as well as understanding what it is we are attacking. Nothing is more futile than misdirected polemic.

It would be pointless to disguise the fact that in evangelical circles there is a marked difference of opinion on the question of evangelism. As a preliminary caution let us note that we must take great care that we do not unchurch one another over this point. But at the same time we must recognise that our differences are not based on techniques and practices but on theology, and so it is essential that we think out the doctrinal presuppositions on which the differences are based. It is only in this way that we will understand, and be sympathetic towards those with whom we disagree. There are two basic starting-points. Firstly, that which believes that, since man is free to respond to or reject the gospel, any means which are legitimate should be used to this end. Secondly, there is the approach which recognises God's sovereignty, seeing that it is God's work by His Spirit to lead a man to faith in Christ. Always we must think primarily in terms of being faithful to God, and we must remember that we are both trying to be faithful.

It might appear to be almost on the level of bathos to descend now to questions involved in the ordinary running of a local church—women's meetings, the Sunday School, methods of raising money, church councils or diaconates. At this level the theologian often becomes a mere administrator. But we should be seeking to relate Biblical truth to the practical situations in which we are involved just as much as to the apparently more elevated matters. We will need to have our position thought

out in advance if we are entering the ministry. Plausible arguments must be examined in the light of Scripture and judged accordingly. Always we remember that essentially the church is a spiritual agency and this conception must govern our mode of approach. We will not argue from a situation but proceed from basic truths to this particular circumstance.

In all that I have said, my main point has been that our theology is not an academic, intellectual pursuit, stimulating, no doubt, but divorced from practice, whether in terms of personal living or pastoral experience. Both are indissolubly linked, and both will suffer if they are separated. James Denney once said that all our theologians should be evangelists, and all our evangelists theologians. Let me end by modifying this, and saying that all our theologians should be pastors and all our pastors theologians.

(Continued from inside front cover)

perpetual obligation, and suggested practical ways in which we could fulfil the commandment. Remembering the day suggests due preparation for it. Students should complete their studies during the week to avoid work on Sundays; housewives should do their ironing and washing before Sunday; and purchases, including petrol for the car, should be made before Sunday.

The two other evening sessions were on the subject of the "Mission of the Church"—David Kingdon—and "Revival"—Erroll Hulse. The latter is partially reprinted in this issue. David Kingdon drew a strong parallel between the mission of the church and the mission of Jesus—as the Father has sent me, so send I you. The church is obliged to witness by word, deed and by the quality of its fellowship.

Robert Oliver, an elder of the Baptist Church in Bradford-on-Avon in the West Country, spoke on another West Country man, Andrew Gifford, the pioneer of many Particular Baptist churches in the Bristol area. Gifford was baptised at the age of 17 and joined the Friars Church, the first Baptist church in Bristol. He later was set apart for the ministry by the church. In 1677 he began to assist the pastor before becoming pastor himself. In his early period of preaching he had opportunity to preach even in Anglican churches, but some so opposed his message that on one occasion the church organ was played to drown out his words! Under his ministry many churches as well as his own thrived. Gifford was one of the signatories of the 1689 Baptist Confession.

Discussion sessions were ably chaired by David Kingdon, and many relevant topics were considered. The material on family worship is reproduced in this issue.

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