

REFORMATION TODAY '74



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Editorial

Due to the industrial problems earlier this year we are behind in the production of *Reformation Today*. Happily progress is now being made to catch up and we hope that by issue 21 or 22 we will be back to normal. We apologise to readers who may have been inconvenienced by delays.

A history of revivals in South Africa

One of the many encouraging features of the fourth Evangelical and Reformed Conference of South Africa held from 8th-11th July was an inspiring description of revivals in South Africa given by Dr. Jack Allen of the Dutch Reformed Church. The theme of this multi-racial Conference was Original Sin. Two excellent papers were read by David Kingdon who has now settled in Pretoria. Numbers have increased and we hope to report further details of this conference in the next issue.

Church discipline and the Anabaptists

The article by David Kingdon not only provides us with valuable historical material but gives us a fresh perspective of the relevant subject of discipline. This historical, doctrinal and practical study is warmly commended. We attempt to include shorter articles of two or three pages but it has not been possible this time. If you have just come home from work and feel too weary for fourteen pages you will find an intriguing two-page biography of Menno Simons which begins at the bottom of page 26. This should whet your appetite!

The 1689 Confession

The article by Dr. Milner draws attention to the republication of the 1689 Confession in modern English. Steady progress is being made by Carey Publications with this particular production. The relevant chapter is reproduced on pages two and three, first from the original and then in modern English.

Evangelism and the local church

Besides attempting a comprehensive and positive statement of what local church based evangelism is, this study exposes practice which falls short of the mandate to teach all nations. If there are criticisms of World Congresses on the subject it is because such conventions tend to grind on like a colossal machine providing no real hope of reformation, but rather promoting evangelism of the Ecumenical, Decisionist sort, which in the long run is a curse rather than a blessing.

The front cover shows an English gentleman practising good manners and our readers are reminded of the short article included in these pages on that subject.

CHAPTER 20 (The original)
OF THE GOSPEL, AND OF THE EXTENT
OF THE GRACE THEREOF.

1 The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give forth the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect, and begetting in them faith and repentance;¹ in this promise the gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and [is] therein effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.²

¹Gen. iii. 15. ²Rev. xiii. 8.

2 This promise of Christ, and salvation by him, is revealed only by the Word of God;³ neither do the works of creation or providence, with the light of nature, make discovery of Christ, or of grace by him, so much as in a general or obscure way;⁴ much less that men destitute of the revelation of him by the promise or gospel, should be enabled thereby to attain saving faith or repentance.⁵

³Rom. i. 17. ⁴Rom. x. 14, 15, 17. ⁵Prov. xxix. 18, Isa. xxv. 7: lx. 2, 3.

3 The revelation of the gospel unto sinners, made in divers times and by sundry parts, with the addition of promises and precepts for the obedience required therein, as to the nations and persons to whom it is granted, is merely of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God;⁶ not being annexed by virtue of any promise to the due improvement of men's natural abilities, by virtue of common light received without it, which none ever did make, or can do so;⁷ and therefore in all ages, the preaching of the gospel has been granted unto persons and nations, as to the extent or straitening of it, in great variety, according to the counsel of the will of God.

⁶Ps. cxlvii. 20, Acts xvi. 7. ⁷Read Rom. i. 18th ver. to the end.

4 Although the gospel be the only outward means of revealing Christ and saving grace, and is, as such, abundantly sufficient thereunto; yet that men who are dead in trespasses may be born again, quickened or regenerated, there is moreover necessary an effectual insuperable work of the Holy Spirit upon the whole soul, for the producing in them a new spiritual life;⁸ without which no other means will effect their conversion unto God.⁹

⁸Ps. cx. 3, 1 Cor. ii. 14, Eph. i. 19, 20. ⁹John vi. 44, 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6.

CHAPTER 20 (The modern version)

THE GOSPEL AND ITS GRACIOUS EXTENT

1 As the covenant of works was broken by man's sin and was unable to confer life, God in His mercy promised to send Christ, who would be woman-born; and by means of the promise the elect would be called, and faith and repentance wrought in their hearts. In this promise the very substance of the gospel was revealed as the effectual means for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

Gen. 3:15; Rev. 7:9.

2 This promise of Christ and of salvation by Him is revealed to men by the Word of God alone. Neither the works of creation and providence, nor the light of nature, reveal Christ and His grace to men, not even in a general or obscure way; much less is it possible by their means for men who lack the revelation of Christ by the promise of the gospel to attain to saving faith or repentance.

Prov. 29:18; Isa. 25:7; 60:2, 3; Rom. 1:17; 10:14, 15, 17.

3 The revelation of the gospel to sinners, both to nations and to certain persons, together with the promises and precepts which belong to gospel obedience, has been made at various times and in a variety of places, according to the sovereign will and good pleasure of God. The promise of the making known of the gospel has not been made contingent upon any good use made by men of their native abilities developed by means of light common to all, for such a development has never taken place, nor can it do so. Hence in all ages the extent to which the gospel has been proclaimed, whether to wider or more confined areas, has been granted to persons and nations in greatly varying measures according to the all-wise will of God.

Ps. 147:20; Acts 16:17; Rom. 1:18-32.

4 The gospel is the only external means of making Christ and saving grace known to men, and it is completely adequate for this purpose. But that men who are dead in their sins may be born again—that is to say, made alive, or regenerated—something further is essential, namely, an effectual, invincible work of the Holy Spirit upon every part of the soul of man, whereby a new spiritual life is produced. Nothing less than such a work will bring about conversion to God.

Ps. 110:3; John 6:44; I Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor 4:4, 6; Eph. 1:19, 20.

Chapter 20 of The 1689 Confession was added to The Westminster Confession of Faith upon which “the 1689” was based. Why this addition? Dr Jack Milner suggests why and draws out some helpful conclusions.

The Gospel and the Extent of the Grace thereof

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH IS UNASHAMEDLY BASED ON THE Westminster Confession of 1647. The purpose of the compilers was to demonstrate that they were at one with other Christians theologically and differed only on such matters as baptism, the government of the church and the place of the magistrate. This purpose led them to adhere as closely as possible to the words of the Westminster Confession, yet the compilers were not mere imitators (some of them had produced an entirely original confession in 1644) for there are many alterations, deletions and additions. However, Chapter 20, the subject of this article, was wholly original. What follows is an attempt to explain the chapter itself and also, perhaps even more important, to suggest why it has been added.

The “ministers and messengers” who met together in 1689 did so for only seven days and the resulting Confession bears, in places, the marks of hasty preparation. For example, a worthwhile condensation of Chapter 3 on God’s Decree was not done with sufficient care and we are left with a grammatical oversight which would imply, in paragraph 3, that some angels have been predestinated to eternal life *through Jesus Christ*. Similarly, in this Chapter 20 we are suddenly confronted with the Covenant of Works which was (correctly in my view) deleted from Chapter 7. So it would seem that whoever phrased Chapter 20 did believe in the Covenant of Works, whereas the presumably different person who amended Chapter 7 did not. All this is not to detract from the value of the 1689 Confession, but it does illustrate that it can be more difficult to modify an existing Confession than to start from scratch. The purpose of pointing out these inconsistencies is to prepare the way for Chapter 20 the wording of which, in places, is very complicated. Yet I believe that the subject matter of this chapter is most important.

First of all, then, let us turn to paragraph 1. Setting aside any discussion of the Covenant of Works which would only cloud the basic issue, I believe that we have here a statement of the *necessity of God’s grace*. When Adam fell, we all fell in him. The guilt of his sin has been imputed to us and his corrupted nature has been transmitted to us (Ps. 51:5). As a result we are born guilty and corrupt and so “the wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies”

(Ps. 58:3). Our dreadful condition by nature renders us utterly incapable of keeping God's commands and we add sin to sin throughout our lives. Yet God was pleased to choose a people for himself and has ordained that his elect shall be saved from their sin by the means of the preaching of the Gospel—the proclamation of free forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ. All this, of course, appears elsewhere in the Confession. Yet it is reaffirmed here to emphasise that:

- (a) Man is utterly lost and cannot be saved except by God's grace.
- (b) God has his elect people.
- (c) The Gospel is God's instrument for effectually calling his elect out of the world.

In the second paragraph the *absolute necessity of Gospel preaching* is affirmed. It has been asserted already that man is lost in sin and cannot be saved apart from God's grace. The Gospel is the means God uses to bestow his mercy. As it is preached forgiveness is declared and by the Spirit the elect are made to believe the message preached—which is that there is salvation only in Christ. This second paragraph is designed to emphasise the fact that the Gospel is revealed nowhere but in the Bible. Christianity is opposed to all other religions. God is clearly seen in the world around us, but it is not his mercy which is revealed, only "his eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20), which leaves men without excuse for their wickedness. The Bible is utterly opposed to the idea of the "noble savage" who lives up to the light he has received and is so good that he shames the Christian. Nowhere are we told that he is accepted for doing his best. A man can be forgiven only through the blood of Christ and this is revealed in the Bible alone. In paragraph 2 we are told that men cannot be saved unless they hear the Word of God.

This is very relevant today, for I have met many so-called evangelicals who believe in the salvation of heathens who die having never heard the Gospel. There are also many dispensationalists who believe God has a special place in his heart for the Jews as Jews. I once pressed one of these latter very strongly and he could not bring himself to say that a Jew dying in unbelief was condemned! Let us at least take paragraph 2 to heart, for it is utterly scriptural—no Gospel, no salvation! "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

We now come to the third paragraph. Here there is real difficulty in understanding exactly what is being taught. Yet I think we can arrive at the main thrust of the paragraph even though some details may elude us. Let us see the principal idea first of all. We have seen already that man is lost in sin and cannot be saved unless he hears the Gospel. Christians have the Gospel and so, is it entirely in their hands whether or not men are going to hear? Is it true, as the Arminians say, that while Christians are slothful God is like the surgeon without his instruments? Without

denying that Christians often *are* slothful, and are, therefore, chastised by the Lord, this paragraph directs our gaze higher. *The actual sending of the Gospel is in the hands of God.* The particular nations and individuals to whom the Gospel comes are “merely (*i.e.* entirely) of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God”. Also, it is affirmed that no country can presume that there will always be Gospel preachers present because the Gospel has been granted “as to the extent or straitening of it . . . according to the counsel of the will of God”. This means that days of prosperity for the Gospel (“extent of it”) or days of adversity, as in this country today (“straitening of it”) are all according to God’s will. This is a very heartening truth, because it instils in God’s people a great confidence in the ultimate triumph of the Gospel through the gathering in of the elect and saves them from the worry and depression to which Arminianism would render them subject. Because God is in control, we are better employed in calling on the “Lord of the harvest” to thrust out “labourers into his harvest” than we are, say, in having guilty feelings about working in a “secular” job, if that is where the Lord happens to have placed us. God’s labourers are infallibly made to feel their call in answer to the prayers of God’s people.

One of the proof texts for this paragraph is Acts 16:7 and this illustrates most clearly that a scriptural truth is being set forth. To illustrate that God still directs where the Gospel is to go we need only consider Carey. He had a great desire to go to the South Sea Islands yet God through the workings of his providence, sent him to India. In Acts 16 the apostles were directly instructed where to go by the Holy Spirit. Carey was directed by providence, yet the purpose of God was worked out no less infallibly. Incidentally, the South Sea Islanders did receive the Gospel by the mouth of John Paton and others, but it was a different generation to which it was sent.

So much is clear, then, in paragraph 3, but what about the words “not being annexed” etc? To “annex” is to “add” so it would seem here that the Confession rightly denies that the Gospel is ever sent as a “reward” for a prior, natural reformation or promise of it. If we have opportunity; for example, of speaking with a man who is an adulterer, do we demand a reformation of his life before we tell him the good news if he is disposed to hear it? It is clear that we do not. In the same way God sends the Gospel to men in all their sin and misery. No prior good resolutions are necessary. The Ninevites changed as a result of Jonah’s preaching. Jonah was not sent in response to a prior change of heart.

Finally, in paragraph 4, we have yet another reminder that the gospel preacher is merely a servant and that in declaring the Gospel he is fulfilling his duty. As he exhorts, reasons with and calls his hearers it is God the Spirit who works in the hearts of the elect and causes them to respond as the first outward manifestation of their regeneration. So, in them the

Gospel call becomes the effectual call. This final paragraph is a re-affirmation of the doctrine of effectual calling so excellently set out in Chapter 10 (apart from Chapter 10, paragraph 3, which I personally do not think can be supported from Scripture).

Looking at Chapter 20 as a whole, it seems as if the compilers were working their way towards a definition of the Gospel *as sent out into the world*. The force of the Great Commission seems to have been felt by them almost without their having been aware of it. As it stands Chapter 20 is not very clear in its presentation yet that which is only imperfectly presented in this Confession is almost entirely absent from the earlier Westminster Confession. In Chapter 7, paragraph 6, of the Westminster Confession there is mention of the Covenant of Grace being "held forth—to all nations both Jews and Gentiles" but this is only in distinction to the Old Covenant being limited to the Jews.

In order to understand the significance of Chapter 20 as a notable advance, it is necessary to go back in history to pre-Reformation times, in fact back to the days of Constantine. From New Testament times until the days of Constantine the distinction between "the church" and "the world" was clear. Even allowing for the progress of error in the church after the days of the apostles, the church could be seen to be a community of people called out of the world. The Christians were citizens of heaven as well as earthly citizens and they succeeded for a while in keeping the two citizenships distinct from one another. Because Christians were those who were in the world but not of the world, they could be recognised and many were the times they drew the fire of their persecutors. It was their separateness which was their strength, for they were saved from their sin and they called on their fellows to be partakers of the same salvation. In their zeal, the church fulfilled the Great Commission and the Lord added many to their number. However, with the so-called conversion of Constantine, all this changed. Christianity became the official religion of the empire and, in accepting the protection of the state, the church fell. All members of the empire were now "Christians" and so were baptized at birth. Thus originated "Christendom" and we no longer see only two categories of men, the saved and the lost, but three: true Christians, nominal Christians, and heathens (*i.e.* Turks etc., outside Christendom).

With the advent of State Christianity came the evil of coercion—a strong advocate of this being Augustine. In his battle with the Donatists—whose only evil seemed to be that they wished to "opt out" of the Constantinian or "fallen" church—Augustine justified the use of force by using the words "compel them to come in". Also, he seemed to regard the Great Commission as having been fulfilled and this is of vital importance in considering the matter before us now. From Constantine onwards the empire was "Christian" and eventually we had the absurdity of "Christian" warriors with crosses on their shields fighting against the infidels. A church by this time consisted of everyone in a particular locality and not a

group of people called out of and spiritually separate from the world. The situation was that a "parish priest" who preached the truth had to exhort the *church members* to "know the Lord", forgetting that in the Church "all shall know him from the least unto the greatest" (Heb. 8:11).

At the time of the Reformation this all-inclusive idea of the Church had been in existence for hundreds of years and, understandably, it passed into the thinking of the Reformers—I think many of the difficulties experienced by the Reformers in Switzerland resulted from the attempt to impose Church discipline on unregenerate people. However, in making allowances for the Reformers, it must not be forgotten that the Anabaptists on the Continent saw clearly that the Church must be a separate community taken out of the world, and the Reformers became their bitter enemies, calling them "purists" and "perfectionists". The Anabaptists regarded (wrongly, I hasten to add!) Reformed Churches as being as corrupt as the Papal Church and, completely ignoring parish boundaries, went about preaching the Gospel, feeling themselves bound by the Great Commission. They regarded themselves as Christians in a corrupt world and duty-bound to tell their neighbours of salvation in Christ. Those who believed were added to their churches just as in Apostolic times. The missionary labours of Reformers such as Farel were quite different in principle (though *in fact* many were added to the Lord because they preached the truth). Farel would preach in a particular town, having been sent by authority from the city council of Berne, and then the citizens would vote as to whether they wanted the Gospel or not. If a majority voted in favour, the idols in the parish church would be destroyed and the town would have declared for the Reformation. I am not quite sure what the papists did then, except plot to overthrow the reform! It is clear that, although the preaching was Bible truth, it was a rather unbiblical way of "going into all the world". The idea of voluntary associations of Christians was absent. The Reformers thought in terms of Christian countries, states, or cities, but the Anabaptists thought of themselves as Christians and the rest as the non-Christian world—a completely scriptural view, apart from their attitude to the Reformers. It is a pity that, by and large, the Anabaptists believed in free-will and general atonement, because in life many of them were most godly and most zealous in spreading the Gospel.

In our own country, in the 17th century, the Presbyterians, who composed the Westminster Confession, still believed in Christianity in a territorial sense and so they still thought of the church as being supported by the magistrate, with everyone in a given locality having to attend. The Presbyterians regarded themselves as completing the reformation of the Church of England and, had they ever had the power, would have been just as intolerant of dissenters as most of the Reformers on the Continent had been in the previous century.

Like some of the Anabaptists, many of the Particular Baptists of the 17th century started their Christian lives attending the established churches

but, on leaving them because of infant baptism and the state connection, *retained their Calvinistic doctrine*. In this respect they were much superior to the Continental Anabaptists of the previous century. Only gradually did they begin to see themselves as a separated community and become opposed to the state church, with its mixture of believers and unbelievers. Only gradually did they begin to have a view of themselves relative to the world which led them to reject the whole idea of a Christian nation. (In fact, how many reading this article *today*, *still* regard Britain as a Christian land in some sense or other?) Because it took them longer than the Anabaptists to become consistent in their opposition to "Constantinianism" (*i.e.* the Church-State ideas of the reformers), I believe they were more solid and biblical in the end product, and the point I am making in this article is that Chapter 20 of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith marks a step of progress towards a correct view of the Church in the world. I would say that the correct view of the Church as being separate from the world, *held with true conviction*, leads to a true concern for those who are still in their sin and a desire for the gathering in of God's elect. This, in turn, leads to the realisation that the Great Commission rests upon God's people until the end of the world.

I would not like to give the impression that all Baptists of the 17th century were fully consistent with their principles or that all others were utterly unaware of the Great Commission in a worldwide sense; John Eliot, the missionary to the Red Indians, is sufficient proof that this was not so. What I have been seeking to do is to indicate the tendencies of two ways of thinking—the Reformed way, still set in the mould of "Constantinianism", and the more radical way of looking at the church and the world as do the writers of the New Testament.

In conclusion, I think it would be appropriate to point out that progress in the truth is not automatic and mechanical. After 1689 the Particular Baptists tended to stagnate. They maintained their separation from the world but lost their zeal in propagating the Gospel. So much was this so that about 100 years later it became necessary for Carey to prove again the obligation of Christ's command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Then the missionary vision of Carey's time also degenerated and today Christians are still going into foreign lands but there is not much real Gospel preaching—so much of it is unbelievably shallow. Then, again, those of us who have regained the truth in recent years do not seem to know what to do with it. What can we do? First, let us remember, in the words of Chapter 20, that "the preaching of the Gospel is granted as to the extent or straitening of it, in great variety, according to the counsel of the will of God". Today we have days of straitening, and opportunities seem to be few, so let us grasp the opportunities given in the providence of God. Also, since God is the Lord of the harvest, let us call upon him to send labourers into the harvest and, to whatever extent he wills, to

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Reformation of Manners

SHOULD ANY OVERSEAS VISITORS PAY A VISIT TO HAYWARDS HEATH THEY WOULD FIND suitably clad gentlemen (as represented on the cover of this issue) making their way up to London from the local Railway Station. In the evening the same gentlemen return, perhaps not as even tempered as when they began but still retaining the appearance of being well mannered. Visitors are, however unlikely to find that they are greeted in a gentlemanly fashion by many of these commuters. Good manners still exist in England but that there has been an overall and general decline in gentlemanly behaviour few would question or deny.

Where did good manners come from? Some trace this back to the days of King Arthur and the Round Table. The knights of those days had a code which is very interesting to read.

1. Thou shalt believe all the church teaches, and keep its commandments. 2. Thou shalt protect the church. 3. Thou shalt defend the weak. 4. Thou shalt love the country of thy birth. 5. Thou shalt never retreat in the face of thine enemy. 6. Thou shalt fight to the death against the infidel. 7. Thou shalt fulfil thy duties to the Lord in all that is not contrary to the law of God. 8. Thou shalt never lie, and shall be faithful to thy pledged word. 9. Thou shalt be liberal and generous to all. 10. Thou shalt always champion the right against injustice and evil.

In Galatians 5 we read that the fulfilling of the law is to "love thy neighbour as thyself". This general precept is a good foundation for the way in which we ought to treat our neighbours.

The matter can be illustrated by a visit to the home of another. In such a visit we should seek to greet our friends in a cordial way and should also dress suitably for the occasion. To overdress might lead to a feeling of artificiality, while on the other hand to be shabby, dirty and unkempt would insult our friends who would naturally conclude that we did not care enough about them to present ourselves in an orderly way.

If a meal were involved then table manners would be important. For anyone to spread his elbows out and think only of his own needs is certainly to fall short of loving his neighbour. A true love would lead one to make a little study at least of the culture of the person or family being visited.

Consideration needs to be given to the time people have available. If we overstay our welcome and create pressure for them this is to fall short of good manners. If we love others we will be patient to hear what they have to say and not monopolise the conversation with our own interests. Likewise when telephoning others thought ought to be given to whether it is convenient or not, due regard being given to the factor of time.

Manners are needed today in travelling, whether by bus or by train. Thought needs to be given to the weak, people who either because of age or sex are not able to procure suitable seats for themselves. When travelling on the roads one observes the most appalling manners, cutting in front of others and behaving like a "roadhog".

Many other areas can be thought of, but to conclude it is helpful to remember always to greet people in a cordial manner. It may not be our custom as in New Testament times to greet one another with an holy kiss but we should endeavour always to introduce friends who have not met before and to make people feel at ease and at home. It is sometimes possible to walk straight past people in the street quite unintentionally but it is obvious that we should greet people in a friendly way when passing by, which is one detail of hundreds which stem from the principle, "Love is the fulfilling of the Law". Romans 13 : 10.

These are days in which there is great stress on organization, including the organization of great world congresses to talk about evangelism. What are we to think of these huge affairs? Where does the local church figure in evangelism? What is evangelism? Does theology have anything to do with evangelism? And what about the relationship of preaching to evangelism? These are some of the issues expounded in the following article by the editor.

The Local Church and Evangelism

An article in Crusade magazine, November 1973, is devoted to a description of a new evangelistic project. Conscious of the fact that this new organised effort, nicknamed *Power*, is not the first scheme to be imposed on the churches from an organisation outside the churches, the writer declares: "Whilst it is true that *Power* cannot be described as a truly 'grass roots' movement (can anything?), it is doubtful if any project has been the subject of such widespread and intensive discussion at all levels as this one."

Several comments are called for. The project, it is claimed, is the subject of "widespread and intensive discussion". This generation has talked more about evangelism than any other, with massive amounts of money being spent on yet more discussion. Soon another World Congress for Evangelism will have multiplied words about this subject. Yet talking about evangelism has not arrested spiritual declension going on around us. Furthermore, modern evangelism, particularly as practised in America, has not arrested the awful moral decline and darkness of the world whereas the teaching ministry exercised in times of reformation has dispelled darkness and brought light to the nations.

Turning to the Crusade article again the comment about "grass roots" needs analysis. "*Power* cannot be described as a truly 'grass roots' movement (can anything?)" says the writer. In reply I would assert the claim that Christians of previous generations did indeed *practise* "grass roots" evangelism, rather than merely talking about it. They practised it spontaneously because their roots were in theology. They drew their spiritual life from the Word and hence evangelism was a way of life, rather than a technique to be learned. They could do no other than witness to the Lord Jesus Christ and teach his salvation to others.

The roots of evangelism are embedded in the local church which derives its life from Christ, as he is set forth in the whole of Scripture. The

members evangelise as they are nourished by the preaching, strengthened by the corporate prayer and worship of the church and encouraged by fellowship. Christians who abide in Christ by abiding in a true local church will evangelise spontaneously. They can do no other. If the churches are not producing evangelism in this spontaneous way, the way to recovery is not by the imposition of organised efforts upon the churches from without. The only way is by reformation and revival taking place within. The new organisation called *Power*, like all its predecessors, is superficial for it ignores the urgent need for reformation and revival in the churches. Moreover having attended the last World Congress for Evangelism and spent time analysing its effects and writing an appraisal of it, I feel very strongly that such Congresses do more harm than good. Not only is ecumenical evangelism promoted, but Arminian teaching and apologetics are encouraged. The overall tendency is for churches to continue to depend on extramural efforts, *i.e.* efforts coming in from the outside. We should rather devote our time and energy to "grass roots" evangelism, evangelism that springs up all the year round—not just an annual effort, but outreach from healthy, scripturally governed churches. I propose to deal with the subject in the following way:

1. *Evangelism defined from the New Testament in which we also see what evangelism is not.*
 2. *A dynamic theology is the foundation of evangelism.*
 3. *A dynamic Church is the agent of evangelism.*
 4. *Dynamic preaching the chief instrument of the Church's evangelism.*
 5. *A dynamic communication of the Gospel to every creature springs from local churches.*
1. **Evangelism defined from the New Testament in which we also see what evangelism is not.**

Evangelism is the preaching of the Gospel to every creature. There is no limit. We are to go into all the world. No kind of person is excepted, old or young, male or female, rich or poor, weak or strong. There is a priority. The Gospel is to be preached to the Jew first (Rom. 1:16). Apart from the application to the Hebrew people there is another lesson to be drawn from this priority. The Gospel must be preached and applied to our own immediate family circle first. The Christian mother teaching the Gospel to her children is a power that has worked to the salvation of multitudes. Some of the best missionaries have emerged from Christian homes, men such as John C. Paton and William Burns.

When we define evangelism we include comprehensiveness as well as contact. To have a five minute chat about the Gospel with every creature in the world is not to evangelize the world. That is contact alone. That is an introduction and such is valuable indeed, but evangelism is much more than that. Evangelism is comprehensive. Our Lord states this comprehensiveness as follows: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19). The teaching is to be such that those disciples or learners that are made are prepared for baptism into the Trinity and such baptism presupposes a thorough and detailed understanding of each of the three persons of the Trinity. Think of the colossal ignorance, the woeful darkness, the terrible deception about Creation, the Bible, God, Christ, and the Church prevalent today. The task of dispelling this ignorance and deception by way of proclamation and teaching is enormous. Until the end of the world we are to tackle this task with intelligence, courage, energy and dependence upon the Lord who is with us to the end of the age.

Evangelism, then, is the preaching of the Gospel in detail and in a thorough manner to every creature. If people will have nothing to do with it we do not give up but persevere in the knowledge that this is what our Lord has commanded and therefore in wholehearted obedience we will continue.

Having given this brief definition we can now observe what evangelism is not.

(i) *Evangelism is not John 3:16 in isolation*

We must not think that if we shout out a few texts on a street corner we have fulfilled our evangelistic responsibilities. Favourable sites for open air preaching in this modern world of heavy traffic noise are rare and should be utilized wherever there is reasonable prospect of a listening audience. But if such is secured and used regularly it forms only one means of evangelism. Likewise when literature is distributed we must remember that our dropping a few printed tracts or leaflets through letter boxes, while better than nothing, falls far short of the great commission to evangelize. Much that is done today can be likened to a farmer who, instead of engaging in the systematic labour of ploughing and planting ten acres of corn, goes out for five minutes and throws a few handfuls of seed on the ground, the most of which is immediately devoured by the birds of the air.

(ii) *Evangelism is not revival*

Recently I procured a cassette tape on the subject of evangelism by a well known preacher. I played it several times and was edified by it but in actual fact he did not say a word about evangelism! It was all about revival and the theology of revival. I believe in revival with all my heart, but revival is not evangelism. Revival will lead to better and more effective evangelism. If, however, we slip into thinking that we can do nothing until revival comes—and it has not come now for well over a century—then we slip into irresponsibility of the most diabolical kind. Our Lord commanded evangelism. We are to obey as best we can. We may be weak and the churches may be weak. Nevertheless we may never excuse ourselves. Evangelism is an abiding obligation to the end

of the age. Our Lord did not say that we ought only to evangelize when he sends revival. The principle of Psalm 126 is apposite here. If we sow in tears we shall reap in joy. We are not to excuse our sloth by saying to ourselves, "An well, in revival hundreds will be saved, but all our efforts bear little fruit—but one here and two there—so I am going to ease up and wait for revival!" Revival may never be seen in this generation yet multitudes will continue to be saved one by one throughout all nations, through the ordinary outreach and witness of local churches.

(iii) *Evangelism is not the establishment of a preaching centre*

Some dear brothers in the ministry that I know think that all they need do for evangelism is preach in a pulpit three times a week. They pray for people to come in but such prayer shows a lack of common sense for the people round about do not even know of the existence of that pulpit. God uses means. He will not send angels to tell the people. *We* must tell the people and if they are utterly opposed to going to a church then we must resort to other means of teaching them. Our Lord did not lay it down as a condition that the teaching must begin in ecclesiastical buildings. It becomes clear to disciples that Christ and his people are one and that there are decided obligations to make use of the means of grace and to gather where God's people gather. Initially, however, we must be ready to teach people in homes, either theirs or ours.

The pulpit, as we shall see, is the Church's most powerful instrument in the conversion of souls but we must never imagine that the mandate to evangelize is fulfilled merely by the establishment and maintenance of a preaching centre.

(iv) *Evangelism is not a special crusade or campaign*

The idea has long prevailed in evangelical churches that for the most part evangelism consists of a special evangelistic effort once or twice a year, in which an evangelist is employed for a week or two. At the end of every meeting a call is made for decisions for Christ. At the end of the campaign the results are made known. Some souls may have been drawn in and truly saved by this method and in some cases churches have been quickened to recognize their responsibilities. Having come from this kind of tradition and having observed this practice in various places I have noticed that very little, if any, regular, consistent evangelism is carried on in these churches. The tendency is to make a big effort for the special campaign and then to go back to doing nothing until the next effort comes along. In addition to this, the system is fraudulent and dishonest in the extreme—it is a big lie! Only a small fraction of those advertised as though they were converts continue. When the truth is exposed the excuse is made: "it was worth it for one or two!" It is disgraceful that dishonesty of this kind should be practised by some platform evangelists who have to advertise their success in order to

continue in business. If all the decisions that have been reported in such a way as to give the idea that they were converts were in fact true converts, we would be living in the millennium by now! Lying at the root of it all is defective theology which brings us to consider the question of doctrine upon which the apostles, particularly Paul, laid such stress.

2. A dynamic theology is the foundation of evangelism

Our age is an age of power, an age in which people look for and admire the dynamic. Men talk constantly about power: military power, political power, industrial power, economic power. Our Lord in sending his disciples out to evangelize the world, declared that all power belonged to him. He alone has the power to regenerate and quicken sinners. He alone has the dynamic to create new life. A theology that does not come to grips with the sovereign power of God is less than dynamic. "All power is given to me—go ye therefore." Our knowledge of God (theology) and the fact that Christ is now making application of the redemption he has secured for his people forms the foundation of evangelism, the basis upon which we proceed to the work. The knowledge that our Lord has power to quicken whom he wills invests our persevering efforts with hope and expectancy. The doctrine of election, far from shutting out sinners, is the reason for their being gathered in. As we evangelize we soon discover that "there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11). But we are encouraged by the sovereignty of God and such statements as, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:27).

Theology is a knowledge of God. We are to teach all truth, particularly those truths which pertain to the knowledge of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost into whom the converts are baptized. What makes theology dynamic? The Holy Spirit, for he comes like the wind to regenerate and quicken. To us the proclamation belongs. To the Spirit regeneration belongs. We are to command men to repent and to believe. We are to exhort, urge, plead, expound and teach. We can do all this. But we cannot regenerate. "Of his own will begot he us with the word of truth" (James 1:18).

Regeneration precedes faith and repentance. Repentance is God's gift (Acts 5:31 and 11:18). Likewise faith is God's gift to all his elect people. It is not man's faith which causes election but election which causes man's faith. (If the reader is in doubt about this a study of the following Scriptures will be helpful: Deut. 7:7, 8, Hos. 14:4, John 6:37, 39, 44, 12:32, 1 Cor. 1:27, 28, Eph. 2:8, 9, 2 Pet. 1:1, 1 John 4:10, 19). This is the hinge upon which the whole issue turns. Modern evangelism is based on the notion that the preacher must preach to obtain man's response in order that God might then regenerate. Human response can be obtained by the exertion of pressure. By means of a call for decisions a visible result

can be obtained. Our interest is in regeneration. When souls are quickened they soon make their presence felt as they did under Peter's preaching: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Those who follow in the apostolic tradition preach for regeneration. They are not interested in a harvest of hay, wood and stubble. They look for gold, silver and precious stones.¹

Preaching which is vindicated by the living, dynamic, almighty regeneration of God in which souls are brought to life is magnificent. In contrast to this, evangelism in which teaching and doctrine are minimized, and man-centred religion predominates, with the emphasis on entertainment, is weak and disappointing, because those who profess to have made decisions soon fall away.

The question of the centrality of theology was avoided at the World Congress on Evangelism at Berlin in 1966. The outcome was summarized as follows:

"In contrast with the results of other historic assemblies the Congress papers will reflect the theological weakness and uncertainty which characterizes twentieth century evangelicalism. Blessings and curses are mingled together. The atmosphere is grey. The pure air of the Gospel is there, but so is the smog. The sun does shine, but dimly through the smoke and fumes of compromise and doctrinal confusion.

"The Christian Church today faces one of the greatest crises of all time. In past centuries some truths have been assailed. Now the very foundations of the faith are being rejected. The World Congress on Evangelism revealed how ill-equipped evangelicals are to face this crisis. Inarticulate in doctrine and man-centred in outlook, many evangelical leaders are unable even to define what the historic faith is, let alone teach it. The result is that a diluted theology within the churches has produced a shallow and ignorant generation of Christians."²

It is commonly understood that a heresy is something which destroys the Gospel whereas an error is that which is wrong and misleading but which is not serious enough to destroy the Gospel. Two heresies in particular destroy the Gospel as far as its evangelistic thrust is concerned. One is hyper-Calvinism in which the free offers of the Gospel are denied and in which an excuse is made of the fact that men are dead in sin and therefore there is no point in evangelizing. Total human responsibility (men know that they ought to repent and believe the Gospel) must be maintained together with faith in the sovereignty of God. These matters cannot be reconciled to human logic. The hyper-Calvinist in his desire to be logical comes to the wrong conclusion that it is inconsistent to command sinners to repent and believe when they are unable to do so, which is entirely an unbiblical and false conclusion!

The other heresy which destroys true evangelism is decisionism. This system also follows human logic. If God commands sinners to repent

and believe, then obviously, reason the decisionists, they must be able to do so. Therefore, without any further ado, we employ every device at our disposal to get men to make a decision. Clive Tyler of Cape Town, in a most helpful article, has shown the harmful practices which Finney's logic has led to in the churches.³ That which stops short of God's regeneration deceives souls into a false assurance and creates havoc in the churches because of the addition of false converts. Paul preached repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). To us belongs the proclamation to every creature. To God belongs the increase.

3. A dynamic Church is the agent of evangelism

The nature of the Church

That the Church is the agent of evangelism can be seen, firstly, by observing the nature of the Church and, secondly, by examining the example of the Church in the New Testament. Our Lord commissioned his disciples to go and, "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). Those so baptized are joined to the body of Christ which is the Church. The Church is described by different analogies. The predominant analogy is that of the human body. Each member of the Church has a function. (Rom. 12:4, the word "office" is better translated *function* from the Greek word *prazin*; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:16.) Union with Christ by faith is essential in order to be a member of Christ's Church. To be joined to Christ is to live or to have spiritual life. The living union is illustrated by the analogy of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-11). Christ's body, or Church, is like the vine. To abide in it is to have life but to be severed from it is to be severed from the means of grace given by Christ to his Church which leads to drying up and ultimately to spiritual death. A further analogy is that used by Paul in Ephesians where he likens the Church to a living building. It is organic, for it is growing. The Holy Spirit dwells in this building in which all the members are like living stones, fitly framed together in harmony, union and common purpose. (See also 1 Pet. 2:5.)

Essential to the Church is the purity of her membership. The stones must be living for they are to offer up spiritual sacrifices. That they must be living is further seen in that they are to grow and increase in love (Eph. 4:16). It is self-evident that nothing will contribute more quickly to the destruction of the Church than the entrance into her visible membership of those who are hostile to her doctrines and to her Head. Christ has, however, made provision for the purity of the Church to be maintained by means of discipline. This discipline was vested first in the apostles for the establishment of the New Testament Church and following that extraordinary period of establishment this discipline is vested in elders. Stress has been laid on the fact that the Church is a living body, this life

being well illustrated by the human body, the vine and the living building. This life is exclusive. It belongs to the Church alone. Therefore evangelism emanates from the life of the Church for the enlargement of none other than the Church. Furthermore, the body of truth upon which evangelism is based is entrusted to the Church which is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The truth, together with the authority to propagate, defend and maintain it, is vested in the Church alone and the Church alone is commissioned to evangelize by taking the teaching to all nations, and by preaching the Gospel to every creature. The converts or disciples that are made are added to the parent body by baptism and each one is subject to the discipline of the elders of that body.

The Example of the New Testament Church

This principle is illustrated throughout the book of Acts. All the evangelism issued or came from the Church. All the converts made were baptized into the Church. "Repent and be baptized every one of you," declares Peter (Acts 2:38). When Paul writes to the Corinthians he writes to the Church at Corinth, the composition of which he specifies exactly as "them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints". To them he writes and no other. Paul insists that discipline be maintained to preserve the purity of the body or the membership at Corinth (1 Cor. 5), just as Peter was used to maintain the purity of the Church at Jerusalem by the removal of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

Every true local church is an expression in an area of the body of Christ. The life of Christ is seen in that body as it can be seen in no other group of people on earth. The members of that local church are joined to Christ. They have his life and to have his life is to have dynamic life. The Holy Spirit dwells in and fills the members of the local church. Such love of people for each other the world has never seen. This is no small factor in convincing them that the Gospel is true (John 17:21). Such unity and such affection for God and devotedness in worship as expressed in the local church the world has never witnessed. The members of Christ's body found in the local church should have no peers when it comes to hospitality and good works. The inhabitants round about observe in them a people who suffer with meekness, who rejoice in God's goodness, whose lives are blameless and who abound in the truth which has brought transformation and eternal life to them. Thus the dynamic local church is God's agent for evangelism. The whole local church is involved. All members evangelize by life and lip and support some of their number who have been recognized and set apart, not only for the oversight and the maintenance of discipline, but for the public preaching of the Word. Care is taken to fulfil the high standards of correct doctrine insisted upon by the Scriptures (Acts 20:27-32; 1 Tim. 4:16; Titus 1:9 and 2:1). Those recognized in this way lead the flock in evangelism. The

work is a corporate work and the elders or leaders do not act independently but see every member as having some part to play.

In the New Testament we see all the preaching coming from the Church as expressed in the local churches whether at Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus or elsewhere. All converts were added to the churches. All preachers were subject to the discipline of the churches and, if travelling abroad, were sent out by one church or another. Even the great apostle Paul did not go unsent or independently. He and Barnabas, after prayer and fasting, were sent out by the church at Antioch and to that church they returned and reported after their journeys.

Wrong practice in evangelism today

Independent evangelists, some of whom set up their own evangelistic organizations, are popular today. Some churches which are far from dynamic and which have poor preaching; little, if any, discipline; badly attended prayer meetings and a poor reputation in the towns where they are found, often resort to evangelistic campaigns to give them a boost. There is a flurry of activity and for a time a special effort is made to reach out to the neighbourhood. Contacts are made and there may be some additions to the church. After the excitement of the special effort all the unsolved problems emerge once more—the lack of doctrine, the lack of oversight and discipline and the lack of consistent week by week outreach. The real problems are not solved by an evangelistic campaign. Evangelism does not produce life in the church. Rather, life in the church produces evangelism. Consistent, all-the-year-round evangelism will emerge when the churches are reformed and when due heed is given to the order which God has ordained by way of Scriptural church government, teaching and pastoral oversight. When such reformation takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit and He surges through or empowers the Scriptural order God has specified in his Word, evangelism will be irresistible and spontaneous. The people will not need to be bullied into it. Nobody will be able to stop them doing it!

Evangelistic societies which operate independently of the churches reason that they are needed because the churches are lifeless and dead. The churches, they argue, do not evangelize. Therefore, they contend, it is necessary to have evangelistic organizations to do the work. Yet these organizations appeal for money and depend on the churches for their existence. The evangelists are not subject to the authority of the churches. Their abilities, energies and resources are not channelled into churches but into separate organizations. Their lives, their thoughts and their practice are not moulded by the realities of local church life. They are responsible for their doctrine, their practice, and their methods to no one but themselves. That the forms of entertainment and the gimmicks they use to gain an audience are harmful to the true worship of God does

not concern them. They do not have to face basic issues at local church level. They are independent of the churches and can act as they please.

When evangelistic organizations become huge in power and influence their own interests are predominant and they become a curse to the churches. There may be great talk about evangelizing the world by the end of the twentieth century, but in fact an enormous sum of money and time is spent merely on promoting a colossal organization and the system of evangelistic societies as a whole. In order to bolster up and support the needs of the evangelistic societies two matters are essential. One is the maintenance of Arminian or decisionist doctrine and the other is the promotion of Ecumenical evangelism. Should anyone preach free grace doctrine at a world Congress for Evangelism it will not make any impact for the simple reason that such convictions represent but one viewpoint among many. Synergism is the order of the day at these Congresses. Synergism is the combination of Arminian and Calvinistic concepts—the blending of truth with error. You take the five points of Calvinism, say on your right hand, and the five points of Arminianism on your left, you fold your two hands and ten fingers together and, hey presto!—perfect truth is the result! Even the apostle Paul would be baffled by one of these Congresses of Evangelism! His voice would simply be drowned by a hundred others—huge mountains of words and papers—and the end result?—Arminianism and Ecumenism! I can well imagine Paul's astonishment to observe the truth he made clear buried under such an enormous pile of words and papers!

Let us consider Ecumenism and its implications at the local level. Ministers of true local churches are labouring to fulfil the command of Christ to teach, preach, administer baptism and the Lord's supper, maintain discipline and evangelize. In most cases they battle and struggle with the problem of Modernistic churches in which false ministers (wolves in sheep's clothing) deny the faith by rejecting the authority of Scripture and such basic truths as the wrath of God, the Judgment, hell, the atonement, the deity of Christ and the necessity of the New Birth. In some parts evangelical ministers are opposed by Roman Catholic, Anglo Catholic and Modernist ministers all working together in the Ecumenical movement. Along comes the Evangelistic Crusade which, in order to have adequate support, co-operates with all these alien bodies. When evangelical ministers are not prepared to join in and unite with such an effort they are accused of narrow-mindedness and disinterest in the great work of evangelism.

Not only independent evangelistic societies but all societies must be subject to the local churches. In no other place is spiritual authority vested but the local church. To no other place are disciples ingathered, taught and incorporated (Eph. 4:16). The Church, as represented by spiritual local churches throughout the world, is alone the object of Christ's

saving love (Acts 20:28). It is high time that we thought in terms of dynamic churches alone as God's agent for evangelism!

4. Dynamic preaching the chief instrument of the Church's evangelism

It is not by the wisdom of men that souls are saved, but by the foolishness of preaching (1 Cor. 1:21). Through the ministry of the pulpit believers are fed and by means of the *same* ministry converts are made. Since so much depends on powerful and edifying preaching how careful ought we to be to safeguard the pulpit. If the flock is to be fed, then the preaching needs to be expository, systematic and doctrinal. Happily, such a ministry is well suited to evangelism for all parts of Scripture, including the doctrine of election, can be applied to unbelievers. Election implies total depravity. Since all men have rejected God he is free to save whom he wills. If he saves an enemy then that is an act of grace. I maintain that any part of Scripture can be preached evangelistically. We are to teach all things—all truth we find in Scripture. Thus teaching should be powerful, convicting, inspiring and relevant.

With regard to the evangelistic aspect of the pulpit ministry, I would suggest five factors of which the preacher should always be mindful.

(i) *Biblical content.* God should be set forth in his attributes. Who is God? God is Creator, God is holy, God is just, God will judge all men. Content is essential in the preaching, but this content should be arresting, it should be interesting, it should be relevant and delivered in a powerful manner. There should be content always. That we are living in an age of education for all highlights this requirement. This is an age of education, far more so than in previous generations. Content and substance in the preaching does not in itself convert. What I am trying to explain is the fact that most people are repulsed from a natural point of view by mere emotionalism. They can recognize when there is real content and substance to what is said. It is interesting to observe how surprised people are to discover far more than they ever imagined. They just thought we were governed by emotions alone but then they discover we are a thinking people, that we are concerned about the application of the Gospel to every aspect of life. They may argue and disagree yet they are drawn back again and again and find themselves arrested and convicted by the truth of God.

(ii) *The moral law.* The Gospel is for sinners only, so our first task is to convince people that they are sinners. They are totally depraved, vile, evil, wicked sinners. These words sound extreme but when the full meaning of transgression against a holy God is realised by means of the law, they are no longer extreme words but true words. In exposition of the moral law there ought to be variety, directness and personal application. I have found Thomas Watson's book a help in understanding the Ten

Commandments. The Larger Catechism is a great help, for it explains in precise terms the different ways in which the law is broken. Are we preaching the moral law? Is the Holy Spirit convincing sinners by the law through our preaching?

(iii) *Justification by free grace.* I believe we should always be conscious of the wonder of God's grace when we preach. God in his mercy comes to save all kinds of sinners. This is the wonder of grace. He freely justifies the sinner who believes. No matter how bad a man has been, no matter how foul he is, God can save him and give him a free justification—instantaneously and once and for all. This is why we give glory to God for the wonder of his grace. Everything is to this end: "the praise of the glory of God's grace" (Eph. 1:6). When sinners are saved that grace is magnified. Therefore we expect that sinners will be saved.

(iv) *The free offers of the Gospel.* The Lord invites all men to himself. He freely invites them to come to him as they are and not because of anything good or righteous they may find in themselves. The sinner does not look to see if he has worthiness, or if there are preliminary signs of grace in him. We should be free, flexible and fervent in our preaching of the free offers of the Gospel. In other words we must not in any way be stiff or starched or hampered. If the doctrines of grace hamper the preacher in any way it indicates that he has not grasped their implications. The Puritans can help us a very great deal here.⁴ They were marvellously free. They held the doctrines of grace; they held to particular redemption absolutely, but this never hampered them in their preaching of the free offers of the Gospel. There is great joy in offering the Gospel, because the Holy Spirit often favours Scripture passages containing Gospel invitations and applies them with power to sinners.

(v) *Faith in preaching.* Do we have faith in the Word of God as such? It is possible for the preacher to become over-worked or distracted and without realizing it he loses faith in his own preaching as God's instrument not only of edification but of conversion. He needs to pray always for the power of the Holy Spirit in preaching. Do we really believe that the Word of God is powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12)? Do we have a great faith in the Word of God preached? Do we believe in the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven when we preach? Do we expect for the Holy Ghost, God himself, to come down from heaven? That is what Peter said (1 Pet. 1:12), and Paul declared that "our Gospel unto you came not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5). We should wrestle with the Lord that he will send down the Holy Ghost and that there will be much assurance and power in the preaching. We should do this every time we preach, not just sometimes. W. G. T. Shedd has a fine sermon with the title, "The certain success of Evangelistic Labour," in which he says, "suppose that I myself have never felt the revolutionising power

of Christianity, or have never seen an instance of it in another person: will not the theoretical belief that I may have in this religion be likely to wane away in the lapse of time? If a power is not exerted, we begin to doubt its existence. And if an individual or church witnesses no effusions of the Spirit, and no actual conversions of the human soul, it will inevitably begin to query whether there be any Holy Ghost, and whether the Gospel is anything more than ethics.”⁵

It is the effusions of the Holy Spirit that we long for. It is conversions which we look for, pray for, plead for and aim at. The regeneration of souls is the best proof we have of the power of God among us.

Shedd goes on to illustrate this from different parts of history. The beginning of the eighteenth century was a time of scepticism, doubt, coldness and rationalism, and one of the reasons was that there were not these powerful conversions. But when the awakening came what a change there was then! God was in the land. People were being converted from all strata of society. Rationalism crumpled like paper. We need such spiritual awakening today. It will show itself in preaching first just as it did with the apostles. And if we look behind powerful preaching we will see the Spirit of grace and supplication.

5. A dynamic communication of the Gospel to every creature

My headings with regard to the above are as follows: (i) The prayer meeting; (ii) effective house to house visiting; (iii) relevance in our presentation of truth; (iv) using our homes as a base; (v) the use of literature; (vi) zeal and perseverance in the work. All these aspects are connected to, spring from, are inspired by or directed by the local church but space forbids the development of these points here, and hence we will have to seek opportunity for enlargement at some future time.

REFERENCES

¹It is questionable whether Paul is speaking of sound teaching when he refers to “gold, silver and precious stones”. 1 Cor. 3:11-15. The foundation has already been laid, as we see in Matt. 16:18, Eph. 2:21, 22, and particularly 1 Pet. 2:5. We are built on that foundation. Wood, hay and stubble represent those who are false converts—the unregenerate; gold, silver and precious stones, those who are true. This passage is a vindication of the gathered church principle and the necessity of discipline with regard to a realistic church membership. R. L. Dabney in an exposition of this passage warns against the use of artificial means to gain professions of faith. c.f. *Discussions*, Vol. 1, p. 551 ff. ²*Banner of Truth* No. 48, p. 8. ³*Reformation Today* No. 18. *Finney and the disappearance of revival* by Clive Tyler. ⁴In a paper, *The Puritan Approach to Persuading Souls*, given at the Westminster (Puritan) Conference the question of the free offer is expounded in detail. It is published in a booklet with the title *Adding to the Church* at 50 pence and is available from Carey Publications. ⁵W. G. T. Shedd, *Sermons to the Spiritual Man*, *Banner of Truth*, p. 413.

Study of the Anabaptists is relevant for us today. Like them, we are a minority group. The big battalions are not on our side. As far as some "establishment" evangelists are concerned we scarcely exist. David Kingdon relates and applies the Anabaptist vision of the church as a brotherhood. He does not neglect their weaknesses, from which we can also learn with profit. Can we approve of their practice in the realm of church discipline? Is it right to "shun" a person who is excommunicated? How can both legalism and laxity be avoided? These are some of the questions faced in this thorough treatment of the subject.

Church Discipline among the Anabaptists

I MUST BEGIN BY STATING THE LIMITS OF OUR CONSIDERATION. I INTEND TO confine myself to a study of the evangelical, or biblicist Anabaptists, not because the revolutionary Anabaptists or the contemplative Anabaptists are unimportant, but because our theological sympathies are obviously with the evangelical Anabaptists. In saying this, however, I do not wish to attempt a judgment on the vexed issue of the extent, if any, of Anabaptist influence on Baptist origins.

I propose to divide the subject into the following sections:

- i The historical context in which Anabaptist ideas on church discipline arose.
- ii The theological principles involved in the Anabaptist understanding of church discipline.
- iii The exercise of church discipline.
- iv Issues arising from the exercise of church discipline.
- v The relevance of Anabaptist thinking for our own day.

i The Historical Context

G. H. Williams has emphasised the importance of this in relation to believers' churches in general, and the Anabaptists in particular. He writes: "In the sixteenth century the Anabaptist conventicles, unfolding in their astoundingly mobile and martyr-minded vitality represent a spiritual growth inexplicable apart from the previous generation with its

disciplines and despairs.”¹ Even though the Anabaptists sought to restore the primitive church *de novo*, they could not escape the conditioning of history. Thus, although the Anabaptists did challenge the sacralist concept of the Church which the Reformers carried over, largely uncritically, from medieval Christendom, it is also right to appreciate the fact that they themselves may well have been influenced by medieval sects such as the Waldensians, though of course the extent of such influence is still a matter for debate.²

If the extent of the influence of medieval sects is not yet determined, what is clear is that Anabaptist ideas on church discipline were largely worked out in antithesis to the teaching and practice of the Magisterial Reformation, as G. H. Williams terms the Lutheran and Calvinist sections of the Reformation movement. Basic to the Magisterial Reformation is the conviction that the instrument of the reform of the Church should be the civic power, whether the “godly prince” as in Luther’s Germany or the city council as in Calvin’s Geneva. As an ideal, the reform of the Church by means of the power of the state was upheld even when the Reformation movement represented a small minority in a predominantly Catholic country.

Intimately related to this ideal is a territorial view of the Church as embracing all the citizens of an area or country by virtue of their (infant) baptism. When, in 1531, Melancthon drew up a memorandum on Anabaptism in which the death penalty was prescribed for Anabaptists, it is this territorial conception of the Church which is in the foreground. “What would happen,” he asks, “if children were not baptised, if not that our whole society would become openly heathen? . . . it is a serious matter to cast children out of Christendom and to have two sets of people, the one baptised and the other unbaptised. . .”³ In complete agreement with the identification of Christian discipleship with citizenship is the Zurich reformer, Ulrich Zwingli: “The Christian is none other than the good and faithful citizen, and the Christian city none other than a Christian church.”⁴

The Anabaptists completely rejected the territorial conception of the Church. To their mind the Church was a covenantal community of converted men and women who were pledged and active disciples of Christ. For them Church and State were not two sides of the same coin but two distinct spheres. Their view was that the Church was separated from the world through the action of God in regenerating a people for the praise of his name. As Menno Simons put it: “The entire evangelical Scriptures teach us that the Church of Christ was and is, in doctrine, life and worship, a people separated from the world”.⁵

Most modern scholars locate the emergence of the evangelical Baptist movement at Zurich during the years 1524-1525. The leaders of the movement were former supporters of Ulrich Zwingli, who not only disagreed with his policy of gradual reform but desired the restoration of the primitive, apostolic church composed of visible saints. As they

searched Scripture, and especially the New Testament, they became convinced that only the baptism of professed believers was sanctioned by its teaching.

The decisive break between the "Brethren", as they preferred to be known, and Zwingli came when the city council decreed in January 1525 that all who failed to have their infants baptised within eight days would be exiled. On January 21, 1525, three days after the issuing of the decree, four leaders of the Brethren were expelled from Zurich, and two others who were citizens, Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz, were forbidden to hold any more "schools" for agitation. That same day, in the evening, Grebel baptised George Blaurock, a former priest, by affusion (pouring), on profession of his faith. Blaurock then baptised his companions. The account of this historic meeting in the *Hutterite Chronicle* says, very movingly, "Thus they together gave themselves to the name of the Lord in the high fear of God. Each confirmed the other in the service of the Gospel and began to teach and keep the faith. Therewith began the separation from the world and its evil works."⁶

Though it was chiefly in contrast to the teaching of the Magisterial Reformation that the evangelical Anabaptists worked out, through a careful study of Scripture, their principles of church discipline, they were very well aware that the battle had to be fought on another front as well.

The Anabaptist movement had not been in existence ten years before the disastrous episode of Munster (1533-1536) and a similar one at Amsterdam, brought unjustified abuse upon the whole Anabaptist community. Unhinged fanatics, stirred up by apocalyptic expectations, presumed to anticipate the Second Coming by setting up a Christian commonwealth at Munster, which they saw as the location of the New Jerusalem. Soon polygamy appeared, and sins punishable by death included blasphemy, seditious language, scolding one's parents, back-biting, spreading scandal and complaining.

Most remarkably, it was the Munster episode and its immediate aftermath which brought into the ranks of the Anabaptists a priest of the Church of Rome who was to become the outstanding leader of the scattered communities of the Brethren.

Menno Simons, who was born in 1496, at Witmarsum in the province of Friesland, became a priest in 1525, the same year that the evangelical Anabaptists of Zurich founded their church. Within a short while after his ordination Menno began to have doubts about the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation. Through a study of the New Testament he became convinced that Roman teaching on the mass was false, but he remained in the Catholic Church for he was not prepared hastily to leave a good position and a generous income. Gradually he began to question the practice of infant baptism, but he was not forced to think seriously about

it until 1531, when on March 20 a tailor by the name of Sicke Freeks was publicly executed in the neighbouring city of Leeuwarden for the crime of being baptised a second time. Menno was amazed that a pious, godly man, as he learned that Freeks was, should have been prepared to die for the sake of a "second baptism". Was it possible that Menno's church was as wrong about baptism as he had discovered it to be about the mass?

Again Menno searched the Scripture, and again he found that it did not sanction either Rome's teaching or practice. Turning to his superior at Pingjuin for help he found none. Nor were his evangelical contemporaries, the reformers, able to guide him, for they all taught that infants should be baptised, though for differing reasons. So Menno concluded that "all were deceived about infant baptism", and that baptism on confession of faith alone was scriptural.

Yet still Menno lingered, Lot-like, in the Church of Rome. In 1534 a division occurred in his parish when certain persons of the "sect of Munster" reached Witmarsum, and "deceived many pious hearts in our village". For over a year Menno fought the effects of Munsterite fanaticism on the more pious members of his flock. His own brother was swept away by it, to Menno's great distress. So vigorous was Menno in his public denunciation of the Munsterites that he won the reputation of being able "to stop the mouths of the enemy very well".

Menno finally decided to carry the battle against the Munsterites still further by attacking their beliefs in writing. Early in 1535 he wrote a little pamphlet entitled *A Clear and Indubitable Proof from Holy Scripture Against the Abominable and Great Blasphemy of Jan van Leiden*. It was not printed until 1627.

However, another conflict arose in Menno's mind. By attacking the Munsterites and not offering anything better, was he not encouraging pious souls to think he was merely a defender of the Roman Church? The climax to Menno's conflict came when three hundred souls stirred up by Munsterite errors decided to set up their own new Jerusalem in Friesland. In March 1535 they seized an old monastery (Oude Kloster) outside the city of Bolsward and entrenched themselves against attack. The forces of the government laid siege, and after 130 Munsterites had been killed the remainder were captured and executed on April 7. Among them was Menno's own brother.

This terrible event made an impression upon Menno which he could not shake off. If they could give their blood for a false faith, why was he not prepared to give anything for the truth? He felt that their blood lay upon his soul. "The blood of these people," he said, "became such a burden to me that I could not endure it nor find rest in my soul".

By the strange workings of Providence, Menno had been brought to the parting of the ways. The path of duty became clear. He could no longer

evade his responsibility of caring for the erring sheep. In deep agony of soul Menno turned to God. "My heart trembled in my body," he recalls. "I prayed God with sighs and tears that he would give me, a troubled sinner, the gift of his grace and create a clean heart in me, that through the merits of the crimson blood of Christ he would graciously forgive my unclean walk and ease-seeking life, and bestow upon me wisdom, candour, and courage, that I might preach his exalted and adorable name and Holy Word unadulterated and make manifest his truth to his praise."

For nine months he publicly declared from his pulpit in Witmarsum the necessity of repentance and faith, believers' baptism and the proper understanding of the Lord's Supper. Probably on Sunday, January 30, 1536, he voluntarily resigned his charge and renounced his priesthood to embark upon a life of danger, ministering to the scattered flocks of Anabaptist believers in the Northern Netherlands and North-West Germany until he died on January 31, 1561.⁷

I have spent some time on the early life of Menno Simons because it illustrates the point that Anabaptist writers on church discipline had to fight on two fronts. On the one hand they felt obliged to set right the views of the Reformers, who in their view were still maintaining a Romish doctrine of the Church. On the other, they did battle with the fanaticism of the Munsterites and others who sought to exalt the Holy Spirit at the expense of the written word of Scripture. If I am not mistaken, our task as Reformed Baptists is not much different today. The heirs of the Reformers, so far as their doctrine of the Church is concerned, are still with us, and if the extremism of the men of Munster is happily no longer in evidence, their leading principle still is, breaking out in those who in our day attempt to magnify the Spirit by belittling the Word of God written by the Spirit.

ii The Theological Principles

The evangelical Anabaptists might be described as Bible-searchers. Eager to know the truth of God, they gave themselves unstintingly to the study of Scripture. They were well aware of the importance of what they were doing. As Balthasar Hubmaier put it in the *Eighteen Dissertations*: "It is an old custom that comes to us from the times of the Apostles, that when evil things befall concerning the faith, all men who wish to speak the word of God, and are of a Christian way of thinking, should assemble to search the Scriptures."⁸

As they searched the Scriptures, they came to an understanding of discipleship and of the nature of the Church which marked them off from the Magisterial Reformers to whom they were ready to acknowledge their indebtedness in other matters.

Harold S. Bender has argued, I believe convincingly, that, "First and fundamental in the Anabaptist vision was the conception of the essence of

Christianity as discipleship".⁹ Reacting against the Lutheran *sola fideism* (faith alone), which so often did not appear to issue in transformation of life, the Anabaptists insisted that regeneration is evidenced by newness of life. Pilgram Marpeck, a leader of the South German Anabaptists, is representative of many who joined the Anabaptists because the libertinism of the Lutheran Reformation profoundly disappointed him.¹⁰ Constantly as we read about these men we are made aware that, for the evangelical Anabaptists, the true test of the Christian is discipleship. For them the great word is not so much "faith" as "following". Not that they would deny the importance of faith, but they were concerned that it should not be isolated from discipleship. Thus Menno, with the churches of the Magisterial Reformation very much in mind, avers that, "before God no outward baptism counts, nor staying away from the churches, nor Lord's Supper, nor persecution, if there is no obedience to the commands of God, and no faith which manifests itself in love, and no new creature".¹¹ Active, obedient, loving discipleship which embraces all aspects of human conduct and shows itself in every human relationship is Menno's great concern as a writer. He says that "it profits nothing to move about in the inward communion of the brethren if we are not inwardly in the communion of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ",¹² and for him union with Christ is evidenced by the imitation of Christ.

That the evangelical Anabaptists lived out their teaching, even their enemies had to admit. Typical is this grudging admission from Heinrich Bullinger, one of their bitterest opponents: "Those who unite with them will by their ministers be received into their church by rebaptism and repentance and newness of life. They henceforth lead their lives under a semblance of a quite spiritual conduct. They denounce covetousness, pride, profanity, the lewd conversation and immorality of the world, drinking and gluttony. In short, their hypocrisy is great and manifold."¹³

Baptism, according to Anabaptist teaching, introduced these baptised to both the life of discipleship and the discipline of the covenanted community, the church. For them it was the "covenant of a good conscience toward God". (1 Peter 3:21.) Here they followed Luther's translation which calls baptism the "Bund eines guten Gewissens mit Gott",¹⁴ (Good conscience with God.) They viewed baptism less as the symbol of a past experience and more as the pledge of a complete, present and continuing commitment to obey Christ.¹⁵ This commitment was understood as having implications for the person baptised, not only as an individual, but also in his relationship to the believing community to which baptism introduced him. This is made clear in the following quotation, probably from Hans Hut:¹⁶ "One receives the sign of baptism as a covenant (bund) of dedication (verwilligung) before a Christian church which itself received the covenant from God in his name and has the power and authority to share it with all those who have a heartfelt desire for it. As the Lord said, 'what you shall bind on earth shall also be bound in heaven. . . .' This

covenant is a dedication to the obedience of Christ with a rendering of divine love toward all the brethren and sisters with body, life, goods, and honour, irrespective of what evil the world may say to him.”¹⁷

From the Anabaptist conception of discipleship there follows, secondly, a new concept of the Church. “Voluntary church membership based upon true conversion and involving a commitment to holy living and discipleship was the absolutely essential heart of this concept.” Obviously such a Church had to be regarded as distinct and separate from the state. Being thus separated in their own Christian society, the Anabaptists expected the hatred and opposition of the world.

The Church was thought of not only as a separated people, but positively it was regarded as a brotherhood. The Anabaptists did more than pay lip-service to this ideal. They worked it out in the practicalities of life, taking the voluntary sharing of goods in the primitive church at Jerusalem as their model. In some Anabaptist communities voluntary communism of goods became the way of life. In 1528 the Hutterite Brotherhood adopted Christian communism, and have continued to practise it to the present day. Other groups did not go this far, but they emphasised that the Christian is only a steward of his property, which love will make available to meet a brother's needs. Harold Bender cites the testimony of a Protestant visitor to a Swiss Brethren baptismal service held in Strasbourg in 1557.¹⁸ He reported that a question addressed to all applicants for baptism was: “Whether they, if necessity require it, would devote all their possessions to the service of the brotherhood, and would not fail any member that is in need, if they were able to render aid.”¹⁹

In conceiving of the church as a brotherhood, the Anabaptists stressed the importance of each member watching over not only his own soul, but, in brotherly love, the souls of his fellow believers. In this connection, they placed great emphasis upon the disciplinary process outlined in Matthew 18:15-18. Once again, baptism was connected in Anabaptist thinking with what they termed, referring to the text in Matthew, as “fraternal discipline”. In Balthasar Hubmaier's Baptismal Order, as followed at Nicolsburg, the candidate is asked by the presiding elder, “If thou hereafter sinnest and they brother knoweth it, wilt thou accept from him the first and the second steps of fraternal discipline, and then, if necessary, willingly and obediently allow thyself to be disciplined before the church?”²⁰ Baptism, then, commits one not only to a life of discipleship but also to the discipline of the brotherhood. Thus, the church is not the optional extra which it is for many evangelical Christians today, rather it is “a brotherhood of love in which the fulness of the Christian life ideal is to be expressed”.²¹

The third great element in the Anabaptist vision was the ethic of love and non-resistance as applied to every area of life in society. The Anabaptist might carry a staff, but never a sword, for he renounced warfare, strife and

violence. Yet he was not naively pacifistic, for outside of "the perfection of Christ" there was still needed the state to maintain law and order by using, if necessary, the sword. For the Anabaptists to be under the New Covenant meant that the taking of human life was not permissible. As Conrad Grebel wrote: "True Christians use neither worldly sword nor engage in war, since among them taking human life has ceased entirely, for we are no longer under the Old Covenant. . . The Gospel and those who accept it are not to be protected with the sword, neither should they thus protect themselves."²²

So far as church discipline was concerned, this understanding of the demands of the ethic of love defined both the body which exercised discipline and the ultimate sanction which could be applied when discipline had to be carried out by the church. Not the magistrate, as in the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformations, but the brotherhood was responsible for discipline. The sphere of the magistrate lay altogether outside of "the perfection of Christ". The final decision lay neither with the godly prince nor with the city council but with the whole congregation.

The ultimate sanction was not the death penalty, as it was in Luther's Germany and Calvin's Geneva, but the ban, which was held to have replaced the death penalty prescribed in the Old Testament for certain offences.

The introduction of the ban had been one of the principal demands of the Brethren at Zurich, but after a period of wavering Zwingli rejected it on the ground that the punishment of blasphemers by the government made the ban unnecessary.²³

By their insistence that discipline should be exercised by the brotherhood, the Anabaptists challenged the fatal confusion of sacralism which had for centuries failed to see that punitive measures in society must never be intermingled with punitive measures in the church. The sacralist confusion finds its classic expression in Thomas Aquinas who taught that heresy is a thing for which a man deserves "not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication but also barred from the world by death".²⁴ As Verduin points out, it comes as a shock to realise that discipline as one of the marks of the Church was not only absent from the Reformer's earliest delineation of the Church, but was actually opposed as a piece of Anabaptist fanaticism. Calvin, for example, argued against the Anabaptist case for discipline at the Lord's table by saying that 1 Corinthians 5:11 "has to do with private association and not at all with the public communion. If the Church puts up with an unworthy person then let him who knows it keep himself from the man in his private contacts. . . but he is not to make a schism nor separation in regard to the public communion".²⁵ In other words, it is permissible to sit with a rogue or knave at the Lord's table but right to avoid him at all other times! As late as 1552 a Reformed opponent of Menno Simons was arguing that "the papistical abomination

by its abuse has so frightfully destroyed the ordinance of the churches and the right use of the ban, that it cannot be re-established suddenly".²⁶

In fairness to the Reformers, however, it must be pointed out that, having opted for reformation by means of the civil power, they created a problem for themselves when they sought to re-introduce church discipline. The evangelical magistrates having been liberated from the yoke of papal domination did not prove at all keen on submitting themselves, and the higher echelons of society, to ecclesiastical discipline exercised by the leaders of the church. The story of Calvin's struggle with the city council of Geneva over the issue of discipline is a classic illustration of the dilemma which faced the Reformers when they attempted to re-introduce church discipline.

The Anabaptists, of course, faced no such dilemma. Rejecting sacralism root and branch they denied to the magistrate any place whatever in the affairs of the church. For them, church discipline was to be exercised by the brotherhood and not by the government.

iii The Exercise of Church Discipline

As I have already remarked, baptism served, in Anabaptist thinking, to link the believer with the brotherhood, pledging him not only to walk in newness of life but also to live in community with the brethren. In this respect they recovered the New Testament view of discipleship as a commitment to Christ and to the Church, his body (see *e.g.* Rom. 2:1-13).

Before the Reformers did so explicitly, the Anabaptists taught that discipline is one of the marks of the true church of Christ. Menno Simons speaks for all evangelical Anabaptists when he writes: "For as a city without walls and gates, or a field without trenches and fences, and a house without walls and doors, so also is a church which has not the true apostolic exclusion or ban."²⁷

Firstly, we shall consider the necessity for church discipline. Menno regarded church discipline as necessary because the Scriptures require it. The key texts are Matthew 18:15-18; John 20:23; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 1 Timothy 5:20 and Galatians 6:1. The fact that Christ commanded it and the apostolic church practised it was sufficient reason for its re-introduction in the restored church of the New Testament which the Anabaptists sought to establish. It was, in Menno's words, the "express ordinance of Christ and his holy apostles".²⁸

Again, church discipline is necessary in order that the church of Christ might be kept pure. The Church is the bride of Christ, pledged to have none other but Christ as her husband. Without discipline, the separation of the church from the world would become blurred and indistinct. To use Menno's vivid metaphor, the church would become like a city without walls, a prey to its enemies who would come in like a flood and destroy its

life. Church discipline is needed, then, as a rampart against sin and error. More positively, through "fraternal admonition" the members of the church encourage each other to advance in holiness, following in the way of Christ.

If the necessity of church discipline resides in the fact that Christ commands it and the life of the church demands it, there was also a pressing contemporary reason for its practice in the churches of the evangelical Anabaptists. Only by the maintenance of a proper discipline could their churches be freed of the reproach of Munster. Menno spells out the contemporary challenge: "It is more than evident that if we had not been zealous in this matter in these days, we would be considered and called by every man the companions of the sect of Munster and all perverted sects."²⁹

Secondly, the Anabaptists viewed church discipline as brotherly, or fraternal, discipline which is to be exercised in love. "If your *brother* sins. . ." (Matt. 18:15) was taken seriously with equal emphasis being placed upon the fact of brotherhood as upon his sin. The fact that he is a brother places him under obligation to receive fraternal admonition and, what is often forgotten, the wronged brother under a loving obligation to exercise it. By emphasising the nature of the church as a brotherhood, Anabaptist writers linked the initial process of discipling (evangelism) with the continuing process of discipling (sanctification). Thus, they took a much more positive view of discipline than the word conjures up in our minds today. For them, discipline was not the last resort of the church against an erring brother, but the continuing expression of brotherly love. Even the ban (or excommunication) was brought under this rule. As Menno puts it: "the ban is a great work of love, notwithstanding it is looked upon by the foolish as an act of great hatred."³⁰ Provided such a view of church discipline is maintained, it is freed from the two dangers of legalism and harshness to which it is always open, and which often issue in the complete breakdown of discipline. Furthermore, to understand church discipline as brotherly discipline is to move away from the debates, often sterile, about the authority of elders which are a feature of modern discussion. Whilst the Anabaptist churches did recognise the gift of eldership, and placed great store by it, they refused to confine the exercise of discipline to elders. Brotherly discipline is the discipline of the brotherhood. That is to say, it involves the whole church, each member having a responsibility to care for every other member.

According to Menno, the key of binding, which is "nothing but the Word and the righteousness of God: the directing, commanding, threatening, terrifying, condemning Law of the Lord. . .", is "given to his ministers *and* people. . ."³¹ When the ban is exercised, it is the work of the whole church undertaken in the fear of God. The unrepentant brother "is brought before the congregation" which has "the judging Word of the Scriptures, by which they may expel him and announce to him by the

Spirit of Christ that he is now no longer a member of the body of Christ. . .”³² Even when this final stage has been reached, the church, though acting in judgment, does not cease to act in love, for the ban has been “ordained with a view to repentance and not to destruction”.³³

Thirdly, as I have already remarked, the Anabaptists viewed church discipline as a process. Following Matthew 18:15-17 they regarded the first stages of fraternal admonition as secret. The wronged brother does not go either to the elders or to the church but to the erring brother, and seeks to win him to amendment of life. Should this fail he still persists in seeking to win his brother, but this time he does so in the presence of witnesses, who are necessary if the matter should unfortunately not be settled at this second stage. The witnesses may presumably be elders, though this is not stated. The next stage involves going before the church, the whole brotherhood. Should the brother still refuse to listen to the church, he is to be expelled—“let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”.³⁴

Menno, unfortunately, followed the Vulgate translation of “tax-collectors” as “publicani”. He renders it very literally as “public, or manifest sinners”. I say unfortunately, because it seems to me that here we possibly have the source of a tension which developed in Menno’s thinking towards the end of his life, when he was being pressed by “hard-liners” (such as Leonard Bouwens) who were extremely rigorous in the use of the ban. Bouwens employed the ban without preliminary examination in most cases. There are even instances where the elders, or those commissioned by them, entered the house of an adulterous husband by night and forcibly removed his protesting wife and screaming children in enforcement of the ban.³⁵

In his earlier writing on the subject of church discipline, Menno had argued that the process laid down in Matthew 18:15-17 should be applied to every sin. Later he modified this position, maintaining that for certain notorious and public sins “the rule of three admonitions”³⁶ should be dispensed with on the ground “that men may not return those whom God himself by his Spirit and Word excludes, lest Christ and his church be divided from each other”.³⁷

The dangers of Menno’s position are obvious. Firstly, it implies there are certain sins which fall outside of the possibility of fraternal admonition and demand immediate action in the excommunication of the offender. While it is true that the New Testament does appear to make a distinction between forgivable and unforgivable sin (see Mk. 3:29; 1 John 5:16; 1 Cor. 5:11) yet, as Marlin Jeschke has recently pointed out, an invalid conclusion is drawn. “It infers that a certain class of sins *per se* indicate a fall from grace and therefore an individual’s response to the gospel can be prejudged. In the case of this given class of sins the invitation to repentance can then be by-passed as unnecessary, for in effect these sins

are by definition unforgivable. The corollary inference is that another class of sins is tolerable in that they do not necessitate excommunication. The tendency to classify sins generally leads to the toleration of some sinners in the church".³⁸ He goes on to say, to my mind rightly, that "Church discipline is called for by sin as such, and sin is any act or spirit inconsistent with the disciplined life. Often this may not even be connected with so-called grave sins; for discipline may be occasioned by a person's coldness of heart and neglect of Christian fellowship, and it may be rendered unnecessary in the case of so-called grave sins that are followed immediately by repentance and therefore do not signify a fall from grace".³⁹ Whilst it would be unfair to Menno to suggest that he himself would have wished to argue to this conclusion, it is certainly fair to say that by distinguishing between "manifest sinners" and others he opened the door to the idea that some sins, being more heinous than others, require a more rigid discipline than lesser sins.

The second danger of Menno's position is that by dispensing with the stages of fraternal admonition, it opens the door to the unbridled exercise of power by determined men who occupy places of leadership. Thus, the afore-mentioned Leonard Bouwens banned the leaders of the moderate faction in the churches of Franeker and Emden, not because of their sins, but because they could not agree with his rigorous interpretation of the ban as involving separation in "bed and board" when a spouse was excommunicated. The eventual result of Bouwens' "hard-line" was the Waterlander schism.⁴⁰ It is surely significant, too, that most schisms among the Mennonites have been over the use of the ban.

The fourth feature of Anabaptist church discipline to which I wish to draw attention is the ban. The term is used to denote either exclusion from communion (*kleiner Bann*), or exclusion from membership (*grosser Bann*), though, as far as I can see, Menno did not make this distinction, which appears to have been made at a later stage of Mennonite history.⁴¹

From the beginning of their history the ban was practised in Anabaptist churches. The introduction of the ban was one of the principal demands at Zurich.

The ban replaces the death penalty prescribed in the Old Testament. It is the Church's last resort, for it has no other weapon. The erring brother is not to be handed over to the civil authorities for physical punishment, yet his dismissal from the church is solemn and severe. According to Menno the apostolic ban "is a delivering over to Satan, yes, a public expulsion, excommunication, or separation from the congregation, church, body, and Kingdom of Christ, and that in the name of Christ, with the binding power of the Holy Ghost and the Word".⁴² How seriously banning was viewed, and perhaps an indication of why it was carried out only after a day spent in prayer and fasting, may be appreciated by reflecting upon another statement of Menno: "It is incontrovertible

that all who are outside of the congregation and church of Christ must be in that of Antichrist.”⁴³

The erring brother is expelled, in the last analysis, because he has already separated from Christ. It is inconceivable that he can therefore remain any longer within the body of Christ, the church. Excommunication thus formally seals what has already taken place—separation from Christ. Menno goes so far as to say that “no one is excommunicated or expelled by us from the communion of the brethren but those who have already separated and expelled themselves from Christ’s communion either by false doctrine or by improper conduct”.⁴⁴

After the ban has been carried out, the excommunicated person was shunned or avoided. All contact with him was to be avoided unless a work of mercy was indicated, for example, caring for him if he were ill. The scriptural basis for shunning was found in Matthew 18:17 and 1 Corinthians 5:11. As the pious Jews would allow themselves no contact with Gentiles or tax-collectors, so the Church should have no dealings with the banned member.⁴⁵

How far should shunning be carried? What should happen if a husband were excommunicated? Should his wife, as a member of the church, avoid all contact with him, in terms both of “bed and board”? Menno and the more rigorous of the Anabaptists argued that there could be no exceptions to the rule. “If some liberty should be granted to some, it would be more reasonable to give the whole church liberty to eat and deal with apostates than to give it to husband and wife. For it can do this with less danger than husbands and wives who are continuously together, something which the church could easily avoid.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, there is the argument from experience. “I have known not much less than three hundred spouses in my day who did not observe between them and their mates the ordinance, counsel, doctrine, will and command of the Lord and his apostles concerning shunning, and have so run together into perdition.”⁴⁷

Other Anabaptists, particularly in the Rhineland and in Switzerland, took a more liberal view of shunning, being prepared to allow that enforced separation would serve rather to harden than to humble the erring member. The issue of the extent of the ban was to prove a fruitful source of division; a number of schisms have resulted in consequence of one party insisting on a rigorous line whilst others have pleaded for a more tolerant application of the principle of shunning. Though the more liberal view is predominant today, shunning in “bed and board” continues to be practised among the Old Order Amish and Old Colony Mennonites, and some other groups.⁴⁸

iv Issues arising from the Exercise of Church Discipline

A study of Anabaptist church discipline raises, it seems to me, several important issues.

Firstly, there is the difficulty of avoiding legalism on the one hand and laxity on the other.

If one maintains, on scriptural grounds, the regenerate nature of the church there is always the danger that the church's separation from the world will be understood more in terms of taboos which have to be maintained than in terms of free and responsible Christian discipleship. For example, during the sixteenth century men, in general, wore beards. During the seventeenth century they shaved, and there was some objection to this practice in Mennonite congregations. Once shaving was accepted, it was difficult again to change to a beard when it returned to popularity.⁴⁹

On the other hand, fear of legalism can lead to laxity about the whole matter of church discipline. In later Mennonite history, especially as far as Germany and Russia are concerned, discipline virtually disappeared. Clearly it is one thing to identify legalism and seek to avoid it. It is quite another to deal with laxity. How does one preserve the tension between the freedom into which grace brings the believer and the responsible and ordered discipleship to which the regenerated believer is committed? How does one draw the line between legalism and a proper concern for the purity of the church? How does one distinguish between charitable tolerance and un-Christian laxity? These are not easy questions to answer, but they are important enough to be pondered carefully.

Secondly, there is the problem of what can be called the "second generation". G. H. Williams has argued that, between 1540-1557, the Anabaptists were using the ban and the equally formalised solemn reinstatement into membership as "the ethical and constitutional equivalent of believer's baptism for the increasingly numerous 'birthright' members, who in routinized baptism in adolescence were no longer undergoing the great formative experience of the public rebaptism of the heroic days of the first apostles of the new evangel".⁵⁰ Even if Williams is overstating the problem for the period 1540-1557, he is nonetheless rightly identifying the major problem which faces gathered churches—that of staying gathered. Routinized baptism in adolescence is not peculiar to Anabaptist congregations; we recognise the same phenomenon among the Welsh Baptists and, at a much earlier age, in the Southern Baptist churches of the United States.

When an increasing number of "birthright" members (those brought up in the church) are admitted, is there a tendency to make discipline more rigorous in an attempt to maintain a high level of discipleship, or is a point soon reached when discipline begins to fall into disuse because the "birth-right" outlook becomes predominant? How can the problem of the "second generation" be dealt with, unless by continuous schisms caused by ardent spirits whose answer to laxity is to form new, pure churches, which in a generation or two exhibit the same features as the bodies from which they have seceded. This is not an academic question, but a severely

practical one which has to be faced by today's separatists if they do not wish to become tomorrow's conformists.

Thirdly, there is the pressing issue of authority. Where does the authority for church discipline lie? Is it with the elders, as some, following John Owen, not too accurately I fear, would maintain? Does it lie with the church? If so, could not this work against church discipline being exercised, particularly when a fair proportion of members are related to one another?

We have already noticed the tension within Anabaptist thinking between the rigorists, who tended to stress the authority of the eldership, and the more tolerant party, which maintained that the three admonitions should apply to all offences. The same tension exists among us today. There are those who emphasise the eldership, and those who emphasise the church, as the seat of authority. Probably the truth lies at neither extreme. May it be that we shall have to think in terms of the authority of both spiritually qualified and ecclesiastically recognised leadership *and* the whole body of the church? If that is the case, the problem of authority requires re-definition: it is the problem of defining the relationship between leadership and community. As in national life a government can lose credibility, so in the life of a church the eldership can come to the position of lacking any living authority. Yet, on the other hand, as a community can suffer because it either lacks or will not recognise leadership, so can a church. Is there not a sense in which, when there is a properly functioning spiritual organism, the problem of authority is not an issue, because the leadership is sensitive to the rest of the body and the body accepts the leadership? If so, what happens when the leadership and the body are out of harmony? How can harmony be restored so that the organism functions properly once again?

If writers like Menno Simons do not supply us with easy answers to our questions, they do at least enable us to identify some of our problems, as we regard the ways in which they wrestled to rebuild the walls of separation which marked the Church from the world.

v The Relevance of Anabaptist Thinking for our day

I have been struck by the contemporary ring of the Anabaptist material on the subject of church discipline. Various reasons can be suggested, I think, to account for this.

Firstly, the Anabaptists were seeking to re-establish the Church life and order which they had discovered in the New Testament. To do so, they had to challenge the "system", whether Roman, Lutheran, Zwinglian or Calvinist version of it. They were consciously a minority group with the big battalions ranged against them. They were not deterred, however, for they had an unbounded confidence in the power of God's Word and the power of God's Spirit.

Our situation today is not unlike theirs. The big battalions are not on our side. As far as establishment evangelicals are concerned, we scarcely exist. Let us be possessed of the same vision as our Anabaptist forebears. Without pride or censorious legalism let us seek, like them, to re-establish, through the Word of God and by the power of the Spirit, the church life and order of the New Testament.

Secondly, we can learn from their mistakes. Some of the Anabaptists fell into the pit of legalism, others fell into the slough of laxity. As John had to contend with a Diotrephes so there were men like Leonard Bouwens, who loved power so much that he embittered the closing years of Menno's life and eventually thrust him out of leadership. I suggest that we need to be on our guard, lest we repeat too easily the mistakes and excesses of our forebears.

Thirdly, we need to recover the Anabaptist emphasis on the church as a brotherhood. We have accepted, without question, the unbiblical individualism which has characterised evangelication for far too long. Thus, the church is viewed as a kind of spiritual petrol station at which one gets "filled up" for the week but as for relationship with other members of the body of Christ—there is none! To view the church as a brotherhood, and to apply this concept practically, is to behave quite differently. When we accept that we are brothers then we relate to each other in the dynamics of personal relationships, and give ourselves to one another in a love patterned upon the love of Him who gave Himself for the church.⁵¹ Then truly the church becomes "the society of those who care" for one another, and for mankind.

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²⁵Quoted L. Verduin, *ibid*, p. 125. Taken from Calvin's refutation of the Anabaptist manifesto published at Schlattan am Raude, (1527), printed in C. R., Vol. XXXV.

²⁶Menno Simons, *Writings*, p. 725, quoting the words of his opponent, Gellins Faber, a former R.C. priest, who became the Protestant pastor in Emden, E. Friesland. In 1552 he published a bitter attack on the Anabaptists to which Menno Simons replied.

²⁷*Writings*, p. 962. ²⁸*Writings*, p. 457. ²⁹*Writings*, p. 962. ³⁰*Writings*, p. 413.

³¹*Writings*, p. 989, (my italics). ³²*Writings*, p. 991. ³³*Writings*, p. 470. ³⁴*Writings*, p. 459. ³⁵G. H. Williams, op. cit., p. 494. ³⁶"Reply to Syllis and Lemke" (1560), *Writings*, p. 1003, cf. p. 975. ³⁷*Ibid*, p. 1003. ³⁸Martin Jeschke, *Disciplining the Brother*, Herald Press, U.S.A., 1972, p. 661. ³⁹*Ibid*, p. 73. ⁴⁰G. H. Williams, op. cit., pp. 495-6. See also A. L. E. Verheyden, *Anabaptism in Flanders, 1530-1560*, Herald Press, U.S.A., E.T. 1961, p. 9. "The brotherhood of the Northern Netherlands was soon divided under the influence of the individualism of the elders desirous of leadership. . ."

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grant to us the sight of sinners turning to Christ, being added to the Church and being taught, among God's people, all the ways of godliness.

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¹For more details about my remarks concerning Augustine and Constantinianism read Chapters 1 and 2 of "The Reformers and Their Stepchildren" by L. Verduin. ²My comments on Farel and the Swiss Reformation can be verified by reading Vol. 4 of J. H. Merle d'Aubigné's "History of the Reformation".

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